

# MARXISM TODAY

FOR AUSTRALIAN INDEPENDENCE  
FOR AUSTRALIAN SOCIALISM





This booklet is a tribute to the memory of our late comrade Dulcie Steffanou, who promoted the study of Marxism and its application to the Australian revolutionary struggle.

The articles selected were originally published in the Marxism Today section of the newspaper Vanguard in the period between 1990 and 2007. They represent the political position of the CPA (M-L) on key issues confronting the Australian working class in the revolutionary struggle to win national independence and socialism.

We acknowledge all the writers and other comrades who have contributed to Marxism Today over many years.

We believe these articles will be timely and useful for all those seeking to come to grips with the theoretical and practical questions of building a revolutionary people's movement for fundamental change.

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# The Origins of Marxism

*The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism* was written by Lenin in 1913. In this short article, Lenin summarised the main elements of Marxism and explained their historical origins

## Philosophy, Political Economy and Socialism

Lenin's writes in the introduction, "...the genius of Marx consists precisely in the fact that he furnished answers to questions the foremost minds of humanity has already raised. His teachings arose as the direct and immediate continuation of the teachings of the greatest representatives of philosophy, political economy and socialism."

Unlike bourgeois philosophy where the individual "great thinker" takes all the glory for their wonderful ideas, Marxism pays respect to ideas which precede it and form its foundation. In the nineteenth century, three major ideological streams were...

- German philosophy, represented by Hegel and Feurbach
- English political economy, represented by Adam Smith and David Ricardo
- French utopian socialism, represented by St. Simon, Fourier and Proudhon

Marx and Engels not only developed these particular areas but also drew them together into a comprehensive system which, for the first time, could provide rational answers to questions of the natural world and human society.

## Historical Materialism

In the area of philosophy, Marx and Engels

developed dialectical materialism, the theory of constant change driven by internal contradictions, "...development by leaps, catastrophes and revolutions; interruptions of gradualness; the transformation of quantity into quality..." (Lenin *Karl Marx* 1914)

Modern scientific developments continue to re-affirm the validity of the Marxist theory of change in the material world, but Marx and Engels went further. They applied their theory to changes in human history. "Deepening and developing philosophical materialism, Marx completed it, extended its knowledge of nature to the knowledge of human society. Marx's historical materialism was the greatest achievement of scientific thought."

In their study of historical social systems, Marx and Engels realised that the economic mode of production and the subsequent division of society into classes were critically important in understanding the dominant ideas and values of each society. "Just as man's knowledge reflects nature (i.e., developing matter) which exists independently of him, so man's social knowledge (i.e., his various views and doctrines – philosophical, religious, political and so forth) reflects the economic system of society. Political institutions are the superstructure on the economic foundation."

## Surplus Value and Capitalist Crisis

In *Capital*, Marx developed the labour theory of value which proved "...the value of every commodity is determined by the quantity of socially necessary labour time spent in its production." From this, Marx revealed the creation of surplus value as the basis of capitalist exploitation of workers. "The worker spends one part of the day covering the cost of maintaining himself and his family (wages), while the other part of the day the worker toils without remuneration, creating for the capitalist surplus value, the source of profit, the source of wealth of the capitalist class.

The doctrine of surplus value is the cornerstone of Marx's economic theory."

the true position of the proletariat in the general system of capitalism."

Marx's economic theory covered the growth of monopoly and finance capital, the periodical crises of overproduction and the inherent anarchy of capitalism. "By destroying small-scale production, capital leads to an increase in productivity of labour and to the creation of a monopoly position for the associations of big capitalists. Production itself becomes more and more social – hundreds of thousands and millions of workers become bound together in a systematic economic organism – but the product the collective labour is appropriated by a handful of capitalists. The anarchy of production grows, as do crises, the furious chase after markets and the insecurity of existence of the mass of the population."

#### Scientific Socialism

The Marxist road to socialism is scientific when compared to the visionary schemes of the earlier utopians. It is scientific because it recognizes the reality of class struggle as the main agent for change in society, as opposed to the concept of just changing individual attitudes. "...the stormy revolutions which everywhere in Europe, and especially in France, accompanied the fall of feudalism, of serfdom, more and more clearly revealed the struggle of classes as the basis and the driving force of the whole development."

Marx and Engels identified the proletariat (working class) as the class created by capitalism, the class with "nothing to lose but their chains", the class with the historical mission to liberate itself and all humanity from the tyranny of class rule forever. Marxism is not content with merely interpreting the world, but strives to change it. "Marx's philosophical materialism alone has shown the proletariat the way out of the spiritual slavery in which all oppressed classes have hitherto languished. Marx's economic theory alone has explained

# *The World Outlook of Historical Materialism*

Marx and Engels developed the philosophy of Historical Materialism to explain the process of historical change – the rise and fall of social systems, of different social classes, of political and religious ideas.

## The Mode of Production and Exchange

From their extensive studies of history, they concluded that the process of history in any given epoch was inexorably linked to the mode of economic production and the method of exchange of goods produced. The mode of production might vary from ancient-era individual making of items for personal use, to feudal-era artisan manufacture of goods for sale, through to the global production-lines of modern imperialism.

“The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products are exchanged. From this point of view, the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men’s brains, not in men’s better insights into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange.” (Engels *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* 1880)

## Ideas Reflect Economic Organisation

In all human societies, the dominant political ideas and organisation in the superstructure of society are founded on the method of production and exchange in the economic base. Marx and Engels saw as a law of human development that ideas reflect the social level of society, that they cannot arise “before their time” and are therefore limited by the social organisation and technological development of their era.

“In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.” (Marx *Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* 1859)

## The Scope of Human Ideas

Critics of Marxism have tried to trivialise this important breakthrough in philosophy by reducing Marxism to a simple theory of “economic determinism”. Marx and Engels however, saw the issues at a much more profound level than this.

Defining the economic base as the cause of social development and change does not do away with the role of human ideas leading to change, but it certainly does condition the scope and timing of these ideas. “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make

it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.” (Marx *18th. Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* 1852)

In other words, ideas don't just fall from the skies, before society has passed through the necessary stages of social development where the new ideas can take hold.

### Changing the World

Marxists not only want to interpret the world; they want to change it for the better. Marx and Engels analysed the historical rise of the capitalist system of production and exchange. They recognised the new class of proletarians (wage-workers) as the historical agent of future change – the means by which human society would move from a long history of class struggle towards social harmony and the abolition of classes altogether. “All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.” (Marx, Engels *Manifesto of the Communist Party* 1848)

The process of change, though inevitable in the historical sense, is not simply mechanical – it is shaped and determined by the whole complexity of material and ideological elements in society. “Political, juridical, philosophical, literary, artistic, etc., development is based on economic development. But all these react upon one another and also upon the economic base. It is not that the economic position is the cause and alone active, while everything else only has a passive effect. There is, rather, interaction on the basis of the economic necessity, which ultimately always asserts itself.” (Engels *Letter to Starkenburg* 1894)

Marx and Engels studied the way things

change and developed the theory of dialectical materialism which saw change arising from irreconcilable contradictions within the development of a thing. In terms of society, revolutions which change the social system and mode of production arise from irreconcilable class struggle between a decaying ruling class and a new emerging class.

Far from sitting back and waiting for “economic determinism” to change society, Marx and Engels vigorously supported the efforts of workers to form trade unions to consciously resist capitalist exploitation. They worked tirelessly to establish revolutionary organisations to provide the working class with ideological and political leadership for the class struggle.

Historical materialism shows the tide of history is now running out for imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism.



# Class

Class is not something invented by Karl Marx and the Communists, even though Marxist ideology places great emphasis on the issue of class. It views the progress of humankind as the history of struggles between contending classes. It regards human thought as a reflection of a person's class position in society.

Marxism champions the cause of the working class. It stands for the abolition of classes and class society. To understand and make use of Marxism, it is necessary to understand the origins of the division of society into classes. Frederick Engels' book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* is the recommended Marxist work on this subject.

## Primitive clan communism

In fact classes did not exist at all when humankind first evolved over 4 million years ago. For countless thousands of years humankind lived in small bands and struggled with nature just to exist. The quest for food was a full-time activity – gathering fruits and berries, hunting small birds and animals, trapping fish. The pace of change, evolution, was extremely slow, but gradually humankind learned to use wood, stone and bones to fashion simple tools and more efficient weapons. Fire was harnessed. Later developments brought the evolution of language, the domestication of animals, subsistence agriculture, clay-fired pottery and the smelting of metals.

There was no notion of private property, even though a primitive division of labour arose with men mainly engaged in hunting and women in cooking, sewing, gardening, and looking after children. There was no exploitation of one part of society by another, no division into classes,

as all the products of community labour were owned in common and distributed equally. Consequently, as Lenin noted, "...there was no state, when social connections, society itself, discipline and the labour distribution were maintained by the force of custom, traditions, by the authority or respect enjoyed by the elders of the clan or the women, who at that time not only had equal rights with men, but sometimes even greater rights, when there was no specific category of specialists to rule." (V. Lenin *The State* 1919)

## Slavery

Class division of society only arose with the domestication of herd animals, and the emergence of pastoral tribes 6-7000 years ago. Engels - "The increase of production in all branches – stock-raising, agriculture, domestic handicrafts – enabled human labour power to produce more than was necessary for its maintenance." This surplus production became the basis for exchange between other tribes, creating a division of wealth between different groups. Engels continues, "The addition of more labour power became desirable. It was furnished by war; the captured enemies were transformed into slaves... Out of the first great division of social labour arose the first great division of society into two classes – masters and slaves, exploiters and exploited." The captured slaves together with their land, tools and herds became the property of the captors, private property, rather than the common property of old. "The distinction between rich and poor was added to that between free men and slaves. This and the new division of labour constitute a new division of society into classes". (F. Engels) Hereditary privilege based on father right became common. The invention of written languages left a record of the activities of this new class of slave-owners.

The great slave societies including ancient Egypt, Babylon, Rome and Greece were all

characterised by a militaristic state apparatus based on cruel suppression of the slaves and the poor. Slaves never got a vote in the Roman “republic” and the much-acclaimed “democracy” of the Greeks was confined to a small minority of privileged slave-owning aristocrats. Slavery prevailed for thousands of years, ancient history being sign-posted by wars of conquest and slave revolts. Thus the division of society into classes resulted in struggle between the classes; struggle by the ruling class to maintain the status quo, and struggle by the oppressed and exploited class to change it. The heroic rebellion led by the Roman gladiator Spartacus has inspired oppressed people through the ages.

### Feudalism

The greater productivity of freed slaves working their own land was recognised, adding to the wealth of society. The price of their freedom was the system of feudalism which began to emerge in Europe from 8-900 AD. Under feudalism the slave became a peasant/artisan bonded to a feudal lord and required to surrender a portion of their labour/goods/harvest to their “master”. As the power of this class of feudal lords increased, they took ownership of the previously common land (the “commons” of England, for example) and forced the peasants to pay taxes and to work the lord’s land more often than their own small plot. Agricultural and handicraft production was primarily for consumption, with only a small portion used for exchange or sale. Peasants were regularly conscripted to serve in the armies that plundered the wealth of adjoining lands – and this became a greater source of wealth than the feudal lords could acquire by further squeezing their own already impoverished peasants.

Harsh exploitation and endless war often gave rise to rebellion, and the history of Europe and Asia during the Middle Ages contains many examples of mutinies and peasant uprisings,

such as the Peasant’s Revolt in England (led by Wat Tyler 1381). The class struggle of the peasants was always met with violence.

### Capitalism

As the wealth of the ruling feudal class increased, the production of goods for exchange rather than consumption, ie, commodity production came into being. It was regulated and popularised by the use of minted coin. A new class, the merchants, appeared, quickly followed by the lenders of money, the usurers. Together this emerging middle section, the “bourgeoisie”, preyed upon the feudal class, who in turn leant more heavily on the peasants and artisans. Millions starved or were forced to leave the lands of their ancestors to find casual work.

Class struggle intensified between the new class of rich merchants and the decaying feudal class, represented by the various monarchies. The Civil War in England (1642) and the French Revolution (1789) were examples of violent revolutionary class struggle which overthrew many hereditary privileges, and championed the equal rights of every individual (to exploit). Needless to say, the interests and welfare of the peasants hardly got a look in, although most of the blood spilt was peasant blood.

### Proletariat – the Working Class

The impoverished peasants who survived starvation, epidemics and war had nowhere to go other than the workshops and factories of the new bourgeoisie. At the moment the bourgeoisie became capitalists, the peasants and artisans were turned into proletarians- a new class of workers with nothing to sell but their labour-power. The industrial revolution boosted the productive capacity of society, adding to the accumulated wealth of the capitalists who financed world-wide colonial conquests on a massive scale. Less advanced

societies where feudalism (and even remnants of slavery) prevailed were dragged into the modern colonial world. In these places class struggle took the form of national liberation movements (such as in India, Algeria and Indo-China) in addition to struggle against the local feudal rulers and capitalists.

In the opening words of the *Communist Manifesto* Marx wrote, "The history of hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes."

These words still hold true.

# *Dialectical Materialism – the Marxist method of analysis*

Marx and Engels developed the theory of dialectical materialism to explain the laws of change in the natural world, including changes in human society.

Some of this material is admittedly difficult to digest in one sitting, as it is frequently mixed with unfamiliar historical references. A simple summary of the ideas of dialectical materialism was written in 1939 by the British Marxist Emile Burns in *What is Marxism?*.

## Materialist conception of the world

“...Marxism regards human beings, and therefore human society, as part of nature. Man’s origin is therefore to be found in the development of the world: man developed out of previous forms of life, in the course of whose evolution thought and conscious action made their appearance. This means that matter, reality that is not conscious, existed before mind, reality that is conscious. But this also means that matter, external reality, exists independently of the mind. This view of nature is known as materialism”.

The materialist viewpoint is totally opposed to the idealist conception that “the mind, whether human or divine, is the primary reality and that matter, if it has any reality at all, is secondary”. The idealist position holds that we can never understand the “mysterious ways” of the world and flies in the face of all scientific knowledge and discovery.

## Man and Nature

However, there is more to the issue than an abstract debate between materialism and idealism – it determines the practical actions people take and their consequences. This is because, as Burns puts it, “Man does not only observe external Nature: he changes it and himself with it. Secondly, the materialist standpoint also means that what is in men’s minds, what mind is conscious of, is external reality; ideas are reflections, as it were, of reality, they have their origin in external reality.”

Mankind is unique among the animal world, able to consciously alter his environment rather than passively adapting to whatever exists. As the real environment changes, new ideas arise changing not only the environment but also human understanding and consciousness about their situation within that environment.

## Scientific search for truth, for facts

Whether or not these new ideas are true is tested in the experience of real life. They are modified and enhanced by this experience. Marxist theory is based on the relentless search for truth and knowledge, free from preconceptions and prejudices. “Marxism, therefore, bases all its theories on the materialist conception of the world, and from this standpoint it examines the world, it tries to discover the laws which govern the world and – since man is a part of reality – the laws which govern the movement of human society. And it tests all its discoveries, all its conclusions, by actual experience, rejecting or modifying conclusions and theories which, to use the simplest phrase, do not fit the facts.”

In this sense, we can use the term “scientific Marxism”, meaning that our theories, ideas, concepts and actions are all subject to continuous testing and refinement. This approach recognises that our knowledge is

only partial, relative knowledge and is not absolute and unchanging.

### Dialectical materialism

Marx and Engels looked closely at the process of change in both the natural world and in human society. From their life-long studies they confirmed that the process of change is a dialectical one; that is change comes about through the resolution of opposing aspects within the essence of things; a unity of opposites that is at the same time a struggle of opposites. The four key features of this dialectical relationship were explained by Emile Burns ...

1. "Every ordinary person also realises, if he examines things at all, that nothing, so to speak, leads an entirely independent existence; that everything is dependent on other things." Burns gives the example of water – it is only water depending on temperature – it may become steam or ice. These days the interdependence of all life forms is a clearly recognised scientific fact that few would argue.

2. "The dialectical approach also sees that nothing in the world is really static, that everything is moving, changing, either rising and developing or declining and dying away." Burns here gives the example of the earth itself, together with all other living things. Motion, movement, development, decay; all things are in transition, whether on the micro scale of atomic particles, or on a macro scale such as the entire diversity of nature or the complexity of human society.

3. "...the development that takes place in things is not simple and smooth, but is, so to speak, broken at certain points in a very sharp way." Burns again uses the example of water; it undergoes quantitative change in temperature up to certain point, and then, suddenly, it "completely changes its character"

and becomes steam or ice.

4. "The dialectical approach to things shows that they are not simple, not completely of one character. Everything has its positive and negative side; everything has within it features that are developing, becoming more dominant, and features that are passing away, becoming less dominant. One feature is always expanding, the other resisting that expansion. And it is the conflict between these opposites, the struggle of the rising factor to destroy the domination of the other, and the struggle of the dominant factor to prevent the other factor from developing, which is the content of the whole process of change which ends ultimately in a violent break." In human history this phenomenon is repeated in the form of revolution when the rule of one particular class (slave-owners/feudal lords/capitalists) is overthrown and replaced by the rule of another (free serfs/capitalists/proletariat).

### Summary of dialectical materialism

Emile Burns provides a useful summary of the theory of dialectical material:

"It is the view which holds that reality exists apart from our consciousness of it; and that this reality is not in isolated fragments, but interdependent; that it is not static but in motion, developing and dying away; that this development is gradual up to a point, when there is a sharp break and something new appears; that the development takes place because of internal conflict, and the sharp break is the victory of the rising factor over the dying factor."

Marxists try to use their understanding of the process of change in both their strategic and tactical approach to practical problems. They look for the contradictions within issues, situations, even individuals; for the struggle between opposing aspects; for the trend

which is rising. "This gives men and women the first chance of consciously fitting their actions to a process that is actually taking place, a movement that, as Marx said, is "going on before our own eyes" if we care to see it. It gives us a guide to our actions which cannot be provided by any abstract principles or views which in fact represent some static outlook of the past."

# *The principal contradiction and the principal aspect of a contradiction*

The Marxist-Leninist theory of dialectical materialism deals with the issue of contradiction. What do we mean by the term contradiction?

Lenin wrote, "Dialectics in the proper sense is the study of contradiction in the very essence of objects: not only are appearances transitory, mobile, fluid, demarcated only by conventional boundaries, but the essence of things is so as well." (*Conspectus of Lectures on the History of Philosophy*).

