

discussion bulletin

Published by the RED EUREKA MOVEMENT

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No. 10

November 1980

IN THIS ISSUE

- ~ Theory vs practice?
- ~ The personal & the political
- ~ World War III
- ~ Punk rock
- ~ China's Cultural Revolution

... and more ...



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Discussion Bulletin is published by the Red Eureka Movement as a public forum for thrashing out the application of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought to the concrete problems of the Australian revolution. For more on the role of the bulletin, see the Editorial Guidelines on page 7 of this issue.

Material from non-members is welcome. Financial assistance and assistance distributing bulk copies of the bulletin to others would also be very welcome.

Individual articles are the views of their authors. Signed articles use pseudonyms. Editorial comments are the views of the editorial team and are not necessarily REM policy.

Policy statements are made formally by the REM executive or membership and will be signed as such in this bulletin.

Articles hostile to REM policy and Mao Tsetung Thought may also be published in the bulletin.

The **Red Eureka Movement** is a small revolutionary organisation that arose from opposition to revisionist attacks by leaders of the "Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist)" on Mao Tsetung's close comrades, the Chinese "gang of four", and generally opposes the revisionist line of the CPA(ML) leadership including its bourgeois nationalism, extreme sectarianism, subservience to Chinese revisionism and outright opposition to socialist revolution in Australia.

Our stand is to defend the revolutionary principles of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought against the new revisionist attacks on them in China, in Australia and throughout the world. We oppose both Chinese and Albanian revisionism and reject the tendency towards "left wing communism" prevalent among many opponents of the latest revisionism.

We support the concept of "three worlds" and the united front of all forces that can be united against Soviet social imperialism, which has become more dangerous, although not more powerful, than US imperialism. Within Australia US imperialism is the greater enemy.

We are not, and do not pretend to be, a new vanguard party of the working class, nor do we pretend to have all the answers. We believe that overcoming sectarianism is central to building a genuinely revolutionary movement in Australia and is a major contribution of Mao Tsetung Thought, or "Maoism".

Our basic programme is the complete overthrow of all exploiting classes, the establishment of working class rule (the dictatorship of the proletariat) in place of capitalist class rule (the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie) and the triumph of socialism over capitalism.

Our ultimate aim is the classless society of world communism. This is a process of continuing revolution by stages, and the fight for Australian independence is part of that uninterrupted revolution.

We believe in armed revolution.

(**Note:** The above statement about REM is what we have come to call our "Blurb". It aims to give some idea of what REM is and where it stands. It is not a very good statement. We are really much more confused about things than the Blurb would lead readers to think. We would like to rewrite it, probably expanding on many of the points, possibly changing some. Since we have not yet done so, we continue to print it as it is, believing it to be better than nothing. Readers' comments on the statement would be welcomed.)

The **After Hours Bookshop** has closed down. After Hours Books may be resuming operations on a limited scale as a mail order service. Watch this space for further details. For the time being, After Hours Books at the address given on page 1 is still being used as a postal address for the Red Eureka Movement.

APOLOGY AND EXPLANATION

We apologise to readers for the very long delay since publication of the previous edition of the Discussion Bulletin. This was due to factors entirely within our control!

Sharp differences had emerged within REM over political and organisational questions, including the role and editorial control of the Discussion Bulletin. (Readers may have got an inkling of this situation from remarks in some articles in earlier issues, especially DB9.) These disputes intensified to such an extent that we decided to suspend publication and concentrate for a time on internal discussions.

After a period of discussions, a number of people resigned from REM. Rather than us attempting to summarise the reasons why they felt it necessary to take this step, we invite those who have resigned from REM to submit - individually or as a group - their views on the questions in dispute in a form suitable for publication in the Discussion Bulletin. (A short note on the resignations, outlining the viewpoint of those who resigned, has appeared in the newsletter of the "Adelaide anti-imperialist study action group" who may be contacted at P.O. Box 88, Cowandilla, South Australia 5033.)

Some of the articles in this edition of the Discussion Bulletin are based on articles written for our internal discussions, including the series of contributions on the relationship between theory and practice. The idea contained in some of the articles, that 'theory is primary', is probably contrary to the view prevailing in the left, and we encourage people to write responses.

Indeed, we repeat our general encouragement of readers to submit articles, either responding to articles already published or on fresh topics.

During the time the Discussion Bulletin has been in suspended animation, we have been encouraged by the number of people who have asked about it. We hope the bulletin, with the help of its readers, will continue to improve as a tool for developing a revolutionary political position.

OUTLINE OF FUTURE PROJECTS

Steve Melipone

One of the main aims of the Discussion Bulletin is to promote investigation of questions important to the communist movement in Australia. This article is intended to identify some of these questions and suggest lines of approach for coming to grips with them. It is a first outline and far from complete. I hope it will stimulate others to join together in clarifying the areas that most urgently need investigation and
(continued page 4)

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Mao Tsetung: on the Fourth Anniversary of his Death, Sept 9, 1980

A booklet published by the Adelaide anti-imperialist study action group. Contains articles on China's economy, cultural policy and general political line, contrasting Mao's approach with that of the present leadership. Also short but sharp criticism of REM - compulsory reading for polemic fans! Contributors include Ted Wheelwright, Bill Kerr and Albert Langer.

Available from AAISAG, P.O. Box 88, Cowandilla, S.A. 5033, Australia. Price for orders within Australia: 1-9 copies = \$1.30 per copy plus \$2.70 postage; 10-15 copies = \$1.20 per copy; 16-25 copies = \$1.10 per copy; 26 or more copies = \$1.00 per copy (price includes postage for orders of 10 or more).

Make cheques out to "Adelaide anti-imperialist study action group".

Future Projects

working out how to get started, so that collectively we can begin to develop a better understanding of the world we live in and how to change it.

Topics have been grouped under six broad headings although there are obvious interconnections.

1. REVOLUTION

Questions:

How should revolutionaries act so as to be revolutionary? How to link up struggles for reforms with the development of a revolutionary movement, rather than either becoming totally immersed in fighting for reforms or indulging in abstract revolutionism that ignores the actual content of particular struggles?

Lines of Approach:

(1) Discussion and assessment of struggles we've been involved in - to what extent did we act as revolutionaries, and could we have acted any differently?

(2) Case-study of a current campaign. Suggestion: the struggles around unemployment and the economic crisis. Analyse the activities, demands and propaganda of the various activist groups and left organisations and sects. Try to work out what approach revolutionaries should be taking in these campaigns. (Then do it!)

2. SOCIALISM AND COMMUNISM

Questions:

What are the key differences between capitalism, socialism and communism? If a revolutionary movement won power in Australia tomorrow, what would it do? What will things be like a long time after the revolution?

Lines of Approach:

(1) Look at the histories of the revolutionary movements in the U.S.S.R. and China. Identify the actions of the revisionist leaders in those countries that showed they were/are restoring capitalism. Find out how the revisionists define socialism. Work out a revolutionary definition. Explain how you distinguish between revisionist crimes, on the one hand, and mistakes by genuine revolutionary leaders, on the other.

(2) Describe how various aspects of Australian society could be run if capitalism were overthrown. Identify how our visions of the future differ from those of reformists.

(3) Critically analyse the programmes of various "Marxist" parties here and overseas.

3. ECONOMIC CRISIS

Questions:

Why do capitalist economic crises occur? Why, in particular, has the present crisis occurred? Is it basically the same as earlier ones, or does it have significant new features? How is it likely to develop? What effects is it having on society, the economic structure and the political climate? To what extent does the crisis in Australia have specific characteristics different from other countries?

Lines of Approach:

(1) Discuss the articles already published in the Discussion Bulletin (especially No. 6) and The Rebel! Develop the arguments - or refute them.

(2) Collect and summarise statistical and other information on what has happened to the economy over the last ten years, here and world-wide.

(3) Analyse existing theories about the economic situation - conservative, liberal, "left", whatever.

Future Projects

(4) Study Marx's economic writings. Summarise and discuss sections that appear to be particularly relevant.

4. AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY

Questions:

What are the specific features of capitalism in Australia? What is the role of overseas capital - are we under foreign domination? What are the relationships between the various sectors of capitalism in Australia - manufacturing, financial, retail, farming, mining, state, etc? What are the roles of protectionism, arbitration, state governments? What is the class structure of Australian society? What positions could the various classes (and sections of classes) be expected to take in a revolution?

Lines of Approach:

- (1) Collect and summarise statistical information.
- (2) Review some of the existing writings on these themes.
- (3) Debate the "independence" issue - the articles in Discussion Bulletin No. 4 could be a starting point.

5. TECHNOLOGY

Questions:

What is the role of technological change in the capitalist economy, in particular in economic crisis? Do types of technology reflect types of society? Is our idea of the communist utopia a society with high technology and hardly any obligatory work, or one with limited technology and a humanised working environment? Will artificial intelligence eventually take over, and if so will it be a good thing?

Lines of Approach:

- (1) Follow up on the articles already published in the Discussion Bulletin (Nos. 8 and 9). Summarise the issues in contention and discuss them further.
- (2) Analyse the Myers Report and the various responses to it.

6. THE WORLD SITUATION

Questions:

Are we headed for world war? If so, can it be prevented or delayed, and what can revolutionaries do to help prevent or delay it? What are the economic or other motives driving the superpowers? If world war does break out, how should revolutionaries act? What are the possible outcomes?

Lines of Approach:

- (1) Prepare comprehensive summary of WWII discussion group notes (see pages 17-23 of this bulletin for some of these notes). Identify the major issues and use as a basis for further discussion.
- (2) Work out how we would deal with the world situation in propaganda; and do it - e.g. broadsheet, posters.
- (3) Resume discussion group on imperialism, making efforts to get more people involved.

Editorial Note: The above article was written primarily to help REM in organising its own theoretical work, and will be used for that purpose. However, if any readers feel inspired to write articles, notes, reading lists, etc, on any of the topics outlined, we would be delighted to receive them. We hope to publish in future issues reports of work in progress, as well as - of course - articles resulting from that work.

ADVERTISEMENT OPPOSING THE EXECUTION OF FORMER CHINESE POLITICAL LEADERS

Despite the judicial trappings, there can be little doubt of the essential political nature of the trial which has just concluded in Peking. The aim is to discredit a whole range of political and social developments that emerged during the Cultural Revolution and which evoked a sympathetic response in the West from just about everybody left of centre. The issues involved are in no way exclusively Chinese, but cover almost every important social and political question in a modern industrial society - elitism in education, the relations between people in the production process, hierarchy, authority etc.

Even a casual reading of Beijing Review reveals that the current regime has no wish to face up to these questions but prefers to embrace policies that would do Malcolm Fraser and Milton Friedman proud.

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The following advertisement was recently placed in the National Times accompanied by the names of a number of signatories.

You may also like to write to the Chinese authorities to let them know your views. Suggested addresses: Beijing Review, P.O. Box 399, Beijing, China; Embassy of the People's Republic of China, Canberra 2600; Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Beijing, China.

Text of the Advertisement

JUDICIAL MURDER IN CHINA

Whether China takes a socialist or capitalist direction is a matter for the Chinese people. Nevertheless, it is our view that in a civilized country governments do not resort to executing their political opponents. Also, show trials which are held for purely political reasons do not reflect well on those who stage them.

We would also remind the present rulers of China that they owe their own lives and liberty to the obviously more lenient policies of Mao Tsetung and the 'gang of four'. Furthermore, any executions could do considerable harm to Australia-China relations and to China's foreign relations generally.

EDITORIAL GUIDELINES

1. The principal purpose of the Discussion Bulletin is to promote investigation and exchange of views on issues vital to the communist movement and to polemicize in defence of Marxism-Leninism and Maoism against other trends.
2. The Discussion Bulletin aims to publish a wide variety of views from outside and inside REM, in the belief that struggle between different ideas can help achieve clarity.
3. A secondary role of the Discussion Bulletin is to state, and argue for, views which REM has adopted as policy. We aim to produce formal policy statements summing up our understandings of questions that have been discussed in the bulletin.
4. In publishing the Discussion Bulletin we aim for professionalism, the test of which lies in what is included rather than what is excluded.
5. Major efforts should be made to ensure that each edition contains a number of well-written articles dealing with important questions in a critical and scientific manner.
6. Articles submitted which are not of such high quality will still normally be published. Where the editorial team believes an article could be improved by rewriting or abridgement, it will, if practicable, attempt to do this in consultation with the author, but such attempts will not be allowed, unless the author agrees, to unduly delay the publication of any article which is of some value in terms of the aims of the Discussion Bulletin.
7. If an article is submitted which, in the opinion of the editorial team, is of no appreciable value, it will be rejected. Where there is substantial disagreement within the editorial team over whether an article should be rejected, the article will normally be given the benefit of the doubt. The membership or executive of REM are the ultimate arbiters of such questions.
8. These guidelines are subject to review and alteration in the light of experience.

DEVELOPMENT OF ARMED STRUGGLE

Anon.

I've always had a vague notion of some great climax to the Australian revolution (insert multiple R-R-R's if required) where I and all my friends on the left take on hero roles machine-gunning from behind sand-bags in Bourke St, or picking off cops in Russell St from our stronghold in the Trades Hall. Who supplied the guns, or how I came to be in there at the finish is never explained in this comfortable dream.

Yet for all that, I know there has to be armed struggle, there will be, and the sooner the better. No-one is going to stand up like the umpire at the footy, hold a grenade aloft, and proclaim the official start of Armed Struggle.

Armed struggle started when the first demonstrator threw a rock at the authorities of the time. Armed class warfare started in Australia when aborigines attacked the first European settlers.

The seeds of constant widespread proletarian armed struggle are around us now. When youth gangs turn on police trying to bust them, they do it with chains, knives, sticks and stones - and they do lot of damage. The reasons are obviously political - the result of an inhuman system that cages and represses people until they hit out. Predictably it is often against one another (racism, rival gangs, domestic fights), but increasingly it is against the authorities.

Just because the working class doesn't chant slogans or correctly analyse the cause of unemployment is no reason to write off instinctively well-directed violence as a waste of time.

Real communists have an historical perspective of class struggle, know what sort of new society is possible, know something of the practical difficulties in getting there, know their class enemies and allies at any given time, and have long practice in explaining all that in terms anyone can understand. They may not be of working class background, but are at one with the proletariat, having lived and struggled with the exploited for many years. They are humble, but confident.

Those of us calling ourselves communists should be checking out how far we fall short of the above, and setting out to rectify it. With at least some of those attributes, we are in a position to unite usefully with the "instinctive revolutionaries" mentioned above.

The bill reads:

Tenants versus landlords, Housing Commission Estate dwellers versus the Commission, unemployed versus both the CES and the big companies engaged in lay-offs, prisoners versus screws, and half of Melbourne versus Waltons' baillifs.

The bricks are flying - where are you?

I surmise the housing estates and fibrous-cement jungles will eventually become 'uncontrollable' for the cops; whence it will probably be riot squads and the army. By that time perhaps the flying bricks will have become bullets.

There is obviously an underworld arms market. Even allowing for the fact that a large slice of the underworld is big business, cops, and the politicians - guns are moving, and are therefore commonly accessible to left-wing elements. Apart from this, the masses have untold skills and ingenuity for making armaments and knocking them off. But that has to develop with struggle, experience, and more awareness. You can't just go off and do a C.A.E. course in arms and explosives. Pity. But you can acquire guns now and teach yourself.

Armed Struggle

* * *

I have made it sound rather pre-determined - as if agitators possessed of ideology have no part in it. Higher consciousness born of experience is a pre-condition for greater unity and struggle by the masses. It's a sure bet there are many aware communists amongst the people now, who are not in any of the present left parties or groups. But with more communists fighting alongside the people, organisation should develop faster, victories should be more frequent, and handicaps like racism and sexism be less damaging. The defeat of the ruling class should therefore be closer.

Yes, armed struggle is as close as your nearest house-brick. No, there won't be a whistle to tell you when to start.

THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND THE REVISIONIST THEORY OF PRODUCTIVE FORCES

Norm Sinclair

A number of people seem to think that after the gang of four were arrested they were presented with "new revelations", they now had the "full facts", and therefore could proceed to do political somersaults. One of these "new revelations" was that the revolutionaries in China were "sabotaging production" and "setting revolution against production".

To see that there was nothing new about this tune you need go no further than the documents of the 9th and 10th Congresses of the CPC.

From the 9th Congress Report in 1969 we read:

As the 16-Point Decision indicates, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is a powerful motive force for the development of the social productive forces in our country.

Our country has seen good harvests in agricultural production for years running and there is also a thriving situation in industrial production and science and technology. The enthusiasm of the broad masses of the working people both in revolution and production has soared to unprecedented heights. Many factories, mines and other enterprises have time and again topped their production records, creating all-time highs in production. The technical revolution is making constant progress. The market is flourishing and prices are stable. By the end of 1968 we had redeemed all the national bonds. Our country is now a socialist country with neither internal nor external debts.

'Grasp revolution, promote production' - this principle is absolutely correct. It correctly explains the relationship between revolution and production, between consciousness and matter, between the superstructure and the economic base and between the relations of production and the productive forces. Chairman Mao always teaches us: 'Political work is the life-blood of all economic work.' Lenin denounced the opportunists who were opposed to approaching problems politically. 'Politics cannot but have precedence over economics. To argue differently means forgetting the ABC of Marxism.' (Lenin, Collected Works, Chinese Edn., Vol. 32, p.72). Lenin again stated: 'To put politics on a par with economics also means forgetting the ABC of Marxism' (ibid).

Politics is the concentrated expression of economics. If we fail to make revolution in the superstructure, fail to arouse the broad masses of the workers and peasants, fail to criticise the revisionist line, fail to expose the handful of renegades, enemy agents, capitalist-roaders in power and counter-revolutionaries and fail to consolidate the leadership of the proletariat, how can we further consolidate the socialist economic base and further develop the socialist productive forces? This is not to replace production by revolution but to use revolution to command production, promote it and lead it forward. We must make investigations and study, and actively and properly solve the many problems of policy in struggle-criticism-transformation on the economic front in accordance with Chairman Mao's general line of 'Going all out, aiming high and achieving greater, faster, better and more economical results in building socialism', in accordance with his great strategic concept, 'Be prepared against wars, be prepared against natural disaster, and do everything for the people' and with the series of principles such as 'take agriculture as the foundation and industry as the leading factor'. We must bring the revolutionary initiative and creativeness of the people of all nationalities into full play, firmly grasp revolution and energetically promote production and fulfill and overfulfill our plans for developing the national economy. It is certain that the great victory in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution will continue to bring about new leaps forward on the economic front and in our cause of socialist construction as a whole. (pp 60 - 64, FLP 1969).

On page 39 of the same report we read:

Especially when the capitalist-roaders in power failed in their scheme to suppress the revolution on the pretext of 'grasping production' and whipped up the evil counter-revolutionary wind of economism, the broad masses came to understand still better that only by recapturing their lost power was it possible for them to defeat the capitalist-roaders in power completely".

Chou En-lai's Report to the 10th Congress is even more explicit. On pages 4 and 5 of the FLP 1973 edition we read:

As we all know, the political report to the Ninth Congress was drawn up under Chairman Mao's personal guidance. Prior to the Congress, Lin Piao had produced a draft political report in collaboration with Chen Po-ta. They were opposed to continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat, contending that the main task after the Ninth Congress was to develop production. This was a refurbished version under new conditions of the same revisionist trash that Liu Shao-chi and Chen Po-ta had smuggled into the resolution of the Eighth Congress, which alleged that the major contradiction in our country was not the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, but that 'between the advanced socialist system and the backward productive forces of society'.

