

RED BERSKA MOVEMENT

INTERNAL BULLETIN

JUNE 1980

MELBOURNE ARTICLES

Introduction

The articles in this section of the bulletin (pages numbered M1, M2, etc) were written by Melbourne members of REM. The articles have been written in the light of discussions at Melbourne REM meetings and, in some cases, discussions among smaller groups of people. However none of the articles have been endorsed by the Melbourne membership at this stage.

The authorship of articles (in code names) is specified in the table of contents appearing below. The articles are grouped broadly in accordance with subject matter.

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MELBOURNE ARTICLES

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The articles in this section of the bulletin (pages numbered 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100) were written by Melbourne members of RHM. The articles have been written in the light of discussions at Melbourne RHM meetings and in some cases discussions among smaller groups of people. However, the Melbourne articles have been endorsed by the Melbourne members of RHM. The authorship of articles in this section of the bulletin is not a matter of concern. The authorship of articles in this section of the bulletin is not a matter of concern. The authorship of articles in this section of the bulletin is not a matter of concern.

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COMMUNISM LIVES ! - ON UNITING THEORY & PRACTICE.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mao puts it more pungently -

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

(1942 from Compton B. Party Reform Documents)

If it's not useful - Forget it !

DOING THINGS IS NOT PRACTICE

We do have a theory. It may not always be conscious in that it may not inform all our actions. This is why we often lose a sense of direction in our work. We should aim to provide communist leadership

in action groups. This means understanding how the action fits in with the broader pattern of social change, as well as how to lead the other members of the group to a deeper understanding of the nature of capitalist society. It never means just taking them over.

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

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

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

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

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

PRACTICE IS THEORY LIVE !

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

ON HEADLESS CHOOKS

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

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

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

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

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

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

Of course there are many truths of Marxism which have been done

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

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

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

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

Given this, our choices for the future are few. We could degenerate into a weirdo 'Marxist' sect (and I always thought that Catholicism was the one true faith), and because religious fervor does have its own

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momentum, we may even become a little successful; we could become cynics and drop out; or we can take stock of the situation and start to remedy it. And this brings me back to the question of theory and practice.

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

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

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

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

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ON UNTYING THEORY AND PRACTICE.

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

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

So it is with theory and practice. But some of the articles on this subject seem to be, at best, glossing over this fact, and at worst, assuming that unity is fundamental and struggle is an optical illusion or the result of errors. I have in mind 'Communism Lives! On Uniting Theory and Practice' - (C.L.O.U.T.A.P.) and some of the Adelaide articles, especially 'Waiting for a Communist Party?' (DE 9) and Steve's response to 'REM: Directions for 1980'. (From the Adelaide material I also get a whiff of the same thinking in relation to the contradiction between ideology and organisation and the contradiction between the personal and the political.)

First lets consider the notion that neither theory nor practice is primary. This idea comes through in C.L.O.U.T.A.P. The Adelaide articles don't explicitly advance this proposition, but they want to re-formulate "theory is primary" at present" into "raise the theoretical level while uniting theory and practice". They are, I think, trying to water down the primacy of theory by making theory one task among many and by exaggerating the danger of armchair Marxism when the real problem is that there is still far too little theoretical work being done. They accuse Melbourne members of hypocrisy for giving lip-service to the idea that "theory is primary and propoganda is secondary" while not doing any propoganda work. They should be calling us hypocrits for not doing any theoretical work!

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

We could think of the two aspects of a contradiction as being like the two sides of a coin. They are opposite sides, but of course they are both part of a larger whole and both indispensable to that whole. But you would do well not to try to emphasise this latter aspect too much in a two-up game. Each coin at any given time has either its head or its tail upper-most and the two-up players are interested in which one it is. It's no good going on about how there can be no heads without tails and how essential it is always to bear in mind the basic unity of the penny. Maintaining that neither theory or practice is primary is like betting on the coin landing on its edge.

Practice means engaging in activity which brings you directly into interaction with society and/or nature. In the present discussion, political

struggle is the type of practice we have in mind. Political struggles give rise to questions as to what should be done. They also generate experiences and information which can be used in answering these questions. Theory means analysing facts, identifying the forces at work and formulating plans for future action. The results of theoretical work are used to guide further practice and are tested in that practice.

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

Previous practice has given us questions that need answering and facts we can use in answering them -- the previous practice being the struggles we have been involved in, the struggles that have taken place in Australian history in general and the struggles that have been waged elsewhere in the world, including the experiences of the world Communist movement. We need to draw some conclusions and work out at least a tentative plan for communist practice in the future. Until this is done, theory should be the primary activity, the leading activity. However practice may continue to be the main activity for most or all of us. By this I mean that every member of R.E.M. is and will continue to be involved in political struggles, and practical activities in these struggles may take up more time than theoretical activities such as reading, writing and arguing about the questions facing the communist movement. This is quite healthy. Firstly because continuing involvement in struggles provides some safeguard against becoming remote from reality and oblivious to trends in society and in progressive movements. Secondly because although we have as yet little to offer as communists we do have something to offer as relatively experienced activists with a few skills that are worth passing on to newer activists.

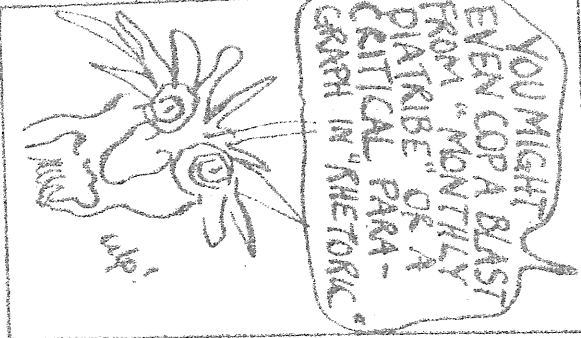
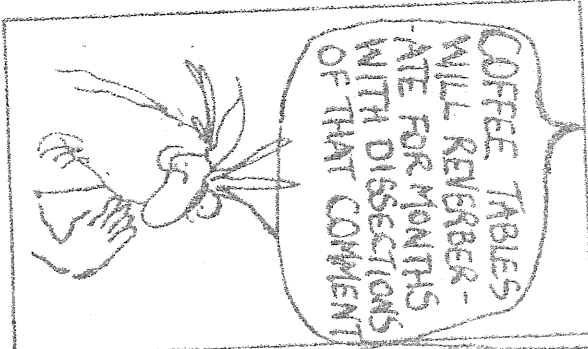
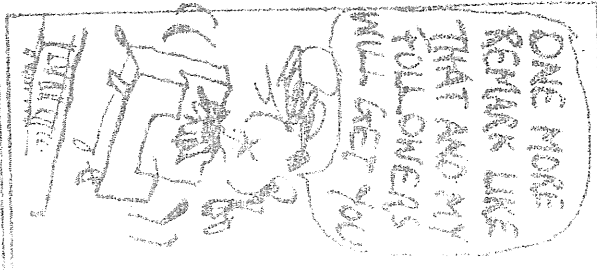
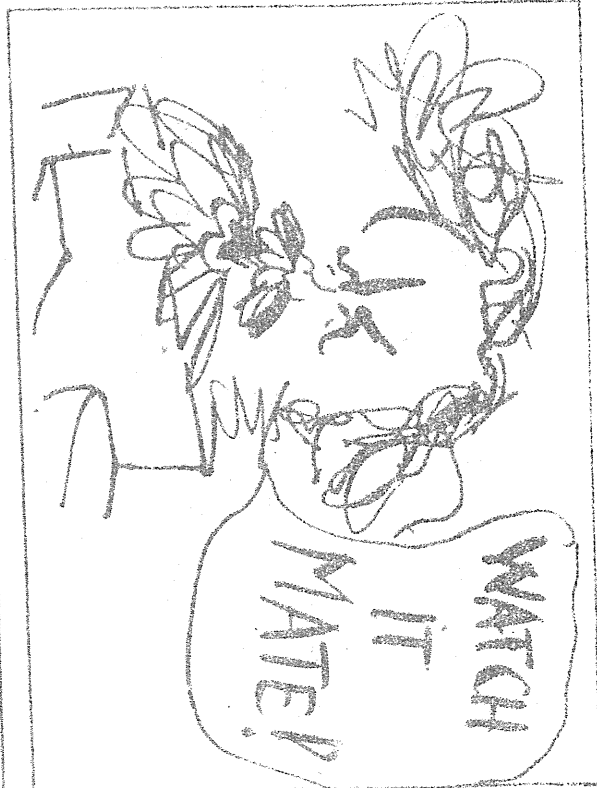
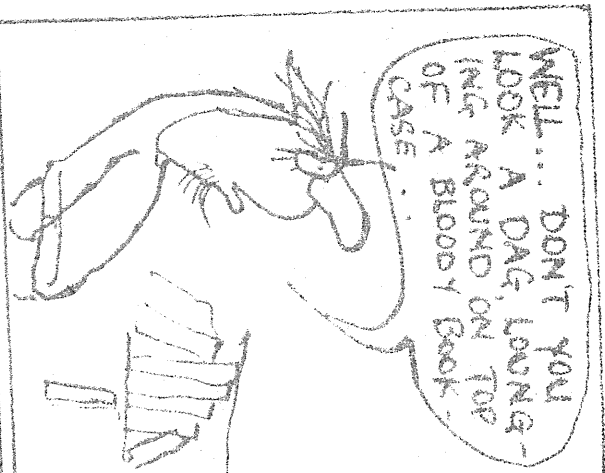
But the first priority right now for a communist organisation must be to organise investigation of theoretical questions. (When I say "theoretical questions" I don't mean academic questions like how many bolsheviks can dance on the head of a pin but vital questions like how to overthrow capitalism.)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