Lenin also wrote, "The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts is the essence, one of the "essentials," one of the principal, if not the principal, characteristics or features of dialectics." (*On the Question of Dialectics*)

## Mao Zedong studied contradiction in detail

Mao Zedong analysed the question of contradiction in great detail in his article *On Contradiction*. He determined that contradiction exists in the process of development of all things and that a movement of opposites exists in the process of development of each thing from beginning to end ("universality of contradiction").

According to Mao Zedong, "the fundamental cause of the development of a thing lies in the contradictoriness within the thing. This internal contradiction exists in every single thing, hence its motion and development.

Contradictoriness within a thing is the fundamental cause of its development, while its interrelations and interactions with other things are secondary causes."

Mao pointed out that every form of motion contains within itself its own particular contradiction that distinguishes it from other forms (particularity of contradiction).

He also investigated the questions of the principal contradiction in a process and the principal aspect of a contradiction. In a complex process there can be many contradictions. The principal contradiction determines and influences the existence and development of the other contradictions. The principal aspect of a contradiction of a contradiction is the one playing the leading role in the contradiction. The seemingly dry philosophical discussion is actually vital to the practical questions of building a revolutionary movement and winning national independence and socialism.

In particular, unless we understand the questions of the principal contradiction and the principal aspect of a contradiction, we cannot correctly analyse the processes taking place in the world or in Australian society.

## Identify the principal contradictions in a process

If we don't identify the principal contradiction in any complex situation involving several contradictions, we would fail to identify our real enemies or take advantage of the contradictions between various classes in Australian society to further the revolutionary cause.

For example, the contradiction between the people of the world and US imperialism is the principal contradiction in world affairs. There are other contradictions such as the contradictions between US imperialism and other imperialist powers such as Britain,

Japan and Germany.

The principal contradiction in Australia is the contradiction between the people and US imperialism. There are other contradictions such as the contradiction between the working class and the Australian capitalist class and the contradiction between the Australian capitalist class and US imperialism.

Having identified the principal contradiction, the revolutionary forces can make use of the other contradictions to isolate US imperialism and hasten its defeat. It is essential that we do not confuse the various contradictions. To do so leads us to commit "left" or "right" errors.

#### The principal aspect of a contradiction

As we said, the principal aspect of a contradiction is the one playing the leading role in the contradiction. The nature of a thing is determined mainly by the principal aspect of a contradiction, the aspect which has gained the dominant position.

However the situation is not static, the principal and non-principal aspects can transform themselves into each other.

A look at history shows this to be true. Once capitalism was the secondary aspect of the contradiction between capitalism and feudalism. Capitalism became the dominant aspect over feudalism. The working class is the secondary aspect its contradiction with the capitalist class. Eventually the roles will be reversed and the working class will become the dominant aspect, as has happened in countries where socialist revolution occurred. US imperialism is the dominant aspect of its contradictions with the people of the world. Eventually US imperialism will be defeated and the people of the world will be the dominant aspect of the contradiction.

As Mao wrote in *On Contradiction*, "Changes in class society are due chiefly to the development of the internal contradictions in society, that is, the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, the contradiction between classes and the contradiction between the old and the new, it is the development of these contradictions that pushes society forward and gives the impetus for the supersession of the old society by the new."



# The Vision of Socialism

Karl Marx defined Communism as a classless and therefore stateless society, in which all people contributed to the common cause, and in return received all their social needs; "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!" (K. Marx *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1875)

## Transition to classless society

Marx recognised that it was not possible to establish communist society in one hit, and that a fairly long transition period would be necessary to create the material conditions and to develop the social outlook necessary. This first stage of communism, the stage of transition, has been called Socialism. "This socialism is the declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the abolition of class distinctions generally, to the abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionising of all the ideas that result from these social relations." (K. Marx *The Class Struggles in France*, 1850)

Marxist socialism differs greatly from the earlier visions of the utopian socialists such as Saint-Simon, Fourier and Robert Owen, who saw socialism mainly in terms of reforms and moral re-education to make capitalism more "humane". Marx, however, demonstrated that people's thinking, their consciousness, would only change in the process of changing the economic base of society, and that "socialism" was a necessary stage in this revolutionary process. "...no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in

modern society, nor yet the struggle between them...What I did that was new was to prove: 1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production; 2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; 3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society." (K. Marx *Letter to Weydemeyer*, 1852)

## Marxist socialism

The revolutionary smashing of the old state power by the working class is only the beginning of the much greater, more complex and difficult task of building a new society. "What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges." (K. Marx *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1875)

In his famous work, "*Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*", Frederick Engels spelt out some of the fundamental principles by which a socialist society would progress in the direction of communism. Central to this is the transformation of the economic base of society. "...the economic structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical, and other ideas of a given historical period." (F. Engels *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, 1877)

Therefore, Marx and Engels saw the necessity to establish planned and regulated production to overcome the random anarchy of capitalist production, and to produce goods and services to meet the real needs of the people rather

than just for profit. This controlled economic development would also avoid the boom-bust cycles characteristic of capitalism. "But with the taking over by society of the productive forces, the social character of the means of production and of the products will be utilised by the producers with a perfect understanding of its nature, and instead of being a source of disturbance and periodical collapse, will become the most powerful lever of production itself."

"...With this recognition, at last, of the real nature of the productive forces of today, the social anarchy of production gives place to a social regulation of production upon a definite plan, according to the needs of the community and of each individual." (F. Engels *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, 1877)

#### State capitalism is not socialism

Socialism should not be confused with government-operated industries that function within modern capitalist economies. These exist as a means for the capitalists, as a class, to avoid the huge cost of providing all the capital for the construction and maintenance of infrastructure such as roads, railways, seaports, power grids, etc. Nor do they wish to pay for services considered unprofitable, such as education and medical facilities in working class suburbs, emergency services, armed forces, and so on. No, the whole population is forced to pay for these things through taxation and government charges.

However, if any government-operated industries or services become efficient and profitable, or show some potential, the political representatives of the capitalist class call for their "privatisation". If important private industries stagnate or run at a loss, the same people demand government subsidies or "intervention". In either case, the needs of the people play second fiddle to the greed of the capitalists.

"Nationalisation" of key industries seems like a progressive reform that would benefit the working people, but the real key is which class has control, which class holds state power, whose class interests will be served?

All that government-operated enterprises prove is that capitalists are not really necessary for the production of goods and services, and that even huge enterprises can be successfully operated without them stepping in to cream off the profits. "State ownership of the productive forces is not the solution of the conflict, but concealed within it are the technical conditions that form the elements of that solution." (F. Engels *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, 1877)

#### Transforming the economic base of society

There is a constant chorus from the media monopolies that the whole idea of socialism and the so-called "centralised economy" has been discredited by the collapse of the Soviet Union. But what are the facts of history? What is the current reality in the world today?

#### The facts are...

The Soviet Union under Lenin, and later Stalin, established a socialist economy based on working class ownership of industry and collectivised agriculture, which delivered the most rapid growth of industry and agriculture ever seen. Centralised planning in the form of successive five-year schemes dramatically raised the living standards, health, education and cultural life of many millions of workers and peasants.

It was only in the early sixties, when the revisionist leadership of the Soviet Party turned away from socialism, from factory and workplace committees and collectivised agriculture in particular, that economic decay set in. Today's crude gangster-capitalism has created even more economic

collapse, poverty, and despair than the most bureaucratic or bastardised form of socialism ever practised by the old Soviet Union.

In the People's Republic of China, the socialist economic system has propelled China from abject poverty into the modern world in a mere fifty years. The media monopolies either ignore this, or try to pretend that any progress is due solely to international trade deals and new technologies recently acquired from the West. While China has been able to avoid some of the mistakes of the Soviet Union, there are undoubtedly huge problems still to be overcome.

Cuba also, has demonstrated that socialism can provide the whole people with basic necessities such as food, education and health-care, in spite of a most ruthless and sustained economic blockade imposed by the US superpower. Cuba is now overcoming the handicap of a one-crop (sugar) economy, and moving away from total reliance on imported products.

Whatever the problems, whatever the deficiencies, socialist economic planning has consistently demonstrated that it can release the full creativity and productive potential of human beings. In a relatively short historical time, socialist production can achieve the material conditions which allow all people to receive from society "each according to his needs." But there is much more to building socialism than re-organising the system of production.

#### The working class state - Dictatorship of the Proletariat

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"Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. There corresponds to this also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat." (K. Marx

#### *Critique of the Gotha Programme, 1875)*

The task of the working class state involves not only economic re-organisation of society in the interests of the workers and other working people, but also the critical tasks of preserving and consolidating the gains of socialism, to move forward the whole of society in the direction of communism. This means gradually introducing new ways of thinking based on the common good rather than the old, selfish values of capitalism. It means using the state apparatus of the working class (i.e., the people's armed forces, police, courts, prisons, etc) to prevent attempts by the defeated classes and their international supporters to overthrow or side-track the revolutionary power of the workers. The broad scope of these critical tasks means that the period of socialist transformation is necessarily prolonged, and does not always proceed in a straight line.

#### Lenin summarised the difficulties facing Soviet Russia...

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"The abolition of classes means not only driving out the landlords and the capitalists – that we accomplished with comparative ease – it also means abolishing the small commodity producers, and they cannot be driven out, or crushed; we must live in harmony with them; they can (and must) be re-moulded and re-educated only by very prolonged, slow, cautious organisational work."

Lenin continues...

"The dictatorship of the proletariat is a persistent struggle – bloody and bloodless, violent and peaceful, military and economic, educational and administrative – against the forces and traditions of the old society. The force of habit of millions and tens of millions is a terrible force. Without an iron party tempered in struggle, without a party enjoying the confidence of all that is honest in the given class, without a party capable of watching and influencing the mood of the masses, it is

impossible to conduct such a struggle.” (V.I Lenin *Left-Wing Communism*, 1920)

In China, the Soviet experience of building socialism was carefully studied. The style of Chinese socialism has been different to that of the Russian, but Lenin’s analysis of the dual nature of the dictatorship of the proletariat was taken by the Chinese revolutionaries as the guiding principle.

“The people’s democratic dictatorship uses two methods. Towards the enemy, it uses the method of dictatorship, that is, for as long a period of time as is necessary it does not let them take part in political activities and compels them to obey the law of the People’s Government and to engage in labour and, through labour, transform themselves into new men. Towards the people, on the contrary, it uses the method not of compulsion but of democracy, that is, it must necessarily let them take part in political activities and does not compel them to do this or that, but uses the method of democracy in educating and persuading them”. (Mao Zedong *Speech at Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference*, 1950)

#### Towards a classless society

Dictatorship of the proletariat is class rule by the working class. It replaces the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, i.e., the capitalists as a class. Unlike the rule of the rich, who seek only to perpetuate their rule, the working class state acts in the interests of the majority of the people, and struggles to empower the working people in such a way that it will eventually “wither away”. Communists have a vision of a future society that has no need for hierarchies or weapons. “State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state

is not abolished.” It dies out.” (F. Engels *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, 1877)

In the short history of building socialism, we have sometimes seen a glimmer of this future through the selfless commitment of ordinary workers to its defence and construction. The first example was the subbotniks (literally, “Saturday workers”) in Soviet Russia, who voluntarily worked extra time without pay to build the new industrial plants of the socialist state. “If there is anything communistic in our present system in Russia it is the subbotniks, and only the subbotniks; everything else is but a fight against capitalism for the consolidation of socialism...” (V. I. Lenin *Report to Moscow City Conference of Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)*, 1919)

Their heroic example still inspires us.

# *The Marxist concept of Surplus Value*

The Marxist concept of surplus value is based on Karl Marx's examination of the role of human labour in the production and circulation of commodities in society.

Volume 1 of Marx's monumental work, *Capital*, first published in 1867, sets out the precise detail of the production of surplus-value as the source of capitalist profits. In any brief summary of the process, there needs to be some simple definitions and understanding of the terminology Marx used.

## Commodity production

Commodities are goods produced solely for sale in the market place. If there is no market for the goods, or the market shrinks or disappears or is glutted, production is cut back or ceased altogether. In historically earlier periods of human production, goods were produced mainly for direct individual or social consumption, rather than for sale.

For a product to be successfully sold at market, Marx determined that it possess two criteria, two values; a use-value and an exchange-value.

## Use-value

The use-value of a product is the fact that it satisfies some human need such as the basic needs of food, shelter and clothing, or other needs such as long-distance telecommunications, public transport systems, sunscreen and any number of things. Use-value is not confined to products of human labour. The natural environment also provides

many items for human use, such as rainfall, plants and animals, fish in the oceans, and so on.

Should any of the products become broken, worn out, consumed, rotten or obsolete, their use-value diminishes or vanishes altogether. Without use-value, a product cannot be sold in the market.

## Exchange-value

The exchange-value of a product is the ratio in which it can be swapped for other use-value products. Marx showed that this ratio is determined by the amount of "socially-necessary" labour time incorporated in the production of each product. By "socially-necessary" labour time, Marx meant a production process using the average level of skill and intensity of work in the average workplace of a particular society, rather than the fastest or slowest, the most technically advanced or the most backward.

As commodity production replaced the ancient system of bartering goods, a universal exchange-value emerged in the form of money, which was more convenient and represented the value of goods as a price. Marx noted that price is only ever approximate to the real value of a commodity. Fluctuations around the value are influenced by the laws of supply and demand and the general unplanned nature of production.

## Commodity circulation

Marx represented simple commodity production by the formula  $C - M - C$ , commodity – money – commodity. At this point money only serves to facilitate the circulation of commodities in society through buying and selling. There is no profit generated through this process, as the intrinsic value of one commodity is exchanged for one of equal value.

Marx looked closely at this process and was able to show that the circulation of commodities changes under the conditions of capitalist production. In this case, the formula becomes  $M - C - M$ , where the start and end point is money and the actual commodities are only produced for the purpose of generating money. Furthermore, he showed that the capitalists do not go to all this trouble merely to end up with what they started off with. A more accurate version of the formula is  $M - C - M_1$  where  $M_1$  represents a larger amount of money (capital) than was originally invested, i.e. a profit is realised when the commodity is eventually sold.

What is the source of this profit? What happens during the process of commodity production that generates a profit for the owner of investment capital?

#### Labour power

Like any other commodity in the market, human labour power has its own value. This is calculated by the necessary labour time for the maintenance of each worker, that is, for food, clothing and shelter. Thus, the value of labour power is equal to the value of all those commodities which the average worker must consume to maintain themselves and their family, to ensure ongoing and future labour power for the capitalist class. This value is paid for by the capitalist in the form of wages.

Unlike other commodities and materials consumed in the process of production, labour power has the unique characteristic of adding value in the process of its consumption. This is because human beings, through their physical efforts, can transform what nature provides into things that have more use value.

#### Surplus labour produces surplus value

After several hours work, under average

conditions, the worker may be close to adding sufficient value to the production process to repay the capitalist for the wages received. But workers cannot just knock off and go home when this point is reached. Generally they are hired for a set number of hours. (It used to be 8!) They are expected to keep on working and adding value to the production process until the allotted hours are up.

The finished product is appropriated by the capitalist and sent to market. When it is eventually sold, its exchange value (price) reflects the cost of raw materials and their processing, plus the labour power added and paid for by the capitalist as wages, plus the additional labour power (Marx called it surplus labour) that is unpaid.

It is this surplus labour and the surplus value that it produces that is the real source of capitalist profit – the hidden exploitation of workers who spend a portion of their working day performing unpaid labour.

#### Class struggle

The capitalist mode of production gives rise to a constant struggle between the interests of the capitalist class who want to maximise their profits by extending the length of the working day and speeding up the pace of work to increase the unpaid period of labour, and the working class who struggle to resist and roll back the new level of exploitation.

The current battle against the IR laws highlights this conflict of interests, but adds two more features.

Firstly, the attack on workers and their wages and conditions is led by the section of the capitalists most closely connected with foreign imperialism. Their agenda is orchestrated through the Business Council of Australia and fits in neatly with the sell-out deal already stitched up through the US

Free Trade Agreement. The idea is not only to screw down the Australian workers, but also to weaken and divide the local capitalists in preparation for further penetration and takeover of Australian industries.

Secondly, the new IR laws directly attack the rights of workers to organise and operate effective trade unions. These laws are similar, and in some cases worse, than those already operating in the USA, the home base of globalisation/imperialism. In the new globalised economy, repression must also be globalised.

Therefore, the class struggle increasingly takes on the character of struggle against imperialism, the dominant and driving force of capitalism in Australia.

# Technology can't save capitalism

The idea is sometimes put forward that the introduction of computer technology, new machines, inventions and scientific developments is now so rapid that capitalism can avoid the periodical cycle of boom and bust.

Karl Marx dealt with the issue of new technology (in his day the word was “machinery”) in Volume 3 of *Capital*. Far from viewing technology as the saviour of capitalism, Marx saw it as something imposed on the owners of industry by the system of capitalist production; something that intensified the fundamental contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production; something that generated and intensified the cycle of boom and bust. His “theory of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall” exposes the inevitability of crisis in capitalism. Before summarising this important finding of Marx, it will be useful to review the Marxist theory of profit.

## The source of profit

When commodities are exchanged for other commodities or money, they exchange in accordance with the average socially necessary labour time for their production – that is, the time determined by average technology and production methods. Competition in the market regulates the buying and selling prices of commodities between acceptable high and low limits. Therefore, price manipulation cannot be anything more than just a momentary source of profit to the capitalist.

The commodities themselves contain two basic values; the value added to the raw materials by machines/technologies which

pass on a portion of their own value, and the value added by workers in the process of production.

Marx held that the value added by the workers is the source of profit, since the workers are paid wages sufficient only for their reproduction as workers (housing, food, necessities) but they continue to add value to the commodities in excess of what they are paid. This “surplus-value” is realised as profit by the capitalist when the commodities are exchanged in the marketplace.

## Theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall

The capitalist who can extract the most surplus-value from workers can produce commodities more cheaply than competing capitalists. One method of increasing surplus-value is to lengthen the working day (see Vanguard 11/8/99), another method is introduce labour-saving machinery/technology.

Investment in labour-saving technology leads to greater than average profit, as Marx noted, “...the difference between their costs of production and the market price of other commodities which are produced at higher production costs. This is possible because the average socially necessary labour time required to produce the latter commodities is greater than the labour time required with the new method of production.” By undercutting prices this more ruthless capitalist can capture a bigger share of the market and make even bigger profits.

Yet this advantage, like price manipulation, is only temporary. Sooner or later other capitalists get access (via bribes and industrial espionage) to the new machinery/technology. Indeed they driven to do so. “... those capitalists who operate under the old conditions of production must sell their product below its full price of production; the value



of this product has fallen, so that they need more labour time to produce it than is socially necessary. In short, and this appears as the effect of competition, they must also introduce the new mode of production which reduces the ratio of variable capital to constant.”

