

A useful article on correct communist work

We reprint the following article written by Dulcie Steffanou "Fundamental Question is Detailed Mass Work" from the Australian Communist, No. 93, Nov/Dec. 1978. We apologise to our readers as the article was accidentally omitted from the July/Dec. 1999, issue of the Australian Communist.

It is timely to return to this article as it sets out some fundamental principles of Communist Party work. Dulcie dedicated her life to building a Communist Party with close connections to people's struggles, particularly the working class. She paid a great deal of attention to promoting communist style of work which ensured proper integration of communists with the people. How else can the Communist Party learn about the conditions and working people as a whole? How else can the revolutionary ideas of Marxism be brought to the working people without the communists taking part in people's struggles? How else can revolutionary Marxism be further developed in Australian conditions? Dulcie fought for communists to immerse themselves in people's struggles with the ultimate aim to overthrow oppression and exploitation.

Mass work demands vigorous participation in people's struggles in the workplace, in the communities and at all levels, linking people's everyday difficulties and struggles to the broader problems of imperialist domination and the capitalist social relations of production. More often than not this work is not visible or spectacular, but it is indispensable work in building, step by step, the revolutionary movement. Mass work is not a matter of laying low waiting for the revolutionary

situation to mature. On the contrary this approach can delay the revolutionary development. Mass work releases unlimited possibilities and creativity. Working appropriately amongst the people requires infinite flexibility, boldness, patience and a great deal of thought. Mass work requires constant review of the particular and general conditions, trial and error, criticism and self-criticism. Underlying it all is the study and application of Marxism to Australian conditions. Capitalism throws up many obstacles and diversions to prevent Marxism from reaching the people. Proper mass work can overcome these hurdles and provide enormous potential in developing and advancing revolutionary ideas in Australian conditions.

Dulcie's insistence on mass work as the main focus of communists' work arose from her long and deep involvement in the Australian revolutionary and people's movements and a firm grasp of Marxism. Much of the work in the old Communist Party was characterised by left-blocism and communists confining themselves to the upper echelons of trade unions and winning of trade union positions. They became captives of trade union politics and bourgeois parliamentarism. It led to isolation from the people and, combined with neglect of study of revolutionary Marxism, largely contributed to the eventual abandonment of revolutionary politics.

Dulcie had no time for bourgeois individualism, self-importance, arrogance and seeking limelight. She insisted and relied on the collective wisdom and strength of the mobilised working class. For her the highest and most noble achievement was the selfless service to working people in their struggles to overthrow oppression and exploitation.

Dulcie Steffanou - 1978.

Fundamental question is detailed mass work

In his splendid article "On Correcting Mistaken Ideas in the Party" Chairman Mao Zedong said: "Some comrades, disregarding the subjective and objective conditions, suffer from the malady of revolutionary impetuosity; they will not take pains to do minute and detailed work among the masses, but riddled with illusions, want only to do big things". (Emphasis ours).

In our ranks are wonderful comrades who have taken great pains to do minute and detailed work among the masses. They have not suffered from the malady of wanting only to do big things or if they have suffered from this malady they have combated it. This is a very great encouragement in the correct building of the Party. Because of the very fact that such comrades are doing detailed and minute work among the masses, it is not possible to publicise them. It can be said that in the factories of the multinationals, in the rural areas, devoted Communists have refrained from succumbing to the temptation to do only big things, and to thrust themselves into the limelight. They continue to do patient and minute work. This is a hallmark of service to the people, devotion to the revolution.

In the social conditions of Australia, such minute and detailed work among the masses is at the very foundation of building the Communist Party and developing revolutionary consciousness in the working class and among other sections of the people.

Why do we say this is fundamental in the social conditions of Australia? The social conditions of Australia have created all sorts of illusions among the people. They have created an atmosphere of legalism — you may shout out and proclaim any and all sorts of political views, you are "free". These social conditions give "democracy", "elected" parliament,

"freedom" of trade unions etc. They produce a revolutionary Communist Party and two revisionist "Communist" Parties and various splinter groups. The comparative "stability" of capitalism before the present economic crisis, lulls certain sections of the workers into a sense that everything is all right. Comparatively high wages are paid to particular sections of the workers who act as a brake on struggle. A barrage of anti-working class material comes over every day. All sorts of diversions are exploited.