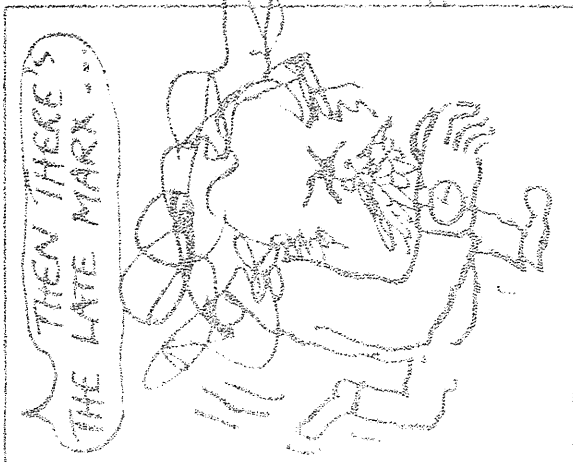
Struggles are going on anyway, regardless of what R.E.M. does. REM members are involved in some of them. But a communist (or would-be- communist) organisation like R.E.M. is not uniquely qualified to provide leadership in these struggles precisely because we lack any clear idea of the way forward for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

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

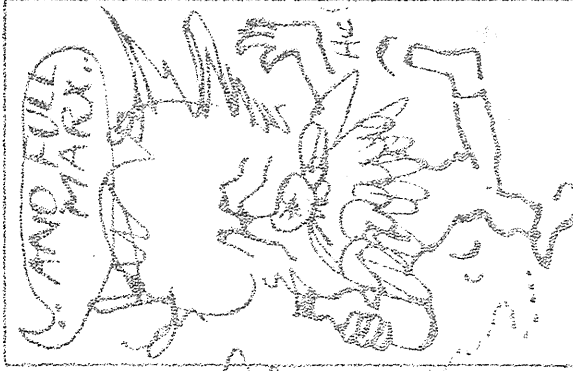


ARCHHAIR MASH

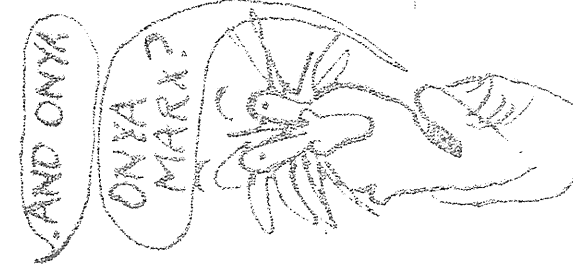




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AND FULL MARX.



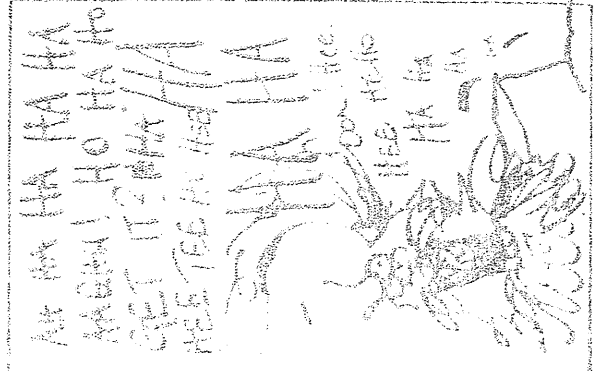
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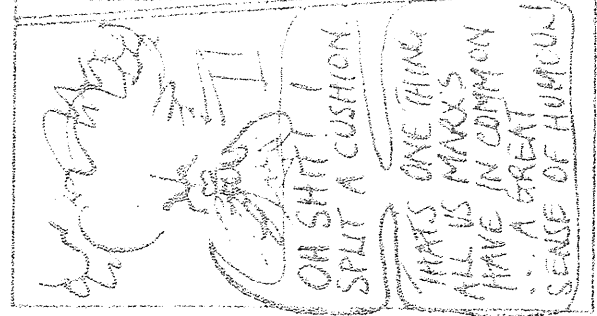
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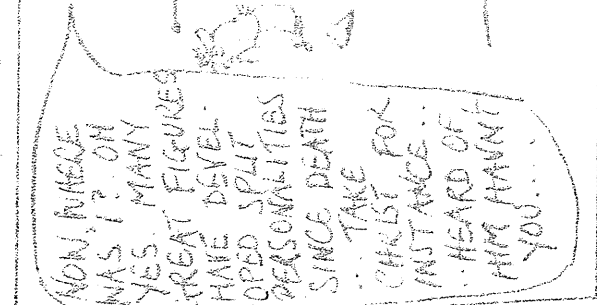
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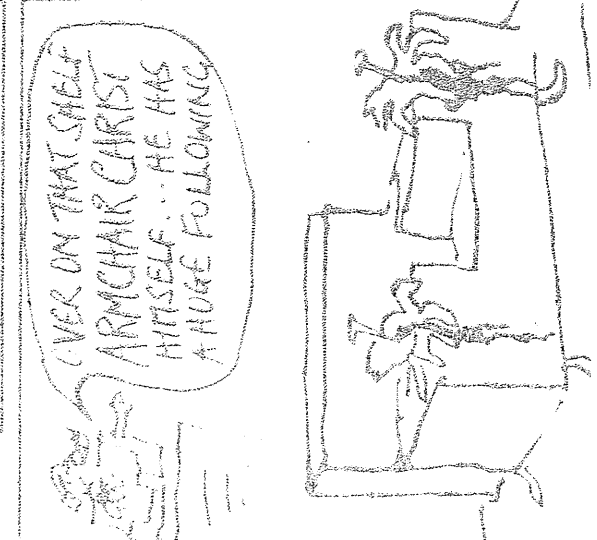


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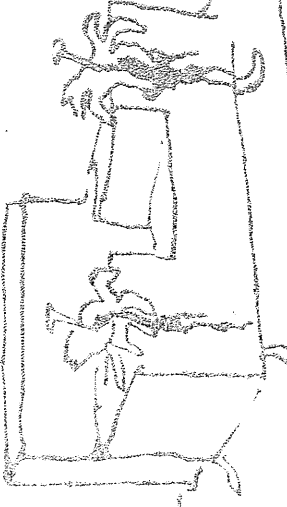
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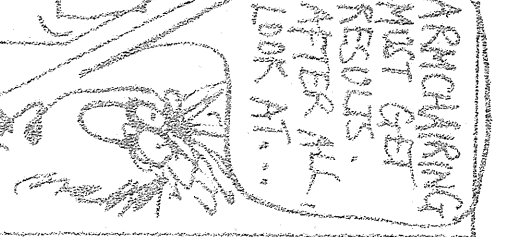
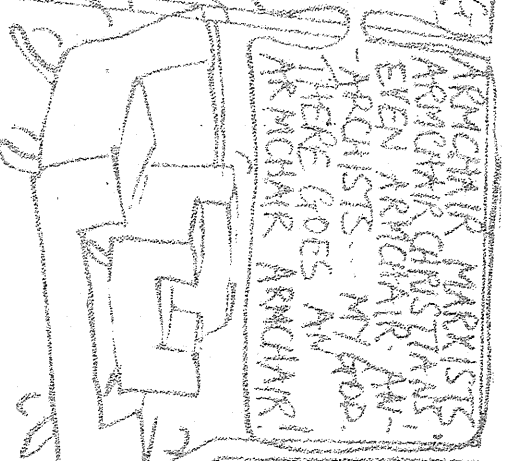
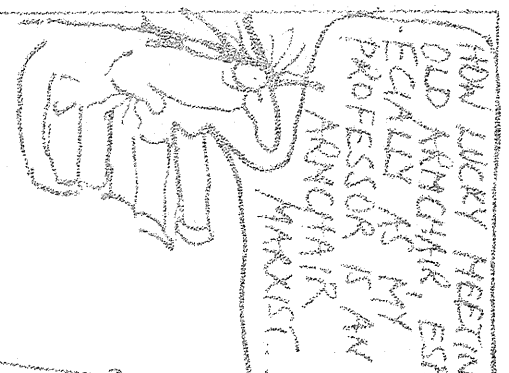
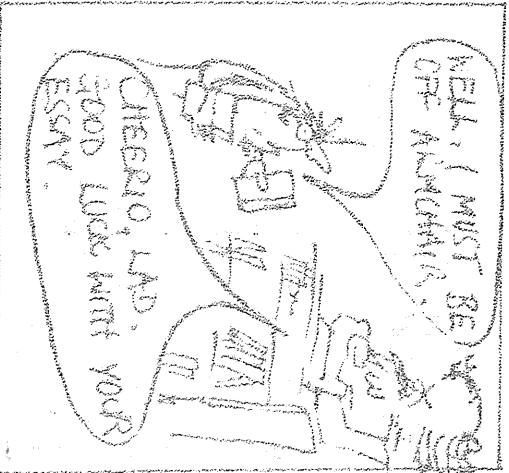


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... TAKE
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INSTANCE...
... HEARD OF
HIM HAUNT
YOU...