Here is the catch! The rate of surplus-value is dependent on the ratio of investment in workers (Variable capital) to investment in materials, tools of production and new technology (Constant capital). The real source of profits for the capitalist is the surplus-value created by the workers. Therefore any investment or increase in technology leads to a reduction in the proportion of Variable capital to Constant capital, and a reduction in the rate at which surplus-value is created.

Marx closely examined this contradiction at the very heart of capitalist production.

“The progressive tendency for the general rate of profit to fall is thus simply the expression, peculiar to the capitalist mode of production, of the progressive development of the social productivity of labour. This does not mean the rate of profit may not fall temporarily for other reasons as well, but it does prove that it is a self evident necessity, deriving from the nature of the capitalist mode of production itself...”

### Boom and bust

The increased productive capacity of the competing capitalists within all industries sooner or later generates a flood of goods onto the market. Capitalist production is uncontrolled, unregulated, and anarchistic; it exists to generate profits. The actual needs of society are never met. If there are better profits to be made by selling lawn-mowers, then lots of capitalists start producing lawn-mowers. Eventually, this overproduction saturates the market, leaving the excess goods, such as the lawn-mowers, unsold. The boom period

of investment, expansion and employment gives way to the bust conditions of shrinking markets, production cut-backs, bankruptcies, wage-cuts and unemployment.

In such times of economic depression, the poorly paid or unemployed workers have little income to buy the glut of goods produced by their labour. Capitalism stagnates, frozen in a crisis of its own making. “...the contradiction between social production and capitalist appropriation comes to a violent explosion. The circulation of commodities is for the moment reduced to nothing; the means of circulation, money, becomes an obstacle to circulation; all the laws of commodity production and commodity circulation are turned upside down. The economic collision has reached its culminating point: the mode of production rebels against the mode of exchange...” (F. Engels *Anti-Duhring*)

When such a crisis flares up in capitalist society, there are few alternatives for the capitalists. One is to cut the losses, ride out the storm and wait for the surplus production to be gradually used up or become redundant. Historically, war has often been launched in the wake of economic crisis, hastening the process by soaking up the excess productive capacity, militarising society, and getting rid of large numbers of surplus, potentially rebellious workers. Either way leads to misery and suffering for the working class.

### Technological advances create the conditions for socialism

The real alternative to this destructive system is socialism. Although modern technology has unleashed massive productive forces, capitalism is incapable of applying these forces for the benefit of the mass of people. Socialism, ie, the ownership and regulation of industry by the working class, does away with anarchy in production and introduces rational planning for the whole of society.

# Marx on the alienation of the worker

Karl Marx is best known for his monumental work *Capital* (1867), in which he proved that the basis of capitalist exploitation is the surplus-value produced by the worker during the process of production.

The essence of his economic theory is contained within Volume 1, while the other three volumes refine the theory in detail and correct (or sometimes demolish) other opposing theories of his time.

As well as his economic theory on the origin and workings of capitalism, Marx also studied the philosophical issues that emerged. Although not often credited to Marx, the “alienation” of the worker (and working people generally) under capitalism is now a commonly expressed idea, even though it is only loosely understood. Marx’s *Economic and philosophical manuscripts* (1844) provide his main work on this subject, although the theories were interwoven into his later *Capital*.

## Workers alienated from the products of their labour

Marx’s first point of alienation is the fact that the capitalist appropriates (takes) all the goods produced by the workers. Not only do the workers surrender any entitlement to the products of their labour, but the workers cannot even ‘borrow’ the machines of production to run off even one item for personal consumption. Unlike the craftworkers of old, capitalism’s modern workers no longer own the tools of production either. “The worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces,

the more his production increases in power and extent. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he produces. The devaluation of the human world grows in direct proportion to the increase in value of the world of things. Labour not only produces commodities; it also produces itself and the workers as a commodity and it does so in the same proportion in which it produces commodities in general. This fact simply means that the object that labour produces, its product, stands opposed to it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer.”

The production methods of imperialism, especially the international production lines set up for industries such as motor vehicles, computers, metals and processed foods, mean that many workers never really see the finished products, let alone identify with them.

## Workers alienated from the process of production

Marx’s second point of alienation is the actual process of capitalist production where work is neither fulfilling nor creative, but a chore that has to be performed in order to satisfy the material need for food and shelter. “... the worker feels himself only when he is not working; when he is working, he does not feel himself...His labour is, therefore, not voluntary but forced, it is forced labour. It is, therefore, not the satisfaction of a need but a mere means to satisfy needs outside itself.” Like the commodities produced, the very labour of the workers belongs to the capitalist, is sold to the capitalist for wages and is no longer owned by the workers. “... the external character of labor for the worker is demonstrated by the fact that it belongs not to him but to another, and that in it he belongs not to himself but to another.”

“The result is that man (the worker) feels

that he is acting freely only in his animal functions – eating, drinking, and procreating, or at most in his dwelling and adornment – while in his human functions, he is nothing more than animal.” Capitalism robs workers of their social vision; it restricts their capacity for initiative and limits their freedom of expression to minor personal matters. It pushes them to the margins of society, and tosses them aside when their working life is over. Most workers sense that their lives are shaped by someone else’s agenda, that their work is for someone else’s benefit, that it is not them, but just something they do.

#### Workers alienated from their own humanity

Marx’s third point of alienation is the loss of the essential human qualities that allow humanity to change its environment rather than just reacting to it. Capitalism drains away the creative life of the workers, making ‘work’ the reason for living. “Conscious life activity directly distinguishes man from animal life activity...Estranged labour reverses the relationship so that man, just because he is a conscious being, makes his life activity, his being, a mere means for his existence.”

Many workers hunger for “meaningful work” or “job satisfaction” but these aspirations cannot be satisfied under capitalism where the sole point of work is to generate surplus-value for the owner(s) of the business.

#### Workers alienated from other workers

Marx’s final point of alienation is the isolation of individuals from one another and their common isolation from their collective humanity. “An immediate consequence of man’s estrangement from the product of his labour, his life activity, his species-being, is the estrangement of man from man...What is true of man’s relationship to his labour, to the product of his labour, and to himself, is also true of his relationship to other men, and to

the labour and the object of the labour of other men. In general, the proposition that man is estranged from his species-being means that each man is estranged from the others and that all are estranged from man’s essence.”

#### Struggle the best cure for alienation

No other social system has produced the levels of mental distress such as modern capitalism (imperialism) has refined: depression, loneliness, aggression, cynicism, discrimination, drug dependency, intolerance, etc. – all symptoms of alienation.

The struggle to defeat imperialism helps workers to rise above the daily grind of meaningless work and introduces the prospect of socialism – the only social system which puts value on their contribution to society.

# *Imperialism as a system*

Communists regard imperialism as a system of minority class rule which is ruthlessly exercised through the economic power base of the biggest monopolies and the political and military power base of the capitalist-imperialist state. Defeating imperialism requires struggle against both aspects which are mutually dependent parts of the one rotten entity.

## Economic power base

The economic power of imperialism is expressed through the actions and policies of the most powerful national and international corporations, the elite of monopoly capitalism. Many of these corporations arose from commodity production as industrial capitalism emerged from the feudal era, some arose from banking and financial lending, others from the private ownership of land and agriculture, and some of the newer ones from the computer and info-tech industries of recent times. Some built their prosperity in the wake of colonial invasions and imperialist wars, seizing resources and imposing trading conditions which have condemned other countries and peoples to many decades of grinding poverty and oppression.

Regardless of their origins, these powerful corporations are in a state of both unity and conflict with their fellow monopolies. They are united by the financial chains of investment capital and stock markets, by legal and illegal trade cartels, by overlapping directorships and links between their executive personnel. At the same time, they are in conflict with one another from the demands of capitalist competition to “get big or get out”, and the never-ending struggle amongst them for advantage and influence to the exclusion of

others. Names such as Shell, Mobil-Exxon, Nike, ING, Nestles, Microsoft, General Electric, Ford, Nissan, Bayer, etc. are well known.

## The false hope of economic regulation

The anarchy of international capitalism is seemingly regulated by such bodies as the World Trade Organisation, The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Economic Forum, in vain attempts to stave off the periodic cycles of boom and bust that have always dogged capitalist production. However, all these bodies are dominated by the representatives of US, European and Japanese imperialism. Their real purpose is to bribe and bully national governments into accommodating the multinational takeover of their resources and markets, and to re-divide the world in proportion to the shifting relative strengths of the competing imperialist powers.

Some well-meaning people are sucked in by the idea that such international bodies can be reformed with fairer and more humane policies that would curb the worst features of “globalisation”, leaving a kind of benevolent capitalism in its place. They focus on one or two particularly nasty corporations as though that were the extent of the problem, and shy away from confronting the economic system that gives rise to these corporations and allows them to flourish. This is a common position taken by the left wing of the Labor Party, the Greens and some Democrats. Sadly, these ideas ignore the inevitable process of monopolisation under capitalism, they ignore the fierce resistance of the big corporations to the slightest restriction on their operations and, most critically, they ignore the reality of state power, of brutal force exercised daily by imperialist governments in support of their own monopoly groups and so-called “national interests”.

### Political-military power base

A similar position is taken on issues of political and military power. Rather than focus on imperialism as a system of exploitation and oppression, the problem is reduced to the aggressive policies of particular governments or even personalty flaws of leaders such as Bush, Blair or Howard, etc. This just feeds illusions that all will be well if only certain policies could be changed or Bush/Blair/Howard could be voted out.

Calls for the reform of such institutions as the United Nations, the Group of Eight, NATO, International Courts, etc. pay little attention to the bitter fact that these organisations are intimidated and manipulated by the imperialist powers, and that US imperialism in particular, calls the shots and does whatever it likes anyway.

### Parts of the same thing...

In taking up these issues, Communists expose the countless connections between the economic power base of the multinational corporations and the political-military power base of the capitalist-imperialist state. They are but parts of the same thing. Neither could exist without the other. Neither can be comprehensively opposed or defeated in isolation from the other.

### Socialism is the only alternative

Many people are concerned about the debt and impoverishment brought by "globalisation", the growing threat of war, and continual environmental destruction. In varying degrees, they sense that imperialism is to blame, but can't see a way out of the mess. Anti-communist propaganda is still a barrier to seeing imperialism for what it really is, but nowadays the "i" word crops up in publications well beyond Communist circles and can be used quite effectively.

All these issues need thorough explanation, in good time and under proper circumstances. Communists carefully distinguish between people with genuine illusions about dealing with the assaults and abuses of modern imperialism, and those who know better but persist in raising false hopes and diversions.

Recognition of the need to oppose the worst aspects of imperialism is a necessary step along the way to reaching the conclusion that imperialism must be utterly defeated. Although this is many steps away from the conclusion that socialism is the only guarantee of a peaceful, prosperous world, it is the only way to go.

# Globalisation and imperialism

Globalisation is a term that over the last decade or two has become almost hackneyed in its overuse. What is more, writing and theorising about globalisation has been and still is a growth industry for intellectuals. The problem with it is that it means different things to different theorists, social commentators and the wider public.

## Definition of imperialism

By comparison, the term imperialism whilst still used by the revolutionary left, fell out of favour amongst the Western intelligentsia during the 1980s and 1990s, after enjoying a level of popularity in the 1970s. This decline in usage was due in part to the influence of postmodernism and/or post-structuralism and perhaps more importantly, the perception amongst certain intellectuals and theorists that the socialist project could never be implemented. This pessimism, which it has been argued is the basis for the advent of postmodernism and post-structuralism, has some of its roots in the unravelling of the promise and potential of widespread worker and student strikes of May 1968, and the demise of the Soviet Union and its bloc of states. Notwithstanding the pessimism of certain intellectuals and their reluctance to use the term itself, imperialism had been, in the main, fairly well defined. We are all familiar (or we should be) with Lenin's five basic features of imperialism...

1. the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life
2. the merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation on the basis

of this 'finance capital', of a financial oligarchy

3. the export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance
4. the formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world amongst themselves
5. the territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed.

Whilst Lenin himself issued a warning about the problems associated with brief definitions not capturing all the connections between phenomena, his *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* and the above five features became a benchmark, defining what was meant when the word imperialism was invoked.

Now we have a new phenomenon called globalisation which in many respects has become a buzzword, an ill-defined assemblage of effects which seems to span the technological, the political, the cultural, the social and the economic. Counterposed to this is the reasonably well-defined social, historical and political-economic entity called imperialism, which until recently had become somewhat unfashionable. Imperialism and its pernicious effects pre-dates globalisation, but does this mean that there are no connections between them? A comparison of the essential features of globalisation with Lenin's definition of imperialism reveals that there are indeed connections, and what is more, both entities have their genesis in monopoly capitalism.

## Technological change and the nation-state

It has been remarked by the Marxist cultural critic and theorist Frederic Jameson, that technological change is often identified as one of the key features of globalisation. Over the last thirty or so years, dramatic innovations have been apparent in communications

technology and we all know about the information revolution. But technological advance is not just a recent occurrence. The history of capitalism has always been marked by technological advancement. So there is nothing novel here.

What has been suggested as novel is the impact that this new technology has had and will continue to have upon nation-states. By enhancing and speeding up communication, via the progress made in computer technology, the advent of the Internet and so on, the claim has been made that space and time is being compressed. This claim, which has an element of truth to it, is extended out to suggest that physical barriers will become almost irrelevant and national boundaries made almost redundant. In addition, it has been asserted that this aspect of globalisation, like globalisation itself, is irresistible and irreversible. This supposedly adds up to the impoverishment and decline of the nation-state.

#### Uneven development of capitalism

Whilst technological advancement has had powerful impacts not only in communications but also in production and marketing, it will not bring about the demise of the nation-state.

As has been identified by Marx and Lenin, capitalism is marked by its uneven development, which has seen a relatively few rich countries and corporations dominate the world economy at the expense of the majority of the world's people. The people who do not live in the rich countries witness the distorted and largely unplanned changes to their nation's economy, due to the vagaries of the market. This limited and uneven development mires the poorer nations in positions of dependence and subject to the domination of the few. Similarly with technology, the advanced capitalist countries apply new technology more rapidly, more thoroughly

and in general, get more benefit from it. The less developed countries due to their lack of infrastructure, financial resources and the like, find themselves left behind or marginalised.

Contemporary technological progress is itself predicated on the capitalist social system, with the former having important modifying effects on the latter. However, the capitalist social system with its attendant political form, the nation-state, will not be fundamentally altered by something (technology) that is based in and on capitalism itself and thus exists to serve it. It is naïve to suggest that technological innovation alone will bring about the demise of the nation-state. Would the ruling class of the United States for example, passively allow improvements in technology to undermine a key element of their power base, the nation-state? No, but they would and do use technological advance to enhance their position vis-à-vis other nations.

We have covered in the above discussion two of the supposed essential features of globalisation; technological change and the alleged demise of the nation-state. We move on to the third feature identified by some as being part of the globalisation process; the cultural aspect.

#### Cultural imperialism

In the cultural sphere, there has been an upsurge in resistance to the prospect of a globalised culture. People in France, and lately concerned actors, writers and citizens in Australia, as well as countries in Sth. America and the Middle East, have organised protests about the increasing penetration of US films (Hollywood), television, music, food, in short, culture into their respective countries. The notion of a globalised culture – read as US culture – engenders on the one hand national resistance and on the other the blithe assertion that American mass culture is not as bad as it is made out to be.

What is evident is that the cultural aspects of globalisation have been recognised for what they are, largely US cultural products, which in turn benefit specific US corporations and class interests. The term cultural imperialism adequately sums up this situation. The cultural ramifications of globalisation, the fear that US culture is supplanting all other cultures, or attempting to, shades into the social side of globalisation.

At both the cultural and social level, there is the perception that globalisation may lead to the extinction of local customs and mores, 'resuscitatable only in Disneyfied form, through the construction of artificial simulacra and the mere images of fantasized traditions and beliefs.' (Jameson, 'Globalization and Political Strategy' *New Left Review* 2, 2000, p.56) This perceived erosion of cultural and social norms which has informed the resistance to these features of globalisation, stems from what Jameson and others have called the 'culture of consumption'. This last tends to lead to the atomisation of society. It celebrates and fosters the notion that we all look to maximise our happiness through the passive purchasing of consumer items, as individuals, not as part of a collective, with collective interests and goals. It is socially divisive in theory and practice.

### Economics is primary

The remaining feature of globalisation is the one that dissolves into all the rest - economic globalisation. As Jameson suggests, the economic side of globalisation controls 'the new technologies, reinforc[es] geopolitical interests...' and melds the cultural with itself via the marketing of commodities, using images and advertising. Without doubt, the economic side of globalisation is its bedrock, with the other features having powerful influences but of a secondary nature.

Economic globalisation is marked by the

preponderance of transnational corporations most of whom have their headquarters in the advanced capitalist nations such as the US, Europe, and Japan. These corporations look to the state to protect and promote their interests both domestically and globally.

A further manifestation of economic globalisation is the heightened role of finance capital, especially after the dismantling of the regulations that hemmed it in from the 1940s through to the 1970s. The expansion of finance capital markets was in large part made possible by the new technologies.

In addition, we see the promotion of neo-liberal ideology as a one-size fits all approach to managing economies, forced upon smaller impoverished countries by bodies such as the IMF and the World Bank. Foreign direct investment, also known as export of capital, is a critical component of globalisation, with much of it directed to investment in the rich countries of the North.

### Imperialism, then and now

As has been noted above imperialism has been fairly well defined. Lenin's brief definitions of what he termed were the economic components of imperialism held pride of place in Marxist literature. However, Lenin's pamphlet was published in 1917 and there have been a number of changes in the world since then.

One of the most notable of the changes to the imperialism of Lenin's day has been the dismantling of the colonial empires that took place after the Second World War. The decolonisation process was a watershed. The positive side was that it saw the former colonial subject nations formally gain their political independence from their colonial masters. The negative side is that old forms of domination, - colonialism used political, military and economic forms of dominance



- were re-jigged, with economic dominance becoming the preferred method. This last is conducted through the auspices of the global marketplace, and via the institutions that are charged with imposing global economic norms of neo-colonialism, the IMF and the World Bank to name the two most visible.

### US Superpower

Also apparent is the preponderance of the sole superpower, which it seems, has no immediate challenger for the title of master of imperialism. This contrasts with the first half of the twentieth century, when inter-imperialist rivalry caused the First World War and played a major role in World War Two. It also contrasts with the Cold War era when the US was challenged by the always militarily and economically weaker Soviet Union and its bloc of states.

### Lenin's definition holds true

These are the major differences between the world that Lenin wrote about in the opening decades of the twentieth century and contemporary times. These differences do not undermine the veracity of Lenin's definition of imperialism.

