

Australian Communist

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Cover image: Baiada workers and supporters celebrate their victory.

AUSTRALIA AND IMPERIALISM:

Independent Sovereign State or Protectorate Dependency of Great Powers?

Some key questions confront Australians in getting to grips with Australia's path to socialism.

In the early days of Marxism in Australia, there was an inevitable focus on the Russian Revolution (1917) and on what had happened there, given the great inspiration it was. That persisted and persists in many quarters. Looking overseas is always full of pitfalls, but inspiration and useful examples can help clarify the mind, warm the heart and rejuvenate the spirit.

What is the right approach, the response necessitated by the material and ideological realities in this country and in the world?

Mao Zedong went straight to the nub of the matter in declaring the internal contradictions of a country determine how things can change, while external contradictions are the conditions in which the internal things work out. The external conditions can speed things up, can provide circumstances of advantage to one side or other of an internal contradiction. This is true of contemporary Australian society.

So the fundamental starting point for Australia's revolution is the internal reality of Australia. That is not to turn one's back on international conditions

and developments, nor internationalism.

Clarity is vital about the objective and subjective situation from which change will arise when properly encouraged by action and leadership. More than just the material conditions, it is the relations between classes, objective and subjective, that are vital to getting to grips with what we do.

The issue of whether Australia is an independent sovereign smaller imperialist state or a protectorate dependency of great powers has a crucial bearing on our understanding of the tasks confronting the Australian revolutionary movement.

The conclusions require a good look at what Lenin revealed about the character of imperialism and the great powers' relations with other states and their character and forms. It necessitates some quoting of Lenin to provide the base on which the examination pivots.

Australia is a reasonably well off country with stable development and some security for a large section of the workers

A brief look at Australia reveals a country with some developed industry, developed commerce and exchange, mechanised agriculture on a large scale, relatively high living standards, and other features separating Australia from the developing or third world.

The range of developed industries includes metal refineries, chemical industries, advanced communications, car industry, huge mining and petroleum

/gas industries, some metal industries, relatively large electrical generation, large scale commercial and finance centres. To this is contrasted limited manufacturing, including a very small machine tool industry, little though important electronics manufacture, consumer electronics and relatively high levels of education and health care services. Agriculture is capitalist farming run by capitalist enterprises, whether small business, family farms or large agribusiness. There are no peasants as such.

Business is divided between large conglomerates, banks and financial institutions, medium enterprises, as well as a small business sector around 350,000 strong.

The employed workforce amounts to more than 11 million of a 22 million population. The working class is the completely overwhelming class numerically, more than 85% of the population.

Median Household Income is relatively high in world terms at \$66,872 per annum, or \$46,082 in USD in 2007 and growing.

It is a sovereign state, with modern mechanised armed forces with advanced planes, ships, armoured units, electronic spying, extensive police forces, and many spy agencies, secret police units, a court system under central control, and extensive bureaucracy supporting the state apparatus.

Australia has a history of military interventions to the present day across

the South Pacific and participation in great power aggression across the globe, particularly in Asia (the Philippines, Indonesia, Korea, Vietnam, Malaya) and more recently in the Indian Ocean littoral states (Somalia and Iraq) and Afghanistan.

The state has the form of bourgeois parliamentary “monarchist” democracy with the formal appointment of a head-of-state, the “Governor-General” by the British Monarch, at the selection / recommendation of the Prime Minister, a hangover of former colonial days.

Revolution is not on the immediate agenda but history grinds unerringly towards socialism

The proposition of Australia being “dominated by US imperialism” and, as a consequence, struggle for National Independence from imperialist domination being the key task of the Australian working class and current stage of the revolutionary struggle, stands in conflict with many militant workers’ and revolutionary petty bourgeois’ desire for and ideological commitment to immediate transition to socialism.

The attraction of destroying the Australian bourgeoisie in a socialist revolution is powerful.

On top of a sentimental attraction, the working class comprises well over 85% of the population, evidence that the contradiction between capital and labour dominates all others.

The struggle for independence is

considered by some as an error, a failure to understand the real position of Australia engaged in its own export of capital and throwing its military and diplomatic weight around as a regional power. In short, some consider Australia an imperialist power in its own right without particular consideration of the relationship between the Australian state and bourgeoisie with imperialist powers.

Lenin raised some ideas about the relations between the great powers and other countries in his classic, *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* which need consideration.

It's worth noting that Lenin was constrained in writing this work by his eye on Tsarist censorship but that he notes in a preface after the Russian Revolution "the main purpose of the book was and remains: to present, on the basis of summarized returns of irrefutable bourgeois statistics, and the admissions of bourgeois scholars of all countries, a composite picture of the world capitalist system in its international relations at the beginning of the twentieth century - on the eve of the first world imperialist war."

Lenin provides a framework for considering the issues of colony, semi-colony and other transitional forms of relations to the big powers and the features, characteristics and place of independent sovereign states which have importance in relation to the strategies of the working class.

He provides foundations on which the concrete conditions of Australia and

the working class's relations within and outside Australia can be understood.

Lenin's Imperialism

The following quotes are taken from *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, V.I. Lenin, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1975.

1. Chapter VI The Division of the World Among the Great Powers, p 90

In the table "Percentage of Territory belonging to the European Colonial Powers (Including the United States)" Australia is noted as 100% "belonging to the European Colonial Powers" in 1876 and 1900, the year before Australia's formal independence from Great Britain. It is not presented as a power on its own account though the average income in Victoria was either the highest in the world at the time and was slipping or had just slipped below the highest at the time.

2. Ibid pp 96-7.

"Alongside the colonial possessions of the Great Powers, we have placed the small colonies of the small states, which are, so to speak, the next objects of a possible and probable 'redivision' of colonies. Most of these small states are able to retain their colonies only because of the conflicting interests, friction, etc., among the big powers, which prevent them from coming to an agreement in regard to the division of the spoils. The 'semicolonial' states provide an example of the transitional forms which are to be found in all spheres of nature and society. Finance

capital is such a great, it may be said, such a decisive force in all economic and in all international relations, that it is capable of subjecting, and actually does subject to itself even states enjoying the fullest political independence; we shall shortly see examples of this. Of course, finance capital finds most 'convenient', and is able to extract the greatest profit from such a subjection as involves the loss of political independence of the subjected countries and peoples. In this connection, the semi-colonial countries provide a typical example of the 'middle stage'. It is natural that the struggle for these semi dependent countries should have become particularly bitter in the epoch of finance capital, when the rest of the world has already been divided up."

3. Ibid, pp 101-103

"Since we are speaking of colonial policy in the epoch of capitalist imperialism, it must be observed that finance capital and its corresponding foreign policy, which reduces itself to the struggle of the Great Powers for the economic and political division of the world, gives rise to a number of transitional forms of state dependence. Typical of this epoch is not only the two main groups of countries: those owning colonies, and colonies, but also diverse forms of dependent countries which, officially, are politically independent, but in fact, are enmeshed in the net of financial and diplomatic dependence. We have already referred to one form of dependence - the semi-colony. An example of another is provided by Argentina. 'South America, and especially

Argentina,' writes Schulze-Gaevernitz in his work on British imperialism, 'is so dependent financially on London that it ought to be described as almost a British commercial colony.'

'Basing himself on the report of the Austro-Hungarian consul at Buenos Aires for 1909, Schilder estimates the amount of British capital invested in Argentina at 8,750,000,000 francs. It is not difficult to imagine what strong connections British Finance capital (and its faithful 'friend' diplomacy) thereby acquires with the Argentine bourgeoisie, with the circles that control the whole of that country's economic and political life.

'A somewhat different form of financial and diplomatic dependence, accompanied by political independence, is presented by Portugal. Portugal is an independent sovereign state, but actually, for more than two hundred years, since the war of Spanish Succession (1701-14), it has been a British protectorate. Great Britain has protected Portugal and her colonies in order to fortify her own positions in the fight against her rivals, Spain and France. In return Great Britain has received commercial privileges, preferential conditions for importing goods, and especially capital into Portugal and the Portuguese colonies, the right to use the ports and islands of Portugal, her telegraph cables, etc.** (Schilder, op- cit., Vol 1, pp 160-61.) Relations of this kind have always existed between big and little states, but in the epoch of capitalist imperialism they become a general system, they form part of the sum total of 'divide the world' relations, become links in

the chain of operations of world finance capital.’

(NB - At the time Portugal had colonies in Africa (Mozambique and Angola), Asia (Timor, Goa, and Macau), the Americas and held the Azores in the mid-Atlantic.)

4. Chapter IV The Export of Capital pp75-8

Table “Approximate Distribution of Foreign Capital (about 1910) Shows Great Britain - Europe 4, America 37 and Asia, Africa and Australia 29 (In billions of marks)

“The principal spheres of investment of British capital are the British colonies, which are very large also in America (for example, Canada) not to mention Asia, etc. In this case, enormous exports of capital are bound up most closely with vast colonies, of the importance of which for imperialism we shall speak later.”

.....

Lenin identifies a range of transitional forms of dependency/subservience to great powers including protectorates dependent on a Great Power. He noted various features and forms of these relations.

The prospect of Portugal, a colonial power holding overseas colonies for hundreds of years, being dependent on Great Britain for more than two hundred years, with Great Britain having trade advantages, advantageous conditions for export of capital, military bases, etc.,

is noted.

The CPA (M-L) has looked at it time and again, looked at the struggles of the working class and other classes, local capitalists and sections like family farmers, to work out the way to break capitalism in our conditions.

The character of capitalism in Australia

Capital in Australia takes 26.7% of total National Income in Profits, even in the midst of the global financial crisis of 2009. It was down from 29% in 2008. The wages share, including government services and benefits is just twice the profit share at 53.4%.

And what is the core of capitalism in Australia? Business organisation itself points to it.

The Business Council of Australia is made up of the 100 biggest corporate operations in Australia. Companies go in and out of the Business Council on the basis of the size of their turnover of their operations in Australia.

The members employed a total of 1.1million in Australia in 2004, around 10% of the total workforce and 14% or so of the private sector workforce. They paid tax of \$27 billion in 2006. Their portion of total profit is much larger than their portion of the workforce, but further detailed work is needed to specify it.

The Business Council is the council of big business in Australia. It is the core of Australia capitalism.

There is virtually no member of the Business Council whose capital is separate from or not dependent on finance capital of one of the great imperialist powers.

Even the one or two who have an appearance or present themselves as ‘big Australians’ such as BHP, Packer’s businesses, Wesfarmers, Westfield, Rio Tinto, the big 4 banks, all fit within Lenin’s view of dependence.