OVER ON THAT SHELF
ARMCHAIR CHRIST
HIMSELF... HE HAS
A HUGE FOLLOWING





THE MELBOURNE MESS

The shambles in REM in Melbourne seems to have two main features:

(1) Decisions not being carried out

This ranges from major campaigns not being systematically pursued (and generally being dropped after a short time) to decisions on matters which should be routine not being carried out, or being forgotten. This appears to have been a problem in REM from the beginning.

(2) Breakdown of internal life

Although it would seem that Melbourne's communications with Adelaide have been inadequate since early 1978, internal life within Melbourne REM began to disintegrate later in 1978, as branches one-by-one stopped meeting. This did not lead to a drastic problem at first, as there were a number of fairly well attended general meetings in the last few months of 1978. However, during 1979, with no branch structure surviving, general meetings were poorly attended, most members wrote nothing for the DB, and visits and circulars to the members from the executive were sporadic. In short, many members had virtually no contact with the organisation in 1979.

What caused this sorry state of affairs? I think there were a number of causes, some of them not significant in themselves, but in total quite effective in making the organisation ineffective. Here are the two (interacting) factors which I feel are in themselves significant:

- (1) Lack of agreement on what we should be doing;
- (2) petty-bourgeois tendencies (sorry about the 'jargon' but I'll explain what I mean a bit further on).

Lack of Agreement

This boils down to lack of an agreed programme and strategy for the revolution, which further boils down to lack of any credible programme and strategy for the revolution. It has been reflected in skepticism among the membership about the various projects and 'Main Tasks' which have been undertaken, and unwillingness on the part of many members to work on things they don't feel are worthwhile. If we had an established organisation which had demonstrated its viability and seriousness and generally correct orientation, it would be reasonable to expect all members to put time and energy into the organisation's activities, even members who are doubtful about the value of a particular activity (since they should be aware that their opinions might be wrong and in any case the value of a project can only be conclusively shown by giving it a go). However, REM has never been more than a fledgeling organisation, explicitly aware of its lack of an overall programme and strategy, so it is hardly surprising that members' commitment has generally not extended to putting an effort into particular activities in which they cannot see any value.

Is this an excuse or an explanation? On one level it is simply an explanation - whether we like it or not, people are not going to throw

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themselves into things they think are a waste of time purely through 'commitment to REM'. But I am going beyond that to say that, however frustrating it may be to the leadership, this sort of reaction (or lack of reaction) from the membership is quite reasonable. Someone who is aware of the vacuum in revolutionary strategy is correct in not devoting time or energy to something they think is a dead-end.

This situation was the backdrop for the rapid changes of 'Main Task' in late 1977 and 1978, as the organisation tried to hit on some campaign that would galvanise the membership into action. In practice, none of these tasks inspired the whole membership, and so none of them got off the ground on the large scale which the tasks' proponents had hoped for.

The failure to implement many of the more routine decisions which were taken can also be partly traced back to this lack of overall direction. The executive was reluctant to dismiss any idea that seemed like it might be worthwhile for fear of missing out on doing something that would help get REM going. As a result, commitments (on paper) to do various things piled up far beyond the organisation's real capacity.

Eventually, things got to the stage where many of the membership doubted the value of even going to meetings and, rather than coming to meetings to express their dissatisfaction with what REM was doing, or not doing, many stayed away. This was a sign of no confidence in REM itself. Some of those who drifted away from REM during the last year and a half, complained of the organisation not being activist, not going out to the working class, etc. But those who voted with their feet by staying away from the meetings, rather than coming along to fight to change the orientation of the organisation, may perhaps have themselves felt the familiar uncertainty as to what should be done, precisely.

The solution to this part of the problem is surely obvious - if all our previous plans have come to nothing, or next to nothing, because of a fundamental lack of confidence that what we were doing was a worthwhile contribution to the revolution, then we should make it our main task to strive for a clearer idea of what the revolution is all about.

I'll come back to this point later in the article.

Petty-Bourgeois Tendencies

Here I am referring to the tendencies in REM to launch grandiose schemes, to be easily discouraged when things don't turn out as we hoped, to be unwilling to carry things through. These phenomena are summed up well in the passage from Lenin quoted by Charlton in REM: Directions for 1980 (p.5) :

"This slovenliness, this carelessness, untidiness, unpunctuality, nervous haste, the inclination to substitute discussion for action, talk for work, the inclination to undertake everything under the sun without finishing anything, are characteristics of the 'educated'..."

These failings are much worse in some people than in others. Moreover, the aimlessness discussed in the previous section provides fertile ground

for these tendencies to flourish. Some people who were not markedly afflicted with these shortcomings in the past have developed them in the REM atmosphere where it is normal for activities to be started without much thought and dropped just as casually, where no-one is surprised when or particularly irate when somebody fails to do something they undertook.

So it is essential to tackle the problem of lack of overall direction if we are to eradicate the petty-bourgeois tendencies it encourages. However, these tendencies have an independent existence, and they must be fought off directly as well. Part of the answer is simply being aware of these tendencies and pointing them out when people exhibit them.

There are also organisational measures which can help keep us on the rails. For example, running meetings in a more orderly way by circulating beforehand an agenda which (with any modifications made at the start of the meeting) will be adhered to. Some people seem to think that ideas can only flow freely when a discussion is at liberty to drift randomly from one subject to another. There is, indeed, value in this type of discussion at times, although in a meeting of more than a few people it has the disadvantage that before you've had a chance to express an idea about one topic, the conversation has moved onto something else. However, this kind of stream of consciousness discussion should be clearly distinguished from a discussion meant to achieve a definite result (a decision, a plan of action, allocation of tasks, etc.). Perhaps we should schedule 'brainstorming sessions' - to borrow a term from management theory literature - on major political questions, while clearly understanding that more orderly discussions will also be needed before any identifiable conclusions can be formulated and published.

Drawing up and circulating meeting agendas required someone to devote some time to it. So do some other things that should be done, for example -

- * informing people who were not at a meeting of what was discussed and what was decided,
- * keeping a register of the things we have decided to do and who was going to do them, and checking up on whether they have been done.

These and other tasks were meant to be carried out by the 'Administrative Secretary' appointed by the executive early last year. But after a few months he decided that he was unable to do the job adequately, and there did not appear to be anyone else who would be able and willing to do it. The proposal to transfer the position of paid organiser to Melbourne was largely an attempt to solve this problem, and thereby help to solve the larger problem of general disorganisation and sloppiness. It was never expected to be more than part of the solution.

Other Sources of the Mess

I said at the start of the article that many of the causes of the Melbourne mix-up were factors not significant in themselves. By this I mean particular incidents or situations, factors basically outside our control.

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One factor which falls at least partly into this category is the absence, mentioned above, of any individual(s) able and willing to devote a significant proportion of their time and energy to organisational tasks. This has certainly been a problem for the past 18 months, and maybe it was before (I'm not in a position to know). To be sure, this situation can partly be traced back to the low priority given to REM by many members, which reflects some of the more basic problems, but there is also a more specific dimension to it.

Consider the Melbourne REM members who have served on the executive during the last 18 months. A couple of them were unable to attend meetings regularly or undertake other regular commitments for reasons beyond their control. Some others are people who are not at all good at following things through systematically - in fact they are not all that good at organising themselves, let alone anything else. Of course, they should change their behaviour and develop these skills, but in the meantime A couple of others who were more suited to attending to organisational tasks happened to be particularly badly placed to put much time and effort into REM because of work commitments and other political activities.

So What Do We Do About It ?

As I said before, one of the things we need to do is to acknowledge that our main task is to develop an understanding of our society and the revolution needed to change it. In other words, theory is primary at the present time. A number of Melbourne members of REM, including most of the executive, have held this view for some time. But until recently, we've made scarcely any headway in putting it into practice. One reason for this is that the question of whether or not theory is primary, and in general the relationship between theory and practice, was not explicitly thrashed out among the Melbourne membership. This is being done in the present discussion, and we have a good chance to clearly resolve the issue one way or another.