If we look at the first of the five basic features in Lenin's definition, which is that 'monopolies play a decisive role in economic life', we can confirm that this still holds, because some transnational corporations have even more capital than many nations. This is recognised in a backhanded way by the establishment of bodies such as the ACCC, whose purpose is supposedly to regulate monopolistic practices, such as price fixing.

The second of the basic features, the appearance of a financial oligarchy, is still readily apparent, and can be seen in the enhanced role that institutions such as the IMF and World Bank play in the global economy.

The third basic feature which is about the importance of the export of capital as opposed to the export of commodities, finds its confirmation in the importance that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has in the world capitalist economy.

The fourth feature, the international monopolist capitalist combines sharing the world amongst themselves is a good description of the essence of the transnational corporations.

It is the fifth feature that perhaps does not apply as formally now, because the colonial era has come to an end. (Editor's note: The growing power of the European Union forshadows future violent inter-imperialist struggles for the re-division of the world.)

Imperialism is still with us despite the political, military, social and economic changes that have taken place. What then is the connection between imperialism and globalisation?

### Imperialism and globalisation – the primary connection

The most obvious connection between imperialism and globalisation is that they both stem from conditions of monopoly capitalism. They both are predicated on the primacy of the economic, which in this instance can only mean monopoly capitalism, which in turn, has a preferred political form; the nation-state. Globalisation, despite the assertions of some theorists regarding the demise of the nation-state, relies on a global system of multiple states to implement and enforce its agenda. Imperialism too operates through nation-states. At bottom, imperialism and globalisation are about the domination of the world militarily, politically, socially, culturally and economically by the great powers.

In the current era the overarching power is the United States. Globalisation, it could be argued, because it has been such an

overtheorised yet ill-defined phenomenon, has served the purpose of obscuring the present geopolitical reality. The reality being that we still live in an age of imperialism and we must struggle to overcome this blight on humanity and establish socialism.

# *Political consciousness and the current struggle against US imperialism*

“Marxist philosophy holds that the most important problem does not lie in understanding the laws of the objective world and thus being able to explain it, but in applying the knowledge of these laws actively to change the world.” (Mao Zedong *On Practice* July 1937)

For Communists, the true essence of revolutionary politics is “changing the world” both fundamentally and permanently, comprehensively doing away with poverty, exploitation and oppression, and relacing human alienation and class antagonism with social cooperation. This clearly distinguishes revolutionary political struggle from spontaneous day to day class struggle, regardless of militancy or intensity.

## Class struggle is inevitable

Ever since the emergence of different classes, oppressed and exploited people have struggled against war, poverty and repression, sometimes resisting and overthrowing their rulers, occasionally winning concessions from them, quite often enduring even more slaughter and misery. Class struggle takes place as the inevitable consequence of the division of society into classes with irreconcilable interests. This spontaneous struggle, of itself, generates ideas of reform rather than the demand for fundamental change. Historically it has usually been confined to national or regional boundaries, but it has also been expressed through various national liberation

movements and some ethnic and religious conflicts.

In today’s world, carved up by US, European and Japanese imperialism, spontaneous class struggle is evident in the efforts of the underdeveloped nations and peoples to resist the “globalisation” schemes of the IMF and other agencies controlled by modern imperialism. It is reflected in the world-wide movement opposing US aggressive war-mongering in the Middle East and Asia, and in the many struggles to protect the natural environment.

In Australia, class struggle takes place in the context of multinational domination of the main industries and resources and the political and military subservience of the Australian government to US imperialism. Class struggle often pits workers, working farmers, small business people, professionals and others against the profiteering interests of foreign corporations and international finance networks. For fundamental revolutionary change to take place in Australia the working class and its allies must first overthrow the domination of imperialism with all its agents and apologists, expel its military bases and spies, and nationalise the major industries. Only then is it possible to lay the groundwork for the next, higher stage of revolutionary change – the transition to socialism.

## Political consciousness

What is meant by the term “politically conscious”? For most people it means being aware of the political realities, the facts, events, personalities and so on. For Marxists, however, it means much more than being informed and knowledgeable.

Political consciousness is really the recognition that spontaneous class struggle alone is limited to a perpetual cycle of winning and losing concessions from the ruling class, to piecemeal and temporary reforms at best,

along with suffering and vengeful repression in times of defeat. Unless the class struggle is guided by revolutionary ideas, the ideas of Marxism, the working class and its allies will never break the chains that bind them, never get off the treadmill, and never get rid of imperialism.

Therefore, a Marxist definition of political consciousness involves going beyond merely understanding and commenting on the laws of society to actively participating in the struggle to effect fundamental change. It recognises that just as ideas are shaped by experience in the daily struggle to survive and prosper, revolutionary ideas can also be powerful tools which react on and shape the real world.

“While we recognise that in the general development of history the material determines the mental, and social being determines social consciousness, we also – and indeed must – recognise the reaction of mental on material things, of social consciousness on social being and of the superstructure on the economic base. This does not go against materialism; on the contrary, it avoids mechanical materialism and firmly upholds dialectical materialism.” (Mao Zedong *On Contradiction* August 1937)

#### Revolution or reformism?

None of this negates the importance of the day to day class struggle, the arena of experience which teaches the workers and other oppressed classes the need for organisation and the power of collective action.

Revolutionary ideas don't just arise spontaneously in the course of struggle. They are consciously promoted by committed and organised revolutionary activists who participate in class struggle, who share the ups and downs of the working people and have close and enduring connections to many sections of the people. Their political

work involves exposing the limitations of confining struggle to reformist demands, and guiding the masses to the realisation that only fundamental social change will solve their problems. Revolutionary ideas only become a potent force when they are consciously embraced by the masses in struggle.

The two lines within the working class movement on this issue were well summarised by Lenin, “The socialists teach that revolution is inevitable, and that the proletariat must take advantage of all the contradictions in the life of society, of every weakness of its enemies or of the intermediate strata, in order to prepare for a new revolutionary struggle, to repeat the revolution in a broader arena, with a more developed population. The bourgeoisie and the liberals teach that revolutions are unnecessary and even harmful to the workers, that they must not “shove” towards revolution, but, like good little boys, work modestly for reforms.” (Lenin *Reformism in Russian Social-Democratic Movement* 1911)

#### Imperialism won't fall unless it is pushed

In the current circumstances US imperialism is more exposed and isolated than ever, both internationally and here in Australia. The situation calls for greater efforts by the revolutionary forces to be bold and forthright in building the peoples' movement against imperialism, and guiding the struggle in the direction of revolutionary change. For this we need to have confidence and trust in the people and not be intimidated or diverted from our objectives.

“All reactionaries are paper tigers. In appearance, the reactionaries are terrifying, but in reality they are not so powerful. From a long-term point of view, it is not the reactionaries but the people who are really powerful.” (Mao Zedong *Talk with Anna Louise Strong* 1946)

# Marxism and Nationalism

The ideal of Communism is a world society based on human cooperation without the historical divisions of class or nation. Communists are true internationalists who confront the issues of class and nation in order to abolish them forever.

## Revolutionary process

Australian Marxist-Leninists have sometimes been accused of petty-bourgeois nationalism by promoting a two-stage revolution, ie, a stage of national independence leading to the later stage of socialism. It is true that in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels stated, "The workers have no country". But far from advocating the complete disregard for national issues, they went on to say, "... the proletariat...must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word."

Lenin also linked the class struggle to the struggle for national liberation. "Just as mankind can achieve the abolition of classes only by passing through the transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, so mankind can achieve the inevitable merging of nations only by passing through the transition period of complete liberation of all the oppressed nations, i.e, their freedom to secede." (Lenin Theses: *Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination* 1916)

## Nation-States

Writing on matters of nation and the relationship to capitalism Lenin noted, "Developing capitalism knows two historical

tendencies in the national question. The first is the awakening of national life and national movements, the struggle against all national oppression, and the creation of nation-states. The second is the development and growing frequency of international intercourse in every form, the breakdown of national barriers, the creation of the international unity of capital, of economic life in general, of politics, science, etc. Both tendencies are a universal law of capitalism. The former predominates in the beginning of its development, the latter characterises a mature capitalism moving towards its transformation into socialist society." (Lenin *Critical Remarks on the National Question* 1913)

In our present era of mature, decaying capitalism ("globalisation"), the various (national) economic systems of capitalism are being transformed into a single (international) system of imperialism. While this may be news to some, Lenin recognised the process more than eighty years ago. "Imperialism is the highest stage of development of capitalism. Capital in the advanced countries has outgrown the boundaries of national states." (Lenin Theses: *Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination* 1916). In setting up the conditions for a global economy, monopoly capitalism is also preparing the economic basis for the eventual merging of nations.

## International movement against imperialism

The division and re-division of the world between the imperialist powers has been a feature of the last century, with US and European imperialism now moving towards further contention, while Japanese imperialism is losing ground. In addition to these conflicts, imperialism is weakened by endless cycles of economic crisis, as well as the conscious world-wide movement against it. This growing movement includes the peoples of the socialist countries, the

workers and peasants of countries struggling against imperialist bullying and resisting neo-colonialism, and it also embraces the workers and working people of advanced countries such as Australia.

Struggle against imperialism is class struggle  
“The characteristic feature of imperialism is that the whole world, as we see, is now divided into a large number of oppressed nations and an insignificant number of oppressor nations, which command colossal wealth and powerful armed forces.” (Lenin *Report of the Commission on the National and Colonial Questions* July 1920)

Australian Marxist-Leninists place Australia in the category of an oppressed nation, one that is economically and politically subservient to the imperialist “world order”. In Australia, the critical core of capitalism is imperialism, with most major industries and capital resources increasingly owned or controlled by foreign multinationals. (Even the bastion of Australian domestic capitalism, BHP, cannot resist this trend.)

The reality of capitalism in Australia is the International Monetary Fund dictating to the Howard government how to exploit and repress the working people – the direct orders of US imperialism! The class struggle for socialism in Australia cannot therefore ignore the national question, cannot effectively oppose capitalism without calling for the overthrow of imperialist-dominated capitalism.

#### National independence movement

Leading this struggle the Australian working class stands in the front line, as it is the class most exploited and oppressed by imperialism, the class with nothing to lose, the best organised and determined class. But it is not the only class oppressed by imperialism.

Potential allies of the working class include

the working small farmers and small producers who are driven to bankruptcy by the multinationals and their mates in the banking and finance industry. They don't have access to the tax concessions and fancy lawyers enjoyed by the super-rich monopolies.

Building a united movement against imperialist domination of Australia is not petty-bourgeois nationalism. It is the application of Marxism to the reality of Australian conditions.

# *Imperialism in Australia – the shameful history*

The word “imperialism” comes from the Latin word for emperor. Ever since the Roman conquests, imperialism has meant creating or expanding an empire. Australia became part of the British Empire and is now part of the American empire.

The violent heritage of British imperialism  
Less than 100 years ago the British Empire consisted of occupied colonies in India, Africa, the Caribbean, Sth. East Asia, Australia and New Zealand. Britain made and enforced the laws, plundered the environment, exploited the populations, controlled the trade routes, etc.

British imperialism brought genocide to the indigenous population of Australia. The military occupation was followed by murderous round-ups, disease, starvation and destruction of culture, all accompanied by brutal suppression of indigenous resistance. This tradition continued through decades of oppression into the modern era, with the kidnapping and forced labour of children, and the systematic racism and abuse now promoted by the Howard government.

Even when British imperialism conceded nominal national independence to Australia at the 1901 Federation of the states and colonies, it still maintained its basic control of the Australian economy and political institutions. Young Australians were sent to defend the British Empire in southern Africa, and again at Gallipoli, Palestine and the trenches of France during WW1. The slaughter of this generation is recorded on war memorials in every town across the country.

During WW2, Australian troops were first sent to defend British colonies and interests in the Middle East before popular outcry led to the belated defence of Australia from imminent Japanese invasion. No surprise that the Australian army still fought under the title of “Australian Imperial Forces”! In spite of its vast resources and powerful military, the sun did finally set on the British empire just as it did on the ancient Roman one.

## Takeover of Australia by US imperialism

America emerged from WW2 with its financial-industrial base and military machine far stronger than the devastated countries of Europe. Through the Marshall Plan and other inducements, the monopoly capitalists of the USA quickly penetrated weak economies and weaker governments right across the world, including Australia. Their military encircled the new socialist counties of Eastern Europe and the war-torn Soviet Union. They actively supported French colonialism in Vietnam and propped up fascist dictatorships in Taiwan and Korea to contain and undermine the example of the Chinese revolution.

In Australia, the export of American capital financed the construction of modern factories and process lines which churned out motor cars and household appliances during the “boom years” of the fifties – a period of rapid expansion for industry in Australia. Many local businesses and even established British companies could not compete and were swallowed up by the power of the Yankee dollar. Much British capital continued to be tied up in agriculture rather than the new manufacturing industries. The balance of economic power in Australia, and hence political power and influence, shifted from Britain to America.

This was reflected in the commitment of Australian forces to the wars in Korea and Vietnam, where they answered to the

American tin-whistle rather than the British bugle. Even the British led involvement in Malaya was really part of the American world-wide anti-Communist strategy, as Britain was in the process of disengaging from its colonial possessions, settling for a nostalgic “commonwealth” rather than a real empire.

### Imperialism in Australia today

What has changed since then? Certainly US imperialism has tightened its grip on Australia. It owns not only key sections of the mineral and industrial sectors, but now has significant land-holdings as well. It dominates the food processing industry. In many places it has ownership of previously public utilities such as gas, water, electricity and public transport. The import of American capital into Australia and the export of profit to America has become a flood! In the global race for profits, technology intensifies exploitation, de-skills workers, and wipes out jobs. Manufacturing becomes the simple assembly of parts made cheaper elsewhere, businesses go broke.

Politically US imperialist domination of Australia is accepted without question by all the bourgeois parliamentary parties. It is just not an issue for Labor or the Democrats; a few individuals sometimes mumble the word “multinational” but nobody ever takes a stand against the system of US imperialism. This is in sharp contrast to the working class who are often in struggle with foreign monopolies and readily see that many of Australia’s problems can be sheeted home to the sell-out of Australia by various governments, both Liberal and Labor.

Australia’s foreign policy and military forces are fashioned to fit the requirements of US imperialism, to provide a token of “international support” for whatever the US Secretary of State wants, and a base for electronic surveillance and nuclear weapons systems.

### Other imperialist influences

For a while Japanese imperialism challenged US economic supremacy and made a few inroads into Australia, mainly in manufacturing and property. Japanese imperialism wasn’t able to sustain the challenge, but is still influential in East Asia and the Pacific region.

British imperialism has now merged with growing European imperialism, led by Germany and France. Although irrevocably committed to the economic ties of the European Union, Britain still hankers after the old days of “partnership” with the USA and is quick to endorse American political initiatives. Nevertheless, European imperialism is becoming stronger and poses a threat to American dreams of a “New World Order”. Events in the Balkans and even the Middle East take place against this backdrop of competing imperialist interests.

Russian imperialism, like its aging nuclear stockpile, is decaying and unstable, but cannot be ignored.

### National independence

There are big problems in Australia – unemployment, poverty, environmental degradation, the unresolved issues of Land Rights and Reconciliation etc. None of these can be fixed until Australia has cut off the throttling hand of imperialism and gained real national independence.



# *Eureka Flag – Symbol of Australian National Independence*

December 3rd is the anniversary of the Eureka Stockade battle of 1854, when the rebellious gold miners of Ballarat were attacked and overwhelmed in a military assault by troops and armed police.

The symbolism and magnitude of this significant event in Australia's history has continued to influence the political consciousness of following generations, in spite of various attempts to sterilise it or ignore it.

## Bakery Hill

The "diggers" of Ballarat had met on Bakery Hill on the 11th November to demand radical but essentially bourgeois reforms from the autocratic rulers of the colony of Victoria. Led by the Ballarat Reform League, their main claims included parliamentary representation without any property qualification, voting rights for males, the right to own land, and the abolition of oppressive taxes such as the Diggers' and Storekeepers' Licences. These demands were also voiced at similar protest meetings in the goldfields of Bendigo and Castlemaine, as well as in Melbourne. Prominent among the miners were some with republican and anti-colonial views, such as Raffaello Carboni who had fought with Garibaldi in Italy, a large contingent of Irish, and a few American and European socialists.

The situation was a political crisis for the ruling class of British colonial administrators, rich squatters and merchants. It was, in fact,

part of the early push for bourgeois democratic rights, a parallel to the bourgeois revolutionary upsurge in Europe at that time.

The miners swore allegiance to the blue and white flag of the Southern Cross, an act intended as a defiant challenge to the rule of British colonialism. To demonstrate their determination, they constructed a makeshift barricade at nearby Eureka, formed into armed squads, and called on other supporters to join them. Though they had not actually attacked the established colonial order, these actions were regarded by the ruling class as insurrection against the Crown.

## Eureka Stockade

Initially the miners were in a strong position. They enjoyed widespread public support and were well supplied by the surrounding rural populations. After several weeks of inactivity, some followers drifted away and the stockade was ill-prepared for the dawn charge of the troopers on that Sunday morning. After a short and violent battle, the flag of Eureka was torn down. Some miners were murdered as they tried to surrender, others hunted down as they fled into the bush. Altogether 25 died, with many more wounded and beaten.

In the aftermath, the ruling class was forced by public outrage to release the arrested leaders and grant many of the reforms demanded by the rebellion. These concessions headed off the more revolutionary demand for independence from Britain.

## Traditions of Eureka

The events at Ballarat have shaped the character of the Australian people in many ways. There is a long-standing tradition of egalitarianism among the people, the idea of "fair go", that all people are equally deserving, whatever their origin and their economic position in society. On the goldfields, the Irish

peasant toiled beside the German scholar, the black American sailor shared a tent with the farm laborer from New South Wales. The growth of an Australian multicultural identity can be linked back to the common struggle at Eureka.

Disrespect for petty authority is another characteristic that is deeply etched into the consciousness of the Australian people. This reflects the long and continuing struggle for democratic rights, as well as a certain contempt for the police and their political role as defenders of the status quo.

The concept of Australian national independence was born at Bakery Hill and has flowed through Australian history ever since. The demand for an Australian republic remains unsatisfied. It will emerge again. In contrast to the handful of rich finance capitalists and toady politicians who are hell-bent on selling off Australian resources to foreign imperialism, most Australians believe that the wealth of the country should be used to benefit people here, not investors in New York and London.

#### Southern Cross – The Eureka Flag

The most enduring symbol of the Ballarat uprising is undoubtedly the Eureka Flag. It is a symbol of the rebellion of ordinary people against tyranny and a symbol of the aspiration of the people for national sovereignty and independence.