Packer for decades has relied on the family’s relationship with Hambros Bank of the UK for finance. In the 1990s when the Packers had 6 billion of assets in their companies, 4 billion belonged to Hambros, a private British bank run by a British family, with huge connections with the US, being one of the largest landholders in the US.

The big 4 banks rely on overseas financiers for large credit, which then has a vital influence, a determining one, on their expansion and contraction.

In BHP’s case, from its origin, the mines at Broken Hill were developed using British capital. In the 1920s, the building of the Port Kembla steel works was financed from Britain accompanied by massive British investment in a wire drawing plant as part of the complex. Its post war expansion with flat plate rolling mills was a “John Lysaght” British firm allied to America’s domination of Australia. The plate was destined for British and American car and whitegoods plants.

The ownership of BHP was clouded by a range of dominant nominee companies

held by local institutions for overseas capitalists. They were the largest shareholders through the 1960s at least up to the 1990s and beyond. In turn, the nominees represented originally British capital, and gradually found Japanese and American capital growing in force through the 1960s to the 1980s, Gradually British and Japanese interests declined relative to American interests.

The impact could be seen in the management of BHP. From its earliest days management was carried out by Australians who had engineering backgrounds. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a great struggle emerged between the Australian management throughout the company and American capital whose position had grown. It largely had two related centres.

First was a brawl in the boardroom over the level of return on assets. Over years the boardroom and the capitalists dominating ownership took a long term view. Huge investments were made over sometimes a decade before returning a cent, while returns on other activity carried the company. Returns in metal and minerals refining, steelworks, and metal manufacture came in at returns of 5 or 6%. The Mining division and Oil and Gas made much better returns. Financiers insisted on a 12% return on assets in each division of the company. This challenged the ‘engineers’ commitment to manufacturing, mineral refining and steel production.

On top of that, American finance capital pushed for a break up of the conglomerate for quick returns. The field of this struggle was a proposal to

break away the Oil and Gas division, particularly from the steel, mineral refining and manufacturing divisions. This would lead to the manufacturing units being unable to access the high oil and gas returns for major mining and manufacturing investments.

An American was brought in as the company's Chief Operations Officer. He in turn brought in other Americans as Chief of HR, and then one as Chief Finance Officer. Eventually the 'engineers' retired and the Yank took the Chief Executive's Office. In the end the Chief Finance Officer succeeded him as CEO, completing the submission of BHP to US imperialism.

Metal products manufacturing was sold off and now operates under the banner of Bluescope Steel.

The proposed carving off of the Oil and Gas division was abandoned.

Since the consolidation of American control, BHP has undertaken a huge merger with Anglo-South African Billiton.

Recently the Australian building and development company, Leightons was the subject of a huge takeover grab by a Spanish company. The largest shareholding in Leightons is owned by a German Firm, Hochtief, which the Spanish construction giant ALS is trying to takeover via a takeover of Leightons.

When the particulars of the "Aussies" in the Business Council are examined the pattern is repeated.

Reactionaries and Imperialism: Role of Australia in the world imperialist system

Does the Australian state operate as a subservient participant in American imperialist military aggression across the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean Littoral states?

Australian forces are at war in Afghanistan and the Philippines in alliance with American forces.

In wider international affairs, the Australian government is notorious for subservience to US imperialism.

In trade, the Australian state has been a strong supporter of imperialist globalisation and deregulation.

Australian governments entered into a series of oppressive trade agreements with the US and Britain over the last 110 years, providing advantages to the US and Britain.

American military bases can be found across the country. A major expansion was floated in November 2010 during a visit by US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton. Military exercises with US forces are a regular event. Australia has a nearly complete reliance on military purchases from the US and occasionally Britain.

The sorry performance of then Prime Minister Rudd at the Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change was revealed as an agent for the Western Powers to undermine the coalition of developing and socialist countries.

It is such a feature of Australia foreign policy that it has come to be expected. Of course there are differences between the overt subservience of the most reactionary elements like Abbott and the simply subservient like Rudd and Gillard.

The approach to Israel is a case in point. The ALP generally reflects the less reactionary elements in the US imperialist state rather than the most reactionary, though Gillard may be moving to the right in this. The ALP leadership's condemnation of the attack on the Gaza aid flotilla was very muted.

So What!

The importance of this is in the strategy of what Australian socialists set out to do.

While having the form of an independent sovereign imperialist power, the Australia state is more comparable to the place of Portugal outlined by Lenin in his work.

The Australian state is not the state power of a viable local capitalist class that pursues interests of its own outside of the web of imperialist control, but is rather the state power of US imperialism exercised through local collaborators. Consequently, the main revolutionary force must inevitably be focussed on breaking the control of Australia by imperialism in order to realise the conditions for a socialist transformation of society.

It means the working class building alliances with small business and

family farmers against US imperialism in particular and the great imperialist powers in general.

The working class is the main class and the leading class in the struggle. That gives the struggle for independence an overwhelmingly socialist character in the process of struggle for independence from imperialism.

Nationalisation of imperialist enterprises will be an aim, alongside relieving small business of the oppressive rule of the big multinationals and finance capital. The enterprises will not be carved up among local capitalists, small, medium and large, but will become the common property of the Australian people under the leadership and direction of the working class.

Victory of this stage of the struggle will not institute socialism but it will establish the foundations for doing so. And unless this stage of the struggle purposefully leads to socialist economic relations under the political direction of the working class, there will be no anti-imperialist Australian independence. No class other than the working class has the capacity to develop the economic and political structures capable of consolidating a decisive break from the power of imperialism.

This has many features which relate to contemporary South American experience.

The governments of Venezuela and Bolivia as examples, have taken steps in this direction with the nationalisation of key resource industries. Their

experiences add to the examples set by earlier efforts to build socialism in various countries, some of which are no longer socialist.

There is a long way to go to overcome petty jealousies in the left, and unite in this task.

In reaffirming the strategic policy of revolution by stages based on the reality of the internal composition of power in Australia and of the contradictions underlying this power, we acknowledge that the tactical measures to move us in the right direction continue to challenge all Australian revolutionaries.

THE STATE AND THE MEDIA MONOPOLIES IN AUSTRALIA

“The state is a machine for maintaining the rule of one class over another;a machine for holding in obedience to one class other, subordinated classes”.

(V.I. Lenin, *The State*, 11/7/1919 p.p 11 + 14. Foreign Language Press, Beijing, 1965).

When we speak of the state in modern capitalist societies, we refer to the instruments and institutions which are used by and enable the bourgeois ruling class to in fact rule and to maintain its domination and exploitation of those who make up the oppressed classes in these societies. It is not the purpose of this article to examine the nature of classes and class relations in modern Australia (for a detailed discussion of this topic see “The Role of Class Analysis in Australia’s Revolution” in the October-December 2010 edition of this journal), but to briefly outline the instruments and institutions of the state in Australia and the role the monopoly media plays in supporting and reinforcing the state apparatus.

As was pointed out by Engels (1884) in his work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, the state came into existence when humanity progressed from the stage of primitive society (when general ties, society itself and the allocation of work were arranged by custom or tradition or by the authority of elders of clan

groups) to societies divided into classes – primarily a ruling class to appropriate the labour of others, and subordinate oppressed classes whose labour is, in varying degrees, appropriated.

It is historical fact that in the previous forms of class relations – those of slave owners and slaves, feudal land owners and serfs and capitalist owners of the means of production and industrial and agricultural workers – the ruling or exploiting classes have constituted a small minority of society and the oppressed and exploited classes the vast majority. It is only through the creation and maintenance of the state apparatus that these ruling classes were and are able to maintain and enhance their dominant position. As Engels pointed out in his above mentioned work,

“ The state is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, these classes with conflicting economic interests might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have a power that would alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of ‘order’; and this power, arisen out of society and placing itself above it, is the state” (pp.177-78).

In capitalist society the components of this state apparatus are primarily the armed forces and the police forces, the

prison and “correctional” institutions, the legislature and the legal system which administers the ruling class’s laws, and the civil bureaucracy. These are the means by which the ruling bourgeois class maintains its dominance over the vast majority of the rest of society – the means and mechanisms of coercion and ultimately, physical violence by which its power is exercised and enjoyed.

From a brief examination of past forms of class relations, it is clear that ruling classes have used various means to disguise and conceal the real nature of their dominance to avoid the necessity of using naked coercion and violence. The invention and promotion of superstition and irrational religious beliefs (including the claim of supernatural authority!) and the restriction of access to education and literacy are examples of these means. It is of course infinitely preferable for an exploiting class to maintain its hold on political and economic power through peaceful means rather than to constantly resort to force and violence, which has the potential to seriously disrupt profits. In a political sense, in modern capitalist societies the monopoly media’s role is to grease the cogs of the state apparatus and to mislead the oppressed classes into accepting the inevitability of their domination and exploitation.

The monopoly media is of course a creation of capitalism and therefore has all the characteristics of capitalism. In an economic sense, it primarily exists to support capitalist production of commodities through advertising. As pointed out by Humphrey McQueen (1977) in his work *Australia’s Media Monopolies*, it is also subject to

the capitalist law of tending toward monopoly, to the current stage where the likes of Murdoch, Fairfax, Packer and their ilk are now the only major mainstream players in Australia.

Politically however, the media monopolies have another role which can be described as:

- propagating the ideas and ideology of the ruling class (for example, individualism, greed, selfishness, privilege and the desire for cultural and economic superiority) so as to make these ideas the accepted ideology and values of the people.
- presenting information and news in a disjointed, fragmented and frequently concocted way so as to discourage any connection between what is in fact happening in Australia and the rest of the world and the reality of imperialism and class oppression.
- creating, promoting and fuelling sexism, racism, mindless violence and anti-working class ideas to create populist divisions in society and to discourage peoples’ unity.
- promoting trivial events and issues (infotainment, royal weddings, celebrity scandals, etc) to distract people from the issues and events that are in fact important.
- discouraging and ridiculing the concept that any other system of government and economic and social relations is viable or preferable to the status quo.

This role of the mass media is carried out in an increasingly sophisticated

way through the daily newspapers, radio, television and through monopoly electronic and computerised means. It is an undoubted understatement to say that the mainstream media occupy an important role in the maintenance of bourgeois ruling class oppression. For this reason it has been described as the fifth arm of the state.

This topic is worthy of continued investigation and discussion, with an analysis of the role in Australia's revolution of the working class and peoples' media in its various forms.