Another problem is, if the view that theory is primary prevails, how do we go about implementing it? We proponents of theory being primary are guilty of having given this question far too little attention. It was as if we assumed that once REM's only activity was the Discussion Bulletin, people would automatically start writing for the DB, responding to articles in it, coming to meetings to discuss issues raised by DB articles, etc. Of course it didn't happen. The way we've been operating the last couple of months has been much better - articles are being written as a result of discussions at meetings, tackling questions that people see as contentious and important. From the masses, to the masses - on a modest scale.

We should also give some thought to the relationship between theory and propaganda. People are more inclined to think, argue, read and write about some political question if they are conscious of striving for a concrete result, in the form of a leaflet, booklet, article, position paper or whatever. We should, of course, be wary of "putting something out" for its own sake before we have anything useful to say, but on some issues, even an explanation of what we don't think, and why, or an outline of questions that need to be posed, could be quite stimulating to people outside our ranks. For the time being, the DB will be our main propaganda vehicle (and

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with a circulation of 500 and growing, it is not an insignificant medium), but that need not prevent us from publishing other things from time to time.

As far as organisation is concerned (and I am not attempting to deal here with interstate organisation, only organisation within Melbourne), we should probably steer clear of "comprehensive schemes" for the time being, and try to make the best of the people we have, concentrating on the most essential tasks for keeping people in touch with one another. If there is any potential left for REM - and I think there is - one way it will show itself will be in membership growth over the next few months. This new blood (as it is termed in the Transylvanian Workers' Party) will boost our enthusiasm and confidence that REM is worthwhile, as well as increasing the amount of energy and skills available for the work to be done.

One thing that worries me a bit is that when an organisation starts to spend most of its time analysing itself, it generally means the organisation is about to collapse. To a great extent, REM has been doing this right from the beginning, (spending too much time analysing itself, I mean - not collapsing, although a case could be made out that we have been collapsing since we started.) We have always spent an inordinate amount of time agonising over what REM's role should be, how it should be structured, where did we go wrong, etc. Naturally, people tend to get fed up with this after a while. There are so many important things to do. Analysing REM is, in itself, one of the least important - although some of the issues arising from such analysis are important political questions.

But there is a dilemma here. While some members have become fed up with REM because it isn't doing anything except arguing about what it should be doing (or worse still, what should have been done at some time in the past), there are others who have got browned-off because they felt REM wasn't facing up to precisely these kinds of questions. The problem, I think, is this. All of us agree that whatever REM's main task might be, it shouldn't be self-analysis, but at any given time there are likely to be some people who feel that the organisation is doing the wrong things - or not doing the right things - and want above all else to have this thrashed out.

The only solution to this problem is to try to strike a balance. Neither "Let's stop everything and have a soul-search!", nor "Let's cut the crap and get on with it!" This means, at the present time, that we should all be determined to see that this internal discussion leads fairly quickly to at least a provisional decision on how to get moving again. We can then tackle any outstanding issues, taking as much time as it needs, without holding everything up. To achieve this modus vivendi, we should all be prepared to make compromises, without relinquishing our right to continue struggling for what we think is correct.

It will also be helpful if we try to identify and concentrate on the political questions in dispute and not waste too much time on recriminations for their own sake or arguments about trivia like who said what at which executive meeting.

REM is not all that important. It would be no great tragedy if it

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folded. But it is worth making an effort to keep it together for a couple of reasons. Firstly, because it is there, and if we let it fall to pieces we will only have to try to set up something else sooner or later. Secondly, because after being so scornful of the sectarian and vindictive way the revisionists in the CPA(ML), AIM and WSA for AI reacted to opposition to them within those organisations, it seems a shame that we haven't yet learnt to handle our own internal differences much better. If we can work out how to pull back from the brink and settle our differences like comrades, we will have created something of real value to the whole world movement.

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THE PERSONAL IS PEOPLE'S POWER !

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

"He will die with total strangers

But he will not live with me..."

(Dory Previn The Altruist and the Needy Case)

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

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

This raises the problem of what a communist style is. The article's answer is quite clear - communists are people who are careful of how they present themselves to others, and are serious in their attitude. Is this true ? Whatever happened to the cheeky, often bloody-minded rebelliousness of the left ? There's a lot of destructiveness / carelessness in the attitude punk music, for example, takes towards other people, but there's also a good element of rebelliousness. Are we to straight-jacket ourselves with caring, or are there good progressive elements in both these styles of communism (if that's what we think punk is). We really do have to decide what our

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attitude is to the lumpen-style culture which is around now. Is it progressive? Can some part of it be supported? How should the semi-fascist element be opposed? Pious demonstrations of caring will not solve this problem. Investigation of where we are and the program we are to follow will.

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

Some Thoughts on 'The Personal is Political'

The last paragraph of Charlton's A History of the 'Red Eureka Movement' reads:

'In my opinion the 5 failures of REM (listed on page 8) all boil down to one main thing, that is, the need to develop an REM collective life. Melb. REM has never managed to solve this problem and in 1979 stopped trying. Adelaide branch is, at present, trying to tackle this question along the lines of the ideas raised in "The Personal is Political" (Discussion Bulletin 9)'

From this it would appear that in Charlton's view it is to the ideas raised in The Personal is Political that we in Melbourne should look for a solution to the problem (lack of collective life) to which many of our other failures boil down. The importance which Adelaide members attach to the article in relation to the shortcomings of REM in Melbourne has been confirmed by discussions a number of Melbourne members have had in Adelaide recently. In fact some Melbourne members seem to have got the feeling that the tensions between the two cities result mainly from a clash of cultures - with the Adelaide members being a humourless bunch of encounter group enthusiasts who spend their time gazing into each other's eyes and assiduously showing how much they care about one another; in contrast to the happy-go-lucky, cynical, abrasive Melbourne members who militantly refuse to take anything too seriously. A couple of people returning from visits to Adelaide commented with some surprise that the REM members there seemed to be more-or-less-normal people, not all that different from us!

This emphasis put on The Personal is Political by Adelaide people is the reason quite a bit of time has been spent discussing some of the ideas in it at Melbourne meetings and a number of people have decided to write articles commenting on it.

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

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

An important issue raised in The Personal is Political is that of deciding questions by voting. Where there is disagreement on an important issue (or an issue seen by some as important) a decision should not be taken until everyone has had a chance to express their views and feelings, including if necessary time to go away and think questions over and discuss them outside meetings. But even when this has been done, there may

still be some who feel radically dissatisfied with the majority view, seeing it as radically wrong and dangerous, etc. In such a case, if the question is one of what we should do, then it would normally be better to take a majority decision than to prolong the discussion after all viewpoints have been discussed - even if there is no 'crisis situation'. After all, such questions can ultimately only be answered in practice. Even if we reach a unanimous view we may be wrong.

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

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

What I have written so far takes the form of general assertions, without reference to specific episodes in REM's history. In this respect it is like The Personal is Political. This is all right for trying to establish a framework for discussion, but if ideas put forward about these issues are to be cited as justification for taking a particular stand on relations within REM (such as the Adelaide branch's unwillingness to be bound by majority decisions) then the concrete events and actions people have in mind would need to be analysed. I fear this would prove to be largely a waste of time (a diversion), but one thing's for sure - you can't just say: 'REM must develop a collective life based on the recognition that the personal is political. It should practice communist democracy, not bourgeois democracy. People shouldn't use hasty votes to ram things down other people's throats and evade issues. The members of a communist organisation should care about one another. Therefore we are rebelling against you.' The line of argument needs to be fully and precisely spelt out.

A few final remarks which do refer to recent events in REM. Adelaide members aren't angels either. In Melbourne-Adelaide Differences and in some conversations, they give the impression that their main aim is to make Melbourne members feel like a worn-out clique of bumbling smart-arses who should shuffle off quietly into the dustbin of history. This is not calculated to make us feel that we are cared about. Secondly, if you're in the minority on some question and you feel the majority doesn't care about you, you've got a right to complain - in fact you ought to complain - but that doesn't mean you should attempt to seize control in the name of the caring minority. You should show the majority you care about them, and the organisation, by abiding by the vote and trying to change the majority's behaviour and/or attitudes.

HYPOCRITE EFFECTIVENESS TRAINING

Ron
9 June 1980

When I first read "The Personal IS Political" (DISCUSSION BULLETIN 9, p13), I felt quite positive about it. Now I feel quite negative. The main reason is that I have since experienced an EXTREME display, from the author of the article and others who identify with it, of exactly the sort of uncaring, undemocratic and priggish attitudes, and breakdown in communications, that I thought the article was meant to combat. Indeed the article has even been adopted as a sort of rallying point in defence of those very attitudes.

Specifically, it has been used to defend a naked attempt to bully REM by people so convinced of their own superiority that they have openly declared it doesn't matter what the rest of us think, they will do as they please. The theory behind this is apparently that since other members of REM do not act in a sufficiently "caring" way towards those who identify with the article, therefore it is alright to treat us with complete contempt.