For precisely these reasons, the flag was more or less adopted by the working class during the industrial struggles of the 1890's, including the shearers' strikes in 1891 and the later maritime strikes.

With the birth of the Labor Party, the trade union movement put aside the Eureka tradition to concentrate on winning parliamentary elections. It was not until the fifties that the

original flag was re-discovered and put on public display for the centenary of the stockade battle in 1954. The Communist Party had kept alive the memory and tradition through the establishment of the Eureka Youth League. In the seventies, the flag became part of the culture of the BLF, flown from cranes and pasted on bumper bars.

Since then the blue and white flag of Eureka has flown proudly at thousands of strikes, picket lines, rallies and demonstrations throughout Australia. Other unions have incorporated the flag in their official logos and union banners. It even bobs up at Test cricket matches and the Olympic Games!

The symbolism of the Eureka Flag is not lost on the ruling class of today. The immensely popular Eureka Museum in Ballarat is funded by the public, not government. Even though the City of Ballarat has the Eureka Flag flying from a huge flagpole on Bakery Hill, it was taken down when Lizzie Windsor visited the city. On the few occasions that the monopoly media acknowledges the presence of the flag, it is referred to only as a symbol of democratic rights, or trade union struggle. The revolutionary and national independence aspect of the Eureka tradition is conveniently pushed into the background.

#### For an independent Australian Republic

As the struggle against US imperialism intensifies in Australia, fighters for national independence and a peoples' republic will unite the broad mass of the people under the revolutionary symbol of the Eureka Flag.

# *The Legacy of Ted Hill (1915-1988)*

Australian Communists continue to learn from the enormous contributions of Ted Hill, founding Chairman of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist), to the development and practice of revolutionary struggle in Australia. Some of these important theoretical contributions are summarised here.

*Looking Backward: Looking Forward* (1965)  
This book was Hill's major work in which he returned to the classics of Marxism, especially Lenin, to examine Australian history and the history of working class struggle. Using the Marxist dialectical approach of examining the facts, he argued that the extent of imperialist domination of Australia required an anti-imperialist revolutionary struggle as the first step towards socialism. This position was in sharp contrast to the prevailing "left" view that relied on the Labor Party to create favourable conditions for a "peaceful transition to socialism". In his later writings, Hill elaborated on the fundamental ideas he introduced in *Looking Backward: Looking Forward*, as well as his criticisms of trade union politics and parliamentarism.

## Trade union politics

Hill strongly refuted the idea that trade union activity alone can win lasting benefits for the working class, or even socialism. Trade union politics restricts struggle to the limitations set by the ruling legal system and ignores the reality of the state apparatus.

## Parliamentarism

The idea that the working class can achieve significant reforms, or even socialism, by the

election of "left" candidates into parliament. Parliamentarism channels all political struggle into the dead end of parliamentary debate and compromise, i.e., sell-out. It relies on the capacity of the Labor Party to divert workers struggles whenever there is a rising level of political consciousness. Hill categorised the Labor Party as a bourgeois party rather than the vague "two-class party" notion promoted by monopoly capitalism.

## Revolution by stages

"One may characterise Australia's history as the struggle for national democratic revolution for independence and freedom from imperialism...This national democratic revolution underlies all Australian history from 1788. It embraced black and white people. It involved many strata of people. It gathered way as the imperialists were compelled to build up capitalism in Australia, giving rise to a working class and a capitalist class. The national democratic revolution of necessity developed from small beginnings and is a revolution by stages." (*Australia's Revolution: On the struggle for a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party* 1973)

Hill defined the principal contradiction in Australian society as that between foreign monopoly capitalism (imperialism) and the working class, working farmers and small producers. He put forward the concept of an anti-imperialist united front as vehicle to achieve national independence as a necessary precondition for socialism. "Small shopkeepers, small producers and manufacturers, small and medium farmers...These sections impelled by fear of being forced down into the ranks of the workers, form a valuable source of allies for the workers in the struggle against the might and policies of the multinationals...The workers can both unite with them and struggle against them." (*The great cause of Australian independence* 1977)

Working class leadership of the United Front  
Victory for the united front would only be possible under the leadership of the working class.

“The Australian working class is thus the most disciplined, the most exploited class in Australia. It has only its own labour power to sell and nothing (in the way of property) to lose...It is the very class with the greatest interest in overthrowing the imperialist exploiters of Australia and in establishing a state in which it is the leading class and which state will put an end to imperialist exploitation.”  
*(Australia’s Revolution: On the struggle for a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party 1973)*

Hill regarded the united front not merely as a tactical means of building the broadest possible unity against imperialist domination, but as the correct and historical direction the working class was compelled to take by the very nature of Australia’s situation. “Indeed the struggle for Australia’s complete independence is in the final analysis class struggle. It is the form which class struggle in Australia takes.” Within the united front, “... the Communists retain their independence and initiative...All unity and no struggle is wrong and all struggle and no unity is wrong.”  
*(The great cause of Australian independence 1977)*

#### The state

Whenever the struggle of working people becomes really effective and seriously threatens the interests of monopoly capital, the power of the armed state apparatus is bought to bear on the workers – this is the lesson of history all over the world. Australia is unlikely to be the exception to the rule! Presently, the ruling class of US, British and Japanese imperialists and their local apologist mates are able to rule through the deception of parliamentary democracy and the illusion that the Labor Party will protect the working

people from the excesses of imperialism. “The methods of maintaining imperialist monopoly domination of Australia are infinitely various. One of them is deception, persuasion if you like, and the other is force. The essence of the question is force and the subsidiary question is deception. But deception (persuasion) is a more effective weapon than force...The real business of government is done and its continuity ensured by the public service. It is backed by the army, the police, the courts and gaols. Governments come and go in competition with each other for the spoils of office: they call it power but it is a very limited idea of power and is based on power in the hands of the monopoly capitalists.”  
*(Revolution and the Australian state – a Socialist analysis Feb 1974)*

#### Role of the Communist Party

Ted Hill paid a lot of attention to the role of the Communist Party in providing revolutionary leadership for the struggle of the working class. He closely examined the role and style of work of the former CPA and worked to build a new party free from the ideological, political and organisational errors of the past. This required the whole membership to be actively studying Marxist theory, to be involved in day to day people’s struggles and to operate in a democratic yet secret manner.

“The Party must be capable of maintaining its mass connection in all circumstances, particularly among the workers. While taking full advantage of all legal opportunities it must never lose sight of the fact that the organisational connections of its main mass work must be concealed from the enemy. Hence its work must be open and secret, legal and illegal and it must be prepared as circumstances demand to change its emphasis from one to another...”  
*(Australia’s Revolution: On the struggle for a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party 1973)*

## The current situation

With the passage of time, events have re-affirmed the correctness of Hill's analysis of Australian society and the necessary tactics of the working class to win socialism. The penetration and domination of Australia by US imperialism in particular, has greatly increased, as has the rate of exploitation of Australian workers. Over the last decade increasing sections of the working people has been pushed downward into the ranks of unemployed and semi-employed workers, while many small farmers and producers have been wiped out by the forces of "globalisation", the polite word for modern imperialism. Neither the Labor Party nor the trade union hierarchy offers any solutions as they both accept and support the permanence of US political and economic domination. The task still remains to build an effective united front for national independence, but many struggles now flow in this direction.

# *Australian National Independence – a real alternative*

The Programme of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) calls for the winning of national independence from foreign imperialism, and the establishment of a peoples' democratic republic, as a first stage in the struggle for a socialist Australia.

But what is the content of this "National Independence"? What fundamental change will this have on the lives and well-being of the Australian people, especially the working class and small producers? Is this the revolutionary alternative to capitalism?

## Economic independence

All the important sectors of Australian industrial production are owned or controlled by foreign monopolies – US, British, European and Japanese. This is true of minerals, steel production, energy generation and distribution, vehicle manufacture, petro-chemicals, oil, airlines, food processing, info-technology, agri-business, etc.

In a few sectors Australian capital still predominates, such as farming, retailing, timber production, building and construction, road freight and part of the finance and banking industry. In all cases, foreign capital is moving in, challenging and undercutting the local capitalists, turning them into suppliers and agents for the large multinational corporations. The US preaches "free trade" in order to penetrate everybody else's markets, and flaunts the World Trade Organisation rules by targetting Australian exports with grain subsidies for US farmers and new tariffs against steel imported into the US.

The effect of this growing domination of the Australian economy has been the increasing impoverishment of the working people, growing unemployment and the dismantling of many social services and public amenities. Only the class of rich monopoly owners and large investors has benefitted; for the great majority there is only intensified exploitation, deteriorating working conditions, insecurity, and a falling standard of living. This situation is not new for the working class, but now also effects farmers, small producers, self-employed and even professional people. The overwhelmed majority of the Australian people are suffering under the dictates of foreign imperialism. This means that the era of the local Australian capitalists, even large monopolies, has well passed. Capitalism in Australia is firmly controlled by foreign multinationals, and increasingly, US imperialism.

Economic independence from imperialism would mean a momentous, revolutionary change from this domination. It would mean the passing of economic power to the majority of the Australian people, stopping the flood of profits and jobs now going overseas. It would necessarily involve the nationalisation of key industries such as power and water utilities, petro-chemical production, heavy manufacturing, banking and finance, health and education, etc. Not the half-hearted nationalisation of the old Labor party, nor a heavy-handed Soviet-style bureaucracy, but a rational and planned economy where production was geared to the needs of the people and where workers and other producers had a real and democratic say in the running of their industry, workplaces and communities. Cooperative farming and food production would be encouraged, while a market economy would remain in the other less critical sections, but no longer dominated, intimidated and manipulated by foreign multinationals and international finance. Such a system of economic management would

liberate the initiative and resourcefulness of the Australian people to rapidly fix the current problems of inequality and poverty, and move on to solving the problems of water resources, environmental degradation, sustainable agriculture, etc.

### Political independence

Economic, political and military domination of Australia by the United States ensures that Australia is essentially a puppet state, echoing the policies and stances of the USA. This has been painfully obvious in the period of the Howard government, but is hardly even questioned by the Labor Party leaders who dance to the same tune. Sections of the Australian people are already seeking answers beyond the narrow limitations of parliament.

Political independence would establish a real peoples' republic, sweeping away the relics of colonialism, including the (unelected) Governor-General and the talking-shop of parliament. It would create new democratic institutions with a powerful place for the working class, for indigenous Australians, for regional communities and others presently kept down by imperialist domination. It would promote national unity and purpose rather than divisive competition between States.

Political independence would set Australia on the path of assisting the educational, training and development needs of poorer countries in the region, rather than rubber-stamping schemes by US imperialism to exploit and oppress them. It would mean the expulsion and dismantling of US spy bases and an end to the military domination of our armed forces. Certainly it would mean an end to Australia being dragged into aggressive invasions of other countries whenever the so-called "interests" of the USA were threatened.

### Cultural independence

Every day we are bombarded with monopoly media reports from primarily US or British sources, giving their biased interpretation of world events. As for monopoly-owned TV, it's either sex and violence or mindless shows that copy mindless US themes – broken frequently by ads featuring imported or fake Yanks telling us what to wear, what to eat and how to speak!

Cultural independence from imperialism would mean freeing Australian actors, musicians, writers, designers, publishers and other art workers from the economic need to conform to the US market. It would mean a media industry that investigates and questions, rather than tamely accepting official handouts. It would mean opening up the newspapers, radio and television stations to reflect the concerns and aspirations of the working people.

### Revolutionary change

There is no blueprint for change of this magnitude, but a few things can be said. Imperialism will not surrender its stranglehold on Australia without a fight. As struggle sharpens, the courage and solidarity of the working class will be the critical factor in winning the support of other sections and classes who want national independence. There is no other alternative to the revolutionary overthrow of imperialism, led by the working class.

# *Struggle of indigenous people continues*

There is plenty of evidence that the poorest and most oppressed people in Australia are the indigenous people – Aboriginal and Islander people whose ancestors were victims of British invasion. Their struggle for recognition and justice continues in the era of US imperialism.

## A cruel history

Most Australians are aware of the fact that colonial settlement of occupied indigenous lands was accompanied by military suppression of any resistance, including the enslavement of whole communities in certain regions. Violence and abuse were common weapons of maintaining colonial rule. Armed gangs of settlers seized much of the better land and drove indigenous people away from their traditional areas.

Like the Palestinians facing the Nakba of 1948, the indigenous Australians resorted to armed resistance, mainly guerrilla attacks rather than pitched battles. In spite of defeats and systematic massacres, the armed struggles continued right into the first part of the twentieth century. Hunger and disease also took a heavy toll.

## Struggle for survival

Not only were the lands and livelihoods of the indigenous people taken away. There was also an assault on their languages, cultural traditions and communal way of life. Christian religion was imposed with indigenous people being herded into reserves and missions to serve as cheap labour for the colonisers.

Families were split up, children stolen for slavery and abuse, people shipped off to townships far from their own lands and communities.

A virtual apartheid system was enforced, designed to break down indigenous resistance to the massive land-grab of British colonialism. In the more settled areas such as main cities and country towns, indigenous people were confined to river flats and mini-ghettos on the outskirts. Movement away from these areas was restricted and frequently harassed by the police. Increasingly their struggle became one of survival rather than any prospect of expelling the invaders.

## Imperialism and war

The First World War had an enormous impact on Australia. In its desperate search for cannon-fodder, British imperialism encouraged the enlistment/conscription of indigenous people into the armies of its “dominions”. Indigenous people were also able to get jobs in industries and farms depleted of workers by the war.

After the war, when Australian capitalism went back to “business as usual”, many of the indigenous soldiers and workers were sent packing, no longer needed to defend the “mother country”. However, some had been exposed to popular ideas of socialism and working class solidarity. They had learnt of the struggles of other peoples in Asia, Africa and Middle East. They had seen the power of organised workers come to victory in Russia and were influenced by the support of the communist party and other organisations of working class struggle.

The Second World War had a similar effect in promoting the alliance of oppressed peoples with the struggles of the international working class. In Australia, indigenous workers were welcomed into the Communist Party and were



active in the establishment of progressive indigenous organisations fighting for legal and social reforms, voting rights and citizenship.

### Post-war years

While some gains were made, the Cold War and the emergence of modern Revisionism saw many mass struggles diverted into parliamentary debates where indigenous demands became political footballs between the parliamentary parties. Oppression continued, with discrimination, police harassment and violence, and the further refinement of bureaucratic apartheid.

The sixties saw the emergence of a more militant period of indigenous struggle, perhaps influenced by the civil rights movement in the USA and the anti-apartheid struggles in Sth. Africa. This movement promoted self-reliance, leading to demands for Land Rights and formal recognition of indigenous councils and national organisations. Many of these demands were endorsed and supported by the broader movement of workers, trade unions, left political parties and other progressive sections of the Australian people.

Further gains were made with the advent of the Whitlam government in 1972, when some of the more brutal aspects of discrimination were dismantled and money was released to fund badly needed health and education improvements. With this minimal encouragement and constant struggle, young indigenous people were able to stay on at schools, to enter apprenticeships, to gain skills and improve their education. They could participate more fully in all aspects of life. Cultural and social groups developed and expressed a new optimism for the future.

Imperialism is the common enemy of all  
Australian working people

Since then however, successive governments

have whittled away at many of the gains made by indigenous people, and indeed working people generally. This has gone hand in hand with the increasing penetration of Australia by US imperialism, firstly economic penetration and now open political and military domination.

The present Howard government has thrown off any pretence of fairness or compassion in regard to indigenous people. Always crawling to the foreign corporate monopolies, the owners of the largest land-holdings, mines and gas-fields, and the economic interests of US imperialism, Howard has sacked the elected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and is carving up any programmes and services that benefit indigenous people.

Indigenous people have learnt the hard way that reliance on parliamentary politicians and legal arguments will not guarantee fundamental lasting changes. Rights and liberties can and have been swept aside with the stroke of a pen.

History shows that the indigenous people do not give up. Their struggles will continue and win generous support and solidarity from the growing peoples' movement for national independence, as it becomes even clearer that the main enemy of all the Australian people is US imperialism. Only when Australia is truly independent from foreign domination, can the great issues of land-care and ownership be tackled in a way that is just and delivers real economic power as the basis for indigenous self-reliance and development within a democratic Australian republic.

# *Class and multiculturalism*

From time to time multiculturalism becomes a prominent public issue. Multiculturalism needs to be properly defined and this must be done within the context of the nature of the existing social system and in connection with competing class interests.

All sorts of things are said. On the one hand there are those who claim that multiculturalism is a threat to Australian tradition and a source of division within the community. Others say, or at least imply that multiculturalism is the great saviour of society.

Both views are wrong. Most sense this in some way.

Australia is a capitalist society taking the form of foreign domination, mainly by US imperialism. This is the starting point. Broadly speaking, there exist two cultures; the culture of capitalism and imperialist domination, and that of the working class and people. Multiculturalism cannot exist separately from this. It has class content.

From the position of the working class, that which serves its interests is acceptable. That which does not is not acceptable. There should be absolute clarity on this.

## Culture not static

Multiculturalism should serve as a means through which historical traditions and language born out of the ordinary people, particularly the working class, should be celebrated, not denigrated and pushed into the background. The positive of Australia's past should be embraced, for it contributes to the building of a better society.

At the same time, the other cultures brought by migrants to Australia should not be denied. The positive in this also contributes towards building a better future. Over time the new blend of the many traditions builds a new uniquely Australian culture.

Thus constructive multiculturalism involves a blending of the old and the new.

Because Australia exists under conditions of domination by foreign imperialism, progressive Australian culture stands in opposition to this. Therefore culture that serves this imperialism should be rejected.

At the same time a static view on what exactly makes up Australian culture, a view that merely looks backward to the past, does not realise that culture is constantly undergoing change in line with changing society. This static view cannot but eventually lose contact with the existing reality.

A culture cannot be imposed. This breeds resentment and resistance. Therefore those who insist on forcing a narrow view that raises British heritage and English language above everything else, actually work to sow division amongst the people. They serve the interests of imperialism, which constantly seeks to operate the system of divide and rule. Those who seek to denigrate the 'Anglo' aspect of Australia play a similar role.

## Rulers and ruled

Australia has never been the preserve of one culture. Before white settlement indigenous cultures with their own broad range had existed in Australia for 50,000 years. With the first settlement, British culture was imposed by force. Indigenous and British colonial culture competed in an unequal battle. This is also part of what gave birth to a unique and new Australian culture. From the moment white settlement came into existence,

multiculturalism was here.

When the first fleet arrived, was the history, traditions and to an extent even the language of the convicts the same as that of their gaolers? Of course not.