Naturally, this draft by Lin Piao and Chen Po-ta was rejected by the Central Committee. Lin Piao secretly supported Chen Po-ta in the latter's open opposition to the political report drawn up under Chairman Mao's guidance, and it was only after his attempts were frustrated that Lin Piao grudgingly accepted the report to the Congress.

(This statement, by the way, contradicts the claim made by Teng and others about a year later that Lin Piao was pushing an ultra-left line. This point may seem academic until you look at how the revisionists have used Lin Piao to discredit the Cultural Revolution).

ON HEADLESS CHOCKS

Paul

What we need to do - as an urgent task - is to train Marxist theoreticians capable of applying the truths of Marxism-Leninism to Australian conditions and by so doing, advance the revolutionary movement in this country with the aim of seizing state power.

Stirring stuff, eh? Pity I don't go along with it.

What we need to do is to make Marxist theory, not to make Marxist theoreticians. And I'm not engaging in polemics when I say this. Consider the introduction again - and similar statements that have been expressed by us, by the CPA-ML (old days) and by revolutionaries here and internationally - it contains underlying assumptions which, in my view, are wrong.

That Marxists need to apply the truths of Marxism to their local conditions is true, of course, but it is not necessarily the same thing as applying Marxism to local conditions and in practice has usually stopped short of applying Marxism.

Firstly, it misses the point (or tends to) about what Marxism is. Marxism is more than just a set of scientific and revolutionary truths deduced and verified by Marx, Engels, Lenin etc. Marxism is how these truths were arrived at in the first place (i.e., it's the method, more than the result). Forgetting that Marxism is an analytical method which needs to be applied all the time; that because of this, Marxist theory is being enriched all the time, leaves us wide open to fall for the second underlying assumption: that of treating Marxism as a dogma.

This line - which we have all fallen for at some time or another - maintains that you don't need to apply Marxism to create new theory, but to apply the truths of Marxism (already known, but not applied). In other words, it's all been done before (thank heavens); all we have to do is apply it. This is not really Marxism.

Of course there are many truths of Marxism which have been done before and they don't need going over again (revising) because they reflect reality and universal applications. But to then believe that all the answers are known, that all that is required is the mastering of these truths and the problems and answers of the local revolution will at once become apparent, is crap. It is saying that history has stopped, that social reality (from which Marxism is drawn) has ceased its development. To put it this way, demonstrates the fallaciousness of this position.

There really is a strong temptation for revolutionaries to use the revolutions of other countries - the USSR, China, Albania etc - as an ideological crutch which hampers our own thinking, our own development of revolutionary theory relevant to (and hence from) local revolutionary practice. Peking Review says that inflation in the west is a reflection of capitalist overproduction. Erudite Fumblebrain Hill agrees. We agree... and that's another problem solved. Is it really any surprise that the CPA-ML's anti-inflation campaign didn't even get off the ground?

Because the proletariat held state power somewhere, be it Russia, China, wherever, revolutionaries were able to stay in a cocoon and get the line from overseas via local gurus. When the USSR became revisionist, we ended up on the rocks - which is fair enough because we asked for it. And the same can be said for the situation we find ourselves in now, after the revisionist coup in China and the degeneration in Albania. The fact that we got pretty much what we deserved again, indicates the seriousness of the problem and that the lessons of the USSR were not really learnt (or even realized?)

Headless Chooks

That this situation should have ended years ago (like decades) is self-evident. That it hasn't, means we've got a bit of homework to do. The big difference now, however, is that we don't have a crutch anymore. For the first time in over 60 years, we are completely on our own.

Given this, our choices for the future are few. We could degenerate into a weirdo 'Marxist' sect (and I always thought that Catholicism was the one true faith), and because religious fervor does have its own momentum, we may even become a little successful. We could become cynics and drop out; or we can take stock of the situation and start to remedy it. And this brings me back to the question of theory and practice.

Yes, there is a dialectical relationship between theory and practice (which is hardly an original or startling piece of news) and at any time, one will hold precedence over the other (relationships between things are always in a state of flux. When this stops, sterile street begins). This shouldn't really need pointing out - but it seems prudent that I do so.

At the moment we do not possess much (anything?) we can give to the Australian people - which is a direct result of relying on crutches. Although the problem may be older than we are, now that it's been kicked from under us, we've got to stand on our own feet, get our theoretical shit together and use this as a springboard (a solid basis) for the agitational oriented activities.

This is not armchair Marxism. Nor is the suggestion that we become a study group. Part of the problem is that we expended a great deal of energy running around like chooks with their heads cut off (insufficient theory!). No wonder we got pissed off. We also fell for interpreting the relationship between theory and practice as 50% theory and 50% practice very even handed and very undialectical. The paralysis that inevitably followed was a much healthier reaction than people religiously burying themselves into ineffective "mass work". It was a conscious recognition that something was wrong. The fault was not too much theory - but not nearly enough. Without the basis that will come from theoretical research and struggle (amongst ourselves, nationally and internationally) we will remain headless chooks. The emphasis of our work must be toward understanding and developing Marxist theory to the point where we do have something to give the Australian people.

I don't want to be a headless chook all my life and go to the grave satisfied at having tried (but unfortunately never trying to seize state power). There is not much objective difference between this and the contribution to life made by Yevsey Klimkov, the principal character in Gorky's Life of a Useless Man. The motives are better, of course - but the effect is the same - useless. We should be only satisfied with winning.

COMMUNISM LIVES! - ON UNITING THEORY AND PRACTICE

Geoff

There seems to be a feeling that some conflict exists between theory and practice - that theory means "just studying" and practice means "doing things". This is wrong. It faces us with a choice between empiricism and dogmatism. The point is there is no trade-off between the two - you cannot have "more theory and less practice" or vice-versa.

Theoretical study is being done in such a way as to divorce it from reality. Such study has no meaning outside its own assumptions - you study it because it's good to know it. This has been defended under the slogan "Theory is Primary" as though Theory and Practice compete for leadership in the revolution.

Uniting Theory and Practice

It misses the point. Theoretical study is good when it makes the world clearer - when it has some point of reference outside of itself. There's nothing the matter with reading Capital (I suppose Marx meant someone to read it) if the reading serves some purpose other than our own knowledge. There is no point in a communist possessing knowledge unless it is to be used. Capital is useful - let's not 'study' it, let's use it. Theory is not "Primary", it is useful.

This does not mean that every period of study should end in a leaflet. Study is not theory, and leafletting is not practice.

IDEAS-FOR-THEIR-OWN-SAKE IS DOGMA, NOT THEORY

Theory is some notion of what the world is and how it works. Some people develop it by talking to people, some by reading the classics, some by working in action groups or unions. By itself this world view is not enough. It must be tested before it can progress. Proletarian study is like studying the form-guide - it could be done for its own sake, but the point is to find out how to bet - to put the theory to the test in the real world.

Mao puts it more pungently:

Our comrades must understand that we do not study Marxism-Leninism because it is pleasing to the eye, or because it has some mystical value....Marxism-Leninism has no beauty, nor has it any mystical value. It is only extremely useful. It seems that right up to the present quite a few have regarded Marxism-Leninism as a ready-made panacea: once you have it you can cure all your ills with little effort. This is a type of childish blindness and we must start a movement to enlighten these people. Those who regard Marxism-Leninism as religious dogma show this type of blind ignorance. We must tell them openly, "your dogma is no use", or to use an impolite phrase "your dogma is less useful than shit." We see that dog excrement can fertilise the fields, and man's can feed the dog. And dogmas? They can't fertilise the fields, nor can they feed a dog. Of what use are they?
(From B. Compton, "Party Reform Documents" 1942)

If it's not useful - Forget it!

DOING THINGS IS NOT PRACTICE

We do have a theory. It may not always be conscious in that it may not inform all our actions. This is why we often lose a sense of direction in our work. We should aim to provide communist leadership in action groups. This means understanding how the action fits in with the broader pattern of social change, as well as how to lead the other members of the group to a deeper understanding of the nature of capitalist society. It never means just taking them over.

We practice Marxism-Leninism when we bite back an attack on someone with whom we know we should unite, and when we thoroughly demolish someone who is an enemy. We practice Marxism-Leninism when we support someone we know we should support. "Practice" means doing what's required. Sometimes it means a leaflet, sometimes it means a demonstration, sometimes it means keeping quiet. One day it will mean firing guns. Until then it means not firing guns. Practice is living theory.

Mao quotes the saying "To shoot an arrow, have a target"...

In shooting the arrow you must have a target to aim at. The relation between Marxism-Leninism and the Chinese Revolution (he meant the Australian one too) is the same as between the arrow and the target. However, some comrades are shooting arrows without a target, shooting them recklessly. It is easy for them to harm the revolutionary cause.

In addition, there are some comrades who merely take the arrow in hand, twist it back and forth, and say again and again in praise, "excellent arrow, excellent arrow", but are never willing to shoot it. This type of person is a connoisseur of antiques who has hardly any relationship with the revolution. If it were otherwise, why should we want to study Marxism-Leninism? Isn't it because we have not digested our millet that we read a book on the relief of indigestion?

Get theory to find the target, and make sure we're prepared to shoot!

PRACTICE IS THEORY LIVE!

Uniting theory and practice is a matter of taking our communist world view seriously. It means having a pattern to live by, and living it. It means seeing how our own small part of life relates to other struggles in Australia and in the world. It sees beyond splittism and small-group thinking. It demands that there be a point to our study and to our actions. It means making communism live.

ON UNTYING THEORY AND PRACTICE

Steve Melipone

'One divides into two' is one of those catch-phrases that people throw around without necessarily understanding the concept behind it. In fact sometimes people use the phrase merely in order to sound profound. Nevertheless it embodies an important idea - that there are contradictions in everything and that contradiction is fundamental. The unity of the two sides of a contradiction is conditional and transitory, but their struggle is basic. The 'unity of opposites' is just what it says. It is not the unity of things that seem to be opposite but deep down ('in essence') are not. It is the unity of things that really-truly are opposite.

This is not to say that all contradictions are always antagonistic. Both before and after liberation in China there was a worker-peasant alliance. The contradiction between the two classes was not antagonistic. Their unity of interests was highlighted. Just the same, they were still separate classes: their relationships to the means of production were different. The workers were not 'peasants in factories' and the peasants were not 'proletarians on the land'. For this reason it was necessary for the proletariat to struggle for the leading role. They were two classes with two ideologies and one had to prevail.

So it is with theory and practice. But some writings on this subject seem to be, at best, glossing over this fact, and at worst, assuming that unity is fundamental and struggle is an optical illusion or the result of errors. Examples are 'Waiting for a Communist Party' (Discussion Bulletin 9) and 'Communism Lives! On Uniting Theory and Practice' (in this issue).

First let's consider the notion that neither theory nor practice is primary. This idea comes through in 'Communism Lives...'. 'Waiting for a Communist Party' doesn't explicitly advance this proposition but it interprets the formulation 'raise the theoretical level while uniting

Untying Theory and Practice

theory and practice' in such a way as to water down the primacy of theory at the present time. I feel it tends to present theory as one task among many equally important tasks and to exaggerate the danger of armchair Marxism when the real problem is that there is still far too little theoretical work being done. Some members of the Red Eureka Movement, including myself, have been accused of hypocrisy for giving lip-service to the idea that 'theory is primary and propaganda is secondary' while not doing any propaganda work. We should be called hypocrites for not doing any theoretical work!

Actually the belief that neither theory nor practice is primary is the least credible position. Why don't people come out and say that practice is primary? It's a proposition that's got a lot going for it - at most times it would be correct. Overall, practice is the principal aspect of the practice/theory contradiction. If we thought otherwise we would not be materialists. So at most times practice is primary. However there are occasions when theory is primary. But are there occasions when neither is primary? (Or when both are primary? - it amounts to the same thing.)

We could think of the two aspects of a contradiction as being like the two sides of a coin. They are opposite sides but of course they are both part of a larger whole and both indispensable to that whole. But you would do well not to emphasise this latter aspect too much in a two-up game. Each coin at any given time has either its head or its tail uppermost and the two-up players are interested in which one it is. It's no good going on about how there can be no heads without tails and how essential it is always to bear in mind the basic unity of the penny. Maintaining that neither theory nor practice is primary is like betting on the coin landing on its edge.

Practice means engaging in activity which brings you directly into interaction with society and/or nature. In the present context, political struggle is the type of practice we have in mind. Political struggles give rise to questions as to what should be done. They also generate experiences and information which can be used in answering these questions. **Theory** means analysing facts, identifying the forces at work and formulating plans for future action. The results of theoretical work are used to guide further practice and are tested in that practice.

In this process theory and practice are firmly linked, but they are nevertheless distinct phases, distinct types of activity. In fact, as in normal parlance, they are opposites. As I said before, practice is normally the principal aspect but at particular times theory becomes principal. When we have no clear conception of the forces at work in society and no plan of action to change society we must give priority to developing such a conception and such a plan. Isn't this the situation revolutionaries are in now?

Previous practice has given us questions that need answering and facts we can use in answering them - the previous practice being the struggles we have been involved in, the struggles that have taken place in Australian history in general and the struggles that have been waged elsewhere in the world, including the experiences of the world communist movement. We need to draw some conclusions and work out at least a tentative plan for communist practice in the future.

Until this is done theory should be the leading activity. However practice may continue to be the main activity for most or all of us. By this I mean that every member of REM is and will continue to be involved in political struggles, and practical activities in these struggles may take up more time than theoretical activities such as reading, writing and arguing about the questions facing the communist movement. This is quite healthy. Firstly because continuing involvement in struggles provides some safeguard against becoming remote from reality and oblivious to trends in society and in progressive movements. Secondly because although we have as yet little to offer as communists, we do have something to offer as relatively experienced activists with a few skills that are worth passing on to newer activists.

But the first priority right now for a communist **organisation** must be to organise investigation of theoretical questions. (When I say 'theoretical questions' I don't mean academic questions like how many bolsheviks can dance on the head of a pin, but vital questions like how to overthrow capitalism.) An essential part of this first priority task is to disseminate among wider left circles an awareness of the questions we are investigating and our tentative conclusions - and later our less tentative conclusions. This is where the Discussion Bulletin comes in. To a degree our publication of the Discussion Bulletin is also a form of propaganda work, but that is not its principal function. Its principal function is to stimulate discussion within REM and among revolutionaries in general.

Struggles are going on anyway, regardless of what REM does. REM members are involved in some of them. But a communist (or would-be communist) organisation like REM is not uniquely qualified to provide leadership in these struggles precisely because we lack any clear idea of the way forward for the revolution.

What is the purpose of making a clear distinction between theory and practice and a definite decision about which of them is primary at a given time? It is not to negate the unity of theory and practice. On the contrary it is to make that unity real and not just a phrase. It is to achieve clarity about our situation and give us some perspective on our work. It is important to untie theory and practice, not in the sense of breaking the link between them, but in the sense of disentangling the two concepts in our minds so that we can better understand each of them and the relationship between them.

ANALYSING SOVIET IMPERIALISM

Paul

With Afghanistan and the issue of Olympic boycotts dominating much of the news this year, the USSR's activities around the world have clearly become items of public discussion and debate. That's great. Mind you, the Soviets have been doing a lot of nasty things for years now and their behaviour has been a burning issue within the left for a damn sight longer.

Given this, it annoys the hell out of me that we haven't got very far in our anti-Soviet campaigning by now. In fact, the standard of our debate on this point is pretty poor. It hasn't progressed for years and often the progress that is made occurs in spite of us.

It's not that the things we say are not true (on the whole). It's just that we tend to substitute truisms for actual argument.

What's prompted my comments has been a re-reading of 'The Restoration of Capitalism in the USSR' by Martin Nicolaus. I have since also re-read the then Revolutionary Union's 'How Capitalism has Been Restored in the Soviet Union...' Although there is pretty major disagreement between them (see the RCP's article against Nicolaus in "The Communist") a lot of research has gone into both. No, not research into what Marx, Lenin etc. said about this or that (good old quote hunting) but real live research, historical and contemporary, to demonstrate that capitalism has been restored in the USSR and the hows and whys of this process.

Obviously both works have been the result not only of research, but of lengthy debate and disagreement. In other words, they furnish evidence of the fact that many, many people (progressives, socialists, revolutionaries of various sorts), were not convinced, or were largely unaware of the changes that had taken place in the USSR - much less what these changes meant within the USSR and internationally.

Lots of progressive people here (excluding SPA hacks) do not agree with our view of the USSR. They don't see that there's been a restoration of capitalism, resulting in the rise of social fascism and social imperialism. Many do not particularly like the USSR (though they may like the US a damn sight less!) but still see it as "socialist", whatever that may mean. The Soviet Union is often seen as a distinctly lesser evil than the US.

Undoubtedly this situation has enabled the USSR to get away with murder (literally) in places like Afghanistan, by blaming it all on the Yanks. A lot of people fall for this, or at least are influenced by it.

We have fallen down badly through our inability to convince many more people than we have, that the USSR is nasty because it is a big, monopoly capitalist power. We have failed to demonstrate that the Soviet Union's economy is subject to the **same** anarchic forces which compelled the US, Britain, etc. to be imperialist powers and warmongers. We have not sufficiently proved (and you don't do it by ranting and raving) that capitalist productive relations have been restored in the USSR; let alone convincing some that such a process is even possible.

Various bourgeois journals and, even more importantly, military and economic journals published by the Soviets themselves provide us with a veritable gold mine of information which we could use to convince people. The trouble is that none of us have bothered to even look (me included).

If we really want to convince our fellow lefties (and most of them are pretty good people), then we'd better do some homework **now** and enter into and encourage real honest to goodness debate on these matters.

INTRODUCTION TO ARTICLES ON WORLD WAR III

In May this year a group of people (mostly, but not all, members of REM) began meeting at the After Hours Bookshop to discuss the international situation, and in particular the prospect of a world war and how revolutionaries should respond.

We spent some time discussing an article titled "World War Three". This article, together with some notes from our discussion of it on 6 June 1980, are printed on the following pages. We would welcome readers comments on the series of questions on page 21 and on related issues. Discussion notes from 30 May and 14 June have been held over.

It will be obvious that we started from the standpoint that both the USA and the USSR are imperialist superpowers, and that the USSR is at present the more aggressive and expansionist of the two. The material printed here basically discusses what these views imply for the attitude of revolutionaries to various concrete issues. The ideas expressed here should be regarded as tentative. A more finished article is to be prepared, setting out conclusions and identifying questions which require further consideration. This will be published in a later edition of the Discussion Bulletin.

During our discussions we considered the proposition that the Soviet Union is imperialist and discussed how this can be reconciled with the apparent differences in the social and economic systems of the USSR and Western imperialism. While some views were expressed, we concluded that we don't have a good enough understanding of the whole concept of imperialism and the characteristics of imperialism in the West. Accordingly we plan to study imperialism, starting with Lenin's **Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism**.

The Study Group should resume operations early in 1981. Please get in touch if you are interested in participating.

WORLD WAR THREE

Communists take the view that international, or state to state, relations are always the expression of class relations, and hence, of class struggle. How then is the class struggle in international relations being fought out today? I think international relations today are extremely complex and it is difficult to work out a revolutionary-proletarian line to take. For purposes of self-clarification I have written this small article, which is mostly a series of observations and questions rather than a worked out view. I hope other people might be prepared to contribute their views on this very important question, that is : the prospect of a world war, and a communist attitude to it.

NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE

Lenin equated national independence with PURELY political independence (not economic independence).

National self determination means political self determination.

Lenin A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism. Moscow '74 p. 23

Lenin provides the example of Norway, which seceded from Sweden in 1905 and thereby gained political independence. However, it was still dominated by British capital, and other capitals.

Economic annexation is fully achievable without political annexation and is widely practised.

Lenin, Ibid, p. 23.

All this goes to show is that national independence, or self determination, is part of bourgeois democracy, that is, part of capitalism and its highest stage, imperialism. The socialist revolution involves extending the achievements of bourgeois democracy, until such time as democracy itself will be consigned to the scrap heap. (That is, classless, stateless, communist society.)

Hence, communists in general uphold and defend these bourgeois democratic rights as one step on the road to communism, via a socialist revolution.

What does this mean for Australia?

It can only mean that Australia is ALREADY a politically independent country, an independent sovereign state under imperialist domination. Any struggle for ECONOMIC independence must be a struggle against capitalism, since imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism- (Lenin gave other examples of politically independent, but exploited countries in his own day- these were Argentina and Portugal, in their relations with Britain).

Since Australia has already, long ago (1901), achieved political independence an alliance with the national bourgeoisie against imperialist economic annexation seems of limited potential, since such an alliance must be against capitalism itself, or its highest stage, imperialism.

If Australia's self determination, however, is ever threatened (as it was when the Japanese were bombing Northern Australia) then there will be great potential for unity in defence of bourgeois democratic liberties (such as self-determination, for one).

Today, Australia's national independence is threatened, like many other countries in the world, by the U.S.S.R., which is not just into exploiting countries economically, like the U.S.A. is but also political annexation, by military conquest. When people say to this that the U.S.A. is the biggest enemy to the Australian people, that does not seem to me to be quite

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true. The U.S.A. is not attacking bourgeois democracy by exploiting Europe, many third world countries, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, etc. To get it out of Australia requires socialist, not bourgeois-democratic, revolution; that is, an EXTENSION of the national independence WHICH ALREADY EXISTS in our economic affairs. The U.S.S.R. is on the other hand threatening to smash this political independence by military conquest, as did Germany and Japan in W.W.2. Hence, the U.S.S.R. IS the greater enemy, number one enemy, since it threatens what ALREADY exists (national self-determination, or political independence).

Another point on national independence is that communists do not support EVERY national independence struggle, even though national independence, as a bourgeoisie-democratic right, is a necessary step towards socialism. In our analysis of anything, the part is always subordinated to the whole. Marx and Engels opposed the national movement of the Czechs and South Slavs in the nineteenth century because the movements were being used by the Czarist autocrats to extend their domination. Czarism at that time threatened the independence of the European bourgeois republics; it was the bulwark of reaction at that time. On the other hand, Marx and Engels supported the Polish national independence movement because it was a blow against Czarism.

Lenin said that Bolsheviks:

....will not support a struggle of the reactionary classes against imperialism, we will not support an uprising of the reactionary classes against imperialism and capitalism.

All of this raises some interesting questions. What should our attitude be to national independence struggles which are in many cases financed and patronised by the new Czars, the U.S.S.R. The Palestinians are a case in point. They supported the invasion of Afghanistan. Today, the U.S.S.R. is indeed the "bulwark of reaction" in the world. Would a Palestinian state then be another "outpost of reaction" (as Marx described the Czech nation in his time)?

Secondly, an anti-capitalist, feudal revolution has occurred in Iran. Whilst it is anti U.S., is ^{the U.S.} still the major enemy in the world today? The slogan " Fight Both Superpowers " would not have gone down very well in world war two. Britain, at that time, was a full-blooded imperialist, exploiting many countries, yet Stalin and other Communists made the correct analysis that German Nazism (and Japanese militarism) was the biggest enemy, since it was an anti-democratic, annexationist power. Today "Fight Both Superpowers !" seems equally inapplicable.

Of national independence, Lenin said:

The several demands of democracy, including self determination, are not an absolute, but only a small part of the general democratic (now equals general socialist) world movement.

(Lenin's brackets)

" The discussion on self determination summed up"

(Collected Works vol.22 p. 341)

The general democratic movement today (the fight against Soviet military annexation) might well demand opposing national movements which serve the interests of the new Czars. Likewise, while as socialists we oppose the imperialist (mainly U.S., British, and Japanese imperialists) exploitation of Australia, is it right in the context of the Soviet threat to our National independence to say "Fight Both Superpowers "? And if U.S. military bases are a contribution to the national independence of Australia in the face of Soviet annexation (or U.S. bases in Europe etc.) do we still oppose them ? I think not. But then what about, for example, the drafting of Australians into the army which will fight as an ally of America?

To decide these questions, we have to analyze both aspects of the U.S., U.S.S.R. contradiction. If the U.S.S.R. can be shown to be the more dangerous, ANTI-DEMOCRATIC force, then, just as Stalin united with the British imperialists against Nazi Germany, so it would be right to unite with the U.S. imperialists against the U.S.S.R.

LENIN'S ANALYSIS OF WORLD WAR ONE

"((Marxism says:)) if the substance of a war is, for example, the overthrow of alien oppression,...then such a war is progressive as far as the oppressed state or nation is concerned. If, however, the 'substance' of a war is redivision of colonies, division of booty, plunder of foreign lands, (and such is the war of 1914-16) then talk of 'defending the fatherland' is sheer deception of the people."

Lenin - "A Caricature..." pages 11-12

For Lenin, WWI was a war between slave-owners for the preservation and extension of slavery. It was a continuation of the European powers' colonialist policy. Basically, it was a war over colonies being fought out in Europe. Today, are the USA and USSR fighting - or about to fight - over colonies, spheres of influence, etc? There are no colonies any more. But could such a conflict be over markets, raw materials, etc? Perhaps Iran might become a battleground for both superpowers as each tries to gain control over that country. Such a war would surely be totally reactionary. On the other hand, even if a large part of World War 3 were to be over "spheres of influence", might not larger issues be at stake, e.g. the survival of western Europe as independent countries and states? Certainly, both powers are imperialist. Certainly any war will arise because of imperialist contention, the world not being big enough for both of them. But that is not enough to say the war is an "imperialist" war, for on those grounds World War 2 would have been an imperialist war, when in fact it was an imperialist war only for Germany, Japan and Italy, and a democratic, anti-fascist war for the allies, the USSR, etc. The fact that America increased its imperialist domination over much of the world as a result of the war does not alter the fact that the US imperialists, like the British, directed a democratic, anti-fascist war.

THEORY OF THREE WORLDS

In the Chinese pamphlet "Chairman Mao's Theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds is a Major Contribution to Marxism-Leninism" (Peking, 1977), it is stated:

"The international proletariat must do its utmost to build, consolidate and expand an international united front against the Soviet and US hegemonists and play to the full its role as the core of the united front."

(page 78)

Even though it is said that the USSR is the more dangerous of the two superpowers, there is never any suggestion of an alliance with the USA. The USSR is in their opinion the more dangerous of the two because -

- (a) it is the latecomer to the imperialist banquetting table and therefore wants a redivision of the spoils,
- (b) it is economically weaker and therefore must rely on military strength if it is to extend its domination,
- (c) Soviet fascist dictatorship makes militarization an easier task in the USSR than in the USA,
- (d) people have illusions about the "peaceful", "socialist" nature of the USSR.

But now China is forming an alliance with the US as well as Europe and the Third World against the Soviets.

In the pamphlet the Third World is regarded as the main force against Soviet-USA hegemonism, because the proletariats in these countries are too weak to make a revolution. However, forming an international united front against the superpower(s) should not mean renouncing class-struggle at home. Why should we allow the bourgeoisie to direct the democratic struggle for national independence, when these tasks could be carried out by a proletarian dictatorship? When Marx and Engels supported the national liberation war of Germany against France in 1871, they advised the workers' parties to uphold the independent interests of the workers. No matter whether we decided to support America against Russia, the task of building a revolutionary workers' movement which will seize power and create a socialist republic in Australia will remain as important as ever. Furthermore, it is precisely during wars and other great social upheavals and crises that revolutions become possible, but if there is no workers' party to take power there will be no revolution, no matter what the possibilities.

Rather than concluding, I offer some questions for discussion:

- (a) What is US imperialism and what is USSR imperialism? In what respects are they the same things, and in what ways do they differ?
- (b) Can the USSR be singled out as the greater enemy to the world's peoples, in as much as it is bent on obliterating the political independence of nations through military annexation, whereas the US is not?
- (c) Australia, New Zealand, Canada, western Europe, Britain, etc, are all independent nations (many under US economic domination). Are third world countries like the Phillipines, South Korea, Chile, etc, also independent states under imperialist economic control, or are they some type of 'neo-colony', 'client state', etc?
- (d) Conversely, are the East European states, as a whole, 'neo-colonies', 'client states' of the USSR or politically independent states under imperialist economic domination?
- (e) If the USSR is the number-one enemy, the 'bulwark of reaction' in the world today, how do we regard national independence struggles financed, armed and patronised by the Soviets?
- (f) If the USSR is the number-one enemy, the 'bulwark of reaction' in the world today, do we lend support to the US imperialists against the USSR?
- (g) If the USSR is the number-one enemy, how do we regard US imperialism (economic and military) in Australia?
- (h) If the USSR is the number-one enemy, do we support the militarization of the Australian population by the ruling class (draft, etc)?

* * * * *

AFGHANISTAN

The revolutionary character of a national movement under the conditions of imperialist oppression does not necessarily presuppose the existence of proletarian elements in the movement, the existence of a revolutionary or a republican programme of the movement, the existence of a democratic basis of the movement. The struggle that the Emir of Afghanistan is waging for the independence of Afghanistan is objectively a **revolutionary** struggle, despite the monarchist views of the Emir and his associates, for it weakens, disintegrates and undermines imperialism...

(Stalin, "Foundations of Leninism", Chapter VI)

WORLD WAR III DISCUSSION GROUP

Summary of Discussion, 6.6.80

1. Comments on Summary of last Discussion

It was agreed that there was a need for differences of opinion to be brought out more in future summaries - and in future discussions.

Appeasement

It was pointed out that, although appeasement policies are not a significant trend among right wing and ruling class forces at the moment, they have been in the recent past and could be again in the future. Military unpreparedness is one factor which makes governments lean towards appeasement. Other factors encouraging appeasement were discussed - the view that strong opposition to aggression only encourages it, wishful thinking (unwillingness to contemplate the thought of the world being plunged into turmoil) and simple confusion about the world situation.

Australia's Strategic Importance

The statement that Australia would be of extreme strategic importance in a world war was questioned. Among reasons why Australia might be of importance were US military and communications bases here and mineral resources which might be difficult to obtain elsewhere during a war. The general feeling was that Australia would not be of great importance in the early stages of a war centred on Europe, but could become of importance as a centre of resistance to Soviet expansion in south-east Asia and the Pacific (as it was in relation to Japanese expansion in WWII).

Left Attitudes to the USSR

It was argued that it was healthy that there has been no wave of patriotism and war hysteria in the wake of Afghanistan, and that the Left will come to oppose the Soviet Union as its intentions become clearer. This was disputed in view of the strong pro-Soviet position taken by a number of groups recently, especially Trot groups. In opposition to this it was argued that the predominant attitude on the Left is anti-Fraser and anti-US rather than pro-Soviet, and that the Trot groups are attempting to capitalise on this by being so anti-US that they are actually pro-Soviet, but in doing so their ideas have become alien to those of the Left at large (as usual).

It was suggested that knee-jerk opposition to Western moves over Afghanistan was one reason the Left's reaction was different to what it was to the invasion of Czechoslovakia, when there was no suggestion of the Western powers taking any action. Another difference is that the general atmosphere in the Left was more revolutionary in 1968, and the most active forces then wouldn't have dreamt of apologising for the invasion.

How to Change People's Thinking on the Soviet Union

One useful thing would be to collect the facts about the Soviet Union's military forces - the nature and deployment of Soviet weaponry would show whether it's designed for defence or aggression. Useful information could be extracted from various military journals - Western and Soviet - as well as Chinese publications.

Analysing what it is about the Soviet social system that gives rise to expansionism, and repression at home, is vital. Why is the Left so un-indignant about the fascist character of the Soviet system? Various reasons were suggested. The victims of the Soviet actions are seen as reactionaries. Another possibility is that people are feeling so ground-down and despondent they can't lift their sights beyond sullen resentment of our 'own' ruling class.

We all agreed that people would take more notice of what we have to say if we could demonstrate the validity of our analysis by making predictions that came true. But nobody had any definite ideas about how we could manage to do this!

2. The Article 'World War III'

Comments were made on the article as it was being read out.

Is it meaningful to try to distinguish between a politically independent country under the economic sway of foreign capital, and a 'neo-colony' which is only formally independent? Was the ousting of the Whitlam government an example of political control of Australia by foreign capital? It was argued that it was just an example of domination by big capital - the fact that it was foreign capital wasn't of fundamental significance. Whitlam had limited the inflow of capital, which didn't make economic sense in capitalist terms and helped the economy to crash, making the Labor government extremely unpopular and politically vulnerable.

There was disagreement with the statement that US imperialism in economically exploiting other countries is not attacking democratic liberties. It was put that this is one-sided - all imperialism is reactionary, it has no particular attachment to bourgeois democracy. The extent to which it infringes on democracy varies in degree from one country to another - in third world countries the state is weaker so it's easier for a foreign power to meddle in the country's affairs.

There was a discussion of how various aspects of democracy compare in different Western countries. The question was raised of whether democracy is being whittled away by reactionary imperialism. In countries where there is no democracy and it's normal for governments to kill their opponents, imperialists tend to behave the same way. (This is not to deny that imperialism, by introducing capitalist relations of production, creates the social forces which will fight for political democracy - the point being made was that imperialists do not set out to introduce democracy.)

The question of whether imperialism tends to be inherently undemocratic was unresolved. Lenin said that a democratic republic is the ideal form for capitalist society, but he also said that imperialism means reaction all down the line.

There was disagreement with the article's statement about the Palestinians - firstly because the Palestinian leadership isn't solidly pro-Soviet, and secondly because the attitude to the Soviet Union is a matter of the policies of leaderships, which can change from time to time, but that doesn't affect the social content of the Palestinian national movement. It was put that a movement among Baluchis to break up Pakistan would at this time be an example of something that should be opposed as it would inherently serve Soviet expansionism. But we were not really clear on how to distinguish between the two types of situations - in both cases it would seem that the context determines whether a struggle for self-determination is progressive. Other examples raised were Angola, Manchukuo and Tibet - as well as the south Slavs of Marx's day.

There was also comment on whether it can be correct to support feudal uprisings against imperialism. Stalin's statement about emirs, etc, would seem to be saying, yes. How do we react to the struggle of Afghan feudalists against the USSR? It was suggested that even if the predominant aim of the Afghan rebels was an independent, feudal, backward Afghanistan, they should still be supported as preferable to a continuation of Soviet military occupation which totally stifles all possibilities of social development. In any case, is the Afghan struggle mainly a fight to preserve backward social relations, or is it mainly an independence struggle, or is it impossible to separate the two aspects? We weren't sure.

Discussion of the rest of the article was held over till next time.

Ron 1 July 1980

Its a lot harder writing a theoretical article on questions we are not sure about than churning out some more propoganda to pass on answers we have already got. Most people don't have an academic background to write long "heavy" articles, but prefer to write short notes. This may be fortunate since readers prefer short notes. But research skills for looking up information are lacking too, and that has no compensating advantages.

If the Discussion Bulletin is to help develop revolutionary theory in Australia we need more short notes posing questions, or contributing towards answers, as part of the process of working up to more comprehensive statements.

Lets take the need for an article on the economic causes of Russian militarism and expansionism for example, although the same process could apply to many other topics.

A first step would be a short note in the Discussion Bulletin asking for help from readers to write such an article. This would explain briefly why it is an important question, what different approaches to the subject the writer is already aware of, what sources of information are already available, and how it is proposed to tackle it.

This could encourage other readers to respond with notes drawing attention to other aspects of the problem or different approaches to it, and additional information resources not mentioned in the first note. So a cooperative theoretical effort could develop over a period of time.

But even if there was no response, at least the project would have been defined, and people involved in other questions would know there was something under way on that one.

There is already an extensive literature concerning the Soviet Union and before any new and better analysis is attempted, it would be necessary to deal with that. Almost all the allegedly "Maoist" and "ML" sects as well as Trots and other groups have had something to say about it, and this material should be digested first. Even when producing propoganda rather than theory, it is very important to know exactly what enemy arguments have to be answered. As for theoretical writing, it is likely to degenerate into "armchair Marxism" unless done as a sharp polemical struggle against opposing views, for the purpose of winning victory for more correct ideas that can help the practical struggle.

Engels treats the theoretical STRUGGLE as a form of struggle on a par with the political and economic struggle (see Lenin's "What Is To Be Done" Chapter I section D). Almost all the "Classics" of Marxism were written as polemics against opposing views, and we should treat theoretical work as a form of class struggle rather than simply "writing an article".

The polemical diatribes of various "left sects" against each other tend to discredit the idea of theoretical struggle, as does the "armchair Marxism" of circles like "New Left Review". But our polemics should aim to win the battle of ideas for the purpose of changing the world, not focus on personalities, incidents, semantic nitpicking or side issues. If we succeed then people will find "theory", whether long and heavy, or short and light, a lot more interesting than propoganda, and more people will read it, and respond to it with comments of their own.

At present, revolutionary Marxist ideas have been almost completely drowned out in the world movement and socialist or communist literature and journals of the radical intelligentsia are largely dominated by various currents

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of reformism, revisionism, anarchism, ultra-leftism etc. This has happened before, and the only answer to it is a vigorous polemical struggle, both in our own publications, and in contributions to others.

If this sounds intimidating, a relatively easy beginning would be to simply publish a series of brief notes or abstracts drawing attention to particular items and/or summarizing them or stating roughly what the views of the different trends are about the issue.

On the Soviet Union, one could start by noting, and then reviewing the polemics between Martin Nicolaus ("Restoration of Capitalism in the USSR" and article in "Class Struggle" No 2, 1975) and the RCPUSA (Red Papers 7 and the Communist Vol 1, No 1). Then there is important material in Chinese pamphlets and Peking Review, Albanian material, Charles Bettelheim, Tony Cliff, pamphlets from the "British and Irish Communist Organization" and various Trotskyist analyses.

"After Hours Books" receives quite a range of material from overseas and also I have an extensive library which remains unorganized as well as unread. Just cataloging this stuff and preparing bibliographies so people know it is available and can borrow (and return) it would be a very useful contribution. Then anyone interested could easily look things up for themselves and would not be hampered by having to wait for someone else to dig it out for them (which won't happen, since there just isn't time).

There is also an extensive mainstream bourgeois literature on "Soviet Studies" with numerous specialized research journals etc. It's well worth the effort of going to a University library and learning how to use it. (This is not difficult although most University graduates never do learn how to use the library for research).

Take a look at the literature survey Lenin carried out in "Notebooks on Imperialism" (Collected Works Vol 39) before writing "Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism". Also the work Marx did for "Capital". Of course we don't have to reach the standards of Marx or Lenin. But they teach it for granted that socialist theoretical literature would be more scientifically rigorous and at a higher intellectual level than bourgeois literature, while unfortunately today the feeble minded productions of mainstream bourgeois academics are often more scientific than what passes for "Marxism".