Naturally this has made me re-evaluate the article. After all, as we are often reminded, practice is the main criterion of truth.

I still think the article has some positive aspects. The quote from Orwell is very appropriate. So is the refreshingly straightforward account of the state of affairs in the CPA(ML). These raise real and important issues about the whole nature of the revolutionary movement. To make a revolution and build a new society based on fraternity instead of exploitation we have to build genuinely revolutionary organizations based on mutual comradeship. The fact that most "left" groups adopt the uncomradely norms of bourgeois society is a major obstacle to revolution. People are rightly suspicious of such groups and fear of "the dictatorship of the prigs" is very well founded.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Take the question of "body language" discussed under "communication skills". I doubt that 65% of messages are non-verbal. For example recently I saw a written declaration endorsed by the author of this article, along with others, which expressed eloquently in writing the "non-verbal" messages conveyed by "body moves away, feet or entire body pointing towards exit, frequent scratching, tightly clenched hands (suspicion), crossed feet, interest in teeth or fingernails (hostility)."

What body language would be needed to get across the message expressed so clearly as "Until further notice the Discussion Bulletin will be completely controlled by the Adelaide branch, not by the Executive...?"

How could one not notice that this represents "centralism without democracy" in an EXTREME form and is an explicit declaration that you do not "care" about the opinions of anybody outside Adelaide?

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

Unfortunately that is NOT what the article does. Instead of helping people to communicate more effectively by making full use of body language etc, it obstructs communication by encouraging people to disguise their actual feelings to "show caring". This may not be what is intended in courses on human relations and communications skills such as "Teacher Effectiveness Training". Indeed they probably advocate the exact opposite. But in a society based on exploitation it is natural for bosses and the like to extract from these ideas a manipulative approach more useful to them. That is what "Hypocrite Effectiveness Training" is all about.

This makes the distorted application of these ideas a rather typical product of cynical bourgeois pragmatism and behaviourism and one that is rightly treated with contempt and hostility by many people exposed to these courses. In adapting concepts more relevant to relations between adults and children, and applying them to relations between comrades in a revolutionary movement, "The Personal is Political" tends to fall in with the manipulative bourgeois approach, instead of extracting the positive side.

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

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

Of course one could argue that the article only means you should display interest if you really are interested. But that is not what it says and frankly I don't think that is what it means either. Its all very well to say that if you are bored you should say so directly and openly rather than by falling asleep. But people DO communicate many things like that non-verbally with great effect. The only result of acting according to the advice in the article would be to SHUT OFF an important and effective means of communication. When people look bored, suspicious, hostile etc at meetings it is not because they have not been trained in the skill of avoiding misleading signals but because that is actually the way they feel. Instead of helping people to generate and respond to these signals more consciously, as Mao does, "Hypocrite Effectiveness Training" is precisely intended to make people skilled in misleading each other about how they feel.

Another aspect of this approach is its use to actually intimidate people from expressing their feelings. "I hear you but you are not hearing me" becomes the slick yankee equivalent of "wipe that silly grin off your face".

I strongly resent having been lectured about "displaying hostility" during a recent argument with the author of this article. I felt bloody hostile so I said so - both verbally and non-verbally. Why shouldn't I? Serious complaints demand a more "caring" response than mealy mouthed phrases about "I hear you" or "you are entitled to feel that way" or even patronizing "summaries" of what one is supposed to have been saying. People who persist in responding to displays of indignation by such "cool" statements as "you are getting angry" are likely to provoke actual violence.

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

There is a strong element of Liu Shao-chi's "benevolence" line in "How to Be a Good Communist" running through all this, just as there is a strong element of Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People". It comes out most strongly in the section about "maintaining eye contact" etc with Trots when having a political argument with them, to show "respect" even though you don't "like" them.

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

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

I quite like the author of the article (except at the moment!) so I care and feel indignant instead of indifferent about attitudes I think are wrong. But I'm not too keen about this "caring" and "respect" that has to be "shown" by various "techniques" because it doesn't arise spontaneously from one's actual feelings towards others.

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

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

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

"Those winning" are not supposed to have separate "needs" from "those losing", but have simply expressed a different (and quite possibly wrong) opinion as to what the organization should do, which the organization has adopted. The assumption that people with different views, or living in different states, have separate interests, or are entitled to "resent losing a vote" under certain conditions, has led to some completely absurd situations.

A couple of those situations have been mentioned in the last paragraph of the article. Since a request has been made that "detailed polemics, recriminations etc would be best distributed internally in REM", I will comment on those specifics in a separate article. But I find it rather annoying that matters of this sort should be raised publicly (also in "Waiting for a Communist Party") with a request that they be replied to internally, so I have been unable to refrain from making some references to the same matters.

The "Australian Communist" has developed to a fine art the style of writing articles in general terms which have some specific message for those "in the know". It is a rotten style and should not be imitated.

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

An absolute minimum standard of "caring" about what other people think would require a minority firmly convinced of its correctness to keep trying to convince the rest, in spite of any obstacles (real or imaginary), and not just to abandon them.

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

FASCISM AND THE LEFT

Ron
12 June, 1980

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

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

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

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

THE CPA(ML)

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

The bankruptcy of Australian nationalism as an ideology for Communists is now pretty apparent, while the question of whether China has gone revisionist has been settled by open proclamations from the Chinese leadership themselves. Although "Vanguard" keeps coming out each week, the people behind it seem pretty discredited and there is little need to discredit them further. In Adelaide the "Worker Student Alliance for Australian Independence" has disintegrated, along with its newspaper "People's Voice". In Melbourne the entire editorial collective of "Independence Voice" quit some time ago, there was no "Independence platform" at Mayday and supporters of this line have been completely routed in "Community Radio" 3CR.

As a complete expression of E.F. Hill's bankruptcy we have the suggestion in "Australian Communist", that they want unity with us (previously described as "Soviet agents"), and actual signed articles from Hill proposing reunification with the CPA in "one Communist Party" (presumably based on the fact that the Chinese revisionists, having recently recognized the Communist Party of Italy, as well as the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, as great "Marxists", also wish to re-establish relations with the CPA, leaving Hill out in the cold).

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

OTHERS TOO

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

In Australia other groups supposedly on the left have exhibited a personal intolerance comparable to the Chinese parrots (the Spartacists come to mind). Scanning overseas "left" newspapers one gets the impression that narrow minded religious bigotry is pretty common, and even where it isn't taken to extremes, it is still present.

This is a common theme in anti-Communist propaganda from open representatives of the bourgeoisie, from Social Democrats, from Anarchists, from "Left" or "Council" Communists and what have you. Nevertheless, attacks on Marxism-Leninism from our opponents should be taken seriously, and indeed have been taken seriously by the classic exponents of Marxism. Some of the material from the Chinese Cultural Revolution is very valuable in understanding the emergence of fascist tendencies among alleged "Communists". For example Mao Tsetung's unpublished works, and the material criticizing Lin Piao (the "successor" who turned out to be a fascist).

CHINESE FASCISM

In the "gang of four's" Peking University Journal of September 1, 1976 there is an important article on "The Bureaucrat Class and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat" (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition No 4, Translation from "Selections from People's Republic of China Magazines" No 895, American Consulate General, Hong Kong. Reprinted in "Study Notes" No 8, Red Eureka Movement, August 1978):

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

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

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

DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

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

There never can be a guarantee against proletarian dictatorship turning into its opposite, and Communists in power must always be prepared for transition to underground life as Communists in opposition to capitalist roaders in power. Likewise in Communist Parties generally.

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

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

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

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

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

ARE WE DIFFERENT?

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

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

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

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

SOME FACTS

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

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

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

4. As a matter of fact it turned out that no Central Committee actually existed. At least one member of the Red Eureka Movement discovered that they were supposed to be a member of it, after wanting to express their views to it. This must be some sort of record in the international communist movement!
5. Other members of the Red Eureka Movement who were both on the Central Committee and knew it, were able to expose the lie that there had been some kind of Central Committee discussion about China and that documents expressing opposition had been circulated to the Central Committee etcetera.
6. Individual party members had to go outside the "channels" to get any kind of discussion and then discovered that the "channels" didn't really exist.
7. It was not a case of discussion being suppressed arbitrarily and decisions usurped, but of there being no provision whatever for seriously discussing and reversing a policy disagreed with.
8. This situation which existed long before it came to a head was put up with by people who would rebel strongly against similar fascist practices in any other social institution.
9. Many people on becoming aware of it, and seeing people branded as Soviet agents etcetera, took a cynical attitude that this was wrong but not a major question of principle requiring them to take a stand.

LIFE WASN'T MEANT TO BE EASY!

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

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

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

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

Its interesting to note how even people with no attachment to Russia, China or Albania have managed to persuade themselves that Vietnam is still worth supporting and feel a deep and personal threat to their whole ideology when this is questioned.