In relation to the monopoly media, the founding Chairman of the CPA (M-L) had this to say,

“ Who would deny the gross bias and lies of the press? That is alright. I make no complaint about it. If it is said frankly and openly that it is telling a pack of lies on behalf of capitalism it would be entitled to some respect. If it did that, it would not be capitalism. In fact capitalism is a biased system, just as is socialism. In my turn I am biased against capitalism, against the capitalist class, against its press. I will do everything I can to oppose them. At least there is no pretence in that position, unlike the pretence of the press that it serves the community, is ‘fair’, ‘objective’, etc.” E.F. Hill – *Communism and Australia*, 1989, CPA (M-L).

Study notes for V.I Lenin's

"LEFT-WING" COMMUNISM, AN INFANTILE DISORDER

Sectarianism has dogged the working class movement in Australia. The most common definition of sectarianism is a narrow one. On the left it's usually taken to mean the name-calling, abuse and factionalism that once characterised the organised left parties. When core communist principles are at stake, struggle is essential, but the vitriolic manner in which such struggles were played out was often counterproductive. Lenin's vitriol against revisionists was justifiable because their actions caused the imprisonment or death of cadres they or others led. Nowhere is this more vivid than in the vocal support of the ex-Marxist Kautsky for his "own" country during the brutal slaughter of World War One. But applying this vitriol in totally different conditions in Australia damaged the standing of the communist movement. In the history of the communist movement in Australia it put off many who were drawn to the left. "They hate each other more than they hate capitalism," was a commonly expressed view by the seventies and early eighties. Right wing ideologues capitalised on it. The Left Fightback conferences in Canberra and Melbourne in the late 80s brought a much needed respite.

But this narrow definition of sectarianism isn't its core. In *Left-Wing' Communism, an infantile*

disorder Lenin shows that sectarianism does not mean separation and hostile disagreements amongst those on the left, but rather beliefs, and actions based on those beliefs, that separate the left from the mass of the people. It's the masses who make history, not small groups.

Lenin's ideas, developed and steered in the struggle for socialist revolution, provide practical help to Australia's people, particularly the working class. Lenin united and led the mass of the Russian people under the simple, but powerful slogan of 'Bread, peace and land'. They were prepared to face death in defence of it. By 1920 when *Left-Wing Communism, an infantile disorder* was published, many had died in the capitalist military invasion of their country and its resulting famine. The young Soviet Union was on a war footing, not by its own choosing. It was an intensely difficult time, which nonetheless held great promise for the future.

Australian communists have always faced very different conditions to those faced by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, so their specific ways of working and organising may not be applicable here. General principles are. While we need to develop our own scientific knowledge based on facts that apply in our country at this particular time, there is a vast treasure house of knowledge that would simply be lost to us, were we to constantly reinvent the wheel and ignore the experiences summed up in the writings of the Marxist-Leninist founders.

Lenin's clarion call for unity with

the people lies at the core of the tasks that face the communist movement in Australia, and is just one reason that makes *Left wing Communism* worth rereading. But the greater intensity and increasingly long hours of work for those Australians who realise the people need fundamental change, means many can't find time to read extensively. In an attempt to meet that need, this short article tries to bring together key quotes from Lenin's masterpiece, together with commentary which links it to our tasks.

A vanguard party

Lenin states early in the book: "the Bolsheviks could not have maintained themselves in power... unless the strictest, truly iron discipline had prevailed in our Party, and unless the latter had been rendered the fullest and unreserved support of the whole mass of the working class, that is, of all its thinking, honest, self-sacrificing and influential elements who are capable of leading or of carrying with them the backward strata."ⁱ

The concept and practice of a vanguard party of self-motivated activists is central to Lenin's theories. The working class easily accepts the idea of a party specifically representing working class interests, but many working class and progressive activists, especially the young, say the idea of a disciplined vanguard party is out of date. With an ideology against ideologies, they distrust the formality and structures of left parties. They are more likely to drift in and out of loose coalitions, and operate more in the online world. We have to pay attention to how young

people work. It's not just a matter of their greater facility in the virtual world.

In some senses they are right. Dogmatically transposing Lenin's "iron discipline" to a very different situation for our party meant that democracy was crushed. This has been true of many left parties. People, the young in particular, turned away in droves once they realised. But factionalism has also been utterly rejected by the masses. It's part of the reason for the distaste with which both the ALP and Coalition are viewed. Factionalism can't be a part of a vanguard party. Vanguard parties are based on mutual respect and support, because members have a job to do. There's no room for jockeying for position, for gossip, for dragging others down. Members may have different views on particular issues and it is not only their right, but their duty to present those views, but once a collective decision is made, it must be carried out.

Lenin states "victory over the bourgeoisie is impossible without a long, stubborn and desperate war of life and death, a war demanding perseverance, discipline, firmness, indomitableness and unity of will."ⁱⁱ This brings to the fore another idea as well, the need for a dictatorship of the proletariat.

"The dictatorship of the proletariat is a most determined and most ruthless war waged by the new class against a more powerful enemy, the bourgeoisie, whose resistance is increased tenfold by its overthrow (even if only in one country), and whose power lies not only in the strength of international capital, in the strength and durability

of the international connections of the bourgeoisie, but also in the force of habit, in the strength of small production. For, unfortunately, small production is still very, very widespread in the world, and small production engenders capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale. For all these reasons the dictatorship of the proletariat is essential”ⁱⁱⁱ

This statement has implications for our understanding of economic and political developments in socialist countries, but can't be applied simplistically. In the past the communist movement overwhelmingly took its lead from international events, with some major negative consequences. Australian communists must focus on Australia, because we have to work to build the revolutionary movement here. We have very limited influence over developments in other countries, but we need to have some handle on them in order to take advantage of the forward march of the world socialist movement and/or be prepared in a way many were not when the Soviet bloc countries turned to capitalism. The collapse of the Soviet bloc had a huge impact on the worldwide movement. Even groups like the CPA(ML), which had spoken for years about revisionism and the gradual restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union, were not organised or active enough to effectively disseminate a Marxist analysis. The field was left open to the capitalists. We have to be one step ahead.

Having clarity on the fundamental line creates discipline. The wisdom

of the collective must be respected. Democracy of the people is essential to the working class. We have to rely on the masses. Discipline requires study and investigation of the whole of the country, classes and forces, rather than the subjective examination of one's own limited area of work. We have to assess the stage of working class consciousness, being aware that conditions can change quickly and that human consciousness lags behind objective conditions.

Lenin stated, “how is the discipline of the revolutionary party of the proletariat maintained? ... tested? ... reinforced? First, by the class consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its perseverance, self-sacrifice and heroism. Secondly, by its ability to link itself with, to keep in close touch with, and to a certain extent, if you like, to merge with the broadest masses of the toilers -- primarily with the proletariat, but also with the non-proletarian toiling masses. Thirdly, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard, by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided that the broadest masses have been convinced by their own experience that they are correct. ... Without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end in phrase-mongering and grimacing. ... [These conditions are] created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience... facilitated by correct revolutionary theory, which... is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement.”^{iv}

Strategy and Tactics

We must know how to attack and retreat, when to do so and how to use all legal possibilities – what Lenin calls “combining legal and illegal work”. All times have aspects of both. By “illegal” we obviously don’t mean terrorist activities. ‘Left’ terrorism arises out of frustration and lack of faith in the ability of the masses to bring about revolutionary change. At the moment poster pasting, most strikes and refusing to attend the ABCC, for example, are all illegal. The working class must be prepared for periods in which we pass from primarily legal methods, to primarily illegal methods and vice versa. The communist party has been outlawed in Australia in the past, and could be again, and is part of reason for the CPA(M-L) emphasis on combining public and non-public work and membership. The key, however, is that declaring one’s membership of the party widely can put a barrier between that member and the people, the essence of sectarianism.

Trade unions and mass organisations

Trade unions were critical also in linking the party to working class and non-working class masses. Writing about the Soviet Union in 1920 Lenin said: “Thus, on the whole, we have a formally non-Communist, flexible and relatively wide and very powerful proletarian apparatus, by means of which the Party is closely linked up with the class and with the masses, and by means of which, under the leadership of the Party, the dictatorship of the class is exercised. Without close contact with

the trade unions, without their hearty support and self-sacrificing work, not only in economic, but also in military affairs, it would, of course, have been impossible for us to govern the country and to maintain the dictatorship for two-and-a-half months, let alone two-and-a-half years.”

He also stated, “And we cannot but regard as equally ridiculous and childish nonsense the pompous, very learned, and frightfully revolutionary disquisitions of the German Lefts to the effect that Communists cannot and should not work in reactionary trade unions, that it is permissible to turn down such work, that it is necessary to leave the trade unions and to create an absolutely brand-new, immaculate “Workers’ Union’ invented by very nice (and, probably, for the most part very youthful) Communists, etc., etc.”^{vi}

For a considerable time, the CPA(ML) or its public activists by turns interfered in unions (for example the national takeover of the BLF in NSW) or only worked through the rank and file. Ted Hill, a man recognised as one of the leaders of the international struggle against revisionism and the first chairman of the CPA(ML), found younger members very reticent to contest leading roles in trade unions (apart from the BLF which took numerous young activists from non-building work backgrounds). We must strive to avoid the pendulum swing – either “all through the united front” or “all through independent organisations”, an error which was manifested even within other mass movements such as the anti-war movement.

Lenin also wrote about trade unions as a “school of Communism”. We have to be able to take advantage of this, and constantly keep in the front of our thoughts and actions the strategies of the wider movement that we can raise at each point in time that will raise the consciousness of trade union members and activists. These questions require reflection upon ongoing practical activity to provide answers, to be shared and refined collectively.

Lenin saw opportunism as the principal enemy of Bolsheviks in the working class movement. In Australia, opportunism has wreaked havoc on numerous struggles. “This struggle [against opportunism] must be waged ruthlessly, and it must unfailingly be brought -- as we brought it -- to a point when all the incorrigible leaders of opportunism and social-chauvinism are completely discredited and driven out of the trade unions.”^{vii}

We must struggle against opportunism effectively and in a principled manner, in order to make it difficult for those whose behaviour we attack to isolate us. Opportunism is most dangerous in trade union leaderships. The rank and file often want to fight, but unions usually allow the weakest section of the union movement to dictate. Action is too fragmented. Unity arrives in practise, on particular issues.