If the proletariat is to become the ruling class and enter the halls of Government and boardrooms of industry, then it must also not be afraid to enter the research libraries and prove its superiority and capacity to rule there too. If only bourgeois intellectuals can do research work then we still need a ruling class and the proletariat is not ready yet to rule.

In fact modern industry, as developed by bourgeois society, has developed a literate working class, many of whom have tertiary education and even more of whom have secondary education to a level that would make them "intellectuals" as that term was used in Russia and China. Under socialism in China working class intellectuals were able to take time off work for part-time theoretical study groups which did serious work on questions of history, philosophy, international affairs, political economy and so on. Even "difficult" classical works like Lenin's "Materialism and Empirio-criticism" were made the subject of a nationwide mass campaign closely linked to the struggle against Lin Biao.

"Reference News" was published in millions of copies so that all concerned could follow what the foreign press was saying about world affairs.

In Australia and other Western countries (and now in China too) there is little state assistance for radical research. The academic and similar jobs available to radicals and from which a good deal of "radical political economy" etc is produced, probably do as much harm as good.

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Nevertheless, the level of development of the productive forces makes even the dole sufficient, although hardly adequate, for young single people who want to do theoretical work, or organizational or agitational work for that matter, to maintain a standard of living comparable to that of emigre intellectuals like Marx and Lenin or to that of working class intellectuals in China.

Although the state doesn't actually encourage the study of Marxism or current affairs, the necessary literature is freely available in libraries. There is even a certain amount of encouragement at the fringes of the academic world and also the labour movement and Government funded community projects, although once again this probably does as much harm as good.

Certainly there is no difficulty with publication. Not only is there no censorship whatever, but printing technology is now extremely cheap. A range of publications are open, which mainly circulate among "armchair Marxists" of the radical intelligentsia, but also among activists in various struggles, and it is quite easy to add new ones. The early Russian Marxists defeated Narodism in the "Legal Marxist" journals of the Russian bourgeois intelligentsia and Lenin's "Imperialism" was published under Tsarist censorship. So we have no excuse for not challenging the hegemony of anti-Marxist or pseudo-Marxist ideas in "radical" circles.

After cataloging, noting and summarizing, the next step would probably be some short reviews and critiques polemicizing against the various wrong lines. Destruction comes before construction. All this is ideally suited for a division of labour and cooperative effort (A takes the Martin Nicholas Book, B takes Peking Review, C reads CIA reports and so on). But this will not come about by demanding cooperation and then getting discouraged by the response. It will develop very gradually by people simply reporting what they are doing and what they have done in the Discussion Bulletin, so others will be encouraged (not compelled) to join in, and so that duplication of effort can be avoided and wrong priorities criticized.

When we have a decent organization, not to mention a party, theoretical work can be far more systematic, and so can everything else. But in the meantime the Discussion Bulletin is a higher form of organization than personal correspondence or appeals at meetings. Being able to run the Discussion Bulletin properly is an essential preliminary to having a proper organization.

Although "Waiting for a Communist Party" (Discussion Bulletin 9) says "The Discussion Bulletin is, has been and will become as good as the organization", the exact opposite is true. When the time comes for party building, it will be built around a newspaper, as Lenin explained in "What Is To Be Done". In/^{the}meantime, only by developing the Discussion Bulletin as a collective project, about which collective decisions are taken, can REM function as an organization at all. It cannot be simply left to whoever "firmly believes" that their "control" of it is in our "best interests".

The Discussion Bulletin is not to be "the haphazard and sporadic work of a few individuals" then the few individuals who have run it like that, and who reject the very concept that REM as a whole has a right to decide what happens to it, will have to be told to get stuffed. Nor is this a "contentious issue" that could be put "prematurely" to a vote. It does not even require a vote and if, after reasoned argument, anyone keeps insisting that they, and not REM as a collective, have the right to decide what happens to the Discussion Bulletin, then they will just have to be thrown out (by vote of course, with or without "consensus").

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Of course writing theoretical notes and articles does not exclude propaganda and agitation. On the contrary, theoretical work only provides answers to problems that arise in practical work, and in any case, doing propaganda work is (one) way to promote theoretical work.

But writing theory is certainly a lot harder than writing propaganda (even good, well written, persuasive propaganda quite different from that usually seen in "left" publications). Just as the practical needs of the struggle against Soviet imperialism have forced an awareness of the need to more deeply understand the economic causes of Russian militarism and expansionism, so it will be found that the practical need to resolve that question raises several other theoretical issues that need to be solved together.

If the following list sounds intimidating, please remember that it does not require a series of "heavy" comprehensive statements, but can be tackled piecemeal with short notes posing questions or providing tentative answers. Nor does everything else have to stop while these issues are tackled although we as a group are not likely to accomplish much without solving them.

1. The nature of the Russian revolution and its history. New Democracy and socialism. State Capitalism. "Stalinism" etc. Kautsky's book "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat" and Lenin's refutation "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky" are important on this. Also the struggle between Marxism and anarchism. Related issues arise in connection with China.

2. The nature of imperialism and the economic causes of expansionism and militarism in general. After all the nature of our own society is an even more urgent problem than the nature of Soviet society, and the prevailing "left" conceptions about imperialism and Australia's place within it are not very satisfactory. The BICO material is very interesting on this question (anti-Leninist, Kautskyite, pro-imperialist, and a lot closer to Marxism-Leninism than most "MLs").

A lot of the Trotskyist attacks on Maoist views about capitalism in the Soviet Union and China rest on fundamental misconceptions about capitalism in the West.

It would be useful to examine the parallels between the two societies so that an understanding of why the US economy produces US militarism and expansionism (if such an understanding really exists) will help people to understand why the Soviet economy does too.

Under monopoly and state monopoly capitalism in the West, most means of production are not owned by individuals but by the state or large corporations, and there is extensive planning as well as a "market economy" (indeed in some respects even more so than the in the Soviet Union, let alone Eastern Europe).

The social functions of the capitalist are performed here as in the Soviet Union, by salaried managers.

Direct ownership of finance capital by individuals is more common in the West than in the Soviet Union. But the dominant form is "benefits" under a "trust" and control over wealth that is not directly owned. This could be compared with the Soviet system of party and state positions.

It would also be relevant to consider the role of bureaucrat capital in Third World economies where the state has an important economic role but there is less confusion about it being socialist. Also, what is the social system in Eastern Europe?

3. This in turn leads to questions about the nature of capitalism itself. What is a "market economy"? Money and power. The transformation of wealth into power and power into wealth. Exploitation of surplus value, accumulation of wealth, expansion of markets and avenues for investment, enlargement of power, imperialism, domination, militarism.

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The mechanics of the economic causes of imperialist expansionism involve quite technical economic questions like the reproduction and expansion of capital (explained in "Capital" Vol 2), and the increasing organic composition of capital and falling rate of profit ("Capital" Vol 3). Even questions like the nature of land rent, to which Marx devoted an inordinate amount of attention, are relevant to understanding "resources diplomacy". Also "productive and unproductive labour" and theories of surplus value in general, for an understanding of the advanced capitalist economies and their relationship with the more backward ones.

The example of Rosa Luxemburg proves that revolutionary opposition to imperialism, without an appreciation of these sort of questions, is not enough to provide a correct scientific analysis of it.

Going even further back, to understand imperialism and the world market, we need to understand money and commodities themselves, value as a social relation between people, wealth as disposal of human labor time etc. This subject is covered in "Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy" and the seldom read first chapters of "Capital" Vol 1.

4. World current affairs. What exactly is happening economically and strategically. Who is after what, where?

There are innumerable specialized journals covering these questions much more honestly than the mass media does (although the mass media still has much greater depth than what passes for analysis in "left" publications).

It is very important to use original source material in studying these questions. Half the reason people can't tell genuine Marxism from sham is because they won't read the works that the Marxist classics were polemicizing with and so can't recognize the same ideas served up in "Marxist" garb. Half the reason people don't understand Soviet imperialism is because they only read what (unbelievable) American journalists say about it, and don't read Soviet publications, in all their glory, for themselves.

English language Soviet material is available from New Era books and in libraries from the Current Digest of the Soviet Press and from CIA reports and translations available from the US National Technical Information Service.

Even if all this does sound intimidating, it is a lot less so than the thought of overthrowing imperialism and having to take responsibility for actually running modern society in all its complexity.

One response to that intimidating prospect is to take shelter by simply churning out propaganda articles "giving the line" since it is both easier and safer than actually working to overthrow (and hence first to understand) the present regime.

One does not have to be a Marxist-Leninist to recognize that the Soviet Union is imperialist and that this has an economic basis. Malcolm Fraser, Jimmy Carter, Margaret Thatcher, Teng Hsiiao-ping and even Ted Hill understand this much, without any of them even being mildly progressive. And they often understand it better than your average "revolutionary".

It is just a matter of common sense (which unfortunately is not that common). But if we have broader objectives, then we ought to be able to present a deeper analysis than Fraser, Carter, Thatcher, Teng and Hill.

Nobody is obliged to take up a major topic like "the economic causes of Russian militarism and expansionism". There are all kinds of much easier subjects that people on the left are talking and thinking about. Almost any topic can equally be the subject of lively and thought provoking material that helps people understand and change the world or of more boring crap. More and more people are looking for answers. We must join them.

FASCISM AND THE LEFT

Ron
Revised November 1980

A major theme in left wing propaganda is opposition to fascism. Quite often even relatively moderate opponents of the left are described as "fascists".

Yet scratch a "Communist" and one quite often finds a fascist underneath.

The regime that began with the October Revolution is now a fascist dictatorship. In China too, since the defeat of the Cultural Revolution many revolutionaries have been executed and the right to speak out freely, hold great debates, put up big character posters and so on has been officially and formally repudiated.

The degeneration of Communist Parties in power is a separate problem calling for a separate analysis. But what about the degeneration of parties holding no power?

THE CPA (ML)

Our experiences with the "Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist)" were sufficiently frightening to require some deep analysis. Almost any split is accompanied by outraged cries of "unfair" or "undemocratic" from the losing side, so it seemed undesirable to distract attention from the fundamental issues at stake by going into details of who done what to who. But another reason why we never got around to it was probably embarrassment at ever having been involved with such a sick group.

The bankruptcy of Australian nationalism as an ideology for Communists is now pretty apparent, while the question of whether China has gone revisionist has been settled by open proclamations from the Chinese leadership themselves. Although Vanguard keeps coming out each week, the people behind it seem pretty discredited and there is little need to discredit them further.

In Adelaide the "Worker Student Alliance for Australian Independence" has disintegrated, along with its newspaper People's Voice. In Melbourne the entire editorial collective of Independence Voice quit some time ago, there was no "Independence platform" at Mayday, the "Australian Independence Movement" is virtually defunct and supporters of this line have been completely routed in "Community Radio" 3CR. The Australia China Society is unable to defend the new regime in China and little has been heard from the CPA (ML) in the trade union movement either.

As a complete expression of E.F. Hill's bankruptcy we have the suggestion in "Australian Communist", that they want unity with us (previously described as "Soviet agents"). Hill has even signed an article proposing reunification with the CPA in "one Communist Party" (presumably because the Chinese revisionists, having recently re-united with their Italian and Yugoslav colleagues, also wish to re-establish relations with the CPA, leaving Hill out in the cold).

The thuggish behaviour of CPA (ML) supporters in attempting to intimidate their opponents is well known. Both intellectual and physical thuggery, in 3CR and elsewhere, has become so notorious that the only "broad united front" they have been able to create has been that directed against themselves. They have also become notorious for openly preferring to ally themselves with various Nazis and other fascists against the Soviet Union rather than trying to unite the people, and especially the left, against Soviet imperialism on the basis of progressive principles. Their main political theme these days is the united front they claim to have with

Malcolm Fraser, who nevertheless remains quite unaware of their existence. As for China, they openly say they would rather not talk about it, even though China was, and is, central to their whole political outlook.

These facts are mentioned, not to kick a dead horse, but to emphasize that the horse really is dead and to confirm that the additional facts about it cited below are genuine observations and not just part of some ongoing sectarian faction fight.

OTHERS TOO

The more or less open fascism of the CPA (ML) has resulted in that group being simply dismissed as "crazies". But in fact they are only a more extreme expression of problems that exist, less overtly, throughout the left. Indeed it has been noticeable in 3CR for example, that the excuse of "keeping out the crazies", has been used to justify appallingly manipulative and undemocratic behaviour (e.g. elected listener sponsor representatives voting against explicit directives from a large general meeting of listener sponsors). People who would be shocked and indignant about that in other contexts have made excuses for it when their own friends are doing it. Really how far is it from making excuses to acting in the same way? And how far from there to ending up just like the "crazies" themselves?

Also the fact that China and the Chinese parrots are anti-Soviet (and Reagan, Thatcher, Fraser etc) has become an excuse to actually apologize for Soviet actions that would be called "fascist" if America was doing it. Indeed many quite non-crazy "left liberals" have been prepared to go through the most amazing mental contortions to justify the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea or to minimize the significance of Soviet aggression elsewhere. Rather than agree with "right-wingers" (like Churchill), they prefer to apologize for fascists (like Hitler).

Where was the left wing outrage (as distinct from concern) when Polish workers were being denied the elementary right to form free trade unions? Why do "militants" in "left-wing" unions take delight in the same bureaucratic maneuvers their opponents use to stay in power? Why are splits in left wing groups so common and so nasty?

In Australia many other groups supposedly on the left have exhibited a personal intolerance comparable to the Chinese parrots, and also a comparable willingness to apologize for reactionary regimes in other countries, provided those regimes pay lipservice to "anti-imperialist" principles. (Vietnam, Cuba, Iran, Libya...name a country that's suppressing some other country or trying to impose some medieval religion on its people and you'll find a "left" group wildly enthusiastic about it.) Scanning overseas "left" newspapers one gets the impression that narrow minded religious bigotry is pretty common, and even where it isn't taken to extremes, it is still present. No wonder so many on the "left" thought a fellow zealot like Khomeiny would be progressive for Iran.

The undemocratic tendencies of "Leninists" is a common theme in anti-Communist propaganda - from open representatives of the bourgeoisie, from Social Democrats, from Anarchists, from "Left" or "Council" Communists and what have you. Nevertheless, attacks from our opponents should be taken seriously, and indeed have been taken seriously by the classic exponents of Marxism.

CHINESE FASCISM

This question was especially taken seriously in China and some of the material from the Chinese Cultural Revolution is very valuable for understanding the emergence of fascist tendencies among alleged "Communists".

For example Mao Tsetung's unpublished works, and the material criticizing Lin Biao (the "successor" who turned out to be a fascist). The

Cultural Revolution was after all a direct struggle between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries who both purported to be part of the "left". The concept of fighting bourgeois ideas disguised as "left" ideas was crucial to unleashing the 1960s upsurge and will be crucial again. It was necessary to challenge the "peace" ideas that were **dominant** in the left in the 1960s and it will be necessary to challenge the views that are dominant now - many of which are again crystallized in the eclectic mishmash of the "CPA".

In the "gang of four's" Peking University Journal of September 1, 1976 there is an important article on "The Bureaucrat Class and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat":

...We must further recognize the high concentration of political and economic powers under the dictatorship of the proletariat. If the bureaucrat class succeeded in usurping power and in its restorationist conspiracies throughout the country, then it would continue to flaunt the banner of socialism, take advantage of this high concentration of political and economic powers and turn the democratic centralism of the proletariat into the fascist centralism of the bureaucrat class.

In controlling and manipulating the means of production and the product of labor, these bureaucrats will be far more powerful than any previous exploiting classes and their political representatives, than the slave owners and feudal rulers who claimed that "all land under the sun is my territory and all people on earth are my subjects", and than the bureaucrats and financiers in capitalist countries...In a similar vein, the present day new tsars behave much worse than the old tsars...

(Translation from Selections from People's Republic of China Magazines No 895, American Consulate General, Hong Kong. Reprinted in Study Notes No 8, Red Eureka Movement, August 1978)

This article also goes into the question of the transformation of authority into capital and capital into authority, which is relevant to an understanding of imperialism in the West as well as in the Soviet Union and China.

Western bourgeois democratic society is heading towards an acute crisis and upheaval as another Great Depression and a Third World War develop. The outcome can be Communist Revolution or some form of fascism or social-fascism. We could face a new ruling class more powerful than the present one. It largely depends on how clear the left is on what we are fighting for and what we are fighting against and how sharply we can draw the line against perpetuating the old system of exploitation in our own practice. If the left continues to **whinge** about capitalism, and even oppose it from a **reactionary** perspective then it cannot hope to inspire people to fight for something fundamentally different.

Indeed, just as one would have to defend the national independence that Western and Third World countries have already achieved, from Soviet "socialist" imperialism, one would also have to defend the achievements already won by the bourgeois democratic revolution from attack by alleged "socialists" who want to go **backwards** to a more oppressive society.

DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM.

If the democratic centralism of the proletarian dictatorship can be easily transformed into the fascist centralism of the bureaucrat class in a developing socialist country, then what about democratic centralism in Leninist parties out of power? Is this an argument against democratic centralism and proletarian dictatorship, as anarchists and others insist?

The answer to this argument is that there never can be a guarantee against proletarian dictatorship turning into its opposite, and Communists

in power must always be prepared for transition to underground life as Communists in opposition to capitalist rulers in power. Likewise in Communist Parties generally - one must be prepared to rebel and to be expelled for rebelling.

But if there was no democratic centralism and proletarian dictatorship then it would be quite impossible for the revolutionary ideas held only by a minority in capitalist and socialist society to be centralised and dominant and in that case the bourgeoisie holds power anyway. So weakening democratic centralism is not the answer. On the contrary, it needs to be strengthened to keep fascists out, on the same argument that the left cannot afford to be pacifist and must learn the use of arms if it doesn't want warmongers to hold power.

Proletarian dictatorship means just that. It does not mean dictatorship over the proletariat by some bureaucrats. It means a political system in which the working class can **really** wield political power - something that can be achieved by workers councils led by a revolutionary party and cannot be achieved by parliamentary institutions or by milling around in confusion.

Democratic centralism also means just that. It does not mean the leadership imposing decisions on a reluctant membership. It means that the abstract "Parliamentary" right which almost all organizations give their members to ultimately take decisions, is made **real** by conscious leadership of the decision making process to make it "from the masses, to the masses" and so make it actually work without manipulation or obstruction.

This article is not a plea for everybody to be more tolerant of everybody else. It is a call for **sharper** defence of our basic principles and **less** tolerance of attempts to undermine them. One cannot be a Communist if one is not first a democrat. The democratic revolutionaries of England, France and so on in earlier centuries had no hesitation about chopping off the heads of their aristocratic opponents and neither should we.

Fear of strengthening democratic centralism is really fear of struggle. Such fear is fully understandable in the present situation, and a lot better than blinkered complacency. But it must be overcome.

The quote from Orwell's "Road to Wigan Pier" in "The Personal is Political" (Discussion Bulletin No 9) rang a few bells and is worth repeating:

..."Socialism" is pictured as a state of affairs in which our more vocal Socialists would feel thoroughly at home. This does great harm to the cause. The ordinary man may not flinch from a dictatorship of the proletariat, if you offer it tactfully; offer him a dictatorship of the prigs, and he gets ready to fight.