PRIESTS AND HORSES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The situation we are in calls urgently for working out where we are and where we are going. Without that, calls to press on more resolutely and with greater vigour will only result in people getting more lost. If some of us aren't any good at reading maps or surveying the surroundings, then they will have to make their contribution later. But it seems more likely that everyone would be able to make at least some contribution now, since even illiterates and blind people can study their surroundings and communicate with others.

CHIN UP, BACK STRAIGHT, EYES SHUT!

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

Communism is not the only ideology opposed to liberalism. Fascism opposes liberalism too. We have to make a clear distinction for example between the Communist idea that "bourgeois democracy is a fraud" and the Nazi idea that "democracy is a bourgeois fraud". It is one thing to want to widen and deepen and ultimately transcend democracy by going beyond such mere forms as majority voting to develop real participation. It is quite another thing to declare that ones policies have proved their own correctness and deliberately exclude others from even a vote, let alone a real say, on the matter.

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

DEAR ADELAIDE: PARTY BUILDING IS BULLSHIT!

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. For starters:

We "wipe off all the M.L. groups in the Western world."

What was actually said was this:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. Next:

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

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

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

3. Lastly:

We promote the terrible idea that to involve oneself in practical struggles at the moment is economist.

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

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

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

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

4. Absolutely Lastly:

Instead of reading our articles with ^{an} a priori set of conclusionsthat Melbourne R.E.M. is run by armchair Marxists and that hence our stuff must be wrong, why not just look at our stuff as it is written. It saves so much mis-understanding, so much ballsing around. Then we can more clearly see the differences and start to tackle them.

PAUL.

(draft 24/6/80)

YOU'RE ILL!

Ron

Intellectually, I am convinced that the approach taken towards differences between Melbourne and Adelaide REM by other members of the Melbourne branch is more correct than my own, more hostile and antagonistic attitude. However the article below expresses the way I feel. Although it probably isn't very helpful in itself, it may be useful for others to respond to. Please do.

There have been serious problems in REM Melbourne for some time. By no remote stretch of the imagination can these problems be blamed on anybody in Adelaide, and we must avoid the temptation to use the situation in Adelaide as an excuse to avoid facing up to the problems here. As far as hostile and unhelpful criticism from Adelaide is concerned, we should still "blame not the speaker but be warned by his words".

Nevertheless, I agree with Eric's report of 8 May 1980, on returning from Adelaide, that errors in their ideas and behaviour "constitute a serious problem because the Adelaide members think they are doing fine, whereas we in Melbourne are at least acutely aware of our failings".

It will be difficult to solve the Melbourne problem without taking up the Adelaide problem as well. For example, the Adelaide documents point out, to some extent correctly I think, that a number of excuses have been made in Melbourne which serve to justify and perpetuate disorganization and liberalism. Specifically, one of these arguments goes "It is better to be disorganised with a (comparatively) good line than to be organised with a bad line". This does not get across the need to deepen our understanding in a positive way, and it does encourage continuing disintegration of the group that ought to be developing a revolutionary line.

But my reaction to the Adelaide material is that I would much rather remain disorganized and liberal than become part of a tightly knit collective like that. It is precisely the fear of becoming yet another self-righteous, closed minded and paranoid sect that makes many of us very wary of taking on "responsibility for building an organization of communists". Our response should not be fear and withdrawal, but active ideological struggle to build a worthwhile organization. Nevertheless, a glance around the international and Australian "communist" movement, shows that the fear is well justified, although the withdrawal is not.

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that everything said in the Adelaide material about the current situation was basically correct. Could this conceivably justify their recent behaviour?

Specifically, let us assume the following:

1. People in Melbourne are advocating an "armchair Marxist" position that "theory is primary", while Adelaide has a more balanced appreciation of the unity of theory and practice. Armchair Marxism in Melbourne is a major cause of the lack of collective life, demoralization etc and has caused a number of members to leave.

2. People in Melbourne have persistently refused to get themselves organized despite helpful advice and repeated promises. This is associated with opposition to the very idea of building a Leninist party and stands in contrast to the vigorous growth of Adelaide as a result of its correct policies. (It passes understanding how a group of 7 people, any more than a group of a dozen or two, could even IMAGINE the correctness of its policies has been demonstrated by its growth. If they ever became a respectable propaganda sect with a few thousand members, or even a few hundred members, they would be completely insufferable, instead of just being a joke. Still, we are making assumptions, "for the sake of argument".)

3. Adelaide REM functions democratically as a collective with all members participating while Melbourne does not, but has only bourgeois, not communist democracy. Melbourne meetings are poorly attended and lifeless. Decisions are taken with only a minority present. The rank and file membership have no way to know what is happening. (Indeed so much so that "collectively Adelaide REM has a better appreciation of the real state of the organisation nationally than most Melbourne REM members").

Instead of seriously trying to solve their own problems, some Melbourne REM members have tried to arbitrarily push through a proposal that Charleton be transferred to Melbourne to solve the problems for them. Even then, they refuse to discuss Charlton's analysis of those problems, and declare that they have nothing to learn from Adelaide in solving them.

4. The "Melbourne Executive" has imposed a policy of publishing all material received in the Discussion Bulletin, which harms REM by encouraging badly written and armchair Marxist material. Adelaide's more professional approach has already demonstrated its correctness by the marked improvement in D.B.9 compared with previous issues and it would "be in the best interests of REM" that Adelaide "continue to control the DB".

5. In resolving contradictions, Adelaide advocates a policy of "cure the sickness to save the patient" while some "Melbourne Executive" members use "ruthless struggle and merciless blows". This includes using debating tactics to browbeat people into submission and deny them the right to argue a certain way or ask certain pertinent questions. It also involves attempting to win arguments by distorting an opponents position, wilfully exaggerating differences, treating genuine offers of help with suspicion, questioning motives, prematurely putting contentious issues to a vote, falsely separating ideological and organizational questions, demanding centralism when there is no democracy, not caring about the feelings of people losing votes and so on.

The above is meant to be a fair summary of the position stated in "Melbourne-Adelaide Differences" (21 April 1980), including the reference to articles in D.B. 9. It is not meant to be a caricature and any corrections or clarifications will be welcomed.

Obviously it would be a "debating trick" not to answer the many serious allegations made, either by throwing back other allegations, or by dismissing them as inconsequential. So a reply will be necessary. But BEFORE replying, and AS WELL as replying, I want to talk about something else, so you will just have to grin (or grit your teeth) and bear it.

Frankly I am not very impressed with the allegations and resent having to spend time discussing them. In ten years time nobody anywhere is going to give a damn about this whole business, and right now only one or two dozen are involved, and with varying degrees of interest or disgust. There really are much more important things to be concerned about. Even without going into the merits of the allegations, the mere fact that people can draw those conclusions and carry on in this way, shows a degree of self-righteousness and paranoia that is quite alien to building a revolutionary movement.

Nevertheless it is a simple fact that this sort of thing DOES keep happening in relations between and within left wing groups. It won't go away and it is a major obstacle to building a revolutionary movement. So we may as well put it on the agenda as a theoretical question worth tackling. Also, there are no grounds for assuming that the Adelaide membership of REM just happen to be a bunch of deadshits, so just letting them piss off is not a good idea.

What I want to talk about FIRST is the actions Adelaide REM members took as a result of the conclusions they drew about the current situation. Assume for now that the situation was EXACTLY as grim as they describe it. What responses would be reasonable or unreasonable faced with that grim situation?

First, let us agree that no matter how grim the situation, there are some responses that could not be justified.

For example Adelaide members could have summed up the situation further and decided that Melbourne REM was unshakeably in the grip of counter-revolutionaries who might be planning to kill them and that the only way to prevent this was to send over an assassination squad and kill one or two of the ringleaders first. This would, to put it mildly, be unreasonable.

On being accused of murder it would not I think be open to raise any of the allegations mentioned above as a defence. Nor could one claim that it was diversionary to discuss the accusation of murder before analysing the provocations that had allegedly led to it.

Although it sounds far fetched to discuss murder, the fact is that people do get killed as a result of internal disputes in Communist Parties and other left wing groups, generally for no good reason. We thought Hill was a fine comrade once, but he and his associates did quite seriously discuss bumping some of us off, and it was necessary to warn them against it. It was common enough in the Albanian Communist Party for Enver Hoxha to complain about guns being brought to Party meetings and common enough in China for Mao Tsetung to adopt the criteria of "have they actually killed anybody" in deciding whether to try to unite with hostile elements.

Indeed, an intellectual acceptance of that criteria, rather than any really strong feeling of comradeship, is the main reason I don't advocate just telling the Adelaide membership to piss off. After all, they haven't actually killed anybody.

M44

Now lets look at what the Adelaide members have done, which admittedly falls far short of killing anybody, and therefore should not be taken as grounds for writing them off completely.