The battle at the Eureka Stockade saw miners from all continents standing side by side. This was a reflection of Australian society at the time. Migration from many countries became a reality. Not everyone was of British stock. Included were a considerable number of Chinese immigrants.

Were the culture and traditions of the miners the same as those of the squatters, other capitalists and the British colonialists? Of course not.

All through our history, the main dividing line has not been based on ethnicity and language. It has been that between the rulers and the ruled.

From the time that capitalism began to establish itself in the colonies, the working class began to expand in number and importance. This brought working class values to Australian society. Values concerned with a fair go, mateship, sticking together and helping other people out. It pulled other sections of society towards it. Here is a tradition that should be cherished.

Alongside this grew a tradition of the big end of town. It brought greed, slavish servitude to foreign landlords and a disdain for the people. There is no way this should be cherished. The sooner Australia can rid itself of this the better.

### Immigration

From the beginning, migration from other lands has been a constant reality. At different times people have come from different countries. In

each case, migration has brought much that is positive. It has added to earlier traditions, transforming them into something that is more vibrant. These migrants have contributed enormously to building Australia's economy and society. They have embraced the new land and because of this are as Australian as anyone else.

Here too, we should cherish that which is of the working class and people.

Of course, in some respects migration has also brought negative elements that serve imperialist domination because migrants also come from different class backgrounds and carry a range of ideological and political views.

Here too, what is positive should be embraced and what is negative should be rejected.

An added complication are those differences that are not really differences between the ruling class and ruled, between foreign imperialism and the Australian working class and people, but differences amongst the people.

They should be handled in an entirely different way. Sometimes these differences cause tension and at other times they do not. But imperialism and its servants in Australia strive to manipulate these differences in order to divide.

Differences involving language and customs need to be handled with a great deal of patience and understanding. It requires learning from each other. It requires allowing ownership and not demanding others that they should give up who they are or what traditions they believe in. Instead, their positive contribution to the general Australian culture should be supported and encouraged. Ultimately, only through the exchanging ideas, putting them to the test, and developing something new can

progress be made.

Multiculturalism that takes on board the positive from all the people comes from the perspective of the working class and people. It encourages tolerance and learning from each other, and leads to a unique Australian culture.

This is something entirely different from John Howard's harping after a mythical past of wonderful British tradition. Twenty years ago the same man was complaining about Australia becoming too Asian, a refrain that was taken up by Pauline Hanson and others. Not too much further back, the same sort of people argued that no blacks should be allowed into this country.

This was on top of the shameful treatment of the indigenous population. Back then, assimilation was the policy. There is an attempt to go back to assimilation in the name of national unity. In truth, their assimilation is about imposing the culture of imperialism on all and denying not only the positive contribution of diverse migrant cultures, but also that of the 'Anglo' part of the culture of the Australian people.

Their opposition to multiculturalism is to impose foreign imperialist culture on Australia. This is another important battlefield that is of concern to all decent Australians.

# *US imperialism threatens Australian culture*

Australia's film, television, broadcast and print media and performing arts are vitally important to all Australians.

This goes without saying! The Australian entertainment industry only exists because of an intricate web of support mechanisms provided by the Australian and State governments. These mechanisms have changed over time to respond to the ever changing landscape in the entertainment industry. They are necessary because of our small population and geographic diversity.

The Australia-US Free Trade Agreement seeks to put strict limits on the ability of governments to respond to future changes. The agreement ties the hands of governments in their efforts to ensure Australian cultural content for future Australian audiences.

The US wants to get rid of any government support measures that favour domestic producers over foreign producers. This includes the local content quotas for Australian programmes on television and Australian music on radio. Why do we have these quotas?

It costs about six times more for an Australian TV station to make a local drama or comedy production than to buy an episode of a US-made show. Naturally, if there were no local content quotas, television networks would only buy foreign shows and there would be NO Australian shows on Australian television.

The story is the same for music on radio. Without quotas, Australian music would get

almost no airplay. No airplay would mean NO sales for Australian musicians.

The Australian music industry is a source of steadily increasing export income. Australian films and television shows are being screened in many overseas countries. This will be destroyed if the US has its way.

It is significant that the US is willing to compromise on content rules for free-to-air broadcasting, but is trying to ensure that there are no restriction on the new digital services that are encroaching on traditional technology.

The US-Chile Free Trade Agreement is a pointer to what the US is after. The US-Chile FTA prescribes "E-commerce totally free of regulation." It defines E-commerce as "computer programmes, text, video images, sound recordings and other products that are digitally encoded and transmitted electronically."

Free trade in E-commerce means that there can be no government regulations, subsidies, investments, or procurement interventions that favour local producers over American producers or local musicians over American musicians.

How far does this go? The very broad definition of E-commerce is likely to include any music created or recorded digitally, any text typed into a computer (novels, plays, poems, textbooks) or graphic arts such as architecture or digital multimedia.

If this comes to pass, Australians risk losing the right to government support for a large portion of Australian cultural activity for many years to come. Another point to consider is that there are digital technologies not yet developed fully or not even invented yet.

The Internet is an example. Who even knew

of the Internet twenty years ago, but look at the way the Internet has developed today. This is another reason why culture must not be subject to restrictions under any Free Trade Agreement.

### The main players

Who are some of the main players in the US-led assault on Australian culture? The drive to overthrow regulation of our culture is spearheaded by the US entertainment industry. This industry is dominated by a few giant companies, for example; Fox, Time Warner, CNN and Disney. These companies are the front runners of what is known as cultural imperialism.

What is cultural imperialism? Cultural imperialism is the process of social influence by which a nation imposes on other countries its set of beliefs, values, knowledge and behavioural norms as well as its overall style of life. This definition certainly explains the stranglehold that the US is trying to impose on Australian culture.

Television, movies and popular music are three powerful vehicles for US cultural imperialism. Pick up the TV guide in nearly any country of the world. The majority of the programmes will be US news, sit-coms and soap operas. These imported programmes promote the lifestyles of the US and swamp the country's own cultural heritage and destroy its cultural identity. In Australia, American movies fill our cinemas and American popular music blares out from TV and radio stations twenty four hours a day.

### Fighting back

Australian journalists, musicians, actors and many others involved in Australia's performing arts, film, television and theatre have been actively campaigning against the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement. They fully understand

the threat to Australian culture as well as to their own livelihood.

Their struggle places them among the mighty Peoples' Movement that is developing in Australia. The Peoples' Movement aims to expel US imperialism from Australia and build a truly democratic Australia, an Australia with its own culture, an Australia where we can sing our own songs and watch our own stories.

We all need to work to produce and promote Australian culture--films, television, music, fashions books etc. It is especially important that this Australian culture has an anti-imperialist content rather than just being nationalistic. The seeds are there. They need to be nurtured! The Australian people are getting sick of the flood of US cultural garbage.

Art, literature, drama, poetry, music of all types (whether classical, pop, folk or country), all are needed. They must be produced by artists and performers who are closely connected with the Australian people and can express the peoples' opposition to US imperialism.

The Peoples' Movement (United Front) against US imperialism is developing in Australia. The cultural front is an important front along with fighting the economic aspects of the US domination of Australia.

# Two classes; two class outlooks

In some quarters it is fashionable to deny the existence of classes, or to distort the defining characteristics of classes.

## What are classes?

A class is a group of people in society who derive their income from a common source. In capitalist society, the working class derives its income from wages, while the capitalist class derives its income from the surplus value produced by the working class. (Surplus value is the surplus of the product of labour over the costs of maintenance of labour.)

The working class produces surplus value, the capitalist class appropriates that surplus value. That is the essence of the relationship between the two classes.

## Relationship to the process of production

Thus it is the relationship in which each class stands to the process of production that is important in defining the various classes.

Marx put it very well when he wrote in the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, "In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of

social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social being that determines their consciousness." This includes class consciousness.

## Class consciousness

Working class consciousness is not something that developed overnight. In the early days of the development of capitalism, the struggle against capitalism was at first carried out by individual workers, then by the workers of a particular trade in one locality against the individual capitalist who exploited them.

The earliest form of revolt was machine-smashing and setting fire to factories. This could only be an attempt to turn the clock back to the pre-industrial era. At this stage the workers were a divided mass, not yet united.

As industry developed, the working class increased in numbers and became concentrated in greater masses and started to feel its growing strength. The conflicts between labour and capital took on the character of class struggles. The workers began to form trade unions to allow them to struggle more efficiently against the capitalists. The improvements in communications such as railways aided the growing unity of the workers by allowing easier contact between workers in different locations.

Organisation of working class political parties followed. Radical societies, the Chartist, socialist and communist organisations are examples of these.

The *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, written by Marx and Engels for the Communist League is an example of the revolutionary literature of the early nineteenth century. Marxism Today readers are urged to study the *Manifesto*. It is

as relevant today as it was in 1848. It traces the history of classes and the class struggle between the working class and the capitalist class.

### Two lines of thought

Mao Zedong wrote in *On Practice*, "In class society everyone lives as a member of a particular class, and every kind of thinking, without exception, is stamped with the brand of a class."

This means that both the workers and the capitalists have their own forms of thought and action. Uniting to help one another on the one hand versus ruthless throat cutting and exploitation on the other!

### Two forms of morality

The workers and the capitalists also each have their own morality. Engels discussed this question in his *Anti-Duhring*. Pointing out that each class has its own morality, he wrote, "we can only draw the conclusion that men, consciously or unconsciously, derive their ethical ideas in the last resort from the practical relations on which their class position is based--from the economic relations in which they carry on production and exchange."

He continued, "We therefore reject every attempt to impose on us any moral dogma whatsoever as an eternal, ultimate and for ever immutable ethical law on the pretext that the moral world, too, has its permanent principles which stand above history and the differences between nations. We maintain on the contrary that so far every moral theory has, in the last analysis, been the product of the economic conditions of society obtaining at the time. And just as society has so far moved in class antagonisms, so morality has always been class morality; it has either justified the domination and the interests of the ruling class, or, as soon as the oppressed class became powerful enough, it has

represented its revolt against this domination and the future interests of the oppressed."

The working class and the capitalist class stand opposed to another in every way. The capitalist class created the working class and eventually will be destroyed by the working class.



# *Real democracy is more than words*

The ruling class in Australia shamelessly champions the interests of US imperialism, using local sell-out politicians closely linked to the largest and richest monopoly capitalists.

This pro-imperialist ruling class maintains its power by dual tactics; the use of media deception and the illusion of democracy, backed up by the use of armed force and violence when necessary.

Class rule is reflected in ideas and institutions

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Marxists hold that the superstructure of society i.e., the ruling ideology, the political institutions and state apparatus, arise from and reflect the outlook and interests of the dominant class in society. In feudal society, the superstructure reflected the outlook and interests of the land-owning aristocracy; under monopoly capitalism – imperialism – it reflects the outlook and interests of the most powerful and greedy section of the capitalist class.

“...the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.” (Marx and Engels *The German Ideology* 1846)

Modern imperialism has adapted some of the old national institutions of capitalism, such as parliament and the legal system. It has also added a new layer of international

institutions, such as the World Bank and IMF, NATO, the European Parliament, etc. which reflect the global domination of imperialism. Less directly controlled, the United Nations has also been used as a convenient fig-leaf to mask intimidation and naked aggression. (Such as in Korea, Balkans, Iraq, etc.)

Elections are the veneer of democracy

At the heart of bourgeois democracy is the illusion that the people really control things through the electoral process.

Parliamentary democracy enshrines the sacred freedoms of the capitalist class – freedom to own the means of production, land and resources, to trade freely, to exploit and sack workers, and to enforce their class rule by a legal system ultimately supported by armed forces and other elements of the state apparatus.

The right to vote and to stand for election to parliament provides a means for competing sections of the capitalist class to resolve their differences by peaceful means rather than coups or civil wars which disrupt the orderly flow of business.

While it offers an illusion of democracy, the main role of parliament is that of a “talking shop” which monitors and tinkers with the engine of capitalism, but does not actually drive the machine.

In a capitalist system, the driving seat is occupied by unelected people; the monopoly owners and shareholders of the key industries, the banking and financial executives, and high officials of the public service, police, armed forces and other bureaucrats. These people ensure the continuity and stability of the system, regardless of elections and election results.

In Australia for example, all the important

decisions are made in the boardrooms of monopoly capital or by unelected public service bureaucrats. Elections merely determine which particular section of the ruling class is going to administer capitalism for the time being. "To decide every few years which member of the ruling class is to repress and crush the people through parliament – this is the real essence of bourgeois parliamentarism, not only in parliamentary-constitutional monarchies, but also in the most democratic republics." (Lenin *The State and Revolution* 1917)

Even where elections are relatively free, a result not favourable to the immediate aims of imperialism is often overturned by military or judicial coup. (Remember Chile's Allende government, the Whitlam sacking and Bush vs. Gore, etc?)

Sure, Communist and other progressive candidates are allowed to stand for office, but the ruling class has an overwhelming monopoly on information and propaganda, and generally ignores, trivialises or slanders anti-capitalist opinions. "This choice occurs in an atmosphere thoroughly permeated with capitalist ideas. Newspapers, radio, television, are all in the hands of the capitalist class." (E.F. Hill *Revolution and the Australian State* 1974)

#### Her Majesty's Opposition – the Labor Party

For the institution of parliament to have any authority, there needs to be an illusion of opposition. In Australia, the role of "official opposition" has often fallen to the Labor Party, which is supposed to have alternative reformist policies that people can choose to vote for.

In practice, however, the history of the Labor Party has been one of giving lip-service to the aspirations of the working class while caving in to the demands of corporate monopoly capital. "On no single issue does (Labor)

have an unequivocal attitude. It compromises on almost everything. When it does propose something progressive it then begins to retreat in the face of opposition. It fears the masses and does not seek to rely on them." (E. F. Hill *The Labor Party?* 1974)

Although many people are cynical about parliament and often feel betrayed and disillusioned with the Labor Party, they still maintain some hope that Labor will improve their lot with minor reforms and better regulation of the system. The deceptive role of the Labor Party is the most effective means of diverting and confining class struggle to the safe arena of parliamentary debate.

"Dissent is tolerated, so long as it is ineffective"

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Between elections, the people have no involvement whatsoever. At best they may form mass organisations, trade unions, etc. to seek reforms or changes to government policy. There are no guaranteed human rights in the Constitution and in fact peoples' rights are constantly threatened by the Crimes Act, new industrial laws and "anti-terror" measures.

The system only permits a limited amount of lobbying and protesting. This builds the illusion of 'democratic rights', the illusion that dissenting views can freely compete. It is a useful safety valve for the contradictions and class struggle within the system. "The capitalist class seeks to adapt any and every mass organisation to itself. It permits mass organisations to exist because thereby it can if it acts wisely direct opposition into harmless channels..." (CPA M-L *More on Ideological Questions*)

As the saying goes, 'talk is cheap', but as soon as mass organisations take action to actually force change, or to resist or obstruct government policy, they are met with legal and forceful repression by the capitalist state.

### The struggle for real democracy

Communists place no reliance on the so-called freedoms of capitalism, regarding them as a slick veneer. Because of the illusions created, these issues require careful attention, so that the workers and other oppressed classes see beyond the hypocrisy of bourgeois-imperialist dictatorship.

Real democracy means fundamental change. It means winning Australian national independence in a revolutionary struggle against imperialism, the highest form of capitalism. It means establishing the material and social conditions for socialism, where society serves the majority and no longer the few.

On the one hand the process of class struggle exposes the limitations of bourgeois freedoms; on the other hand, even limited bourgeois freedoms can assist the process of class struggle. "The formal freedom of speech, of assembly, of organisation, formal equality before the law; all have value in organising and educating the workers." (E.F. Hill *Revolution and the Australian State* 1974)

### Australian Democratic Republic

In contrast to this artificial and devious democracy, real democracy requires continuous democratic consultation and on-going participation of the working people in the actual implementation of policies in the workplace as well as general society.

As Lenin noted in *State and Revolution* (1917), "The way out of parliamentarism is not, of course, the abolition of representative institutions and the electoral principle, but the conversion of the representative institutions from talking shops into "working" bodies."

Real democracy requires nationalisation of key industries and utilities, and the expulsion of foreign corporate monopolies. It requires the dismantling of aggressive US military bases and breaking free from the grip of US imperialism. Only then can the Australian people begin to wipe out poverty, to improve healthcare and education, to roll back environmental damage, and to achieve genuine reconciliation with the indigenous people.

# *Marxism and the role of the Individual*

Understanding the relationship of the individual to the collective will always be an important issue for Communists, whether striving to give leadership to the class struggle against imperialism, or trying to build a new socialist society.

As a philosophy of change, revolutionary Marxism is well known for its extensive examination of the “big-picture” issues of human society. These include the decisive role of labour, the development of productive forces and the relations of production, the struggle between various classes throughout history, the function of the state, the revolutionary role of the working class, the causes of imperialism and war, etc.

The seminal writers of Marxism quite properly placed great emphasis on the role of the masses in determining history. To some extent, this has encouraged opponents and distorters of Marxism to scream, “What about the individual?!” as they try to pretend that all history, even socialist revolution, only happens because certain individuals, “great men”, step forward to command events.

They also try to pretend that Socialism would stifle all initiative and impose a regimented and drab uniformity, a “command-economy”, and so on. Not surprisingly, this is the very opposite of what Socialism really means.

## Plekhanov on the Individual

One of Lenin’s contemporaries was G.V. Plekhanov who wrote *The Role of the Individual in History* (1898). (Plekhanov later

joined the Menshevik faction of the Russian Social-Democratic Party and his political standing dissolved entirely when he supported the 1914-18 imperialist war and eventually opposed the 1917 October Revolution. Nevertheless, some of his early writings were acknowledged by Lenin.)

In this particular work, Plekhanov sets the limits within which individuals can influence society – limits determined by past historical development and the class forces in play at the time. “... by virtue of particular traits of their character, individuals can influence the fate of society. Sometimes this influence is very considerable; but the possibility of exercising this influence, and its extent, are determined by the form of organisation of society, by the relation of forces within it. The character of an individual is a ‘factor’ in social development only where, when, and to the extent that social relations permit it to be such.”

While an individual can neither cause nor prevent the general trend of historical change, they can, without doubt, influence the manner and pace of change. “Owing to the specific qualities of their minds and characters, influential individuals can change the individual features of events and some of the particular consequences, but they cannot change their general trend, which is determined by other forces.” This is a critical issue for revolutionary activists, to be able to correctly identify the general trend and take appropriate and effective action in a changing situation. It applies to individual activists and even more so to the collective of individuals that make up revolutionary organisation

As for the role of “great men”, Plekhanov make the telling point, “Casual phenomena and the personal qualities of celebrated people are ever so much more noticeable than deep-lying general causes.” In fact, the reference points of history are significant events, wars, rebellions, famines, etc. and significant personalities

such as political or military leaders, naturalists and scientists. Personalising history makes it easier to remember and details its unique characteristics. But unless these features are explained in the context of historical and social conditions, this view of history remains shallow and useless.