We should be ready to fight against the dictatorship of the prigs and to do this it is necessary to understand the transformation of Communists into prigs.

ARE WE DIFFERENT?

If we take Lin Piao for example, there is no doubt that he did make contributions to the Chinese revolution before emerging as an outright fascist. The superstitious Mao cult he built up in opposition to Mao had definite roots in China's feudal past, but also struck a chord among Western "Maoists".

Ted Hill now appears to be nothing more than a follower of Liu Shao-chi, then Lin Piao (as a major cult advocate) then Liu Shao-chi again, or whoever may hold power in China at any given moment. But some of his analyses of revisionism, parliamentarism and trade union politics in publications like "Looking Backward; Looking Forward" are still valuable and he once made a point of opposing sacred cows and stereotypes and supporting rebellion.

Things were drastically wrong with the CPA(ML) long before we parted company and people are entitled to ask how we got mixed up with them and why we should be regarded as any different. If we are to be any different then we must analyse the thin dividing line that appears to exist between being a Marxist-Leninist or "Maoist" on the one hand, and being a lunatic or a fascist on the other.

There is little need to "expose" the CPA(ML) leadership now in view of its obvious degeneration. But the roots of current fascist attitudes do need study, so the following facts are placed on the record for our own benefit rather than for the benefit of anyone still taken in by Hill.

SOME FACTS

1. There never was anything remotely resembling democracy within the CPA(ML). This became obvious when concrete disagreements made it necessary to have a proper discussion and take a decision. But it should have been obvious even when people thought they were in agreement.

2. As soon as a disagreement in principle was announced "through the proper channels" etcetera, the **immediate** response was to launch vituperative attacks on individuals - at first surreptitiously behind their backs and then openly in Vanguard.

3. The very idea of discussing the differences was repudiated and "security" was abused to tell people that there had been a full democratic discussion, which they just didn't happen to be part of.

4. As a matter of fact it turned out that no Central Committee actually existed. One member of the Red Eureka Movement discovered that he was supposed to be a CC member after wanting to express his views to the CC. This must be some sort of record in the international communist movement!

5. Other members of the Red Eureka Movement who were both on the Central Committee and knew it, were able to expose the lie that there had been some kind of Central Committee discussion about China and that documents expressing opposition had been circulated to the Central Committee etcetera.

6. Individual party members had to go outside the "channels" to get any kind of discussion and then discovered that the "channels" didn't really exist. Now others who accepted this then are finding the same situation.

7. It was not a case of discussion being suppressed arbitrarily and decisions usurped, but of there being no provision whatever for seriously discussing and reversing a policy disagreed with.

8. This situation which existed long before it came to a head was put up with by people who would rebel strongly against similar fascist practices in any other social institution.

9. Many people on becoming aware of it, and seeing people branded as Soviet agents etcetera, took a cynical attitude that this was wrong but not a major question of principle requiring them to take a stand.

10. Our initial reaction to all this shit was not to launch a public struggle as in the Cultural Revolution or in accord with our own experiences in the 1960s. Instead we had great hangups about "the party" and organized semi-conspiratorially.

11. Despite being a very small group, since breaking with the CPA(ML) leadership we have not been able to resolve internal disagreements in a civilized, let alone comradely manner, but have had two further splits. While nowhere near as bad as Hill's, these have also involved strange behaviour that would not be tolerated in most community organizations and should not be tolerated on the left. Moreover they have occurred in a situation where we are not leading any great revolutionary struggle and no pressing life or death decision was at stake.

LIFE WASN'T MEANT TO BE EASY!

We did not fully realize it at the time, but there was little alternative to the apparent extremism of Hill's stand because there really wasn't any possibility of a discussion. If he had agreed to a discussion, what could he possibly have said? And if the CPA(ML) did not follow China religiously, what else could it do? We cannot blame Hill for our own naivety.

We only realized how difficult most people find it to rebel and think for themselves once we had broken with Hill and company. "Stalinists without a country" was the contemptuous Trotskyist label, and there is something in it. It really is enormously easier to at least think you know what you're doing when there is some "socialist motherland" backing you up. (Or a "Fourth International", a "great leader" or some other crutch).

For non-revolutionaries it's fairly easy to maintain a political position sustained by one or other of the reformist currents in mainstream bourgeois society. But in a non-revolutionary society and with no back up from a revolutionary society, it requires real effort to develop a revolutionary program. How much easier it would have been if we could have forgotten that we didn't have such a program by simply pretending to ourselves that China, or Albania or somewhere was revolutionary and that supporting them would somehow help produce a revolution here. Or by pretending that if we were all more dedicated, we would figure out where we were going while getting there.

It's interesting to note how even people with no attachment to Russia, China or Albania have managed to persuade themselves that Vietnam is still worth supporting and feel a deep and personal threat to their whole ideology when this is questioned. Or how people leaving REM because it hasn't been getting anywhere, who know perfectly well what's wrong with the political line of the Revolutionary Communist Party (USA), are nevertheless attracted by the reassuring certainty of that group's proclamations.

Idealism and metaphysics are the easiest things in the world, because people can talk as much nonsense as they like without basing it on objective reality or having it tested against reality. Materialism and dialectics, on the other hand, need effort. They must be based on and tested by objective reality. Unless one makes the effort, one is liable to slip into idealism and metaphysics. (vao Tsetung)

PRIESTS AND HORSES

Judging from overseas literature, the temptation of closed minded religious fanaticism is very strong in this situation. It provides a certainty that would otherwise be lacking and puts an end to all confusion, doubt, cynicism, liberalism, and so on.

But this way out is the way out of the movement. It means joining the innumerable sects that are much better organized and disciplined than we are, and are able to get more done precisely **because** they do not have the "burden" of really having to think out a revolutionary line.

We did not hesitate to reject the "security" of blindly following China, Albania or anybody else so we should not regret the consequences.

One consequence is that we are in some respects more vulnerable to confusion, doubt, liberalism, cynicism, and so on than other left groups that feel more confident about their (manifestly wrong!) lines. The reason horses are given blinkers is that it keeps them working away steadily without getting distracted by things they might see. Groups that have attached themselves to a foreign state, or that merely reflect a reformist current in mainstream bourgeois ideology, have a secure basis for their activity and can work away at it for years after it has ceased to have any social relevance or has become purely reactionary.

The same can easily be true of "revolutionary" groups that feel secure, or pretend to feel secure in their "correct line". They can whip up a great frenzy of activity, full of sound and fury, but signifying nothing. Take a look at the Communist Workers Party or the Revolutionary Communist Party (USA). On many points we would be in full agreement. They have a similar analysis of China and Albania to ours and they certainly do make a clear distinction between communist revolution and the bourgeois reformism advocated by most "revolutionaries".

On international questions of very great significance they appear to have a fundamentally wrong analysis. But even more important, their whole **approach** to "correct line" politics seems alien. They are certainly not paralysed by liberalism like we are - but so what?

While confusion, doubt, liberalism, cynicism and so on persist we will remain unable to accomplish very much, including theoretical work:

We must have faith in the masses and we must have faith in the Party. These are two cardinal principles. If we doubt these principles, we shall accomplish nothing. (Mac Tsetung)

But the only basis for faith in the Party is confidence in the soundness of its analysis and line. Once we have grounds for such faith, we will be able to accomplish something, but not before. (And of course once we do, we will again have the problem of blind faith and the potential for people to continue following a leadership that has proved itself worthy of confidence, long after it has ceased to play a progressive or revolutionary role. But then it would be at a higher stage of the spiral).

Demands that people pull themselves together, combat liberalism or what have you, will not solve the problem of lack of faith. This is an atheistic age and real communists are atheistic people. Our only God is the masses and the only basis for our faith is scientific analysis of reality.

The situation we are in calls urgently for working out where we are and where we are going, without that, calls to press on more resolutely and with greater vigour will only result in people getting more lost!

CHIN UP, BACK STRAIGHT, EYES SHUT!

It is conservative, not revolutionary to promote "leadership", "organization", "doing things", "collective life" and so on without a clear perspective for liberating people from oppression. Defenders of the state's quo habitually make such appeals and every organization, revolutionary or not, naturally wants to be as effectively organized as possible (and most sewing circles and amateur theatrical societies are probably a lot better organized than REM). But it is quite wrong to see the organizational reflection of our confusion as the central problem instead of dealing with the confusion itself. (As for any who are not confused, they would have an even greater problem. Take off the blinkers!)

Communism is not the only ideology opposed to liberalism. Fascism opposes liberalism too. It is one thing to want to widen and deepen and ultimately transcend democracy by going beyond such mere forms as majority voting. It is quite another thing to declare that ones policies have proved their own correctness and deliberately exclude others from even a vote, let alone a real say, on the matter. Yet we have repeatedly experienced this kind of behaviour, not just from enemies, but from comrades who probably really do want to be revolutionaries.

The fact that people like Lin Piao or Ted Hill could turn out to be fascists and that we could go along with a load of shit for a long time should alert us to the dangers. When people on the left start acting like people on the extreme right they must be pulled up sharply and told "You're Ill" before the disease becomes incurable and before it spreads.

PROPAGANDA AND THEORY

Malcolm
June 1980

Less political fireworks and more attention to the simplest but vital...facts of communist construction.

(Lenin: Collected Works, Vol XXIV, page 335)

When I first sat down to write this article I looked up Stalin's Foundations of Leninism, Chapter IX - Style of Work. Almost all REM members would be conversant with this book; it is after all a basic classic. In it we read that the Leninist style of work has two basic features:

- a) Russian revolutionary sweep
- b) American efficiency.

I first thought that what we lacked in REM was the American efficiency. But I then asked myself: Why am I/we suffering from the crippling paralysis of mental stagnation, weighed down with inertia and routine? I finally had to conclude that it was due to my conservatism, i.e. my lack of Revolutionary Sweep. Some members of REM seem to have this "life giving" force. But breaking with the past is the touch-stone! Certainly, some years ago we broke with some of our past. The task now before us is to break with the bad aspects of REM's past. This is no small task.

To do this we must, of course, sum this past up, both in a collective and in a personal way. We know that REM's minimum responsibility is to be an organised Marxist-Leninist-Maoist propaganda circle. That much of our goal is clear. But what is our capacity? What quantity of such propaganda (of a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist quality) can we write, produce and distribute? I think there are two questions we must come to terms with. Who is to push and organise to make sure we get the quantity and who is to determine if it is of suitable quality?

I was, and am, of the opinion that I belong to a group that is striving to be a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist propaganda circle. This circle exists for one thing - to promote revolution! We already know certain things that we can and should be doing. The question now before us is to set down the priority of these tasks.

I agree with the proposition that "the way to build a bridge between theory and practice at the moment is by doing propaganda work in such a way as to promote theoretical work". ("Waiting for a Communist Party?", Discussion Bulletin 9). But what does this mean?

It means we are starting with an assumption, i.e. that we are first of all engaged in practice with other people in a particular struggle. This may be a forum on the Soviet Union or Afghanistan, an unemployed workers' campaign, or whatever. The object of our propaganda is, of course, to promote Communist ideology. The theoretical work that we therefore engage in should first and foremost be an investigation of the facts in **that area!**

But what does REM's practice, as displayed by the Discussion Bulletin, reveal? It clearly shows that **some** articles have reflected the above position - for example, "Can't Bear It", "An Open Letter to the Left", MIS draft platform and debate, "Fighting the Fascists". This is not to say that they were necessarily correct, but rather, useful in their area.

Other articles have reflected a negation of this position - for example, the technology debate, the "three worlds" debate, "Productive and Unproductive Workers". This is not to say that some very useful points

were not made, but it is to say that **their usefulness was really stunted or curtailed.**

Then there are articles that neither reflect nor negate the above process, but which can serve this process by informing our study and theoretical work without having direct relation to the specific activity - for example, "Cut Prices - Cut Profits?" and articles on economics in DE 6 in general.

I believe our Discussion Bulletin (that until recently was coming out regularly) could and should have been a very useful vehicle for stimulating theoretical work if the above propositions had been understood and analysed. I would therefore hope that editorial policy be to direct people to serve the needs of **their** group, ask for rewrites, etc, and be more inclined to edit (a word that terrifies the long-winded who need it most).

It goes without saying that, at the moment, the Discussion Bulletin is our main propaganda vehicle. (Some of us) would say that the **method**, the boat or bridge problem (see Mac: "Quotations", page 226) would be solved - and to some extent has been solved in DE 9 - if we **as a group** adopt the above formula.

The reason why our **central task**, the Discussion Bulletin, recently temporarily ceased publication is due to differences (...) on the validity of this formula (...).

On the one hand, the exponents of laissez faire, the you-print-all school! On the other hand there is the school that says: combat liberalism, consider the audience and allow scope **while giving guidance** to cadres. Are the second school merely pompous phrase-mongers? I think not!

We are paralysed and stuck to our armchairs! That has become evident since we have begun this process of summing up REM's past. The rampant liberalism and individualism that has prevailed really stinks of armchair marxism. We must persuade these comrades at least to join us on the collective couch!

We must be ruthlessly thorough and systematic in this investigation and summation. The digestive tract, its functions and disorders are remarkably similar to a political organisation. To study its actions is vitally important to determine the health of the organism. Most people find the task so unpleasant that a cursory glance is all that is given. Speaking as a nurse I hold no such fears.

We must clear the backlog of tasks that are weighing us down and sapping our morale. And if an enemy be needed then so be it! We must put an end to this petty-bourgeois behaviour of starting jobs and never finishing them. **This I apply firstly to myself.**

We must stop trying to be perfect! This is our most crippling problem - a fear of ever doing or saying anything wrong. If we just say and do things with an open and scientific approach, then we will change anything that is criticised (if we agree) as we go. What we need is **volume**, and the way to get it is through collectivisation (i.e. the production-line process) and an editorial group that is really prepared to offer leadership, guidance and help (to make sure that our propaganda work is done in a way that promotes theoretical work).

(...)

ANOTHER ISSUE

It is, I believe, nonsense to pretend that "we have not got a great deal that is useful to give to the Australian people and working class". The approach should be that we shouldn't pretend to have something when we do not!

In Mac's "Combat Liberalism" his tenth (type of liberalism) is "to regard oneself as having rendered great service to the revolution, to pride oneself on being a veteran, to disgain minor assignments while being quite unequal to major tasks, to be slipshod in work and slack in study."

REM's basic statistics, our quantity, do place definite constraints on what we can give the Australian workers, etc. But given our numbers, our

finances, our commitments and our inexperience, together with our track record, we should not be discharging any minor tasks because it is quite obvious that we are unequal to major tasks

If we are not coming into contact with people that are after **answers that we do have** then something is wrong with our direction.

But where and how we should look to win supporters is not, in the main, from the ranks of committed communists. The simple fact of the matter is that the committed organised left in Australia still forms only a very small minority of the Australian working class.

Engels' view is that:

...the correct tactics in propaganda are not to entice away a few individuals and memberships here and there from one's opponent, but to work on the great mass, which is not yet taking part in the movement. The raw force of a single individual whom one has reared oneself from the raw is worth more than ten Lassallean turncoats, who always bring the germs of their false tendencies into the Party with them.

(Letter to Eebel - 20 June 1873)

The whole article is well worth the read. It is only a couple of pages! My own experiences agree with this. So I repeat:

If we are not coming into contact with people that are after answers THAT WE HAVE GOT then something is wrong with our direction!!

DEAR EDITOR: PARTY BUILDING IS BULLSHIT!

Paul

In the last D.B. you rather indignantly penned the following:

An article authorised by the R.E.M. Executive ("Party Building is Bullshit", see D.B. No 7) airily dismisses all the struggles waged by all the M.L. and "M.L." groups in most western Countries today as follows:

Any energy left over is spent "immersing oneself among the masses" leading economist struggles against the employers and the government. (D.B. 7 p.3)

This is promoting the terrible idea that to become involved in any practical struggle at this time is Economist.

How on earth it is even possible to arrive at such a clear picture from the vantage of one's lounge room in sunny Australia is a mystery to us. Gratuitous insults, so airily wiping off all the M.L. groups in the western world, will not help us to build international contacts. But the implications for R.E.M. itself are far more serious.

When I read this I wrote beside it "missing the point entirely" -- and you were (are?). You also quoted out of context, mis-read what was written and have drawn quite incorrect conclusions.

Party Building

1. For starters:

"we 'wipe off all the W.L. groups in the western world."

What was actually said was this:

A political party is basically "a group of persons organised for the purpose of directing the policies of a government". (Websters 7th New Collegiate Dictionary)

A Leninist Communist Party is the advanced organised detachment of the working class, the highest form of its class organisation, the instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat and so on. (Stalin, "Foundations of Leninism").

It is absurd and pathetic that in most western countries today there are groups, small or "large" (relatively speaking) who have got themselves organised (some quite efficiently organised, judging from their publications), made an analysis, drafted a program, and proclaimed themselves to be the vanguard revolutionary party of the proletariat in their country.

These groups then spend a substantial amount of their energy proving that the other dozen or so competing vanguard parties are really phony (often very successfully). Any energy left over is spent "immersing oneself among the masses", leading economist struggles against the employers and the government.

These people are quite clearly not organised for the purpose of directing the policies of any kind of government, let alone being the instrument of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, and so directing the policies of a proletarian revolutionary government. Indeed the proletariat is generally quite unaware of their existence. Some of these parties appear to be organised because of the inner needs for self expression of their members and leaders -- just as other people express their creativity by joining amateur theatrical groups and so forth.

Firstly, "most" does not mean "all". Surely one of the most basic communicating tools we have is language (English in our case) and we should all try to use it to advantage -- i.e. not point scoring but getting ideas across clearly. Substituting "all" for "many", be it because of error (fitting the article into preconceived notions of armchair Marxism?) or conscious deceit, has a distorting effect and enables wild and/or inaccurate generalisations and conclusions to con the mask of reasoned and analytical thought.

Secondly, are you going to deny that in most western countries -- the U.S.A., Britain, and Italy have stacks of them -- there are groups as described above, ranting and raving at each other and energetically building non-parties?

2. Next:

"How on earth it is even possible to arrive at such a clear picture is a mystery to us." Well it shouldn't be! From our living room chairs, bedrooms, kitchen chairs or even our bloody Kingwoods we were able, and clearly too, to arrive at a picture of Hua Guo Feng's China which did not please any of us. It was really quite simple -- we read the Chinese publications. It was the same process with the foreign W.L. groups. For Christ's sake, if an organisation which proclaims itself as the one vanguard (hallelujah!) of the proletariat, can't give a reasonably accurate picture of what it's on about through its publications then it obviously can't be a vanguard of anything (loonies included).

Party Building

Having read much of the overseas stuff, I have no doubt that most, (not all, but most) are self righteous, narrow minded religious who wouldn't know Marxism if they fell over it, which is precisely why they treat it as a dogma, a bible of set (like concrete, comrades) pre-established blue prints for thought and action. I mean could you imagine any of them in power? You cannot because none of them is actually bent on achieving power. (The one exception to this among the English speaking M.L. groups is the R.C.P.(U.S.A.) who, to their great credit raise the questions of power, of revolution, loudly and attempt to answer them).

These organisations are small time thinkers who want to be big fish in a little pond. That's why they are so intense, so vitriolic and energetic against one another but not in being a real alternative to the bourgeoisie, not on building themselves into bone fide political parties capable of seizing power and then exercising it.