Without consulting with ANY other members of REM they have unilaterally issued the following "Decisions arrived at on 20th March re divisions between Adelaide and Melbourne Branch":

1. They will not come to the national general meeting of REM which they had proposed should be held in May.
2. They will not accept any vote by the membership of REM as to where the paid organizer should work (but they do expect that he should continue to be paid by REM for doing as he pleases).
3. They no longer recognise decisions made by the Executive in Melbourne (unless they happen to agree with them).
4. "Until further notice the DISCUSSION BULLETIN will be completely controlled by the Adelaide branch not by the Executive. The following paragraph has been chopped out of the 'Blurb' in Discussion Bulletin 9:

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

(i.e. The membership of REM, as well as its "unrecognized" Executive has no right to make policy statements. Only Adelaide members may issue Editorial statements - like "Waiting for a Communist Party")

5. "We will not publish articles that fit our description of armchair Marxism.."
6. "We will publish attacks on the DB Editorial group (and controversial polemics in general) provided we think they are of interest to DB readers. We will not authorise such statements from the REM Executive but may publish them unauthorised. In general editorial replies will be published where we disagree."
7. "We feel that some detailed polemics, recriminations etc. would be best distributed internally in REM.."

None of this is particularly earth shattering and the long term future of the revolution is unlikely to be greatly influenced by what now happens to REM, its Executive or Discussion Bulletin.

Nevertheless I would feel pretty hostile if this happened in any trade union or other organization I belonged to, and would describe it as fascist. So I feel the same way about it happening in REM.

The most striking thing about these decisions is that they are indeed "decisions", not "proposals" or even ultimata. "Until further notice the Discussion Bulletin WILL be completely controlled...", "We will" do this and "We will" do that. Nowhere in the entire document is there even an appeal for other members of REM to SUPPORT the actions of the Adelaide members, let alone any hint that it might be up to them too, and not just the Adelaide branch, to decide the future of REM, its Executive, Discussion Bulletin and so on.

The document says "In our opinion Melbourne Executive only represents itself and does not represent the Melbourne Branch membership". Fine, for the sake of argument we can accept that as completely true. So where is the demand for a general meeting or conference to elect a new Executive? Or where is the proposal for the members of REM to adopt a new organizational structure? What exactly are the members of REM who do not live in Adelaide supposed to do? Crawl away somewhere and die quietly?

Lets get it clear, these "decisions" are outright fascist. Not even "social-fascist". "Social-fascism" would involve "socialism in words, fascism in deeds", but where are the socialist words? If social-fascists were staging a takeover bid, they would pretend that some dire emergency had made it necessary for them to assume "provisional and temporary authority" until proper elections could be held. Actually these days even most "reputable fascists" make that pretence too. It is outright Nazism to make naked declarations that leadership must go to the strongest, with no vote required.

What the Adelaide branch proposes other members of REM should do is made clear by paragraphs 6 and 7 above. They do not propose that we should join them in sweeping aside the rotten, undemocratic "Melbourne Executive" and adopting a new and better leadership or new and better policies. They explicitly rule out this possibility by rejecting any general meetings. What they propose is that we should simply accept that they have taken over REM's publication, and if we feel so inclined, submit articles criticizing them. If they feel so inclined they may publish such articles, but with "editorial replies" from the only group of REM members entitled to adopt policy as a group - namely those who happen to live in Adelaide.

This is apparantly meant quite seriously. People who previously offered to help with typing and printing the Discussion Bulletin, or who were responsible for distributing it, have even received letters from Charleton inquiring as to whether they will still help. Apparantly the possibility that they might not help has occurred to him, so he is asking, although the obvious certainty that nobody with any self respect would even consider helping, has not crossed his mind, or he would not bother to ask.

Further confirmation that it was meant seriously is provided in paragraph 7 above, by the suggestion that "recriminations" should be made "internally" - as though it was possible that a group whose publication had been hijacked would just mumble about this to themselves. A classic "explanation" for this fascist approach will be found on page 7 of "Melbourne Adelaide Differences":

"We want to encourage Melbourne REM members to continue (or begin) to contribute to the DB. At the same time we firmly believe it to be in the best interests of REM that we continue to control the DB. If individual contributors can't handle honest criticism of their writings then we think they are not taking the principles of criticism and self criticism seriously."

Thus people living in Melbourne are supposed to contribute to a publication in which they have no say whatever. Of course there are privately owned publications like that. We read them every day over breakfast (and they are often much more reliable than the publications of left sects). But at least their proprietors offer to pay people to write for or distribute their publications, while Charlton expects us to pay him! (He has even had the effrontery to demand an explanation of why we will be opposing his remaining a paid organizer, after explicitly declaring that he will not do the job).

If this is how our Adelaide comrades behave when they are a minority in a very small group, one shudders to imagine what they would be like if they were a majority, or if they held state power. In what way does their conception of how a communist organization should be run differ from E.F. Hill's? Except that he at least had the excuse of having at one time been generally accepted as a party leader, and he did not expect his opponents to degrade themselves by accepting his dictatorial rule and servilely continuing to work for him.

In response to this fascist garbage, Melbourne members of the REM National Executive did not, despite their tendency to "ruthless struggle and merciless blows", simply convene a meeting to expel the Adelaide branch. Instead they wrote a polite letter to Adelaide members (4 April), enclosing Charlton's pay as usual, "despite his decision not to carry out the functions of national organizer at present" (which meant that he had been suspended on full pay), asking that the Discussion Bulletin not be published until current problems were resolved, again asking Adelaide members to come to the general meeting in May, asking Charlton to come to Melbourne for discussions in April, and notifying Adelaide that two members would be coming to discuss things with them shortly.

The letter said "We wish to do everything we can to preserve unity" and was signed sarcastically "your humble and obedient servant". This provoked great indignation in Adelaide, and a declaration that "We are not interested in unity on the basis of slavery or cynicism, but on the basis of the principles outlined in this document" (24 April p7).

The Adelaide branch also reaffirmed that "We can see no reason to change any one of the 12 decisions of our document of 20 March, at this stage". (21 April).

Thus unity was declared impossible unless we accepted such "principles" as Adelaide's unilateral declaration that it would control the DB and Melbourne should continue to pay Charlton for doing it, and this "unity" of course must not be seen as slavery, or regarded cynically.

It is obvious that if we had written back unconditionally accepting Adelaide's principles and enthusiastically praising their initiative, the letter would have been (correctly) assumed to be sarcastic. Nobody unaffected by acute megalomania could possibly believe that the approach taken by Adelaide could lead to a resolution of differences rather than a split.

So although the "decisions" appeared to express an intention to unilaterally takeover REM, it was fairly natural to assume that this was not the real intention and the real intention was merely to make a dramatic gesture with a view to orchestrating a split. After all, if Adelaide had really wanted to become the leadership of REM, there would not at that time have been much immediate resistance to them doing so (although they would probably have ended up going the same way as the last lot that tried). They had already been given one third of the Executive and de facto control of the Discussion Bulletin, and Charlton had been invited to come to Melbourne as a national convenor responsible for sorting things out. As they point out, Melbourne was shrinking while Adelaide was growing so there was widespread acceptance that we should learn from them. Elections were due in June and they could quite possibly have elected a majority without opposition.

Discussion was noted in the minutes of a meeting of Melbourne Executive members as to whether Adelaide wanted to become the leadership or wanted to provoke a split, or whether there might be some explanation we don't know about for their incomprehensible behaviour. This provoked a reply that:

"The answer to this question is that we want to become the leadership. We think this is justified because Adelaide branch is democratic while Melbourne branch is not, our branch is growing while Melbourne branch is collapsing and our branch is doing most of the organizational work for REM. In short our policies are working while Melbourne branch policies are failing."

If we accept this declaration at its face value, then our Adelaide comrades are Nazis, who do not want to be elected to leadership but to establish some sort of Fuhrerprinzip so that they will not have to tolerate any opposition. In the light of our experience with Hill, and the Chinese experience with Lin Piao, this possibility cannot be dismissed. Nevertheless, I think it more likely that the Adelaide members who signed the declaration did not realize its implications.

But whatever they thought they were doing:

1. It was pretty rotten.
2. It should be repudiated.
3. Discussions can proceed even while Adelaide members persist with these viewpoints, but at the end of those discussions (however long they take), a formal repudiation of them should be required as a condition of unity.
4. A split would be better than either accepting this kind of shit, OR brushing it under the carpet and pretending it didn't happen. Because IT DID HAPPEN and it bloody well shouldn't have.
5. Seriously working out the problem would be better than a split.

(Unfinished)

INTRODUCTION TO ARTICLES REJECTED FOR THE 'DISCUSSION BULLETIN'

The articles which appear on the six following pages - dealing with various aspects of China - were written by Daryl and submitted for publication in the Discussion Bulletin. The Adelaide branch has decided that they will not be published. The following passages from Adelaide documents are relevant:

'Until further notice the Discussion Bulletin will be completely controlled by the Adelaide Branch, not by the Executive...