Notwithstanding all that, the most significant feature of the situation is the development of working class and people's struggle on an ever expanding scale. The struggle arises in response to particular repressive acts or, in response to particular attacks upon living conditions or on some particular demand. As has been pointed out many times, the origin of repressive action ultimately lies in the multinational domination of Australia; in present circumstances an overshadowing factor is superpower contention and struggle. The objective direction of struggle is towards independence and socialism. Although the slogan of independence has spread with great rapidity and gripped many new people, still the aims of independence and socialism grip only a comparatively small minority. That is not to deny in any way that the *trend* is very strongly to independence and socialism. It is necessary to affirm this time and again. There is no room whatever for pessimism but room only for supreme optimism. That involves infinite confidence in the masses.

The question is how to accelerate the trend, how to realise the full possibilities. If the Communists confine themselves to the advanced, if they suffer from the malady of revolutionary impetuosity, then they will want to do only "big things". They will

from the malady of revolutionary impetuosity, then they will want to do only "big things". They will isolate themselves from the masses, will disregard the subjective and objective conditions. On the other hand, if they do minute and detailed work among the as yet unawakened masses, then certainly they will participate consciously, subjectively, in pushing along the objective trend. Subjective will be in accord with objective.

We should certainly learn from those who have gone into the factories of the multinationals and into rural areas, precisely to do painstaking work among the masses, precisely to awaken the hitherto unawakened. They have persisted in *seemingly* unrewarding work day in and day out, never sought recognition, praise or being in the limelight.

All this must be expanded. Devotion to the revolutionary cause demands work of diverse kinds, particularly and fundamentally, detailed and painstaking work among the masses. The main thing is that a sound basis for it all has been established.

We can learn from some negative examples. The old Communist Party operated in breach of all this. In many ways, it disregarded the subjective and objective conditions. Its members were, in the main, all in the limelight. Some of them deliberately sought it. They basked in what they saw as their own importance. It was a style of work, a bad style. It has left its legacy even in our ranks. A few continually thrust themselves forward, resent being "left out", "passed by" etc. It is not a question of being "left out" or "passed by". This is sheer personal individualism. It has no place in a genuine Communist Party or Communist. The *fundamental* question is not self-importance but mass work and if need be (and the need is great) taking pains to do minute and detailed work among the masses. In days gone by the Waterside Workers' Federation and Ironworkers Union were under Communist leadership. Numbers of Communists rushed into jobs in industries covered by these unions. They did so because it was considered the done thing, to support the union, to do "Communist" work. In each case the union ceased to be under "Communist" leadership. This sort of thing still manifests itself. Some people rush to join a union said to have Communist leadership. The same

people could equally go into the textile industry or the motor vehicle industry or some other industry. Why don't they do that? It is because of a hangover of the past, a hangover of trade union politics, a refusal to do minute and detailed work among the masses. Generally speaking when Communists did go into these industries the Communist organisation and consciousness among the masses were not developed. This was because insufficient study of the subjective and objective conditions was made. Moreover such Communists collected together, readily identifiable so that it was an easy task for the bosses to pick them off. We should learn from historical experience. Again it must be affirmed that the main thing is that the majority of Communists have learned. Another feature of this error both in the past and the present is that an excessive number of these Communists were sucked into the union apparatus. Because of the particular type of union apparatus such sucking in, tends to isolate the given Communist even more from the masses. This is not to say there is not an appropriate way to handle the matter.

The need for minute and detailed work among the masses extends over the whole of the Australian people. Its aim is to unite all who can be united for independence and socialism. It demands work at every degree of consciousness. It demands minute and detailed work among the masses.

Those who continually seek the limelight should think over what Chou En-lai said to the 10th Congress of the Communist Party of China:

"... a genuine Communist must be ready to accept a higher or lower post and be able to stand the test of going up or stepping down many times. All cadres, veteran and new alike, must maintain close ties with the masses, be modest and prudent, guard against arrogance and impetuosity, go to any post as required by the Party and the people and firmly carry out Chairman Mao's revolutionary line and policies under very circumstance?". Those few who do continually seek the limelight will certainly make self analysis and self-criticism. They will see it as an expression of bourgeois individualism, a mistaken idea in the Party. They will overcome it and learn to serve the people better.