The Marxist view of the role of the individual is summarised by Plekhanov, as follows, "At the present time we must regard the development of productive forces as the final and most general cause of the historical progress of mankind, and it is these productive forces that determine the consecutive changes in the social relations of men. Parallel with this general cause there are particular causes, i.e., the historical situation in which the development of the productive forces of a given nation proceeds and which, in the last analysis, is itself created by the development of these forces among other nations, i.e., the same general cause. Finally, the influence of the particular causes is supplemented by the operation of individual causes, i.e., the personal qualities of public men and other 'accidents', thanks to which events finally assume their individual features."

#### The conscious role of the Individual\_\_\_\_\_

From this perspective, Marxists attach much importance to the conscious and creative role of the individual. Plekhanov observed, "... being conscious of the absolute inevitability of a given phenomenon can only increase the energy of a man who sympathises with it and who regards himself as one of the forces which called it into being." This is especially true during periods of intense political struggle, and even more so in the period of constructing a Socialist society which is focussed on the people rather than profits. In the process of changing society, the oppressed class re-moulds itself and re-discovers its humanity.

# *The class basis of women's oppression*

Communists say that the oppression and exploitation inflicted on women today cannot be separated from the division of society into classes and in particular, the capitalist relations of production.

## Ancient society

Women were not always oppressed and exploited. In primitive societies the means of production were communally owned and every member of the community was provided for on an equal basis. There was no such thing as a wealthy ruling class standing over and exploiting the other classes. There was therefore no need for a coercive state apparatus with armies or police to keep the people in line.

Primitive society was matriarchal, with women occupying influential and respected positions in the community. They were the social and cultural leaders and civic organisers. Women gathered food plants and small animals while the men hunted larger game. They learned how to control fire and to cultivate vegetables and crops. They discovered the medicinal properties of herbs and plants. Women learned to work with fibres, leather and to make pottery and weave baskets. Further reading – F. Engels *“The Origin of The Family, Private Property and the State.”*

## Class society

It was only with the development of private property and changes in the social relations of production that classes came into existence and patriarchal societies arose. Under

slavery and feudalism men took control of most of the activities of social production and women were relegated to the home for the maintenance and reproduction of the families (exploited classes). The state apparatus and religion came into existence and ensured that women remained in this subordinate position.

## Capitalism

The industrial revolution of late 18th century gave birth to industrial capitalism. The newly emerging capitalist mode of production swept aside artisan-based production. Rapidly expanding capitalism required an abundant supply of labour for its factories. Social upheavals created by the industrial revolution forced women into factories to work alongside the male wage-slaves. The change to women's position in the capitalist relations of production (which requires “free” labourers) came into conflict with the old feudal social and political restrictions. Further, it compelled women to struggle to overthrow the remaining feudal shackles. Whilst the new capitalism discarded some feudal restrictions which obstructed its development and expansion, the basic class division between the exploited and exploiters remained. All oppression, inequalities, disadvantages and discrimination against women arises from this capitalist class system. As Lenin, who paid a great deal of attention to the conditions of women noted, “...wherever there is capitalism, wherever there is private property in land and factories, wherever the power of capital is preserved, the men retain their privileges.” (*Collected Works Vol. 30*).

## Economic exploitation of women

The double oppression and exploitation of working women rests squarely on the capitalist system of exploitation of labour. At the centre of capitalist social relations is surplus value, entirely produced by the labour power of workers but appropriated by the

capitalist class. The capitalist class constantly seeks ways to reduce the cost of labour to maximise profits. The cost of the maintenance and reproduction of labour (workers) forms a component of workers' wages paid by the capitalists. It barely covers food, clothing, housing, education, etc. of workers' family, according to the relative social conditions. Women like all workers produce surplus value above and beyond their remuneration. Because generally women's primary role in capitalism is the maintenance and reproduction of current and future generation of workers most working women are still confined to lower skilled, lower paying jobs.

### Social oppression of women

The capitalist economic base gives rise to a superstructure of capitalist ideas, culture and legal system. Contradictions in the social relations of production are reflected in the constant struggles of ideas in the superstructure, in society generally.

As with all ideas in society "male supremacy" arises from the material economic base of capitalist relations of production. Male chauvinism reinforces oppression of women and denies women their rightful place in struggle. Capitalism makes use of "male supremacy" to increase the exploitation of women, hold back women's participation in struggle and divide the people's movement.

Whilst struggles have been able to improve women's position in form, they cannot be realized completely in content whilst the basic contradiction and struggle in the social relations of production continues unresolved.

# *The role of art and culture in class society*

Art and culture are part of the superstructure of class society, along with the State apparatus and the official political institutions.

The forms and styles of art and culture are determined by the economic base of society, i.e., by the mode of production and by the class division of society that arises from the mode of production. They reflect the economic and political interests of the dominant class (such as the aristocracy in feudal society or the bourgeoisie in capitalist society).

“In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art’s sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics.” (Mao Zedong, *Yenan Forum on Literature and Art*)

“Art” embraces the widest range of creative activity including literature, painting, film, dance, theatre, music, photography, computer graphics, etc.

“Culture” embraces the national or ethnic expressions and styles of art, but also includes other social elements such as religion and sport. Culture is shaped by historical experience and can endure through significant economic and political change. Eventually culture also changes, while exerting a powerful influence on the scope and pace of other changes in society.

## Art and culture as weapons of class rule

Throughout history, the various ruling classes

have used art and culture to reinforce and perpetuate their rule, to elevate their importance, to display their wealth and power, and to overawe their enemies. They have never been content with a passive reflection of their ideology within the superstructure of society. Every ruling class, without exception, has consciously promoted itself through art and culture.

In capitalist society, the dominant capitalist class (the bourgeoisie) places a great deal of importance on the ownership and control of mass media and information technology. By this means they maintain a monopoly on news and information, and can ignore, distort or marginalise anything that contradicts their world outlook. (They put enormous effort into discrediting Marxism and the achievements of countries striving to build socialism.)

In particular, they can influence the electoral success of the competing bourgeois parties. Their editorials can be mild or scathing, they can select flattering photographs of the personalities they want, and publish lies and slander (or even the truth!) about people they wish to sink. Why else do the parliamentary politicians and the capitalist class fawn over Packer, Murdoch and Skase?

## Religion

In earlier epochs, religion was an integral part of the State apparatus, and was used to justify the rule of the slave-owners, the feudal lords, the monarchists and even the emerging bourgeois republicans such as Cromwell.

These days, the capitalist class does not try to pretend that their rule is a God-given right, but nevertheless make use of religious sentiment to head off any change to the status quo. Thus they praise religious teachings which stress passive acceptance rather than rebellion, which concentrate on individual remolding rather than social change, which



are more concerned with ancient history rather than the future of mankind.

On the other hand, Communists support the progressive forces within the various religions whenever they identify with the poor and the oppressed. We support their efforts to break with elitist and sexist traditions, to resist autocratic rule, and to actively participate in the struggles of the people.

### Art and culture as commodities

Under capitalism, art and culture are turned into commodities which are bought and sold on the market. The source of profit for the capitalists is the surplus-value produced from two sections of workers. Firstly by the creative workers; the artists, musicians, composers, actors, writers, etc. Secondly by the industry workers; the printers, publishers, theatre workers, technicians, distribution workers, advertising workers, etc.

Massive profits are creamed off by the parasites of capitalism, the entertainment “promoters”, the advertising companies, the recording companies, the film and TV studios. Far from encouraging the liberal slogan of “art for art’s sake”, modern capitalism only encourages art and culture for the sake of a quick dollar! The reality for most creative workers is a daily struggle just to get by, while a small number “make it” for a brief period until they are replaced by the next marketable personality or fad.

In this situation, capitalism reveals its obscene nature. The small number of musicians, actors, singers, tennis and soccer players who “make it” are paid many millions of dollars, which is much more than heart surgeons who save lives, much more than engineers who design public utility systems, much more than primary school teachers who teach children literacy and numeracy and awaken their thirst for knowledge.

Capitalism corrupts art and culture in many ways. Art workers are commonly enslaved to the advertising industry, actors depend on the TV industry to eke out a living, musicians are chained to the recording companies, writers need the publishing houses, etc. Because they control the livelihood of the art and culture workers, these sections of industry exert a huge influence over what is written, what is painted, what is performed. They distort creative expression, they manipulate art and culture to become merely advertising for capitalist profit-making, or a backdrop for self-important politicians.

### “Progressive” art and literature

Terms such as “counter-culture” and “sub-culture” are commonly used to describe those artistic or cultural activities outside of the so-called “mainstream” of bourgeois art and culture. Like all social ideology, they also have a class basis, and can be divided into a “reactionary” and a “progressive” stream.

The reactionary stream promotes extreme nihilism, and focuses on destructive and negative individualism. It is a reaction to the alienation of individuals living within capitalism, an escape from reality, a potential source of fascism. The class basis of this culture is the egotistical world outlook of the bourgeoisie, to whom it represents no threat at all.

The progressive stream promotes the culture of working class struggle, and is based in the history of the working people, and therefore is often expressed with national or regional characteristics. It draws inspiration from the struggles of the past and strives to build up the solidarity and determination of people in struggle. Progressive culture goes beyond the exposure of the greed and violence of capitalism, and is an important part of the united front.

For progressive art and literature to be

effective, it must strike a chord with people's experience, reflecting the essence of real life. "...life as reflected in works of literature and art can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical, nearer to the ideal, and therefore more universal than actual everyday life." (Mao Zedong, *Yenan Forum on Literature and Art*)

In drawing out the significance of life's events in a way that is aligned to the level of mass political consciousness, writers and artists need to know their audience well. It is not necessary to dogmatically spell out the conclusions, but rather to establish the scenarios that allow people to move forward and reach their own conclusions. "To study Marxism means to apply the dialectical materialist and historical materialist viewpoint in our observation of the world, of society and of literature and art; it does not mean writing philosophical lectures into our works of literature and art." (Mao Zedong, *Yenan Forum on Literature and Art*)

Progressive writers and artists are therefore in close contact with the working and oppressed people, and are able to speak their language. From this firm base, they can go beyond mere reflection of the world to consciously striving to change it.

# Parliament and democracy

The ruling class in Australia consists of US, British and Japanese imperialist interests, together with local monopoly capitalist groups and various “camp followers” of imperialism.

Their rule is defended by an apparatus of state power, relying ultimately on armed violence and repression, but for the moment these forces are held mainly in reserve.

Currently deception is the predominant means by which the ruling class maintains its position, and at the centre of this deception is parliamentary democracy.

## Parliament is an institution of capitalism

The institution of Parliament arose in England during the struggle of the emergent bourgeoisie against the hereditary rights of the monarchy and feudal aristocracy. It allowed the new manufacturing and merchant class a share in the running of society, which was reflected in the parliamentary division between “Commons” and “Lords”.

Increasingly the hereditary rights of the aristocracy have been eroded, so that many modern parliamentary democracies have completely abolished their “upper house”, or reduced it to “review” or ceremonial status. This process has stripped away the legal remnants of feudalism which stood in the way of the expansion of capital.

Whenever the modern imperialists talk of “freedom” and “democracy” and “human rights”, what they really mean is unlimited freedom for them to exploit more people, grab more resources and seize control of new markets.

Parliament also provides a means for the differing factions within the bourgeoisie and other sub-classes to resolve their differences by peaceful means, rather than by coups or civil wars which disrupt the flow of business. It is an institution that arose from capitalism and serves the continuation of the capitalist system. Its main role is that of a “talking shop” which monitors but does not control the workings of capitalism.

“The real business of government is done and its continuity ensured by the public service. It is backed by the army, the police, the courts and gaols. Governments come and go in competition with each other for the spoils of office: they call it power but it is a very limited idea of power and is based on power in the hands of the monopoly capitalists.” (E. Hill *Revolution and the Australian State*)

Even though the parliamentary system allows for the election of new leaders and parties, this does not threaten the ultimate control of the ruling class as such, but merely changes their “management team”. As Lenin observed...

“...a change of Ministers means very little, for the real work of administration is in the hands of an enormous army of officials. This army, however, is saturated through and through with an anti-democratic spirit, it is connected by thousands and millions of threads with the land-owners and the bourgeoisie and it depends upon them in every way.” (Lenin, *One of the Fundamental Questions of the Revolution*)

The truth of all this is plain to see whenever Parliament has a “recess” and the biggest bludgers head off overseas. Does capitalism grind to a halt? Is there economic chaos? Is there a crisis in the legal system? No! It is business as usual, because real power lies elsewhere, such as the boardrooms and business clubs of New York, London, Tokyo, Berlin, Sydney and Melbourne.

### The dead end of parliament

In providing greater freedom for the bourgeoisie to exercise their rights to hire and fire workers, to trade freely and to have more say in the running of society, the parliamentary system also provides the working class with greater freedom and some limited rights to organise and struggle for their class interests. In this sense, it is preferable to earlier autocratic or feudal institutions, or to open fascist dictatorship.

“A wider, freer and more open form of the class struggle and of class oppression enormously assists the proletariat in its struggle for the abolition of classes in general.” (Lenin *The State and Revolution*)

As long as the struggles of the working class and other oppressed working people are ineffective or do not seriously challenge imperialist domination, these freedoms and rights continue. Some concessions and minor reforms are possible within the narrow limits of change set by monopoly capitalism, but are often quickly eroded and never lead to more far-reaching change. On the contrary, parliament usually provides blatant support for the schemes and policies of imperialism, and invariably waters down any reforms beyond recognition.

The capacity of the parliamentary system to deceive the working people and to divert their struggles into endless debate and legalism has its basis in these minor reforms and freedoms. They serve to foster the illusion that fundamental change can be achieved by voting in the right party or particular individuals, and of course, all sorts of opportunists and careerists cash in on this.

However, nothing really changes because real economic and political power lies with the imperialists and monopoly capitalists and is backed by the armed force of the state apparatus.

Further deception stems from the mere right to vote, to elect and be elected, which is held to be the purest form of democracy, when in reality the wealthy, well educated, and “well connected” people dominate. Poor and working class people rarely get a look in, and their struggles are often denigrated or ignored.

“...the method of elections and the form of democracy are one thing, and the class content of the given institution is another thing.” (Lenin *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*)

### Working class democracy

Lenin struggled against the sham of parliamentary democracy with its illusion of political power and its stunted and artificial democracy. The Workers and Peasants Soviets were not only highly democratic grass-root organisations, they also exercised both decision-making and administrative functions. Their development was based on the experience of the Paris Commune so closely observed by Karl Marx, and extended the concept of democracy beyond “representation” to actual participation in running society.

“The way out of parliamentarism is not, of course, the abolition of representative institutions and the electoral principle, but the conversion of the representative institutions from talking shops into “working” bodies.” (Lenin *The State and Revolution*)

# *The economic role of the state*

Marxism regards the state as an instrument of power which is used in two principal ways: firstly as a means of suppressing any resistance to the interests of the ruling class in society; secondly, as a means of supporting and reinforcing the economic domination of the ruling class.

In Australia today, the violent and repressive aspect of imperialist-capitalist class rule is mainly held in reserve – for the time being. As the contradiction between the people and US imperialism sharpens, measures have been taken to strengthen military special forces, Federal Police and ASIO, as well as introduce a host of anti-democratic laws and restrictions on existing civil rights. Under the smokescreen of “anti-terrorism”, most of these measures are aimed at current and future peoples’ struggles against the US imperialist takeover of Australia. It demonstrates the critical truth of Lenin’s statement, “A standing army and police are the chief instruments of state power.” (Lenin *The State and Revolution* 1917)

While never forgetting this essential feature of the state, it is also important to understand the role of the state as an economic manager of the capitalist system, nowadays directly serving the interests of US imperialism and its global corporate monopolies.

## Engels’ definition of the state

Marx’s loyal comrade, Frederick Engels wrote extensively on the state, defining it as “...a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is an admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it is

cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel...a power seemingly standing above society became necessary for the purpose of moderating the conflict...this power, arisen out of society, but placing itself above it, and increasingly alienating itself from it, is the state.” (Engels *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* 1894)

Note that Engels says, “seemingly standing above society”. This is in sharp contrast to the false myth of the apolitical independence of the military, the courts, the public service and all the other trappings of the state apparatus. All these trapping arose as tools of class control.

The ruling class in society, whether slave-owners, kings, feudal lords or today’s monopoly capitalists, all adopted and moulded pre-existing instruments of authority and repression to suit the further domination of their particular class. Economic power leads to political power, and the capture and re-shaping of the state apparatus is an essential component of this process. “As the state arose from the need to hold class antagonisms in check, but as it arose, at the same time, in the midst of the conflict of these classes, it is, as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which, through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class, and thus acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class.” (Engels *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* 1894)

## Economic management under capitalism

The mass production needs of capitalism cannot be met by the resources of individual capitalists alone. Collectively they need roads, railways and ports to trade their goods. They need educated workers to operate their factories work in their shops and offices, and other workplaces. They need laws and

regulations to moderate commercial conflicts. They need gas, electricity and water, telecommunications systems, hospitals, etc.

The state provides all these needs, spreading the costs across the whole population through taxation, rates and other charges. In this way the infrastructure necessary for mass production and global trade is built, maintained and extended. Only a small portion of the capitalists' profits need be set aside for any unavoidable company taxes.

#### Monopoly capitalism and the era of imperialism

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Of course, the more powerful and influential capitalists get even more benefits from the state, in the way of timely and convenient infrastructure development, tax concessions and juicy government contracts. Thus the tendency towards monopolisation is pushed along by the state, squeezing out the smaller capitalists. Historically, the role of the state has overseen the transition from "laissez faire" capitalism to monopoly capitalism.

Quoting Engels comments on a democratic republic, Lenin noted, "...wealth exercises its power indirectly, but all the more surely", first, by means of the "direct corruption of officials" (America); second, by means of "an alliance between the government and Stock Exchange" (France and America)." (Lenin *The State and Revolution* 1917)

In Australia, the monopoly capitalists lobby and bribe not only the national government, but also the regional state governments. They have often played one regional government against another, in order to squeeze out more concessions for new investments.