Q. What is our attitude to what will be published in the Discussion Bulletin in future?

We will not publish articles that fit our description of armchair Marxism. Eg. some articles consisting mainly of Mao quotations on the Cultural Revolution have not been published in DB 9 and will not be published in future.'

- 'Adelaide REM : Decisions arrived at on 20th March 1980 re Divisions between Adelaide and Melbourne Branch'

'Our approach is a professional one, while the Melb. Execs. is an amateur one. The Melb. Exec. has pushed for the publication of all material received so as to facilitate the flow of material. We don't believe that this policy has worked. We believe that the publication of armchair Marxist and badly written material will harm REM, not help it.

Because we have exercised control over DB 9 we think it is a better DB and will help REM to grow. It breaks with the "anything goes" policy of the Melb. Exec. and overall it makes some attempt to link theory and practice.

We want to encourage Melb. REM members to continue (or begin) to contribute to the DB. At the same time we firmly believe it to be in the best interests of REM that we continue to control the DB. If individual contributors can't handle honest criticism of their writings then we think they are not taking the principles of criticism and self criticism seriously.'

- 'Melbourne-Adelaide Differences', page 7

When I discussed the matter with Charlton in Adelaide on the 26/27 April weekend, he told me that he would not object to using any one of the articles as 'filler' material but would not be in favour of printing them all in the one DB. (If I have misquoted him I am sure he will correct me.)

Readers may judge for themselves whether the articles are armchair Marxist or badly written; whether their publication would represent an 'anything goes' policy; and whether they are good for anything more than filling the odd blank space.

However it may be worth mentioning that the articles were written mainly for the effects they might have on people still influenced by the CPA(ML) and/or the Chinese leadership, both through such people reading them (and some of those people do read the DB) and through others using the information in the articles as ammunition in discussions with those who have not rejected the new revisionists.

Eric

CULTURAL REVOLUTION & THE REVISIONIST
THEORY OF PRODUCTIVE FORCES.

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

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

From the 9th Congress Report in 1969 we read:

"As the 16-Point Decision indicate,

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is a powerful motive force for the development of the social productive forces in our country.

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

" 'Grasp revolution, promote production' - this principle is absolutely correct. It correctly explains the relationship between revolution and production, between consciousness and matter, between the superstructure and the economic base and between the relations of production and the productive forces. Chairman Mao always teaches us: 'Political work is the life-blood of all economic work.' Lenin denounced the opportunists who were opposed to approaching problems politically. 'Politics cannot but have precedence over economics. To argue differently means forgetting the ABC of Marxism.' (Lenin, Collected Works, Chinese ed., Vol. 32, p.72.) Lenin again stated: To put politics on a par with economics also means 'forgetting the ABC of Marxism'. (ibid.) Politics is the concentrated expression of economics. If we fail to make revolution in the superstructure, fail to arouse the broad masses of the workers and peasants, fail to criticize the revisionist line, fail to expose the handful of renegades, enemy agents, capitalist-roaders in power and counter-revolutionaries and fail to consolidate the leadership of the proletariat, how can we further consolidate the socialist economic base and further develop the socialist productive forces? This is not to replace production by revolution but to use revolution to command production, promote it and lead it forward. We must make investigations and study, and actively and properly solve the many problems of policy in struggle-criticism-transformation on the economic front in accordance with Chairman Mao's general line of 'Going all out, aiming high and achieving greater, faster, better and more economical results in building socialism', in accordance with his great strategic concept 'Be prepared against war, be prepared against natural disaster, and do everything for the people' and with the series of principles such as 'take agriculture as the foundation and industry as the leading factor'. We must bring the revolutionary initiative and creativeness of the people of all nationalities into full play, firmly grasp

revolution and energetically promote production and fulfill and overfulfill our plans for developing the national economy. It is certain that the great victory in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution will continue to bring about new leaps forward on the economic front and in our cause of socialist construction as a whole." (pp 60-64, FLP 1969.)

On page 39 of the same report we read:

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

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

"As we all know, the political report to the Ninth Congress was drawn up under Chairman Mao's personal guidance. Prior to the congress, Lin Piao had produced a draft political report in collaboration with Chen Po-ta. They were opposed to continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat, contending that the main task after the Ninth Congress was to develop production. This was a refurbished version under new conditions of the same revisionist trash that Liu Shao-chi and Chen Po-ta had smuggled into the resolution of the Eighth Congress, which alleged that the major contradiction in our country was not the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, but that 'between the advanced socialist system and the backward productive forces of society.' Naturally, this draft by Lin Piao and Chen Po-ta was rejected by the Central Committee. Lin Piao secretly supported Chen Po-ta in the latter's open opposition to the political report drawn up under Chairman Mao's guidance, and it was only after his attempts were frustrated that Lin Piao grudgingly accepted the political/^{line} of the Central Committee and read its political report to the congress." (This statement, by the way, contradicts the claim made by Teng and others about a year later that Lin Piao was pushing an ultra-left line. This point may seem academic until you look at how the revisionists have used Lin Piao to discredit the Cultural Revolution.)

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JANUARY STORM by N.S.

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

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

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

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

"After the working meeting of the Central Committee the emphasis was on criticizing the bourgeois reactionary line. As the criticism of this line aroused the revolutionary enthusiasm of many revolutionaries, the revolutionary intellectuals and the young students were the first to achieve consciousness, which is in accordance with the laws of revolutionary development. In January of this year the Shanghai workers rose, as did the workers of the whole country and the peasants too, when the January Storm swept across the country. The development of the movement showed that the workers and peasants are still the main force Only when the broad masses of workers and peasants arose was all that bourgeois stuff thoroughly smashed; while the revolutionary intellectuals and the young students had to fall back into a subsidiary place." (From Mao's July 1967 conversations, quoted in Revolution, Vol 5, No 1, RCP(US) p25.)

"This is one class overthrowing another. This is a great revolution" (From Mao's Talk at a Meeting of the Central Cultural Revolution Group, 9 Jan. 1967; Mao Tsetung Unrehearsed, p225.)

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

"The twists and reversals in the revolutionary movement further brought home to the broad masses the importances of political power: The main reason why Liu Shao-chi and his gang could do evil was that they had usurped the power of the proletariat in many units and localities, and the main reason why the revolutionary masses were repressed was that power was not in the hands of the proletariat in those places. In some units,

the socialist system of ownership existed only in form, but in reality the leadership had been usurped by a handful of renegades, enemy agents and capitalist-roaders in power, or it remained in the hands of former capitalists. Especially when the capitalist-roaders in power failed in their scheme to suppress the revolution on the pretext of "grasping production" and whipped up the evil counter-revolutionary wind of economism, the broad masses came to understand still better that only by recapturing the lost power was it possible for them to defeat the capitalist-roaders in power completely. Under the leadership and with the support of Chairman Mao and the proletarian headquarters headed by him, the working class in Shanghai with its revolutionary tradition came forward courageously and, uniting with the broad revolutionary masses and revolutionary cadres, seized power from below in January 1967 from the capitalist roaders in power in the former Municipal Party Committee and Municipal People's Council.

"Chairman Mao summed up in good time the experience of the January storm of revolution in Shanghai and issued his call to the whole country: 'Proletarian revolutionaries, unite and seize power from the handful of Party persons in power taking the capitalist road!' Following that Chairman Mao gave the instruction: 'The People's Liberation Army should support the broad masses of the Left'. He went on to sum up the experience of Heilungkiang Province and other provinces and municipalities, laid down the principles and policies for the establishment of revolutionary committees which embrace representatives of the revolutionary cadres, representatives of the People's Liberation Army and representatives of the revolutionary masses, constituting a revolutionary three-in-one combination, and thus pushed forward the nation-wide struggle for the seizure of power." (Report to the Ninth Congress of the CPC, p38-40, FLP Peking 1969.)

.....

MAO ON THE GREAT PROLETARIAN CULTURAL REVOLUTION

"The current Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is absolutely necessary and most timely for consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat, preventing capitalist restoration and building socialism". (Quoted in Ninth Congress Report, p4 FLP edition.)

"it seems that it won't do not to carry out the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, for our foundation is not solid. Judging from my observations, I am afraid that in a fairly large majority of factories - I don't mean all or the overwhelming majority of them - leadership was not in the hands of genuine Marxists and the masses of workers. Not that there were no good people among those in charge of the factories. There were. There were good people among the secretaries, deputy secretaries and members of Party committees and among Party branch secretaries. But they were following that line of Liu Shao-chi - simply resorting to material incentives, putting profit in command and, instead of promoting proletarian politics, handing out bonuses, and so forth." (Quote from Mao's speech at the First Plenary Session of the Ninth Central Committee on April 28, 1969.)

"In the past we waged struggles in rural areas, in factories, in the cultural field, and we carried out the socialist education movement. But all this failed to solve the problem because we did not find a form, a method, to arouse the broad masses to expose our dark aspects openly, in an allround way and from below. (Quoted in Ninth Congress Report, p27 FLP edition.)