Our enemy and allies

We must work wherever the masses are to be found, and carry out propaganda “systematically, perseveringly, persistently and patiently.”^{viii} We must

see, admit and analyse the causes of mistakes and work out methods to overcome them as a party. The most dangerous mistake of revolutionaries is to mistake “their desire...for objective reality”. We mustn’t simply focus on the advanced elements, but we “must educate and train the class and then the masses”.^x

“The more powerful enemy can be vanquished only by exerting the utmost effort, and without fail, most thoroughly, carefully, attentively and skilfully using every, even the smallest, “rift” among the enemies, of every antagonism of interest among the bourgeoisie of the various countries and among the various groups or types of bourgeoisie within the various countries, and also by taking advantage of every, even the smallest, opportunity of gaining a mass ally even though this ally be temporary, vacillating, unstable, unreliable and conditional.”^{xi}

We can have alliances with people and groups even whilst struggling against their ideology and influence – Lenin and the Bolsheviks had periods of formal alliances and even formed one Social Democratic Party with the Mensheviks between 1903 & 1912.

In Australia this tactical manoeuvring was illustrated during the penal powers struggle, leading to the mass outbreak of action after the gaoling in 1968 of CPA(ML) Vice Chairman and Victorian Tramway Union Secretary, Clarrie O’Shea. Ten years had been spent preparing the ground. The strategy was multifaceted, but three aspects stand out. At every meeting of many trade

unions for years, the Penal Clauses of the Trade Practices Act were an agenda item, so unionists were well aware of them and their implications. Secondly, the legal strategy was developed by Ted Hill, who was also a respected labour lawyer, in tandem with Lionel Murphy who became Attorney General in the Whitlam Government, and remained a target of ruling class hatred and frame-ups almost to his death. Finally, the exact timing made sure that maximum media attention was focused when O'Shea went underground. When he eventually gave himself up, worksites round the country immediately downed tools. All three of these aspects were important, but it was working class action across the country that was the key.

Tactics and Revolutionary Temper

“To tie our hands beforehand, openly to tell the enemy, who is at present better armed than we are, whether we shall fight him, and when, is stupidity and not revolutionism. To accept battle at a time when it is obviously advantageous to the enemy and not to us is a crime; and the political leader of the revolutionary class who is unable to “tack, manoeuvre, and compromise” in order to avoid an obviously disadvantageous battle, is absolutely worthless.”^{xii}

Lenin quotes Engels: “The German Communists are Communists because through all the intermediate stations and all compromises, created not by them, but by the course of historical development, they clearly perceive and constantly pursue the final aim, viz., the abolition of classes and the creation of a society in which there will no longer be

private ownership of land or of means of production.”^{xiii}

We need to be tactically smart, but we also need to value the revolutionary temper of young leftists which will sometimes cause them to make errors because they are impatient for change.

“People who can give expression to this temper of the masses, who can rouse such a temper (which is very often dormant, unrealised and unaroused) among the masses, must be valued and every assistance must be given them. And at the same time we must openly and frankly tell them that temper alone is not enough to lead the masses in a great revolutionary struggle, and that such and such mistakes that very loyal adherents of the cause of the revolution are about to commit, or are committing, may damage the cause of the revolution.”^{xiv}

“This hatred by a representative of the oppressed and exploited masses is verily the “beginning of all wisdom,” the basis of every socialist and communist movement and of its success.” But we must also “appreciate that politics is a science and an art that does not drop from the skies, that it is not obtained gratis, and that the proletariat, if it wants to conquer the bourgeoisie, must train its own, proletarian “class politicians,” and such as will be no worse than the bourgeois politicians.”^{xv}

On Parliament

“As long as you are unable to disperse the bourgeois parliament and every other type of reactionary institution, you must work inside them precisely because

there you will still find workers who are doped by priests and the dreariness of rural life; otherwise you risk becoming mere babblers.”^{xvi}

Clearly we lack the strength to elect communists to parliament at present, but this doesn't mean we should ignore parliament or elections. While people are increasingly disillusioned with the major parties, very few question the parliamentary system itself. We mustn't foster illusions that parliament is anything other than a talking shop that aids the ruling class deception that there is democracy for the people, but we should also acknowledge that the position of the Greens and independents in parliament has offered many benefits to progressive struggles. Particular groupings in parliament, and its instability, allow more or less room for the people's forces to manoeuvre. We have to capitalise on this disaffection with the major parties, otherwise the ruling class will instil feelings of hopelessness, that nothing can be done.

In Chapter 8 entitled “No Compromises”, Lenin criticises those who believe that we can pass from capitalism to socialism with no compromises. He returns to this in Chapter 9, where he supports the campaign of British communists to elect the Labour politicians Henderson and Snowdon. He believed that the masses would only move towards communism when confronted by the negative experience of the Labour Party in office. “To act otherwise would mean placing difficulties in the way of the revolution; for revolution is impossible without a change in the views of the majority of the working class, and this

change is brought about by the political experience of the masses, and never by propaganda alone.”^{xvii}

The experience of Labor in office allows us to do infinitely more to help people draw conclusions about the complete service to imperialist masters of Labor governments, than decades of our explanations without that bitter experience could ever do. But if our primary focus for action is on parliament and elections, then disillusionment is inevitable. Gillard's disgraceful but inevitable attacks on the working class must be met with the rejoinder, “Last time the focus was on the elections and getting rid of Howard and it got us Rudd and then Gillard and the betrayal of the hopes placed in them by the working class. But the key thing must be arousing the people, led by the working class to defend their own interests. Parliament is secondary. The working class and its allies were aroused to defeat Howard. Imagine the change that would have come about if they had remained mobilised, contrary to the wishes and actions of the opportunists who told us that all we had to do was to get rid of Howard and things would be hunky dory.”

The fundamental law of revolution

Lenin stated, “The fundamental law of revolution, which has been confirmed by all revolutions, and particularly by all three Russian revolutions in the twentieth century, is as follows: it is not enough for revolution that the exploited and oppressed masses should understand the impossibility of living in the old way and demand changes; it is essential for

revolution that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way. Only when the “lower classes” do not want the old way, and when the “upper classes” cannot carry on in the old way -- only then can revolution triumph. This truth may be expressed in other words: revolution is impossible without a nation-wide crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters). It follows that for revolution it is essential, first, that a majority of the workers (or at least a majority of the class-conscious, thinking, politically active workers) should fully understand that revolution is necessary and be ready to sacrifice their lives for it; secondly, that the ruling classes should be passing through a governmental crisis, which draws even the most backward masses into politics (a symptom of every real revolution is a rapid, tenfold and even hundredfold increase in the number of members of the toiling and oppressed masses -- hitherto apathetic -- who are capable of waging the political struggle), weakens the government and makes it possible for the revolutionaries to overthrow it rapidly.”^{xviii}

We are clearly not in such a situation, which some people trumpet as the failure of communism and the left. Because it is not happening now, they say, it will never happen. Time and again history has proved that revolutions happen when the contradictions are intense enough and the need for revolution has gripped the masses. It is not, however, time to sit and wait for the time to become ‘ripe’. It’s time to work our utmost to prepare the ground for the changes that will inevitably arise.

Lenin talked about the need for the British communists to unite their four (“all very weak, and some very, very weak”) parties and groups into a single Communist Party.^{xix} It must be remembered that this was written when the Communist Party had not even been formed in Australia. Given the history of the last 90 years, including the rise of revisionism which led to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc countries, we cannot mechanically apply Lenin’s words. But we must bear them in mind and avoid sectarian attacks on other groups, and be prepared to work effectively with other groups and people, as long as we don’t sacrifice basic principles.

He speaks of the importance of the proletariat “infinitely exceeding” its size as a proportion of the population.^{xx} Again, the media and some bourgeois theorists often focus on the contraction in size of the working class, as a reason for the ‘failure of Marxism’, a failure they gloatingly believe is irreversible. Despite this the same theorists and pundits work their hardest to try to destroy any vestiges of working class organisation and strength. If the working class is so pitifully weak, why did Howard and the Business Council of Australia and all their cronies need the arsenal of Work Choices? Why does Gillard persist with it? Why does every government round the country hammer every union prepared to have a go? Deep down they know that the working class, when mobilised and supported by mass allies, is an unstoppable force.

For Lenin, basic tasks are central, “Investigate, study, seek, divine, grasp

that which is peculiarly national, specifically national in the concrete manner in which each country approaches the fulfilment of the single international task, in which it approaches the victory over opportunism and “Left” doctrinairism within the working-class movement, the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, and the establishment of a Soviet republic and a proletarian dictatorship -- such is the main task of the historical period through which all the advanced countries (and not only the advanced countries) are now passing.”^{xxi}

That task has suffered many setbacks, but the truth that in each country the revolutionary masses, led by the working class and a communist party worthy of the name, must struggle to find their own particular path, is undiminished. That path will be different to that taken in any other country, and those that walk it must avoid dogmatism and build the widest possible unity, not primarily amongst the tiny parties of the left but amongst the broadest masses. Its footsteps must be based on detailed understanding of the specific features of that country. Australia is no different. Our path is difficult, long, with many setbacks. But history cannot be held back forever.

We must focus on practical tasks. “Our efforts must be devoted to fulfilling practical tasks...winning branch after branch and sphere after sphere from the bourgeoisie”^{xxii}.

“We can (and must) combine the most intense passion in the great revolutionary struggle with the coolest and most sober estimation of the frenzied ravings of the bourgeoisie.”^{xxiii}

In conclusion

“As long as the question was (and in so far as it still is) one of winning over the vanguard of the proletariat to Communism, so long, and to that extent, propaganda was in the forefront; even propaganda circles, with all the defects of the circle spirit, are useful under these conditions and produce fruitful results. But when it is a question of practical action by the masses, of the disposition, if one may so express it, of vast armies, of the alignment of all the class forces of the given society for the final and decisive battle, then propaganda habits alone, the mere repetition of the truths of “pure” Communism, are of no avail. In these circumstances one must not count in thousands, as the propagandist does who belongs to a small group that has not yet given leadership to the masses; in these circumstances one must count in millions and tens of millions. In these circumstances we must not only ask ourselves whether we have convinced the vanguard of the revolutionary class, but also whether the historically effective forces of all classes -- positively of all the classes of the given society without exception -- are aligned in such a way that everything is fully ripe for the decisive battle; in such a way that 1) all the class forces hostile to us have become sufficiently entangled, are sufficiently at loggerheads with each other, have sufficiently weakened themselves in a struggle which is beyond their strength; that 2) all the vacillating, wavering, unstable, intermediate elements -- the petty bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeois democrats as distinct from the bourgeoisie -- have sufficiently exposed themselves in the eyes of the people,

have sufficiently disgraced themselves through their practical bankruptcy; and that 3) among the proletariat a mass sentiment in favour of supporting the most determined, supremely bold, revolutionary action against the bourgeoisie has arisen and begun vigorously to grow. Then revolution is indeed ripe; then, indeed, if we have correctly gauged all the conditions indicated and briefly outlined above, and if we have chosen the moment rightly, our victory is assured.”^{xxiv}

i VILenin “Left Wing”
Communism, an Infantile Disorder
Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1970
p5 available online at Marx2mao.com

ii Ibid p6

iii Ibid p5

iv Ibid p6

v Ibid p38

vi Ibid p40

vii Ibid p43

viii Ibid p44

ix Ibid p51

x Ibid p51

xi Ibid p67

xii Ibid p75

xiii F Engels “Program of the
Blanquist Communards” Volksstaat
1874, No 73 quoted in Lenin p cit p62

xiv Lenin Op citp79

xv Ibid p80

xvi Ibid p52

xvii Ibid 85

xviii Ibid p86

xix Ibid p87

xx Ibid p93

xxi Ibid p96

xxii Ibid p105

xxiii Ibid p 108

xxiv Ibid p98

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF SOCIALISM

Five fundamental principles of socialism are considered here. These principles are approached from the viewpoint of Marxism and its practice and history to date. They are a starting point for further discussion about how to present socialism as a realistic alternative to imperialism and capitalism.