3. Lastly:

We promote the terrible idea that to involve ourselves in political struggle at the moment is economist.

You said that comrades, not us. Instead of jumping on a sentence read the whole paragraph (quoted at the start of this article). To make the sweeping generalisation from that paragraph that for any M.L. group to involve itself in practical struggles is economist is very opportunist. We were writing quite specifically about weirdo M.L.'s (read the whole paragraph) and what we said we stand by. The generalisation is yours not ours!

Most (that word again) of these groups do burn off bulk calories intoxicating themselves with their revelational polemics. And with what calories they have left they do immerse themselves in economist struggles. Well organised or not, big or not, this is not a recipe for revolutionary mass growth, much less revolution. You can't build anything on flatus anyway.

No comrades, getting involved in practical struggles does not equal economist. But if all an M.L. group is going to do is to harangue other groups (a copy of "Capital" clutched firmly to the bosom), engage in self praise and "immerse themselves amongst the masses", then they might as well forget it for all the good they do.....they are not advancing the revolution one bit.

Actually, all this is a bit close to the bone.....I could just as well be talking about the C.F.A.(M.L.). And those few of us who were in that erstwhile mass organisation would be more than a little dishonest with ourselves if we didn't admit that those ideas have had an influence on us.

THE PERSONAL IS PEOPLE'S POWER!

Geoff

The article "The Personal is Political" (DB 9) points to the need for communists to take their personal relations seriously. It calls for emotional honesty and for demonstrations of caring and respect. No one could oppose such a call, and it has long been felt that communists sell their own feelings out in their concern for more abstract and general issues:

**He will die with total strangers
But he will not live with me...**

(Dory Previn, The Altruist and the Needy Case).

The article mentions the game of "Name the Line" as one way in which the Left can dehumanise an attitude. It is as though people are not people at all, but cardboard representatives of the idea which is motivating them. Opponents are sanitised/dehumanised into ideas, and then discarded. This aspect of the article, which opposes the sanitised approach to politics is to be fully supported.

One problem with the article, however, is that it assumes a degree of intellectual and emotional security which really isn't there. It would be fine if we could be certain about other communists, but the fact is that we don't know who is to be united with. We don't know when a dispute is antagonistic. Is it really true that we would work better if only we improved our communication skills? I think it is more than this. We really are uncertain about what to do, and so we tend to take people's words and ideas as the test of their political attitude. We need to know when to unite with people but the test should be what actions they propose for the Australian revolution. Until we know what we think, how can we apply any test to others? The result is that we judge on the basis of style. That we read a political line into a style of work, label it and throw it out. We should reform a bad style of work, and this involves understanding where we are.

This raises the problem of what a communist style is. The article's answer is quite clear - communists are people who are careful of how they present themselves to others, and are serious in their attitude. Is this true? Whatever happened to the cheeky, often bloody-minded rebelliousness of the left? There's a lot of destructiveness/carelessness in the attitude punk music, for example, takes towards other people, but there's also a good element of rebelliousness. Are we to straight-jacket ourselves with caring, or are there good progressive elements in both these styles of communism (if that's what we think punk is). We really do have to decide what our attitude is to the lumpen-style culture which is around now. Is it progressive? Can some part of it be supported? How should the semi-fascist element be opposed? Pious demonstrations of caring will not solve this problem. Investigation of where we are and the program we are to follow will.

The essential problem with the approach taken in the article is that it takes the method for the content. The author hopes that we should not refuse to develop communication skills just because they are "misused" by the bourgeoisie. The point is that concentrating on our relations with each other means ignoring our main function. We are not trying to create a mountain stronghold of nice folk who communicate with each other, we are trying to communicate with the people outside. It should be useful for us to start a training course in an s-p bookie business, or how to talk about the footy. Or how to fill in a dole form or how to run the car industry. The bourgeoisie runs personality development courses because these courses are a tool especially suited to them. The bourgeoisie does not have to change the world. The solution to any problem for the bourgeoisie is to change peoples' heads. This is not the case with us. The bourgeoisie "loves" the people, and loves them as they are. We aim to develop ways in which the people will be able to seize power. At the moment they cannot, and talking about communicating with each other, or talking about Marxist theory alone, will not help. Develop peoples' imagination - show how we don't need the capitalists, and the people will do without them. To do this we must find out how to run the country.

THOUGHTS ON "THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL"

Steve Melipone

"The Personal Is Political" (Discussion Bulletin 9) is a valuable article. The proposition in the title has been advanced and discussed in various groups, especially in the women's movement, for at least the last ten years, but it would seem that the CPA-ML and WSA, as well as Trot groups, ignored this discussion - or perhaps scoffed at the suggestion of a link between the personal and the political. So it is useful to have this idea raised in REM. The article contains, in particular, some thought-provoking ideas about people's behaviour at meetings. Nevertheless I am not persuaded that the subject-matter of the article is all that central to understanding the problems of REM, as some seem to have suggested.

We should certainly strive to overcome bourgeois habits in our relationships with one another. But we're not angels - we're products of our society. We should be trying to change ourselves but we can't change overnight and we'll never change completely. Humanity **can** change itself radically (though probably not to angels) but that will take generations of struggle.

An important issue raised in "The Personal is Political" is that of deciding questions arising in political groups by voting. Where there is disagreement on an important issue (or an issue seen by some as important) a decision should not be taken until everyone has had a chance to express her/his views and feelings, including if necessary time to go away and think questions over and discuss them outside meetings. But even when this has been done, there may still be some who feel fundamentally dissatisfied with the majority view, seeing it as fundamentally wrong and dangerous etc. In such a case, if the question is one of what we should do, then it would normally be better to take a majority decision than to prolong the discussion after all viewpoints have been discussed - even if there is no "crisis situation". After all, such questions can ultimately only be answered in practice. Even if we reach an unanimous view we may be wrong.

When a decision **has** been taken by majority vote on a question of continuing significance, such as an ongoing programme of activities or a question of political line, the majority should keep making efforts to persuade the minority, rather than just saying, "The issue's been resolved". A vote can decide the question of what the group is to do or say, but the fact that a majority have voted a certain way can never prove that a decision is **correct**. Likewise people who still hold to a minority view should say so, not pretend to have been convinced while in practice carrying out a campaign of resistance by failing to put the decision into practice with any vigour or by reframing their opposition in the form of continual objections to the way the policy is being carried out. Of course those who are in a minority are entitled to continue struggling to have their views accepted, but there can be no hard and fast rules about the forms this struggle can take without obstructing the organisation's efforts to get on with the job in accordance with the majority decision.

Another thing which is said to distinguish "communist democracy" from bourgeois democracy is peoples' behavior towards one another at meetings and the attitudes to others which this reflects or appears to reflect. Rubbishing people, expressing disagreements in an abusive way, going for the jugular etc, certainly create bad feelings and should be fought against. This type of behavior **may** reflect an uncaring, or to be more precise a manipulative, attitude to other people, and if this is the case such attitudes should certainly be struggled against. (Although the mere use of words like "rubbish" about someone's views does not necessarily amount to rubbishing the person - it depends on the context and the way in which it is said.) But we'll get nowhere if we demand superhuman standards of conduct from others as a precondition for associating with them or listening to what they have to say.

HYPOCRITE EFFECTIVENESS TRAINING

Ron

Revised November 1980

When I first read "The Personal Is Political" (Discussion Bulletin 9, p13), I felt quite positive about it. Now I feel quite negative. The main reason is that I have since experienced an **extreme** display, from the author of the article and others who identify with it, of exactly the sort of attitudes that I thought the article was meant to combat. Naturally this has made me re-evaluate the article. After all, as we are often reminded, practice is the main criterion of truth.

Details have been aired in REM's internal bulletin. Suffice to say here that a group of REM members declared that they wanted to "become the leadership", attempted to unilaterally takeover full control of this Discussion Bulletin and rejected the right of other members to meet and decide whether they could or not. These comrades had been dissatisfied with the liberalism and lack of direction of other members, agreed with the article "Party Building is Important" (D.B. 6) and disagreed with the Executive statements "Party Building is Bullshit" and "Playing With Tin Soldiers Is Not Important", which were approved by a small majority of the membership (D.B. 7). They also claimed that their views had been ignored and no real democracy existed within the organization. "Waiting for a Communist Party" (D.B. 9) reflects some of their views.

Eventually those concerned agreed that they had no right to act as they did, and even compared it to "the semi-fascist Kerr coup", apologised, and commented on the restraint with which other members had reacted. Nevertheless, most of them then resigned from REM. It is still unclear what major differences of principle exist and obviously I cannot present the views of the people concerned objectively. They would have to do this themselves, and are welcome to do so in this publication.

It is now claimed that the principles in "The Personal is Political" had nothing to do with the admittedly aggressive and "semi-fascist" behaviour of their advocates. This behaviour is said to have been an inappropriate response to the "uncaring" behaviour of the majority, and a response which could have been avoided if the principles of "assertiveness" instead of "aggression" had been properly understood by those advocating them.

But the plain fact is that at the time of the dispute, this article, which had been written earlier, was referred to as some kind of **explanation** of why the minority's stand was **reasonable**. Moreover the author's subsequent decision to resign rather than try to work things out, with the excuse of lack of time and energy, seems to be a classic continuation of the same behaviour pattern - "passive/aggressive" rather than "assertive".

POSITIVE ASPECTS

I still think the article has some major positive aspects. The quote from Orwell is very appropriate. So is the refreshingly straightforward account of the state of affairs in the CPA(ML). These raise real and important issues about the whole nature of the revolutionary movement. There are no personal solutions, but if we really want radically different social relationships in a new society, we have to show the way in our own organizations. The article's discussion of this is very valuable.

The fact that most "left" groups adopt the uncomradely norms of bourgeois society is a major obstacle to revolution. People are rightly suspicious of such groups and fear of "the dictatorship of the prigs" is very well founded. Some ideas in the article can help in that fight.

Hypocrite Training

These issues have been raised sharply in the women's movement, although the problem exists there too and is not adequately described by the term "male politics". Similar issues are implicit in critiques of "Leninists" both from our opponents and from the large majority of activists who are so repelled by the actual practice of allegedly "revolutionary" groups that they prefer to remain immersed in issue orientated struggles for immediate reforms.

TECHNIQUES?

So I do think its very valuable to take up this question in the Discussion Bulletin, and refreshing too. But the trouble comes when we get to some of the solutions offered:

While intentions and attitudes are basically important, there are many techniques and conditions which can be used to change our behaviour to show caring. Of course, these techniques are often misused by the bourgeoisie (E.g. the way businessmen use communication skills to exploit people more) but just because that happens, doesn't mean we should refuse to use them.

Here I disagree. The problem is to **actually have** caring and comradely intentions and attitudes. Techniques and conditions to change our behaviour to "show caring" are a way of avoiding that, and are used by businessmen precisely because they help to **conceal** rather than change, an uncaring attitude.

In discussing this article other comrades have pointed out that the "techniques" advocated are closely related to "Parent Effectiveness Training", "Teacher Effectiveness Training" and similar fads currently popular in schools, tertiary institutions and in management training.

I hope others will present a more detailed critique, but I think the essence of what is wrong with these techniques is summed up in the phrase "Hypocrite Effectiveness Training". Of course that isn't the whole story. Just as the article has positive aspects, I'm sure there are many valuable things involved in "Teacher Effectiveness Training" and the like. But to gain any benefit from the positive, we have to reject the negative.

BODY LANGUAGE

Take the question of "body language" discussed under "communication skills". I doubt that 65% of messages are non-verbal. Nevertheless I agree that "communication skills" are important and it is valuable to make people aware of the meaning of various gestures, tones etc. It is valuable first so that people can respond more consciously to feedback from others who are communicating boredom, interest etc by non-verbal means, and second so that one's own non-verbal communication will be more accurate and clear and can be responded to more easily.

Unfortunately that is **not** what the article does. Instead of helping people to communicate more effectively by making full use of body language etc, it **obstructs** communication by encouraging people to disguise their actual feelings to "show caring". This may not be what is intended by the author or intended in courses on human relations and communications skills such as "Teacher Effectiveness Training". Indeed they probably advocate the exact opposite.

But in a society based on exploitation it is natural for bosses and the like to extract from these ideas a manipulative approach more useful to them. Thus "human relations" courses do become "Hypocrite Effectiveness Training" - a rather typical product of cynical bourgeois pragmatism and behaviourism and one that is rightly treated with contempt and hostility by many people exposed to these courses.

Hypocrite Training

Even between adults and children, some of the techniques advocated in "Effectiveness Training" are rather manipulative and tend to obstruct communications, for example, by echoing back what the other person has said. These techniques should not be applied at all, let alone used to respond to conflicts over political line between comrades in a revolutionary movement.

FALLING ASLEEP

Take for example the communication of boredom and disinterest. In effect the article says that when someone is speaking at a meeting, you should show that you are interested by using the following techniques: "sit square on towards them, adopt an open position (e.g. don't make a barrier of arms or legs), lean forward, maintain eye contact, sit relaxed and still..."

But then how is the speaker supposed to guess if you are really not interested? Mao Tsetung advocates that if you find a lecture boring (or a meeting?), then you should fall asleep or read a novel. He says this is a form of struggle, and it is, resorted to by countless bored students over the centuries. The article advocates the exact opposite.

Of course one could argue that the article only means you should display interest if you really are interested. But that is not what it says and frankly I don't think that is what it means either. There simply isn't a problem of people who are vitally interested in what others have to say accidentally looking as though they are bored because they don't know how to look interested. So I don't believe anyone could have written an article advising people how to look interested when they are interested. It must be an article advising how to look interested when one is bored.

The article could be advising that rather than fall asleep, one should forthrightly announce one is bored and try to do something about it. If so, it is still bad advice. Sometimes non-verbal communications are perfectly appropriate - especially for communicating boredom, suspicion, hostility etc. So why should an article that draws attention to the importance of this form of communication actually try to inhibit people from using it? Instead of helping people to generate and respond to these signals more consciously, as Mao does, "Hypocrite Effectiveness Training" is precisely intended to help people mislead each other about how they feel, and the article is clearly influenced by this approach.

Several different people have reported feeling intimidated from expressing themselves freely, either verbally or non-verbally, as a result of remarks made about their manner by people who are enthusiastic about this article. So it is not a matter of misinterpretation, or distorting the argument of an article that really advocates more frank and open communications. On the contrary, on first reading it, I assumed from the very positive analytical material at the start that the solutions offered must also be in the same direction. But practice shows this was a misinterpretation.

HOW TO WIN ARGUMENTS....

There is a strong element of Liu Shao-chi's "benevolence" line in "How to Be a Good Communist" running through all this, just as there is a strong element of Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People". I cannot go into that here, but I strongly recommend a critical reading of those two books.

It comes out most strongly in the section about "maintaining eye contact" etc with Trots when having a political argument with them, to show "respect" even though you don't "like" them.

Basically I agree with the point that Trots should be treated with respect as people and that when arguing with anyone at all you should pay careful attention to what they say and respond to their arguments. But

Hypocrite Training

that is not just because "you're much more likely to win the argument, and to leave them feeling that you had some respect for them after all". It should be because you really **do** have some respect for them as people and really **are** interested in what they have to say. If you don't really have any respect for them and aren't really interested (even from the point of view of just understanding how the other side thinks) then it really is just an ego trip arguing and you should forget it, or just do it to show off (and there **are** indeed some people with whom one wouldn't bother arguing or would only do so for the benefit of an audience).

The striking thing about applying this stuff to unlikeable Trots is this statement "...the kind of caring I'm talking about is not the same as liking...It doesn't mean you have to spend evenings boozing with them." I don't think there is much connection between "liking" and having to "spend evenings boozing". But there is a close connection between "liking" and "caring".

I quite like the author of the article (except at the moment!) so I care and feel indignant instead of indifferent about attitudes I think are wrong. But I'm not too keen about this "caring" and "respect" that has to be "shown" by various "techniques" because it doesn't arise spontaneously from one's actual feelings towards others. Why bother? Perhaps the author feels inhibited about "liking" Trots and is making excuses for "caring" about them, which creates a false impression of a manipulative approach. But this kind of inhibition still arises from over concern about what other people will think of your behaviour, and is reinforced by the attitudes in the article.

There is nothing wrong with **liking** (some) Trots and wanting to spend time arguing (or boozing) with them. Nor is there anything wrong with **disliking** others, and **refusing** to show any "caring" or "respect" for them, because they are obnoxious. But there **is** something wrong with deliberately using "techniques" to convey a feeling that you care about and respect someone you dislike - it is hypocritical.

VOTING

The article then goes on to talk about majority voting and democracy. This is really a separate issue and should be gone into separately. But a couple of things stand out about the phrase "those losing votes have not been shown that they are cared about".

First, there is an inherent factionalism in the whole concept of "winning" and "losing" votes. As the article points out, voting has very little to do with democracy. It is really an expression of centralism. The whole point of voting is simply that the organization exists apart from its members and takes a decision as a whole irrespective of what individual members or groups of members think. Such decisions may be taken by consultation, by decree, or by voting, but they become decisions of the organization (and may be right or wrong quite independently of what method was used to arrive at them).

Generally voting is more democratic than not taking a decision (and hence taking a negative decision), because it forces people to define their attitudes and as a result of the experience gained following one path, people can consult again later as to whether it was the right one. A minority convinced that a group should follow one path is not acting democratically when it demands that no decision be taken to follow any other. It is acting dictatorially. It would be acting democratically if it persisted in arguing for a change in direction, while going along with the rest of the group. But not if it demands that the group remains at the cross roads unless it will agree to follow them, and then, on feeling "uncared for" uses this as an excuse to try and forcibly drag people the other way - or failing that, as an excuse to just quit.

"Those winning" are not supposed to have separate "needs" from "those losing", but have simply expressed a different (and quite possibly wrong)

opinion as to what the organization should do, which the organization has adopted. The assumption that people with different views, or living in different states, have separate interests, or are entitled to "resent losing a vote" under certain conditions, has led to some completely absurd situations, referred to indirectly in this article and also in "Waiting for a Communist Party".

These comments have been responded to internally, but something should be said publicly too. The Australian Communist has developed to a fine art the style of writing articles in general terms which have some specific message for those "in the know". It is a rotten style and should not be imitated.

Two issues are mentioned where "voting has triumphed over caring and democracy":

1. "The whole issue of the Discussion Bulletin has not been handled well". Translated into plain English this refers to the fact that the editorial collective publishing the bulletin were not given the "caring" and "democratic" right to run it as they pleased, but were directed to publish certain articles which they wanted to exclude as being below standard.

2. "...the insistence of the executive in making the articles on party building into policy". This refers to the fact that when the Executive of REM failed to agree with "Party Building Is Important", a formal reply was **demand**ed from the Executive and given by it. Those disagreeing with that reply then insisted on it being put to a vote at a general meeting. All this is perfectly within their rights, although a bit pompous. But subsequent complaints about "voting" from those who **demand**ed a formal vote are more than just pompous.

The question of "Party Building" remains an important controversial issue in the international communist movement. Discussion of it should and will continue. Articles criticizing the views we have expressed or proving we should have adopted the views of the minority will be welcome. But why not talk about the substantive issue itself instead of claiming it is "uncaring" and "undemocratic" to disagree with you?

Similarly the questions about "Theory and Practice" raised in "Waiting for a Communist Party" are important and discussion of them will continue. The only "voting" on this question has been on a motion proposed by the author of that article, which was adopted unanimously.

It is quite extraordinary that after only a single exchange of polemics on controversial issues, those with a minority view should simply quit. Assuming that the comrades concerned are no crazier than average, this suggests strongly that we have not yet learned how to cope with internal differences, and in particular that the ideas expressed in "The Personal is Political" do not solve the problem they raise.

A second point about winning and losing votes is that "those losing" are supposed to "care" too. You may turn out to be right in the end, but if a majority keeps on rejecting your proposals, you should take that very seriously and examine whether they might be right and you might be wrong. It takes real arrogance to simply assume that the majority couldn't be listening to you properly, or is being misled, or is made up of people too inactive for their opinions to be worth considering. It takes outright megalomania to demand, as a response to your proposals being rejected, that you should be accepted as the "leadership" since the rest are apparently incapable of understanding your correct analysis. And it is quite childish to declare that its not worthwhile being a member of an organization immediately after having wished to lead it.

Sometimes, when people say "rubbish", "pig's arse", or "bullshit" in meetings or in writing, they are communicating a message you should listen to instead of dismissing as bad manners. Sometimes, when people do not bother to reply at all, they are also giving you a message.

And when we do reply, by taking what you say seriously, and trying to go into it more deeply, it simply isn't good enough to just walk out claiming there isn't time and energy to resolve the differences.

C.P.N.Z. JOINS REVISIONIST RANKS

The Communist Party of New Zealand has joined the revisionist anti-Mao chorus. This was made known to the world revolutionary movement through a Central Committee statement of March 6 1980, published in the March/April issue of the Communist Review under the title "Carry the Struggle Against Revisionism Through to the End."

The Central Committee statement makes it clear that the CPNZ now follows the line of the Party of Labour of Albania as outlined in *Imperialism and the Revolution* by Enver Hoxha and in other material. It virtually declares that Mao Tsetung was never a Marxist Leninist but only a bourgeois democrat. It also repeats the distortions and misrepresentations of Hoxha on many aspects of Chinese history, on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China and on the question of two line struggle within a revolutionary Party.

What makes this new line of the CPNZ so despicable is the fact that it completely reverses the line previously held and unaminously endorsed by the higher committees of the Party. The original line which contained sharp criticisms of many of the views and ideas of Hoxha and the PLA, was conveyed to the PLA by a delegation of two Central Committee members in August 1979. On their return the delegates reported to an enlarged Political Committee meeting (described as virtually a Central Committee meeting). The reports which made it clear that the Albanian position remained unaltered, were enthusiastically and unaminously approved and it was resolved that the PLA line was incorrect and must be opposed.

The content of the reports and resolutions were communicated to the whole Party through circulars, articles and special meetings of members in different areas. The membership with the exception of one or two individuals, endorsed the Party's stand and line.

However, in late November the Chairman of the Party, aided and abetted by some other leading members, in violation of the norms of democratic discussion and practice, forced through a complete about-face in the Party's stand and line. A leading Comrade who opposed this treachery was expelled. Later another Central Committee member and others of long standing as well as some newer members, and even one complete Branch, withdrew from the Party. They now regard it as a revisionist organisation.

It is now evident that the CPNZ, under the command of its present opportunist leadership, is committed to a revisionist ideological line. The fact that it clearly follows the PLA in the latter's wholesale denunciation of Mao-tsetung shows beyond any doubt that it has abandoned revolutionary theory, Marxism Leninism. Furthermore, the repudiation of the concept and principle of two-line struggle in a revolutionary organisation is a total rejection of dialectics and therefore of objective reality. It is precisely through the operation of the law of contradiction, the unity and struggle of opposites, that Marxist Leninist Parties and the revolutionary working class movement have developed.

Thus the leadership of the CPNZ are rejecting the lessons of the experience and history of their own Party and even what they themselves used to teach i.e. that the party cannot isolate itself from its class environment and that (contrary to the ideas of Hoxha), the proletarian party in reality is bound to be an arena of class struggle and conflicting class interests. **This does not mean tolerating bourgeois lines or ideology in the party.** The concept of two-line struggle is a weapon in the hands of Marxist-Leninists not for tolerating or accepting bourgeois ideology and its expression in revisionist lines, but for combatting and overcoming such ideology. It is a weapon for combatting liberalism and individualism and all opportunist lines trends which inevitably appear from time to time in a revolutionary organisation.

Bourgeois opportunist lines require bourgeois opportunist methods of work. The leadership of the CPNZ who formerly often quoted Mao "to be open and above-board" have introduced their new line by rejecting the basic principles of democratic centralism and repressing all efforts to have policy discussed in a democratic manner.

As the CPNZ correctly pointed out before its change in policy, the line of the PLA is causing considerable harm in the international movement and it is necessary to expose and oppose it.

In denying the experience of the Communist Party of China, specifically in relation to the struggle against the rise of a new bourgeoisie and using Mao's principle of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat, the PLA are themselves opening the door to the emergence and development of a new bourgeoisie in Albania. The PLA refuses to accept the fact that bourgeois ideas and new bourgeois elements spring from contradictions in the production relations under socialism. If such bourgeois elements are not defeated they are certain to gain supremacy and control of the proletarian state precisely as has occurred in the Soviet Union and China.

It is a regrettable fact that the CPNZ which formerly enjoyed a high standing and prestige in the international communist movement as an implacable foe of revisionism and imperialism, has been transformed into a revisionist organisation. However, new Marxist-Leninist groups consisting of ex-members of the CPNZ and supporters have grasped the red banner of Marxism-Leninism and revolution thrown into the dust by the reactionary opportunist leaders of the CPNZ. They will continue the revolutionary struggle abandoned by the revisionist party, for the revolutionary cause of the proletariat.

* * *

Statement issued by Marxist-Leninist groups in Auckland and Wellington, New Zealand.

July 22 1980

A more detailed 10 page statement on "Marxism-Leninism or Revisionism" has also been received and will be published in Discussion Bulletin number 11.

"Marxism-Leninism or Metaphysics?", a CPNZ Political Committee Circular to all members dated October, 1979 has been published by the Adelaide Anti-Imperialist Study-Action Group, P.O. Box 88 Cowandilla SA 5033, in "Mao Tsetung - On the fourth anniversary of his death, september 9 1980" (\$1.30). This circular, which has now been withdrawn by the CPNZ leadership, presents a fairly comprehensive refutation of the PLA's analysis, but we are not reprinting it in view of its length and ready availability in Australia.

Some "Notes on Mao Tsetung" intended for publication here have also been held over as they are already available in the Adelaide "Mao Tsetung..." bulletin. If they are reprinted in the future it will be together with "Marxism Or Anarcho-Stalinism" from that publication, which replied to those notes, and also together with a reply to that reply. However at present this prospect doesn't sound terribly exciting.

Additional material on this subject will be found in various publications of the RCP(USA) which are advertized in the Adelaide bulletin. Defences of Mao Tsetung's line against the PLA's attacks have also been published in this Discussion Bulletin since its first issue in October 1977.

JANUARY STORM

Norman Sinclair

China's Liberation Daily reported on December 24, 1979, that the 1967 Shanghai January Storm, the most famous mass uprising during China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, was officially denounced as "counter-revolutionary" by the Shanghai Municipal People's Congress. The revisionists declared that all those who took part in the uprising could face "severe legal action". (No doubt this also refers to three of the "gang of four".)

This itself is not terribly interesting. Of course they denounce it, they were overthrown by it. What is interesting is the question of how long they can keep going before they have to publicly criticize Mao. In defending their present policies, they have throw dust in people's eyes to some extent with their abuse of those they accuse of applying Mao's every word and sentence in a dogmatic way. However this line won't cut any ice when you explicitly line yourself up in opposition to Mao on a specific historical event. If being a good Maoist remains official, though nominal, policy, the Chinese revisionists are going to find themselves more and more on the defensive. Presumably they will have to change the rules of the game. For example, Mao went senile in a year still to be fixed or the guy who came back from Moscow in 1957 was an impostor.

Hua Guofeng has promised an in-depth appraisal of the cultural revolution in the near future. It should be interesting reading.

Below for your reference are three quotes from Mao on the January Storm, plus a quote from the Report to the 9th Party Congress (a report which was reaffirmed at the 10th Congress.)

After the working meeting of the Central Committee the emphasis was on criticizing the bourgeois reactionary line. As the criticism of this line aroused the revolutionary enthusiasm of many revolutionaries, the revolutionary intellectuals and the young students were the first to achieve consciousness, which is in accordance with the laws of revolutionary development. In January of this year the Shanghai workers rose, as did the workers of the whole country and the peasants too, when the January storm swept across the country. The development of the movement showed that the workers and peasants are still the main force... Only when the broad masses of workers and peasants arose was all that bourgeois stuff thoroughly smashed; while the revolutionary intellectuals and the young students had to fall back into a subsidiary place.

From Mao's July 1967 conversations, quoted in Revolution, Vol.5, No.1, p25 - RCP(USA)

This is one class overthrowing another. This is a great revolution.

From Mao's Talk at a Meeting of the Central Cultural Revolution Group, 9 January 1967, Mao Tsetung Unrehearsed, p225.

The upsurge of revolutionary power in Shanghai has brought hope to the whole country. It cannot fail to influence the whole of East China and all provinces and cities in the country. (Ibid p276)

The twists and reversals in the revolutionary movement further brought home to the broad masses the importance of political power. The main reason why Liu Shao-chi and his gang could do evil was that they had usurped the power of the proletariat in many units and

localities, and the main reason why the revolutionary masses were repressed was that power was not in the hands of the proletariat in those cases. In some units the socialist system of ownership existed only in form, but in reality the leadership had been usurped by a handful of renegades, enemy agents and capitalist roaders in power, or it remained in the hands of former capitalists. Especially when the capitalist-roaders in power failed in their scheme to suppress the revolution on the pretext of "grasping production" and whipped up the evil counter-revolutionary wind of economism, the broad masses came to understand still better that only by recapturing the lost power it was possible for them to defeat the capitalist-roaders in power completely. Under the leadership and with the support of Chairman Mao and the proletarian headquarters headed by him, the working class in Shanghai with its revolutionary tradition came forward courageously and, uniting with broad revolutionary masses and revolutionary cadres, seized power from below in January 1967 from the capitalist roaders in power in the former Municipal Party Committee and Municipal People's Council.

Chairman Mao summed up in good time the experience of the January storm of revolution in Shanghai and issued his call to the whole country: "Proletarian revolutionaries, unite and seize power from the handful of Party persons in power taking the capitalist road!" Following that Chairman Mao gave the instruction: "The People's Liberation Army should support the broad masses of the Left". He went on to sum up the experience of Heilungking Province and other provinces and municipalities, laid down the principles and policies for the establishment of revolutionary committees which embrace representatives of the revolutionary cadres, representatives of the People's Liberation Army and representatives of the revolutionary masses, constituting a revolutionary three-in-one combination, and thus pushed forward the nation-wide struggle for the seizure of power.

Report to the Ninth Congress of the CPC, p38-40, FLP, Peking 1969.

MAO ON THE GREAT PROLETARIAN CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Norman Sinclair

The current Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is absolutely necessary and most timely for consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat, preventing capitalist restoration and building socialism.

Quoted in the 9th Congress Report, p4 FLP edition.

It seems that it won't do not to carry out the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, for our foundation is not solid. Judging from my observation, I am afraid that in a fairly large majority of factories -I don't mean all or the overwhelming majority of them - leadership was not in the hands of genuine Marxists and the masses of the workers. Not that there were no good people among those in charge of the factories. There were. There were good people among the secretaries, deputy secretaries and members of Partry committees and among Party branch secretaries. But they were following that line of Liu

Shao-chi - simply resorting to material incentives, putting profit in command and, instead of promoting proletarian politics, handing out bonuses, and so forth.

Quote from Mao's speech at the First Plenary Session of the Ninth Central Committee on 26 April 1969.

In the past we waged struggles in rural areas, in factories, in the cultural field, and we carried out the socialist education movement. But all this failed to solve the problem because we did not find a form, a method, to arouse the broad masses to expose our dark aspects openly, in an allround way and from below.

Quoted in Ninth Congress Report, p27 FLP edition.

FOUR BROADCASTS

The four items which follow were broadcast by Community Radio 3CR as news commentaries from a member of the Movement for Independence and Socialism.

Profits

22 August 1980

Corporate profits in the United States declined by 19 billion dollars in the second quarter of this year.

In absolute terms that is the largest decline of profits in US history. In relative terms the drop of nearly 11% is the largest percentage decline since 1949 and the fourth largest in history.

Profits from US manufacturing fell by more than 13 billion dollars and profits from foreign operations, which includes US investment here, fell by 2.8 billion dollars.

General Motors, Ford and Chrysler all reported record losses.

This sharp decline in profits ought to be front page headlines. It will have far more impact on our lives than anything in the recent budget. After all, as the saying goes, firms like General Motors, Ford and Chrysler are not in the business of making cars - they are in the business of making money. If they can't make money by making cars, or if they actually lose money by doing so, then they simply have to stop making them. That means shut-downs and layoffs and a spreading effect to other sections of the economy. If US operations in Australia can't make enough profits then capital has to be withdrawn from Australia and used where it can. Again that means declining investment, increased unemployment and general stagnation and crisis.

Yet instead of front page headlines in the mass media, this important news rated only a small item in the Australian Financial Review, while the alternative media, if it runs true to form, will not mention it at all. The left prefers to talk about "record" and "gigantic" profits and never about "declining" profits. Only spokespeople for big business like to talk about declining profits and nobody believes them anyway.

Profits

So let's look at this story about declining profits. Is it true and what does it mean?

A natural inclination is to dismiss claims of unprofitability with conspiracy theories about how the "real" profits are being massively concealed. Almost all claims for higher wages, improved conditions, shorter hours or general social progress are met with the answer that "industry can't afford it". Correspondingly, almost all such claims from the trade unions and similar reformist movements are accompanied by the claim that industry can indeed afford it - they are really making excellent profits and can certainly afford a shorter working week and so on.

This involves an acceptance by both sides that what we can and cannot afford depends on capitalist profits. If the employers can make a profit we can afford it, and if they can't then we can't afford it.

But by always claiming that capitalists are making a record profit, trade unions and the like are accepting that if they were not making profits, our demands for improved wages and conditions and general progress would be unreasonable.

Bob Hawke and Bill Hayden have drawn the logical conclusion from that, with a joint declaration that they will sometimes oppose full indexation under a Labor Government. In plain terms they openly support a decline in real wages in order to increase profits. They believe workers should accept a lower standard of living and an actual decrease in their conditions in order to restore profitability to business. They will not fight for improved standards or to restore the standards reached a few years ago. They will not even fight to maintain the reduced standards of the present. They openly declare that those standards must be further reduced and they will support reducing them.

If that's the consequence of accepting that business profits are declining, then it's not surprising many people won't accept it. But is there any alternative?

Frankly, within the capitalist system, there isn't. If we accept the logic of Bob Hawke and Bill Hayden, or the more honest logic of Malcolm Fraser, then we must accept a continuing decline in living standards. It isn't relevant that productivity is higher than ever before and we could get rid of unemployment by working shorter hours. In a system of production for profit there has to be a profit or production must stop. Shorter hours under capitalism will reduce profits and therefore increase unemployment at present.

It's no use arguing against this logic by pretending that they really are making wonderful profits. If they were they wouldn't be closing down plants and laying off workers and complaining about a "crisis". They would be expanding production to make more wonderful profits and talking about what a great contribution they make to the community.

The pretence will become pretty thin eventually anyway. During the Great Depression many firms actually went bankrupt so there was no doubt they weren't making much profit. Did this mean that workers should accept the decline in living standards and mass unemployment of the 1930s? No, but without an alternative it meant they didn't have much choice.

In the coming even Greater Depression we are likely to see huge multi-national corporations, whole industries and entire national Governments going bankrupt. Will we just go on whinging about how badly they run things? Or will we look for a solution?

Let's face it, the only solution will be revolution. That won't be easy and it won't work miracles overnight. But if the system of production for profit can't satisfy people's needs because it can't make enough profit, then it will just have to be replaced with a system of production that doesn't depend on profit - socialist production.

Ordinary working people will have to take over the direction of industry and Government if capitalism can't deliver the goods. We won't be able to whinge about "them". If we can't get things working, it will be "us". In the meantime it's pretty important to study how capitalism works. Don't listen to the alternative media. Read the Financial Review.

26 September 1980

Arthur Calwell once remarked that the U.S. Republican and Democratic parties were like two identical bottles with different labels - and both empty. If he had not been Federal leader of the ALP, he would have had to agree that the same applies here.

Elections have been described as the opportunity, once every few years, to decide which members of the ruling class, will misrepresent the people in Parliament. Anarchist posters have raised slogans like "Don't Vote - It Only Encourages Them!", "Whoever you vote for, a POLITICIAN always gets elected" or "Vote for Guy Fawkes - the only man ever to enter parliament with good intentions!"

Actually when Guy Fawkes tried to blow up Parliament it was part of a papist and monarchist plot against the English revolution, so historically it wasn't really "with good intentions" at all.

We are better off than people living under military dictatorships or in countries like Poland where even elementary trade union rights are still in dispute. But that isn't saying very much is it? This is the 20th century and nearly the 21st. If the rest of the world is still living in the 16th century or whatever, we don't have to wait for them to catch up. We can push ahead. The English democratic revolution achieved Parliamentary sovereignty by cutting off the King's head in the 17th century. Why should we still rest content with the victories of 300 years ago?

The main reason we still have an obsolete social system with obsolete representative institutions is the failure of the left to actively challenge it. Deep down, most people on the left still support the Labor Party. We are still willing to take part in the charade of backing one ruling class party because the other one is worse.

We are still afraid to demand directly the right of the working class to rule society through our own democratically constituted Councils established in each workplace and neighbourhood and controlling all industry and Government.

Instead we still mobilize to "give Fraser the razor", as though Malcolm Fraser personally, and not the capitalist social system, was responsible for all our troubles.

Let's look at some hard facts, that most people on the left seem embarrassed to talk about:

When the Whitlam Labor Government came to power in November 1972 there were 155,000 unemployed, or 2.7 per cent of the workforce. That was record unemployment for the post-war period, and enough to bring down the McMahon Liberal Government.

The press actively contributed to bringing down that Government with one of the most partisan campaigns ever seen in Australia - even featuring the Labor slogan "It's Time (for a change)" as front page headlines. The Murdoch press was particularly active in support of Labor. Naturally most people on the left saw nothing wrong with the newspaper efforts to undermine McMahon with personal attacks and so on. As partisan Labor supporters, we only became indignant when the press, and especially the Murdoch press, reverted to its more usual role of backing the other party.

When Whitlam was thrown out in November 1975 there were 310,000 unemployed or 5 per cent of the workforce. Unemployment had doubled over 3 years. Can anyone honestly say that Fraser's record is much worse?

When the tide of public opinion turned against Whitlam, his Parliamentary opponents tried to force an election through their majority in the Senate. The Labor Government tried to rule without the support of Parliament or the people, by borrowing heavily from overseas Governments sympathetic to it, or by issuing funny money so that the withdrawal of supply

would not force it to the polls. In order to prevent an election, Whitlam was even prepared to persuade the Queen of England to exercise her archaic constitutional prerogatives to dismiss the Australian Governor-General previously nominated by Whitlam.