We live in a time of severe economic and financial crisis for the global imperialist-capitalist system, a time when millions of people across the world are rejecting imperialism and monopoly capitalism with the policies of war, exploitation and oppression, and destruction of the natural environment.

Consequently, there is renewed interest in the concept of socialism; a system based on collective ownership of the means of production, rather than private ownership and greed. But what do genuine people find when they try to investigate this revolutionary alternative?

They find that all sorts of people, including political organisations and the governments of various countries, proclaim themselves to be 'socialist' without ever really defining what is meant by the term. There might be some vague and incomplete references to the wealth and resources of society being used for the benefit of all the people rather than a privileged minority, but not much else, and rarely, any strategy of how to achieve this.

The reasons for this lack of clarity are several. In part, there is a certain arrogance of intellectuals in presuming that everybody knows what socialism is, just because they do, or think they do. A more compelling reason is the deliberate clouding of the issue by opportunists and reformists to escape responsibility for their actions and inactions and to avoid being 'pinned down' by explicit principles. Their concept of 'socialism' can mean anything from mildly reformist bourgeois democracy to state monopoly ownership and the corporatisation of water, gas and electricity, through to state capitalism. None of these have much at all to do with the genuine socialism that Marxists are talking about, but are used to confuse and mislead the people, and hence to deflect interest away from Marxism.

A common smokescreen put up is to avoid any attempt at defining socialism on the grounds that we can't predict the future and that a 'blueprint' cannot be imposed. Since nobody is going to argue with that, it just closes off any deeper consideration of the subject, leaving 'socialism' as a pie-in-the-sky vision somewhere in the distant future. It also leaves the opportunists and pragmatists free to vacillate and somersault through various policies and tactics with no scientific goals other than a 'pragmatic' and resigned critique of capitalism.

This is not good enough for people striving to change the world for the better, and it is certainly not good enough for those who want to understand and practice Marxism-Leninism. We believe the fundamental principles of socialism and their universal application can

be clearly defined without imposing a ‘blueprint’ for the form of their application in any country.

1. The working class has achieved state power and exercises working class control over a completely new state apparatus – a workers’ army, police, courts and other institutions of state, including the administrative bureaucracy.

The class rule of the minority, the imperialist-capitalist bourgeoisie and their agents, has been overthrown and their state apparatus smashed or dismantled. In its place, working class rule operates on behalf of the majority of the people and establishes its own state apparatus to defend and extend working class control over society. It is absolutely necessary to break up the old state apparatus because the institutions, structures and personnel are contaminated with the ideology of the exploiters and provide an avenue for counter-revolution.

There are too many negative examples where workers and working people and their allies suffered huge casualties after putting their reliance in the ‘reasonableness’ of the old apparatus – think of Spain, Chile and Indonesia. Conversely, socialist revolutions were consolidated only in countries where the old apparatus was replaced entirely with a completely new working class state apparatus – think of the Russian, Chinese and Cuban revolutions.

Furthermore, a state apparatus led by the working class is no longer just an instrument of class rule as it was under

the old system. It becomes not only an instrument for defending the gains of the revolution and serving the interests of the people, for delivering justice and fairness, for dealing with natural disasters and emergencies, but also a powerful and positive instrument for building confidence in the revolutionary transformation of society and for taking a leading role in building the new socialist economy. The working class, by its solidarity and determination, is at the core of the revolutionary transformation. With its vision and organisation, the working class has the capacity to rally the support of other classes and sectors of society who have been exploited and oppressed under the old system.

2. There is a centrally planned economy with long-term development cycles and goals to steadily develop the productive economy to meet the needs of the people.

Socialism is a stage in the transition to the classless society of Communism. In order to satisfy the Marxist definition of Communism as a society which operates on the principle “from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs”, socialism must build the material and social foundations. This means building a society where all people contribute to the common good and, in return, receive all their material needs such as housing, food, healthcare, education, decent working conditions, social and cultural development, and live in a sustainable manner compatible with nature and the environment.

Furthermore, a healthy surplus must be

built in to provide for expansion of the population and a reserve for emergencies and natural disasters.

All of this cannot happen overnight. It requires a planned and measured development of the economy to meet the immediate, medium and long-term needs of the people. In addition, a new revolutionary government must move quickly to fulfil the very demands of the people that carried the revolution to victory – for example, demands for land reform, for ending involvement in imperialist wars and pacts, for releasing political prisoners, for nationalising key industries, etc.

Consequently, all aspects of the key sectors of the economy must come under the immediate control of the new revolutionary government. In most societies this would include energy and fuel, water and sewerage, mining and resources, steel and other heavy manufacturing industries, chemicals and other strategic industries. Railways, airlines and public transport must also be nationalised, and price controls applied to rents and basic foodstuff. All education and healthcare and social services should be nationalised to deliver free, quality service to the people. The production of selected essential products such as pharmaceuticals, rubber, plastics and electronics should also be taken over by the government.

Export trade and marketing should be regulated by the government, cancelling all unequal or unfair trade agreements and implementing a system of fair trade for mutual benefit. Important commodities such as grain, metals and

oil/gas should be traded through state-owned enterprises.

Profits generated from all these nationalised enterprises should be returned to the people in the form of better and cheaper services, better working conditions and a steadily improving standard of living. By eliminating the profit-taking of the capitalist class and taking advantage of the economies of scale, a healthy surplus can be quickly created to fund the modernisation, expansion and diversification of essential industries.

Central planning for this re-focussing of the economy is essential to co-ordinate all the various aspects of building the new economy in a sustainable way that steadily improves the lives of the people and consolidates the revolution. Central planning ensures that longer term goals are set and that there is systematic progress made to achieving them. The early five-year plans in Soviet Russia and People's China built the basis for their socialist societies, each followed by a period of review and reassessment and adjustment of priorities to ensure that the overall direction of the revolution was being maintained. Such control over the economy is impossible for market capitalism, which only produces the things that can be sold for the quickest profit, and is therefore confronted with periodic gluts and shortages and a lopsided economy.

3. There is sectoral and representational democracy in national, regional and local assemblies – to frame policies, and to implement and monitor them.

Socialist democracy should be more enlightened, more comprehensive and more deeply entrenched than any bourgeois democratic system. As part of all national, regional and local assemblies of elected representatives, there should also be an agreed number of places provided for sectoral representatives and special interest groups such as indigenous peoples, victims of the old regime, people with disabilities, the aged, students, etc.

A socialist Constitution should uphold extensive human rights, especially the rights of workers to organise and take industrial action over workplace, political and social demands. An essential part of the construction of a socialist society is the empowerment of the working class, and this should be reflected in Constitutional guarantees dealing with informed and extensive consultation on key economic and social issues, together with the power to recall elected representatives.

4. There is vigorous and deep-seated participatory democracy in the workplaces and communities.

Socialist democracy should be an enlightening and inspiring experience for the working people, one that taps into their enthusiasm and stretches their imagination to work towards building a better society for all. It should not be an abstract thing that only the ‘politicians’ or ‘activists’ are concerned with.

In workplaces and communities, working people would initially be encouraged and assisted to establish collectives to make recommendations

and provide feedback to the management and different levels of government. Over time, these collectives should become progressively more involved in implementing and monitoring decisions, and eventually take over major decision-making and management roles in their workplaces and communities. Democracy itself would change from being a formal and occasional process to an everyday way of life.

5. The role of the revolutionary party/parties is to guide and lead the masses in achieving these goals, to encourage empowerment of the masses and to continue the revolutionary process of transforming society to liberate the full potential of all people.

In order to maintain the respect and trust of the people, the revolutionary party/parties must stand shoulder to shoulder with the working people and must stay deeply connected to them. At the same time, revolutionary organisation is distinct from other organisations of the masses in that it is composed of the most ideologically advanced workers and intellectuals who combine practical leadership with the long term perspective. Members of the revolutionary party/parties should devote themselves to serving the people, work hard at their political and occupational tasks, and live modestly among the people.

The revolutionary party/parties must continually analyse and sum up the class relationships in society, the development of the productive and economic forces, the mood and consciousness of the

working class and the masses generally. They must take account of internal and external hostile forces and maintain vigilance against aggression, sabotage and counter-revolution. Only from this analysis and from listening carefully to the masses, can the revolutionary party/parties formulate the path of revolutionary change, map out the key stages, and set the order of priorities.

Class struggle continues under socialism. The backward and reactionary ideology and petty-bourgeois outlook that is inherited from the old system will regenerate itself unless challenged. The revolutionary party/parties must lead the struggle to change not only the material conditions of the masses, but also their political consciousness. This is a continuous process, a “cultural revolution” integrated into the lives of the masses and moving bit by bit in the direction of a classless society.

.....

These are five key principles of Marxist socialism. History shows that the implementation of these principles does not happen automatically as soon as the working class takes power. Their implementation has to be planned, constructed, consolidated and maintained. While all five principles require attention, some can be achieved quicker than others. History also shows that they are inter-related, and that when and where any single principle is not implemented or lapses, the revolutionary movement loses its way and eventually decays or is overthrown by counter-revolution.

WITHOUT ORGANISATION, WORKERS' GAINS ARE SHORT-LIVED.

Karl Marx wrote about the necessity for workers to be organised in mass organisations or face being reduced to “miserable wretches”.

He did not mean that being so organised would solve the fundamental problems faced by workers. A higher form of organisation in his view was needed to remove the fundamental problem of the social system of capitalism from the world stage, a working class party which “distinguished from the other working class parties by this only:

(1) In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality.

(2) In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole” (*The Communist Manifesto*)

V. I. Lenin took Marx’s ideas even further by characterising workers’ mass organisations in the workplaces as schools of the working class and by actually forming and developing such a political party to lead workers in removing capitalism (and feudalism) from the Russian stage with the new

stage being the USSR, ‘choreographed’ by what became known as the Bolshevik (majority) Party. The mass organisations (unions) and leading Party organisation in Russia were further enriched by working people’s power in its organisational form called Soviets (local councils elected by workers).

Without this level of organisation by workers, there would have been no revolution in Russia and the workers would have been reduced to “miserable wretches”.

Struggles in Northern Africa

As events unfolded in Egypt in February 2011, the western press portrayed the overthrow of President Mubarak as the spontaneous uprising of the Egyptian people against a dictator. For the purposes of this article, was it spontaneous or were there elements of workers organising? If there were, how sustainable will the form of organisation be and what new forms of organisation will be needed to move the revolution to overthrow the rule of Mubarak and the military’s backers and masters, US imperialism?

Following the departure of Mubarak, ABC’s Foreign Correspondent program interviewed a young female activist and film maker. The comments by her suggest that far from being spontaneous, there was a great amount of organisation within the mass movement. Her concerns were that the military were checking mobile phone and Facebook communication records to identify and then intimidate or even worse, eliminate, leaders of the movement.

Major strikes by Egyptian workers had occurred back in 2008 over the issue of food shortages and food prices, and there was a formation of unions independent of the Mubarak regime's control.

Far away in Australia, it is not possible to know if there is the development of a higher form of organisation to withstand all forms of oppression thrown at the Egyptian people and workers in particular by the military and US imperialism. Time will reveal whether there is such organisation and how well it is organised.

However, it is a fact that two forms of mass organisation in Egypt have developed, some re-vitalised trade unions prepared to fight with workers and secondly, a form of community organisation using Information Technology as one, but not the only method to communicate with each other. The Mubarak regime was acutely aware of this and tried to break it up by 'switching off' the internet. However the movement continued to grow and communicate with each through the leaders that had already emerged.

What about Australia?

Workers in Australia did organise themselves sufficiently well to convince enough Australian people to vote out the reactionary Howard Government, the preferred government of US imperialism in Australia. How did they do this? Through their mass organisations, trade unions, they educated each other about the repressive nature of Howard's industrial laws and his attempt to obliterate all collective action in the

workplace through the mechanism of Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs).

Despite Howard's laws, the rate of decline of union membership in Australia decreased in the last years of Howard's reign because workers could see they were being reduced to, or in danger of being reduced to, "miserable wretches".

Several unions took a refreshing approach and actually focussed on 'organising the unorganised' and mobilised existing members to take to the streets on national days of action against the government's repressive laws.

Progressive workers took the level of organisation beyond the workplace and established "Your Rights At Work, Worth Fighting For" community based meetings and committees in the suburbs. This movement had elements of organisation both within unions and the community that had a longer term vision for a better society, rather than a vision of only removing the Howard Government and replacing it with a conservative Labor Government.

The controlling pro-imperialist forces within the union movement and the Labor Party succeeded in changing the campaign slogan to "Your Rights At Work, Worth Voting For".

Workers' Organisation under a Labor Government

Once the election was over and Howard's laws were slightly watered

down but not extinguished, workers stood by the original slogan, “...Worth Fighting For” but found that they still had to jump through many hoops to have the legal right to strike. They also found that the leadership of some of their unions ‘dropped the ball’ on any workers’ rights campaign and expected workers to cop what they got from ‘their’ Labor Government.

There have been exceptions among union leaders. For example, construction unions have continued to mobilise members and other workers to campaign against the ABCC laws which target those workers selectively.

In some city suburbs, workers have continued to meet in the community based “Your Rights At Work, Worth Fighting For” groups.

Organising Unions

Some union leaders and organisers are genuinely trying to ‘organise the unorganised’ and build stronger mass organisations of workers.

Most are using an organising method based on what is commonly known as the ‘organising model’. The key elements of an ‘organising union’ are;

- campaigning to organise a whole industry, rather than accepting the framework of ‘enterprise bargaining’ and single workplace as the way of improving workers’ pay and conditions and fighting the onslaught on workers by capital.

- growing membership through collective action
- identifying and developing workplace

and industry rank and file leaders.

- mobilising workers to not only target their employer or industry peak group, but other sections of the capitalist class and/or government that control workers’ pay and conditions

- identifying and using key community allies to support visible public actions to educate the public.

The most successful of this form of organising so far has been in the cleaning industry in a campaign called Clean Start. This campaign successfully organised cleaners of city buildings to the point where ‘the big end of town’ like the banks and other financial institutions and even federal and state governments agreed to finance contract cleaning companies to enable them to increase cleaners’ pay by 40% over 4 years. Plus job security at change of contract and a 50% increase in the minimum hours per week from 10 to 20 hours.

Cleaners across Australian cities won this campaign by taking action in public spaces outside the high rise city buildings, formed networks of their leaders from each building, and successfully engaged the mainly white collar office workforce as their main supporters.

So the form of organisation and actions they took was a clever tactic in conditions of Howard’s Work Choices which made direct ‘protected’ industrial action by a precariously employed (splintered in a geographic sense with small numbers of cleaners in each building) workforce of mainly temporary residence migrants extremely difficult, to say the least.

The cleaners' campaign was a microcosm in some ways of the Your Rights At Work campaign. They share organisational characteristics in that both campaigns demonstrated workers' capacity to find the correct way to organise in a way that made it difficult for the forces of capital to defeat them.

Both campaigns and the tremendous scale of the struggle in Egypt share a common problem. Are the organisational forms of struggle strong enough to withstand the counter-attack of imperialism in their respective contexts?

Secondly, is there a political party that can provide the ideological education and 'glue' to link their particular struggle to the overall political struggle of workers as described in the quote from Marx in the beginning of this article?

This latter question is the one that all readers must strive to contribute to successfully answering by our practice. If not us, then who? If not now, then when?

Otherwise the words of David Harvey in his thought provoking book, *The Enigma of Capital*, will come true.

In this book Harvey says, "Again and again, political movements have constructed alternative spaces in which something seemingly different happens, only to find their alternative quickly re-absorbed into the dominant practices of capitalist reproduction".

The Railways and Capitalism

The Preface and the footnotes, except number 4, have been contributed by Humphrey McQueen to this updated version to assist further investigations, as were the suggestions for further reading.

{PREFACE: The original of this pamphlet appeared in 1973 in Victoria. It was written by a group of young railway workers under the guidance and encouragement of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist). This Marxist analysis was undertaken to deepen the railway workers' knowledge of the capitalist relations of production in the railway industry with the aim of deepening their industrial and political work in the struggles of railway workers. It assists railway workers in understanding the role railways play under capitalism.}

This recently updated version by a group of railway workers should encourage activists in every sector to explore the patterns of exploitation with their fellow wage-slaves. There is a particular need for comparable studies by school teachers, health workers and hospital orderlies, just to name a few. The issues of public transport raised here have become more urgent with urban congestion and environmental pollution. Important though union histories are, we must follow Marx's example by interrogating the needs of capital.}

Introduction

This article was written by a group of railway workers. There is a great need for all workers to understand the role of our industry under the capitalist system. By understanding our role as workers, we are more able to fight exploitation and injustice, and to end it for all time.

In his book *Capital*, the famous German philosopher and economist Karl Marx analysed capitalist society in detail. Volume 2 of *Capital* (published in 1885) contains many references to transportation in capitalist production. Marx's conclusions are true for Australia today. Only by applying Marxism to specific Australian conditions can we workers gain a real understanding of the capitalist system of exploitation which controls our lives.

We hope that workers in other industries will apply Marx to investigate their own situation.

The Transport Industry

Just like workers in other industries, workers in the transport industry take part in the production of commodities. We produce what Marx calls a 'useful effect'. The 'useful effect' of the transport industry is the actual moving of goods and people from one place to another. Raw materials move from the mines to the ports and factories, finished products are transported to and from the markets, workers are brought from their homes to the work-places.

The movement of commodities (the result of the work of transport workers)

adds value to the various commodities being moved – the greater the distance, the greater the value added:

“... the use-value of things has no existence except in consumption, and this may necessitate a change of place on the part of the product, in other words, it may require the additional process of production of the transportation industry. The productive capital invested in this industry adds value to the transported products, partly by transferring value to the transported products from the means of transportation [i.e., the using-up and ‘wear and tear’ of rails, roads, engines etc.], partly by adding value through labour-power used in transportation [i.e., the using-up and ‘wear and tear’ of shunters, drivers, signalmen, etc]. This last-named addition of value consists, as it does in all capitalist production, of a reproduction of wages and of surplus-value.”¹

Look at the production of a Ford motor car. It is the product of the collective labour of thousands of men and women. They work on the production lines and in the offices of factories at Broadmeadows and Geelong, in the rubber mills and glass-works, and also in the transport industry – carrying raw materials, components and finished parts from one

plant to another. However, both the car and the profits from its future sales are owned by a small group of share-holders in the U.S.A. This is the contradiction of capitalism – production is carried out collectively by thousands of workers who do not own what they produce. They are paid a wage which represents the amount necessary to keep the worker and the family from week to week, but no more than that. The products, like the factories, are owned by a small handful of people. In Australia, these people are mainly U.S., European and Japanese monopoly capitalists.

Railways in Australia

Railways are built to link the main cities with the isolated rural districts, sea-ports and other trading centres. This was needed so that goods could be shipped from the inland to the ports and then back to Britain. Railways hastened the development of agriculture and industry, as well as opening up communications. This soon brought the more remote and isolated sections of the economy into contact with developing capitalism. British colonialism greatly benefitted from the increasing flow of agricultural produce, timber and other raw materials, as well as establishing new markets for goods of British factories. Australian life today is still unnaturally concentrated around large coastal cities, partly as a result of the transport system set up to

¹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, volume 2, Charles H Kerr, Chicago, 1915, p. 170. p. 150 in 1957 Moscow edition, and p. 226 in 197 Penguin edition. The translation here differs slightly from the more widely available editions, while the two bracketed sections were inserted. Other discussions of railways are on pp. 52, 55, 143, 149-52, 169-71 and 249-51, Moscow; and 135-6, 159, 220, 225-9, 248-51 and 327-29, Penguin.

serve foreign plunder.²

Because the 'useful effect' of a railway line is confined to nearby areas, many lines were necessary to serve large regions, such as the Mallee and Gippsland in Victoria. Bullock drays and paddle-steamers ceased to be the main forms of transport, and towns close to the railway prospered, while those depending on older forms of transport declined (e.g., ports along the Murray such as Echuca).