If a conservative Government faced with a Labor majority in the Senate had tried to avoid an election by those sort of manoeuvres, we would have been outraged. But as partisan supporters of Labor, we were instead outraged at the attempt to force an election we knew Labor would lose.

Of course the soaring unemployment and inflation of the Whitlam years was not Labor's fault. It was happening in every Western country because we are all part of an economic system in which there is nothing any Government can do to control the world market. Likewise the continued worsening of the economy is not Fraser's fault, although he is more callous about it, and there is nothing either Fraser or Hayden, Hawke and Wran could do about it.

The latter have admitted as much - pledging themselves to support a **further** reduction in real wages by opposing even full indexation to maintain the present decline in living standards. Labor has not even promised to fully restore the reforms dismantled by Fraser - like Medibank, let alone introduce any new ones.

So what possible reason is there for people on the left to support Labor? There is only one reason - fear of the alternative. The alternative is not just Malcolm Fraser, but to face up to our own tasks in preparing for a violent revolution and mapping out the program and plans for such a revolution. That will be difficult so it's no wonder we don't want to face up to it. Attacking Fraser is much easier. But whether Fraser goes or stays, revolution is necessary, it is possible, and we will have to get on with it.

Elections

10 October 1980

Official unemployment statistics released yesterday show 404,000 people looking for work.

According to the Prime Minister, Mr Fraser, this is only a very marginal increase over the previous month.

According to the Opposition Leader, Mr Hayden, the figures are a "disgraceful indictment of Mr Fraser's policies". "The Fraser years have cost Australia about \$18,000 million in lost production and lost wealth through worsening unemployment" and "unemployment has risen by about 100 for every day since Mr Fraser became Prime Minister, in 1975".

What do the Government and Opposition propose to do about unemployment?

Certainly Labor promises more and sounds more concerned. That's why many people really hate Fraser but don't hate Hayden, Hawke or Wran. But what does Labor actually propose to do?

According to Labor's spokesperson on employment and youth affairs, Mr Young, voters have a choice between "a Labor Government committed to put people in Government sponsored job-creation and retraining programs before Christmas, or the Fraser Government who will allow 1980 school leavers to meet the same fate as their brothers and sisters". Is that the choice we face, and if so, what does it mean?

Actually Labor's promise is to create about 100,000 jobs through Government sponsored schemes. Even if they fulfil this promise, which is doubtful, that means they accept more than 300,000 unemployed as continuing under a Labor Government. Thus Labor expects to continue with

twice as many people unemployed as the then record of 150,000 which brought down the McMahon Government and swept Whitlam to office. Labor expects to continue with the level of 300,000 unemployed with which Whitlam got thrown out after three years in office.

It's interesting that Mr Hayden measures unemployment in terms of 100 extra for every day Mr Fraser has been in office. The plain fact is that unemployment rose by about 150 for every day Labor was in office and that was the main reason they were thrown out.

But can Labor even fulfil its promise of unemployment no more than twice as bad as under McMahon?

If they can, then one has to ask why Fraser has not been able to achieve it, because when you look carefully, Labor's policies are patterned quite closely on the policies put forward by Fraser in 1975.

Central to Fraser's program for economic recovery was the promise of a tax cut to put money back in the voters' pockets. Now Labor is promising exactly the same thing - tax cuts and "responsible economic management". It didn't prevent unemployment continuing to grow under Fraser, so why on earth should we expect it to work under Hayden, Hawke and Wran?

And how is it possible to combine Government sponsored job creation with tax cuts. Isn't there a rather obvious contradiction between the two? True enough, Labor has adopted the Liberal philosophy of no major increases in Government spending. For example Labor now supports the dismantling of Medibank and has no plan to restore it except for pensioners. Nor do they propose to simply re-instate any of the other various Whitlam Government projects that were slashed by Fraser. Bill Hayden has even accused Malcolm Fraser of being a "big spender".

But even so, Government sponsored job creation schemes mean more Government spending, and tax cuts mean less Government revenue. How does Labor propose to do it. With mirrors?

What else does Labor promise to do about unemployment? They promise to further reduce real wages by opposing full indexation and persuading unions to "moderate" wage demands. That of course is also Malcolm Fraser's policy from 1975 and it has been implemented quite successfully for the past five years. During that time unions have been so "moderate" in their wage demands that real wages have fallen quite substantially. But unemployment has continued increasing. So why on earth should we expect a different result under Labor?

The joint announcement by Bill Hayden and Bob Hawke that a Labor Government would sometimes oppose full wage indexation in Arbitration Commission hearings, is very significant. It means they completely accept the Fraser philosophy that real wages must be cut for the economy to improve.

This goes beyond merely abandoning any attempt to really "Raise the Standard" of Living in Australia. It goes beyond accepting that the standard achieved five years ago cannot be restored. It goes beyond merely committing a Labor Government to opposing workers efforts to avoid being ground down further. Opposing full indexation means a Labor Government will be committed to actually reducing living standards below their present level by ensuring that the wages workers receive each week will be able to buy less goods.

Persuading unions to "moderate" their wage demands can only mean "persuading" them to accept an even more rapid decline in real wages than has already occurred. After all wage demands that don't even keep real wages constant can hardly be called "extreme". Or can they? After all, it was Whitlam's Minister for Labor, Clyde Cameron, who first popularized the term "dole bludger". Bob Hawke will think of something. Whether he does so as a Labor Minister or in a "Government of National Unity".

The choice Australians face in these elections is between two political parties that both accept increasing unemployment and declining living standards. Both have made patriotism and waving the Australian flag a central theme of their campaign. Patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels. Both parties are scoundrels.

What about the Revolution?

1 October 1980

Now that both major Parliamentary parties have given their policy speeches, it is perfectly obvious that neither of them have any serious answers for the problems we face in the 1980s. Even the newspapers admit this quite frankly.

So is there an alternative short of revolution?

Maybe some new force will arise proposing concrete reforms to the capitalist system that will enable it to survive the coming Depression. In that case those reforms will be adopted, as the "New Deal" and Keynesian economic policies were adopted in the last Great Depression, and the adoption of those reforms will prove that revolution is neither necessary nor possible. People do not turn to violence when reform is still possible.

Reactionaries cannot hold back the adoption of necessary reforms forever. Eventually, if the situation gets desperate enough, vested interests will be swept aside and the necessary measures to prevent a total crack up will be adopted. Common sense does prevail.

But what if there are no such measures? What if the bankruptcy of Fraser, Hayden, Hawke and Wran is not due to their personal malevolence and inadequacy, but there really isn't anything they **could** offer if they wanted to?

In that case we are headed for another Great Depression even worse than the 1930s, and revolution must be considered as a real and practical alternative to just putting up with things as they happen.

Recent public opinion polls show that a majority of Australians now believe a Third World War is quite likely. Marxist-Leninists have believed that for some time. Most people on the left do not believe it and keep trying to invent other explanations for recent Soviet behaviour. But if they are wrong (and they usually are wrong), then we will be facing a situation like the struggle against Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and Imperial Japan in the 1930s and 1940s.

The second world war led to revolutions in countries like China where the left fought independently but it did not lead to revolutions in countries like France where the Communist Party led the resistance but then handed its guns to De Gaulle.

If we agree that a Third World War is likely, then revolution must certainly be on the agenda as well. After all the main reason people have difficulty accepting the fact that a Third World War is likely is because it would obviously be far more devastating than the last one.

Even without a world war, in almost every petty trade union or other struggle for reform the cry goes up "Who's Running the Country?" The reply is always that we who are fighting have no subversive intent and fully recognize the right of the present Government to hold power. We are merely trying to urge upon them certain reasonable reforms which they ought to decide in favour of.

Given a Great Depression and/or a Third World War, the question of who's running the country becomes real and immediate, a matter of life and death. The answer people on the left should be willing to give when challenged is that we **do** aim to run the country. We should aim to take the decisions, not just to pressure "them" to decide in "our" interests.

It sounds unreal today, but revolution becomes a real option in a crisis situation where the existing regime has proved that it simply doesn't have acceptable solutions to the pressing problems of the time. We are moving towards such a situation. The only question is whether the opposition to the existing regime has solutions to offer and the courage to take power and implement them, or whether we will just keep on whingeing about how badly "they" run things.

What about the Revolution?

There are all kinds of protest movements, whether over poverty and unemployment, the treatment of Aborigines, the environment or what have you. Revolution simply means that instead of "protesting" about the way things are run, these movements get together with an agreed common program and take over the administration of the country themselves to carry out that program.

In a crisis situation a large part of the population would be drawn into active political struggle. Already there are all kinds of community organizations demanding this or that, and in many cases themselves administering substantial projects such as welfare establishments, co-operatives, community radio and so on.

In industry things are less developed, but rank and file organizations are developing, and capitalism itself is trying to draw workers into the routine administration of their workplaces.

In a revolutionary crisis a substantial part of the population would be active in councils based on their workplace, neighbourhood or whatever and would be agitating for, or themselves administering, solutions or attempted solutions to the pressing problems society faces. In Russia those Councils were called "Soviets" although that word now has different connotations. In China there were revolutionary administrations in large "liberated areas" long before the nation-wide seizure of power and "revolutionary committees" also emerged in the 1960s "Cultural Revolution". In fact every large scale mass upheaval throws up some sort of democratic "Council" institutions, which have their roots in barbarian societies before civilization and the rise of the State.

Revolution simply means that the councils go beyond agitating for the existing regime to change things and actually take power themselves - not only in their own workplaces and neighbourhoods etc, but forming their own Government to implement the policies they want for society as a whole. No more petitions to the Tsar, "All Power to the Soviets!".

Or as the American revolutionary Abraham Lincoln once said, when the people grow weary of their existing form of Government, they possess two rights - their Constitutional right to reform and rearrange it, and their Revolutionary right to dismember and overthrow it.

IT'S ONLY ROCK'N'ROLL - OR IS IT?

Introduction

In a recent issue of the Discussion Bulletin you published a very short piece I wrote which quoted some lyrics from the punk band the Clash.

The article, which suggested that the Clash (at least) were more rebellious than the Red Eureka Movement, was intended as a cynical side-swipe at our current lack of "revolutionary fervour". Some of the responses that it has elicited, however, are worthy of deeper comment.

The two predominant responses I have received from "communists", which disturb me, are:

(a) "was that the one about punk rock? Yeah, they're really shithouse. It's all poxy music anyway!"; and

(b) "It's pretty obvious that you only chose those little bits that sounded C.K. and ignored all the rest."

It strikes me as noteworthy that punk rock is a topic which produces particularly undialectical responses from left-wingers. In fact, "noteworthy" might not even be the right word to use here. "Frightening" might be more appropriate.

A friend recently said something along the lines of, "Why is it that, in lots of cases, if you scratch a communist you find a fascist lurking underneath?" There may be more truth in that than meets the eye; at least

when it comes to attitudes to music. Some "communists" have the sort of fascist approach to music that creates visions of a socialist society where we are all condemned to eternal wallowing in the dirginess of Redgum¹ (on the basis that they say good stuff and you can understand what they sing). It's a pretty grim vision.

The Bias Exposed

The intention of this article is not to suggest that punk rock, as a thing in itself, is revolutionary (or perhaps even progressive). But then neither is rock'n'roll, soul, disco, folk, bush, blues, jazz, electronic, classical, or any other musical form. Not surprisingly, there are good elements of punk rock, and there is a bad side to it.

Is it really very surprising that, in writing about the rebellious side of punk rock, I would pick the progressive elements rather than the sexist or nihilist ones? I would imagine that anyone extolling the virtues of folk music for motivating people and promoting struggles, would tend to concentrate on Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger in preference to Peter, Paul & Mary and Donovan.

Left Wing Scorn

Why is it then, that punk music has come in for particular scorn from the left? Two reasons suggest themselves to me:

(a) Because some of the Trotskyite groups have adopted the opposite undialectical approach and embraced all punk rock with open arms (declaring its actual form, as distinct from aspects of its content, to be revolutionary in itself), some of those who consider themselves Maoists have opposed it as a matter of principle.

(b) Many lefties have been taken in by the media approach to punk rock, to the extent that they have believed that all there is to punk is nihilism, destructiveness and safety pins.² This contrasts with the usual scepticism about the mass media that prevails in left-wing circles.

In either case, the approach adopted by many in our ranks is, at best, unresearched, naive and undialectical, and at worst totalitarian and conservative.

Punk Under View (The Clash as examples)

All the examples that follow are deliberately selected to show punk in a favorable light. The anti-punk case has been adequately made in the mass media and, in many respects, it is undeniable. My intention is to show the good side of punk because, as we all know, there are two sides to every question.

In what follows, most emphasis is placed on the Clash. This is not simply because they happen to have adopted the most progressive political philosophy, or because I happen to like their music a lot (which I do!), but because, with the possible exception of the Sex Pistols, the Clash have attracted more attention than any other new band in the past five years. And it's attention which evidences their (if not revolutionary, at least) rebellious credentials.

For instance the American magazine Rolling Stone (Issue 316, May 1980) says this of the Clash: "Their first LP, 'The Clash', released in England at the height of the punk movement in 1977, has been hailed by some critics as the greatest rock'n'roll album ever made. Its fourteen songs

1 I don't mind Redgum, but if that's all...

2 All of these were (rather than are) significant elements in the emergence of punk, but it is too simplistic to leave it at that, as some of the examples below indicate.

jump from the record with such ferocious intensity that they demand that the listener sit up and take notice - immediately.³ But perhaps even more important are the lyrics. While the Sex Pistols and other punk bands viewed the deteriorating English society with a sort of self-righteous nihilism, the Clash observed it through a militant political framework that offered some hope. Certainly a long battle was ahead, they suggested, but perhaps it could be won."

The Clash have, in fact, a more optimistic view of the future than many of the so-called revolutionaries who so blithely dismiss them. "The Clash question everything, which is why they're so positive. They don't think it's hopeless. The Clash, in fact, believe we have nothing **but** hope. Just get out there and do it!" (Roadrunner, 6.2.80)

Basically the left have been far too slow to realise the potential of rock music to actually motivate people. It doesn't all have to be deadening and passive. To use the words of Paul Simonon of the Clash, "Rock'n'roll is a really good medium. It has impact, and if we do our job properly then we're making people aware of a situation they'd otherwise tend to ignore. We can have a vast effect!" (Quoted in Caroline Coon, 1988: The New Wave Punk Explosion, p64)

This is not to suggest that rock music can, of itself, actually change anything. That's not the sort of illusion that the Clash themselves would fall for. When Joe Strummer (lead singer) was asked about the potency of rock'n'roll to change anything he answered:

"Completely useless... A rock'n'roll group! None of us is going to change anything. Everyone goes 'Punk! Hurrah!' But in three years what do you think I'm going to be doing? What do you think the guys who buy our singles are going to be doing? I'll still be walking around muttering to myself. They are still going to be shovelling shit down some chute and maybe with their wages they'll buy the Clash's fourth album. Rock doesn't change anything.

"But after saying that - and I'm just saying that because I want you to know that I haven't got any illusions about anything, right - having said that I **still** want to try to change things." (Quoted by Caroline Coon, p74)

Rebellion as the Essence

The underpinning of the progressive side of punk is a rebellion against the status quo. (In the 70s the word "rebel" was almost superseded by the word "punk".) Sure the music they play is loud, raucous and often beyond considerations of taste and finesse. But don't judge it purely on whether it sounds good to **you**, or not.

Even the notorious Johnny Rotten had more to him than the "inarticulate sneer" portrayed in the media as the extent of punk culture. In Caroline Coon's book he gives his response to the hippy culture to which punk was, in many respects, a reaction: "They were all dosed out of their heads the whole time. 'Yeah man, peace and love. Don't let anything affect you. Let it walk all over you, but don't stop it.' We say bollocks! If it offends you, stop it. You've got to or else you just become apathetic and complacent yourself. You end up with a mortgage, watching TV with 2.4 kids out in suburbia - and that's just disgusting. All that's different from them an' those they were reacting against is that they've got **long** hair and bowler hats." (p47)

Progressive punk is an activist philosophy of rebellion. Mick Jones of the Clash sums it up with this brief response to the question about what he'd do if England started the draft again. "We'd start our own anti-draft movement." (Rolling Stone, May 1980)⁴

3 Would that we could make people sit up and take notice - even after some time!

4 And don't forget that punks played a major role in establishing Rock Against Racism in Britain.

So What do they Sing about?

The prime argument that was directed against my initial contribution to the Discussion Bulletin was that I had selected out a couple of sentences which sounded particularly good. For the benefit of the Doubting Thomases who posited this view, here are the contexts from which the two extracts were selected:

"WORKING FOR THE CLAMPDOWN" (The Clash)

... The judge said five to ten - but I say double that again
I'm not working for the clampdown.
No man born with a living soul
Can be working for the clampdown.

Kick over the wall, cause governments to fall
How can you refuse it?
Let fury have the hour, anger can be power
D'you know that you can use it? ...

"THE GUNS OF BRIXTON" (The Clash)

When they kick at your front door
How you gonna come?
With your hands on your head
Or on the trigger of your gun.

When the law break in
How you gonna go?
Shot down on the pavement
Or waiting on death row.

You can crush us,
You can bruise us,
But you'll have to answer to
Ch - the guns of Brixton ...

And just to throw in another morsel to savour, consider this:

"WHITE RIOT" (The Clash)

Black men have got a lot of problems,
But they don't mind throwing a brick.
But white men have got too much school,
Where they teach you to be thick.
So we're content, we don't resent,
We go reading papers and wearing slippers.

White Riot! I wanna riot.
White Riot! A riot of my own.

All the power is in the hands
Of people rich enough to buy it.
While we walk the streets
Too chicken to even try it.
And everybody does what they're told to,
And everybody eats supermarket soul food!

White Riot! I wanna riot.
White Riot! A riot of my own.

The Trump Card

In England at least, which group of people has done the most to popularise the "disgraced" Chiang Ching, Wang Hung-wen, Yao Wen-yuan and Chang Chung-chao? Some M-L group or other, I hear you say? Nuh-uh! A punk rock group who've called themselves The Gang of Four.

They've even had the audacity to set Mao to music (or at least a pretty good version of):

"NOT GREAT MEN" (Gang of Four)

No weak men in the books at home.
The strong men who have made the world.
History lives on in the books at home.

It's not made by great men. [repeated a few times]

The past lives on in your front room.
The poor still weak, the rich always rule.
History lives on in the books at home.

It's not made by great men ...

Finally, the Gang of Four may well have provided the definitive punk explanation of why they refuse to sing the love songs of old. The song "Anthrax" contains this monologue on the topic: "Love crops up quite a lot as something to sing about. Most groups make most of their songs about falling in love, or how happy they are to be in love. You occasionally wonder why these groups do sing about it all the time. It's because these groups think there's something very special about it, and always has been. You know, to burst into song you have to be inspired. And nothing inspires quite like love. These groups and singers think they appeal to everyone by singing about love, because apparently everyone has, or can love, or so they would have you believe anyway. But these groups go along with the belief that love is deep in everyone's personality. And I don't think we're saying there's anything wrong with love. Just don't think that what goes on between two people should be shrouded in mystery."

Conclusion

Punk is a musical form. The ethos that accompanies it is varied - though the media would have us believe that it is stereotyped into one format only.

Like anything else in society, punk is a mass of contradictions. That should go without saying in something like the Discussion Bulletin. Unfortunately, when it comes to punk music, many of us forget about the dialectics we so readily espouse at all other times.

Perhaps contradictions are, after all, subservient to taste?