The first railways in Australia were owned by private companies formed by local landowners and capitalists to serve their growing needs for transportation, and also for speculation.³ British banks and finance companies put up much of the original investment capital – Victorian Railways is still paying interest on this debt, which amounted to

\$10, 500,000 for the year 1972-73. The Colonial governments provided land and guaranteed the investments against financial loss.⁴

The development of capitalism in Australia, the growth of industry and commerce, demanded the building of a vast railway network. The provision of hundreds of miles of track, stations, rolling stock and the hire of thousands of workers were beyond the capacity of the private owners. By 1860, most bankrupt private railways were bought out by the Colonial governments. With the much greater resources of the Colonies, the capitalist class could expand the railway system. The economically powerful colonies (N.S.W., Victoria) build widespread networks which quickly attracted heavy volumes of traffic. The others (Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia, West Australia) could only

² Queensland is the exception, see Glenn Lewis, *The Ports of Queensland, A Study in Economic Nationalism*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1973.

³ Although Marx drew a sharp line between the profits derived from exploitation through the expropriation of surplus value, he reported capitalists as swindling each other, their employees and governments at every turn. Two examples from railways in colonial Australia were: between 1857-61, J. V. Bruce bribed officials with some of his £3.4m contract to construct the line from Melbourne to the Murray; from the 1870s to the 1890s, Queensland premier Sir Thomas McIllwraith schemed to have railways built in exchange for miles of land on either side of the tracks.

⁴ Marx spotlighted the importance of joint-stock companies: 'The world would still be with out railways if it had to wait until accumulation had got a few individual capitals far enough to be adequate for their construction', *Capital*, volume I, Moscow, 1958, p. 628; and Penguin, 1975, p. 780.

Engels explained the role of the state: 'But neither the conversion into joint-stock companies, or into state property deprives the productive forces of their character as capital ... The modern state, whatever its form, is essentially a capitalist machine, it is the state of the capitalists, the ideal collective body of the all capitalists. The more productive forces takes over as its property, the more it becomes the real collective body of all the capitalists, the more citizens it exploits. The workers remain wage-earners, proletarians. The capitalist relationship is not abolished; it is rather pushed to an extreme.' *Anti-Duhring*, International Publishers, New York, 1939, p. 304.

provide enough capital to build small networks on narrow gauge lines, and hardly any suburban services in the cities. As a result of competing regional interests, six independent railways systems grew up with different gauges (5'3", 4'8½", 3'6", 2'6"), rolling stock, signalling and regulations.

Until the 1970's the railways in Australia were mainly run by the State governments and the Commonwealth government. There were some private operations, such as the railways operated for the iron ore mines of north-west Western Australia.

The 70's and 80's were decades of cut-backs to rail services by the state governments. Many stations and lines were closed, passenger services were replaced by buses, and thousands of railway workers made redundant.

A more positive event was the establishment in 1992 of the National Rail Corporation by the Commonwealth Government. The NRC took over most of Australia's interstate rail transport, particularly of containerised traffic.

The 1990's saw the start of privatisation of railways in Australia. The unified state railway operations were split into separate freight, passenger and maintenance sections which were then sold to various companies, many of them overseas-owned. For example, the Victorian freight service was sold to an American company Rail America, while a UK firm National Express took over the Melbourne suburban service.

The Commonwealth Government's

Australian National Railways were privatised in 1997-98. The railways in Western Australia and Tasmania were also flogged off.

In 2001, the NRC was sold to a consortium of Toll and Patricks, as were the country rail freight operations of NSW and Victoria, forming a company called Pacific National.

Queensland Rail was privatised in 2011, with threats of massive job losses to follow. What were once unified State railway systems are now fragmented, being run by a variety of operators. Many rail workers are now employed by Labour Hire companies such as Skilled Engineering, and their services are then contracted out by these companies to railway operators.

Railway Workers

At all times, the capitalist class strives to reduce their costs of transportation. They do this by increasing the amount of exploitation of the workers in the transport industry. Every innovation introduced into the railways is aimed at increasing the efficiency and productivity of each worker, and to reduce the number of workers.

The introduction of diesels, electrification, Centralised Traffic Control signalling systems, standardisation of rail gauge and faster rolling stock have all been used by the railway administrations to increase exploitation and raise productivity. As part of this process, passenger services, which require a greater number of workers for their operations, are being

allowed to decline. Less work than ever is now available for guards, conductors, ticket-collectors, refreshment-room attendants and other station staff. Major work-shops at Newport, Spotswood, Ballarat and Bendigo have been passed over in favour of awarding contracts to private firms. Skilled workers are not replaced on retirement, and the livelihood of the other workers remains threatened.

The elimination of steam engines meant fewer engines, fewer men, less maintenance and much less costs altogether. Diesel-powered locomotives require comparatively little maintenance and do not need to stop frequently for coal and water as did the steam engines.⁵

Similarly, machines operated by a couple of people have replaced the hundreds of track repairers who were necessary to build and maintain the track. Centralised signalling has largely replaced the signallers who were previously needed at each junction, siding or crossing loop.

Railways Serve Monopolies

Capital is always available for the expansion of freight services and the introduction of new equipment for specialised handling, e.g., road-rail terminals, and new wagons for the

transport of containers, bulk grains, cement, steel and ore traffic. These top priority trains carry the goods of the larger monopoly capitalists – in Australia they are quite often the goods of U.S., European and Japanese monopolies – cars for Ford, G.M.H, petroleum products for Exxon-Mobil, B.P., steel products and ore-trains for Comalco, Hammerlsey, B.H.P. and Rio Tinto. They pay low freight charges and use for their own ends the entire railway facilities, dictating the scale of operations and demanding all sorts of concessions. Ordinary people, on the other hand, pay high fares and get uncomfortable, infrequent and unpleasant travelling conditions. In some situations, monopolies have been allowed to build their own modern railways, such as the Hammersley line, B.H.P.'s lines at Port Kembla, Silverton Tramways' lines at Broken Hill and the Emu Bay line in Tasmania.

Passenger Services

Since the last suburban lines were laid to Glen Waverley 44 years ago, dozens of new suburbs have formed without any public transport. Indeed, the last twenty years have seen the elimination of many country passenger services and the closure of metropolitan lines from Hawthorn to Kew, Bittern to Red Hill,

⁵ In his Report of 1954, the Commonwealth Railways Commissioner said that operating costs of steam locomotives was 189 pence per mile, while that of diesel locomotives was 48 pence per mile. A diesel locomotive would pay for itself within two years, just from savings alone.

The Queensland coal firms were getting away with highway robbery before the 1974 Report on 'The Contribution of the Mining Industry to Australian Welfare', alerted the State Treasury, which drove up freight rates rather than royalties. This experience is relevant to the current battle over the Super-Profits Tax.

Epping to Whittlesea, and Lilydale to Warburton. Most of these areas are now highly settled, but are poorly serviced by public transport, as are the working-class suburbs to the west of Melbourne. People have been forced to use cars as a necessity. The monopolies that own the car, oil, cement, rubber and insurance industries have profited immensely from this situation and continue to oppose decent public transport with their demands for more freeways and highways. Inflation is eating away the living standards of the Australian people. The foreign monopolies that are the main cause of this situation should be the ones to bear the burden. All fares in the metropolitan area should be immediately abolished! We should make the rich pay!

Conclusion

At present, the railways are operated mainly in the interests of local and foreign monopolies. These people need a fast, cheap and efficient goods service in order to maintain and constantly increase their enormous profits. They do not care for the services and passenger transport needs of the working people.

Instead of serving this handful of monopoly owners, the railway system should be meeting the real needs of the Australian people. We need fast, cheap, comfortable and frequent urban and inter-city rail travel. We should be getting the benefits of better freight services also.

The history of the railways is the history of the struggle of railway workers. Australian railway workers, including

migrant workers and women workers, have a great tradition of militant struggle. It was the railway workers not 'financiers' or 'entrepreneurs' or the 'government' who built the lines and ran the trains. It was railway workers who fought and are still fighting for decent pay and conditions. The battles of the late 40's for shift concessions, overtime rates, annual leave, the 40-hour week, the joint action with the Trammies in 1946, the big 55-day strike in 1950 and the 'go-slow' in 1959 are all a part of our tradition. More recent struggles over shift penalties and pay rates have been more frequently forced upon us by inflation.

Railway workers occupy a key position in industry. We will remain in the front lines of struggle for an independent and democratic Australia.

Foreign and local monopoly domination of the railways and other industries will be smashed by all the workers and working people of Australia. We shall drive the exploiters right out, and operate these industries for the benefit of all the people.

Under capitalism, 'national ownership' means that the capitalist class has at its disposal even greater resources for development of the transport system required by capitalist industry. In a people's democracy, national ownership would mean ownership by the working peoples who would use these resources for the development of modern socialist industry. Under the present set-up, 'nationalisation' would bring some benefits to the people.

Written and distributed by railway workers for our fellow workers (1973). Updated 2011.

Further reading:

Patsy Adam-Smith, *Folklore of the Australian Railwaymen*, Macmillan, 1969, the first of several oral accounts of railways from her pen.

Eddie Butler-Bowden, *In the service? A history of Victorian Railway workers and their unions*, Hyland House, South Yarra, 1991.

Audrey Johnson, *Fly a Rebel Flag*, Bill Morrow, 1888-1980, Penguin, 1986, deals with Morrow's time as an official of the Railways Union in Queensland and Tasmania.

O. G. Meyer, 'Australian Railways', *Australia's Transport Crisis*, Australian Institute of Political Science Conference, 1955 Angus & Robertson, pp. 48-82; (Meyer was Victorian Railways Commissioner)

Australian Encyclopedia, Grolier Society, 1963, volume 7, pp. 359-381, gives a thorough account of the expansion of railways.

The Year Books of the six States and the Commonwealth give staffing levels, passenger numbers, track lengths, etc

Book review¹

Alain Badiou, The Communist Hypothesis

During 13-15 may 2009 more than one thousand people, mostly young and intellectual, packed an auditorium in London to hear a cast of speakers address the Idea of communism. The only requirement of speakers was that “...whatever their approach, they had to agree that the word ‘communism’ can and must now acquire a positive value once more”. This requirement was demanded by French philosopher and conference organizer Alain Badiou.

That such a conference was held is a testimony to the recognition, in the wake of the imperialist global financial crisis, of the continuing relevance of Marx and his analysis of capitalist economics.

That is the positive side.

The negative side is that through the person of Badiou, the ghost of Herbert Marcuse has returned to the lectern and to the ideological service of capitalist interests.

Marcuse (1898 – 1979) emerged as the so-called “father of the ‘New Left’” during the great social and political upheavals of the Vietnam War era. He spoke as a “Marxist” to oppose scientific socialism, to pose the “young Marx”

against the ideas of Marx himself (and of his inheritors in Lenin, Stalin, Mao et al), and to separate revolutionary youth from the “non-revolutionary” proletariat (Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*). His special service to capitalism lay in focusing the minds of revolutionary students on navel-gazing about alienation and reification, thus dissuading them from taking the path of integrating organizationally, politically and ideologically with the proletariat.

To paraphrase Lenin, if a Marcuse had not existed during the intellectual ferment of the 60s and early 70s, then the ruling class would have had to invent one. The bourgeoisie needs “interpreters” of Marx to oppose Marxism, and “proponents” of communism to oppose communism.

Enter stage left Alain Badiou. Born in 1937, Badiou was a participant in the heady student uprisings in Paris during May 1968. He participated in Union des Communistes de France marxiste-leniniste (UCFml), one of a number of groups seeking to apply the revolutionary politics of Mao Zedong to the developing situation in France. However, his intellectual training had been under the influence of Althusser (a member of the French revisionist Communist Party; his philosophies were an eclectic grab-bag that included elements of Marx and Freud) and Lacan (a psychoanalyst) from whom he never made a clean ideological break. Their influence continues to impact on his thinking.

¹ This short article reviews only one of Badiou’s books. For a complete discussion of Badiou’s bourgeois ideology see Raymond Lotta et al here: http://www.demarcations-journal.org/issue01/demarcations_badiou.html

Badiou has authored a number of philosophical works, the most recent being *The Communist Hypothesis*. His publisher, Verso, has presented the book as a near replica of the *Quotations of Chairman Mao*, with a simple red cover, gold lettering and a gold star.

Badiou's definition of the Communist hypothesis sounds progressive, but is thoroughly infused with Marcusean pessimism about the impossibility of emancipation: "The decisive issue is the need to cling to the historical hypothesis of a world that has been freed from the law of profit and private interest – even while we are, at the level of intellectual representations, still prisoners of the conviction that we cannot do without it, that this is the way of the world, and that no politics of emancipation is possible. That is what I propose to call the communist hypothesis." (p. 63)

In the book, Badiou takes three Events (*Being and Event* is the title of his major philosophical work) and deduces from them the quintessential, pure Idea of Communism.

Those three events are the Paris Commune, the May 1968 upheavals and the Cultural Revolution. In these three Events Badiou sees a communist Idea that transcends questions of state and questions of Party, both of which he rejects as factors holding back the realization of the Idea.

Badiou's attitude towards the party as the vanguard of a class conscious proletariat can be seen in his rejection of contemporary celebration of the Paris Commune: "As a result, the Commune

gets emptied of all properly political content. It is certainly commemorated, celebrated and claimed, but only as a pure point for the articulation of the social nature of state power. But if that is all it consists in, then the Commune is politically obsolete. For it is rendered so by – what Sylvain Lazarus has proposed to call – the Stalinist political mode, for which the unique place of politics is the party." (p. 183)

Badiou's observation is that while the "party-state is endowed with capacities designed to resolve problems the Commune left unresolved...it remains to be asked whether in solving them, the party-state did not suppress a number of political problems that, to its merit, the Commune had been able to discern." (p 182-183)

Likewise, in his discussion of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Badiou idealises the formation of the Shanghai Commune and holds Mao accountable for repressing this extra-Party initiative in favour of a "party of a new type": "It is in fact the party form itself that has to be abandoned..." he writes (p. 70).

Badiou embraces the reactionary post-modern rejection of "communism" as a signifier of human emancipation and of History as an objective narrative: "It is essential today to understand that 'communist' can no longer be the adjective qualifying politics. An entire century of experiences both epic in scope and appalling was required to understand that certain phrases produced by this short-circuiting between the real and the Idea were misconceived, phrases such as 'Communist Party' or

‘Communist State’ - an oxymoron that the phrase ‘Socialist State’ attempted to get around...we need to avoid any such ‘adjecification’ today. To combat such a thing, I have many times had to insist that History does not exist, which is in keeping with my conception of truths, namely, that they have no meaning, and especially not the meaning of History... We must bring the Idea back, by uncoupling it from any predicative usage” (p 240-242)

It gets worse. This advocate of “communism”, this upholder of the Idea and the Hypothesis, is nothing more than a bourgeois idealist, an intellectual obscurantist who would imagine projecting something real into something symbolically fictional and then seek adulation as a revolutionary intellectual. Only a Badiou could write, in complete opposition to philosophical materialism that “The ideological operation of the Idea of communism is the imaginary projection of the political real into the symbolic fiction of History...” (p. 252) At a time when the general economic crisis of capitalism is bringing European nations to the brink of bankruptcy and the working people to the streets in mass displays of anger at capitalism, Badiou asks, and it is a useful question, “what new forms of political organization are needed to handle political antagonisms?” (p. 63)

His answer verges on libertarian anarchism. “The Party-form, like that of the Socialist State, is no longer suitable for providing real support for the Idea.” (p. 257)

He adds, “...we must abandon once

and for all the militarized paradigm of the Party, and move towards what the Organisation politique in France calls a ‘politics without parties’”. (p. 257)

However, politics without a revolutionary party is bourgeois politics, the politics of petty-bourgeois imagining and hypothesizing, of romanticized but ultimately pessimistic thought divorced from the life and actions of the people.

Even in the absence of a revolutionary situation, in fact precisely when to all intents and purposes “no politics of emancipation is possible”, it is necessary to build the revolutionary movement, and to do so under the leadership of a Marxist-Leninist Party. In the quietest and calmest of times, the preparations for moments of crisis must be made, professionally and scientifically.

Badiou is prescient enough to see what is coming. He is keenly aware of the growing crises of capitalism. There is a lengthy passage that develops this theme quite accurately on pp. 94-96. Yet because his social being provides conditions for endless and idealistic musing on an Idea, on an Hypothesis, his task remains to caution youth from embracing the organizational form that will threaten that social being, namely, a revolutionary party.

For someone touted as a “Maoist”, Badiou is surely at complete odds with the advice given by Mao Zedong and upheld by organizations such as our own:

If there is to be a revolution, there must be a revolutionary party. Without a

revolutionary party, without a party built on the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory and in the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary style, it is impossible to lead the working class and the broad masses of the people in defeating imperialism and its running dogs.

Mr Badiou's name is unlikely to ever be a household name, but his capacity to influence revolutionary youth requires our rejection of his anti-materialist and anti-Party views.

Post Script: Tunisia and Egypt

Badiou's comments on the great wave of people's struggles sweeping North Africa and the Middle East at the start of 2011 provide further illustration of the shortcomings in his world outlook.

In an article entitled *Tunisia, Egypt: The universal reach of popular uprisings*² posted online in late February, Badiou offers an analysis of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolts under the following five headings:

1. The East Wind prevails over the West Wind
2. We are right to rebel
3. A single spark can start a prairie fire
4. The people and the people alone are the makers of world history
5. Without a communist movement, there is no communism
6. We are against war, but we are not afraid of it

Readers familiar with the works of Mao Zedong will recognize the first four and the last of these headings as straight copies of quotations from the late Chinese Communist Party Chairman.

The fifth, however, is a bowdlerization of Mao's saying that "Without a Communist Party there would be no new China". It is a distortion of the original that elevates spontaneity above scientific socialism.

What content is grouped under these "Maoist" and pseudo-"Maoist" phrases?

Firstly, Badiou clearly identifies the State in *general* as the enemy of the people. He does not identify the obstacle to the emancipation of the Tunisian and Egyptian people as the "imperialist State", the "bourgeois State" or any other class-infused identifier. He enthuses that the revolts in these two countries are "a revolt against the power of the State" and that the fact that it can be "absolutely successful is an example of universal reach". According to him, "The knowledge that someday the people, freely associated and resorting to their creative power, will be able to throw away the funereal coercion of the State, that's the reason why this Idea arouses boundless enthusiasm in the entire world and will trigger the revolution that ultimately will overthrow the authority in residence."

Badiou goes on to say that the Tunisian and Egyptian revolts constitute Events, "sudden creation(s), not of a new reality, but of a myriad of new possibilities". In

² http://www.lacan.com/thesymptom/?page_id=1031

an Event, “the People is made of those who know how to solve the problems brought about by the Event....To solve the insoluble problems without the assistance of the State becomes the destiny of the Event.” Then, in his clearest declaration of opposition to state power in the hands of the people, that is, to a proletarian state, he observes “Thousands of new possibilities...arise at any given moment, to which the State – any State – remains completely blind”. If Badiou is certain that a proletarian state is not one of the “unknown possibilities for the entire world” created by these popular uprisings, then it stands that he interprets these events as confirmation that a proletarian party acting for the creation of such a state is unnecessary.

“The popular uprising we speak about is obviously without a Party, without an hegemonic organization, without a recognized leader,” writes Badiou. He calls such an uprising a “communism of movement. ‘Communism’ here means: a common creation of a collective destiny.” Such a “communism” is “generic, representing in a place, humanity as a whole”.

For this sad former Marxist-Leninist, for this intellectual petty-bourgeois who is trapped by his reputation as a Marxist-Leninist and a “Maoist”, it is not possible to declare himself openly as an idealist and an anarchist, so he still dresses his pathetic phrase mongering in “Maoist” subtitles; unwilling to remove his campaign medals from the Sixties, he promotes his commitment to spontaneity and to anarchism as a “communism of the movement”. For

him, Communism is no longer the cause of the proletariat but of “humanity as a whole”, hence it is to be created by the People spontaneously responding to the “thousands of new opportunities” as they “raise up, build up a public space for the communism of movement (and) protect it by all means while inventing the sequential course of action: such is the reality of the politics of popular emancipation”.

Seen in the context of a major contemporary wave of struggle, Badiou’s analysis is an even clearer rejection of the truths with which we concluded the previous section, namely:

If there is to be a revolution, there must be a revolutionary party. Without a revolutionary party, without a party built on the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory and in the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary style, it is impossible to lead the working class and the broad masses of the people in defeating imperialism and its running dogs.

Mao Zedong



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See also www.vanguard.net.au for regular updates of
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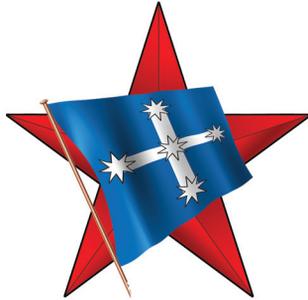
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