But monopoly capitalism in Australia is now dominated by the foreign corporate monopolies and financial houses, the biggest being the US, followed by European and

Japanese interests. They put pressure on all the local capitalists, even local monopolies. They exert enormous influence on the various governments, demanding the privatisation of previously state-owned utilities and services. They demand the dismantling of laws and regulations restricting foreign penetration of the local economy and the accelerated takeover of Australian capitalism.

US imperialism is forced by economic necessity to expand or die. It seeks to control Australia: politically through the subservient Howard government, militarily through the integration of armed forces and military bases, and economically through unfair WTO treaties and the scandalous Free Trade Agreement.

#### The words of Lenin are truer than ever in today's world...

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"Imperialism – the era of bank capital, the era of gigantic capitalist monopolies, the era of the development of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism – has demonstrated with particular force an extraordinary strengthening of the 'state machine' and an unprecedented growth of its bureaucratic and military apparatus, in connection with the intensification of repressive measures against the proletariat both in the monarchical and in the freest, republican countries." (Lenin *The State and Revolution* 1917)

# *Australian state machinery serves US imperialism*

Marxists regard the powers of the state apparatus as the ultimate instruments of class authority, designed to defend and perpetuate the economically dominant class in society. With our armed forces at the beck and call of US imperialism, it is timely to consider some of the ideological issues of the state machine.

Frederick Engels examined the role of the state in his work, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, published in 1894. He provided this definition:

“The state...is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is an admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it is cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel...a power seemingly standing above society became necessary for the purpose of moderating the conflict...this power, arisen out of society, but placing itself above it, and increasingly alienating itself from it, is the state.”

## Class antagonism in Australia

While this was recognised by many, Engels went further, demonstrating through various historical references that the state developed as an instrument of class rule.

“As the state arose from the need to hold class antagonisms in check, but as it arose, at the same time, in the midst of the conflict of these classes, it is, as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which, through the medium of the state,

becomes also the politically dominant class, and thus acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class.”

In modern Australian society, today's ruling class is a minority group composed of foreign multinational corporations and their financial connections, a few local monopoly capitalists and large landowners, and a small gang of shameless collaborators and political parasites.

The great majority of people are excluded from this elite ruling clique. The biggest section is the working class, that is, those who have to sell their labour in factories, building sites, farms, workplaces, offices, institutions, etc. in order to survive. They are the class most directly exploited by imperialism, but they are also most united and organised section of the people, the only section capable of challenging the rule of the foreign monopolies and initiating fundamental change in Australia. There are also dispossessed workers; those too old, too sick, too under-educated, or too alienated to be exploited any longer – cast aside on the scrap heap of capitalism.

Excluded from the ruling class are the smaller local capitalists, small business operators, small farmers and property owners, professional workers, and other intermediate sections. They lack the strength and determination to seriously compete with imperialism and fear the revolutionary potential of the working class. Therefore they are forever trying to compromise with imperialism, to regulate and reform it, and whenever possible divert the working class towards their own shallow agenda.

Finally there is the lumpen-proletariat, the under-class of petty criminals, thugs, con-artists, and spies that are habitually recruited by the ruling class to act as strike-breakers, stand-over merchants and agents of fascist terror.

## The state apparatus

Engels determined that the power of the state apparatus was established around “special bodies of armed men” rather than the armed general community that existed in pre-class societies. With the division of society into classes, weapons ceased to be personal items and came under the control of the ruling class. In our society, this is highly regulated, with only very specific “special bodies of armed men” having access to the most modern and lethal weapons. As Lenin noted in his famous work, *The State and Revolution* (1917), “A standing army and police are the chief instruments of state power.”

Supplementing this naked power are the other elements of the state apparatus – the legal system based on the sanctity of private property, gaols, concentration camps, secret police agencies, and private security outfits sub-contacted for the dirty work.

## Common distortions of Marxism

In Chapter 1 of *The State and Revolution*, Lenin dealt with two common distortions of Marxist theory on the issue of the state. These were critical issues at the time, only a few months ahead of the successful October Revolution in Russia. They remain important issues today.

The first distortion was the desire of the “bourgeois and particularly petty-bourgeois ideologists” to regard the state as “an organ for the reconciliation of classes”. This is in fact the opposite of Marxism.

“According to Marx, the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another; it is the creation of “order” which legalises and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the conflict between classes. In the opinion of the petty-bourgeois politicians, order means precisely the reconciliation of classes, and

not the oppression of one class by another; to moderate the conflict means reconciling classes and not depriving the oppressed classes of definite means and methods of struggle to overthrow the oppressors.”

Fudging on this issue means accepting that fundamental change is neither possible nor necessary, and that the working class and other oppressed sections should learn to cop it sweet, make a best of a bad lot, etc.

The second distortion was that of pseudo-Marxists such as Kautsky, who glossed over matters concerning the revolutionary seizure of state power. Revolutionary change is not just a matter of seizing control of the existing (minority class) state apparatus as in a petty coup, but requires its complete smashing and subsequent replacement by a new (working class) state power exercising authority in the name of the majority.

“...it is obvious that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, but also without the destruction of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class...”

*The State and Revolution* expands on the items covered here, and explains such concepts as the dictatorship of the proletariat, the transition from socialism to classless communist society, and the eventual withering away of the state. It is recommended reading for all people who seriously desire an alternative to imperialist-dominated capitalism in Australia.



# Force and Legal Repression

The illusion of “freedom” is designed to absorb, deflect or divert the economic and political struggles of the people, especially the working class. When this fails, force replaces deception as the main means of maintaining the rule of the capitalist class.

## Capitalism relies on economic force

The whole basis of capitalism rests on the existence of a dispossessed class (in Marxist terms, the proletariat) “with nothing to sell but their labour”. Workers are forced to work for the owners of the means of production (the capitalist class) in order to obtain the necessities of life. No matter how hard or well they work, their livelihood is dependent on the relative success (profitability) of the business.

When profits dip due to overproduction, lost markets, obsolete technology, etc. the workers have no rights, they are sacked, their living standards ruined. They join the reserve army of unemployed workers, eking out a subsistence living on meagre “welfare” payments.

## State apparatus defends capitalist rule

Any attempt by workers to rebel against the economic rights of the capitalist class, or to challenge the injustice of the system is invariably met with repression. The greater the rebellion, the greater the repression.

In his book, *Revolution and the Australian State* (1974), E.F. Hill wrote, “...the nature of capitalism has not changed. There will be economic crises when this most dictatorial weapon of hire and fire will emerge even more

sharply. When the workers revolt against this or against any other dictatorial action the capitalists always have violence to suppress the revolt. They maintain their own physical force to do this.”

This physical force is the state apparatus, in particular the army, the various police forces, and the secret police organisations. They are always present at strike meetings, picket lines, political meetings and demonstrations. They follow people, tap phones, bug houses, hack into computers, read e-mails, build up dossiers on militant trade unionists, community activists, and other leaders of the working people.

## Layers of repression

The capitalist state uses different layers of force and repression, trying to maintain the illusion of impartially enforcing “law and order” on behalf of society rather than openly acting in the interests of the richest capitalists and foreign monopolies.

## Common law

The first layer is the common law. In this case, repression is not overtly political, but has the appearance of merely the normal policing duties of any civilised society. Workers and other activists are not attacked, arrested, beaten up, jailed, etc. because of their industrial actions or their political views. Oh, no! These regretful things happen only because they have broken some common law or other. In reality, as Hill observed, “The string of offences, assault, offensive behaviour, indecent words, obstruction, resisting arrest are simply political weapons used to suppress the working and common people.”

## Industrial law

The next layer is the battery of industrial law that restricts worker organisation and trade

union activity. Special legislation covers the registration and operation of trade unions, as well as the election of officials and delegates. "Essential Services" legislation forbids strikes or bans in certain proclaimed industries or even workplaces. The Trade Practices Act forbids any supportive action by other workers in solidarity with their comrades in another workplace or industry. This is considered "interference" with lawful commercial activity!

The Workplace Relations Act and others provide for severe penalties for unions, their officials and individual workers who break these laws – massive fines, jail, seizure of assets, house, cars, etc. The threat of these penalties is used to try to intimidate trade union leaders, and sometimes provides a good excuse for the more gutless opportunists to duck out of struggle. In reality, when the workers are determined and united behind honest leaders, the courts "resolve" the dispute with some sort of quick compromise.

Disputes can be hauled into the State or Federal industrial Commissions, and go onto the State or Federal Court systems. In this way, the legal process of resolving a dispute can be quite lengthy and expensive for the unions, and almost impossible for individual workers. Decisions are made by politically appointed Commissioners or Judges – not the jury of 12 peers that even murderers get!

### Contempt of Court

A further layer of repression is the use of court injunctions and "contempt of court". Of these, Hill wrote, "Criminal contempt is used to punish words or acts tending to prejudice the course of justice or scandalising the courts or contempt in the face of the court (that is, demonstrations against courts)...Civil contempt for our purposes is disobedience of the order of a court commanding someone to do something or to refrain from doing something." Again, nothing is overtly political,

but the effect is to restrict and confine workers' struggles.

### Crimes Act

The final layer of repression is the infamous Crimes Act. Here the gloves come off. This legislation is openly political – it is aimed at not only the act of rebellion or revolution, but also the intent. It is dotted with crimes like sedition, treason, treachery and so on. All carry the most severe penalties, including life imprisonment and death. It is deliberately vague, so that it can be invoked to cover almost any situation. Nor does it confine itself to Australia, as it can be extended to any "proclaimed country" – now just who would that be?

# *The tactics of anti-communism*

The intent of anti-communism is to isolate the revolutionary activists from the people and to distort and discredit the liberating ideas of Marxism.

US imperialism may boast that “communism collapsed with the Soviet Union”, but it still devotes enormous resources to destabilising socialist and progressive countries, while trying to fit the “terrorist” tag to national liberation struggles and popular revolutionary movements which include Marxist parties. In contrast, regimes which use state terror to suppress their own people and attack communists have frequently been installed and sustained by US imperialism, for instance Columbia, Peru, Morocco, Indonesia, the Philippines and notably Saddam’s Iraq.

As the struggle to expel US imperialism from Australia hots up, the peoples’ movement here will also become the target of anti-communist propaganda designed to confuse and divide the workers and their allies. Political activity within the peoples’ movement needs to take this into account.

## The primary source of anti-communism

Anti-communism is promoted systematically and deliberately by the paid agents of monopoly capitalism, in the first place the various “intelligence” agencies of the main imperialist countries such as USA and Britain. They are experts at spreading “disinformation”, the code word for lies and slander. They do this in the service of a class of the richest and most powerful monopoly capitalists who own the decisive means of production in society, who control the banks and world markets, and directly and indirectly exercise power over the

political and bureaucratic machinery of state.

They conduct a ceaseless propaganda campaign against countries with socialist or progressive governments – China, Cuba, Vietnam, North Korea etc., painting them as regimented hell-holes of mindless repression, with collapsing economies and resentful populations who yearn for consumer goods and the freedom to invest and exploit. On the rare occasions that something positive is reported, it is presented as the result of Western aid and investment or political pressure, rather than give any credit to socialist construction.

They operate through networks of universities, quasi-academic “foundations” and “think-tanks”, which generate an endless stream of so-called research which is doled out to compliant political leaders, favoured historians, and selected media monopolies. The material is then released or “leaked” to the mass media outlets, where it is refined and churned out – a collection of repeated lies, false assumptions, selective facts and distortions of the truth. Contrary evidence is ignored or the source is ridiculed or pigeon-holed as “anti-American”.

Just how this process unfolds has been starkly revealed by the exposure of the Bush/Blair/Howard bullshit over Iraq’s alleged “weapons of mass destruction”, and “nuclear material from Africa”.

## Other sources of anti-communism

As the credibility of US propaganda is eroded, there is increasing reliance on less direct sources, such as various political opportunists who also oppose Marxism and willingly repeat imperialism’s lies and distortions to advance their own political careers. They are more interested in petty point-scoring than in bringing out the truth, more interested in demonstrating their loyalty to US imperialism

then standing up for the interests of the Australian people.

At the front of this pack are the leaders of the Labor Party. They ducked and weaved and hummed and ha-ed over opposing the US invasion of Iraq. They continue to support the operation of US war bases on Australian soil. They will predictably cave in when the US-Australia Free Trade Agreement hands over even greater control of the Australian economy to the greedy multinationals.

Also getting an occasional run off the bench is a confusing array of “super-revolutionaries” who continually trip and collide with one another, but still manage to sing the same tune when denouncing genuine Marxists as “Stalinists” and “petty-bourgeois nationalists”. Who’s pulling the strings? Why do they refuse to recognise the reality of imperialist domination of Australia?

Finally, it needs to be recognised that a portion of the anti-communist critique is founded on facts. Mistakes, arrogance, sectarian behaviour of communists in their mass work, errors and mis-judgements, injustices committed by leaders and parties in different eras – these things are seized on and magnified to fuel anti-communism.

#### Dealing with anti-communism

Exposed to little else, it is no wonder that many ordinary people are influenced by this constant barrage. They lack factual information and the time to study events more closely. The system promotes cynicism and a selfishness which rejects “politics” and moral questioning.

In this context, the worst way to break down the indoctrinated prejudices of anti-communism is to meet them head on with abuse and scorn. It is much better to ignore these negative attitudes and look for points

of agreement to patiently build unity around particular issues and struggles and to win the trust and respect of people. Sooner or later opportunities always occur to introduce ideas of Australian independence. With more politically aware people already committed to the struggle against imperialism, there is more scope to raise issues of socialism and communism.

Even then, the key thing is to preserve and consolidate the existing degree of unity already achieved – in other words adherence to Marxism or socialist ideals is not raised above the more pressing immediate goal of expelling imperialism.

#### Communism

The ideals of communism continue to inspire millions of people across the world and attract the interest of those struggling against modern imperialism. This is because communism offers the only real alternative to the chaos and insecurity of imperialist-dominated capitalism. Not merely resistance and repulsion of imperialism, but the prospect of doing away with class-based oppression forever. It appeals to all oppressed classes, races and peoples, promising equality and real democracy. It rejects metaphysical and unscientific prejudices, myths and religious obscurantism. Its simple and powerful message is projected in the famous call, “Workers of the world unite”.

# *Theory and Practice – a dialectical relationship*

Marxists attach much importance to the dialectics (interrelationship) of theory and practice. The social practice and experience of people leads to a higher level of knowledge (theory) about society, which in turn leads to a higher level of social practice and experience.

## Production – the most fundamental practical activity

This process of learning was most clearly examined by Mao Zedong in his 1937 article *On Practice*. Mao's starting point was human activity in production through which humanity changes both its environment and itself.

"...Marxists regard man's activity in production as the most fundamental practical activity, the determinant of all his other activities...through which he comes gradually to understand the phenomena, the properties and the laws of nature, and the relations between himself and nature; and through his activity in production he also gradually comes to understand, in varying degrees, certain relations that exist between man and man."

This gradual gaining of knowledge, of theoretical understanding of the world and class society, occurs in several overlapping stages, reinforced by personal and social practice, by life experience.

## The perceptual stage of cognition

Initially, only the outward appearance of

events and situations is sensed. Practice, including involvement in production, in scientific experiment, in social relationships, in struggle to change the environment, leads to a deeper understanding of the relationships between things, between people.

"In the process of practice, man at first sees only the phenomenal side, the separate aspects, the external relations of things...As social practice continues, things that give rise to man's sense perceptions and impressions in the course of his practice are repeated many times; then a sudden change (leap) takes place in the brain in the process of cognition, and concepts are formed."

## The stage of rational knowledge

As practice, (experience, experiment) is repeated, certain results can be anticipated and the links between cause and effect can be more clearly seen. Knowledge then moves beyond the superficial to the point where general laws can be applied to predict similar results in new areas not yet experienced.

"Proceeding further, by means of judgement and inference one is able to draw logical conclusions...This stage of conception, judgement and inference is the more important stage in the entire process of knowing a thing; it is the stage of rational knowledge."

## Applying knowledge to change the world

Marxists strive to apply this dialectical theory of knowledge to the class struggle. They apply the theory of knowledge not only to understand the level of consciousness of the various classes in society, but also to determine the most effective strategy and tactics to meet each new situation.

"In its knowledge of capitalist society, the proletariat was only in the perceptual stage of cognition in the first period of its practice,

the period of machine-smashing and spontaneous struggle...but when it reached the second period of its practice, the period of conscious and organised economic and political struggles, the proletariat was able to comprehend the essence of capitalist society, the relations of exploitation between social classes and its own historical task..."

Defeating imperialism and building an independent people's Australia is the first step in the revolutionary struggle for socialism, the first step in changing the world of Australian workers and working people. Theory alone changes nothing, it only has value when it is "a guide to action."

"Theory becomes purposeless if it is not connected with revolutionary practice, just as practice gropes in the dark if its path is not illuminated by revolutionary theory." (J. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*)

#### Why we don't always get it right

In spite of our best efforts, in spite of our Marxist analysis of the main contradictions in Australian society, not many of our initiatives and activities among the working class result in outright success. Quite a few are only partially successful and eventually fizz out, and some are totally rejected by the workers.

Does this mean our theory is incorrect, that we are barking up the wrong tree?

Mao had enormous experience of this problem in China, where the path of revolution went up many blind alleys before the mass level of consciousness was sufficient to carry through the revolutionary struggle to victory. The necessarily limited practice and experience of the revolutionaries was one factor, while the hold of feudalism and the habits of Confucian thought limited the vision of the masses.

"It often happens, however, that thinking lags behind reality; this is because man's cognition

is limited by numerous social conditions."

Thus certain ideas of revolutionary struggle may be correct and appropriate to the circumstances, but will not be truly grasped until sufficient experience has been accumulated, sometimes at great cost to the people.

#### Subjective thought and objective reality

The world in all its complexities, including the laws of science and the laws of class relations determined by the mode of production in society, all exist irrespective of our thinking. This is what Marxists mean by "objective reality". Marxists strive to align their thinking as closely as possible to objective reality, seeking to unravel the truth in things, seeking to reveal the inner contradictions that push forward the development of things.

Just as change is continuous, so is the search for truth. As Mao put it, "...man's knowledge of a particular process at any given stage of development is only relative truth. The sum total of innumerable relative truths constitutes absolute truth."

Therefore we should be neither surprised nor disappointed when our subjective ideas are shown to be wrong, when they do not conform to the objective conditions.

Subjective thought substitutes desires and prejudices for objective reality. Rather than ideas arising from and reflecting the objective world, they distort the view of the objective world. If ideas are conceived in an ivory tower or in a hothouse divorced from the practice of everyday life, they quickly become subjective and irrelevant.

"Idealism and mechanical materialism, opportunism and adventurism, are all characterised by the breach between the subjective and the objective, by the separation

of knowledge from practice.”

#### Endless cycles of knowledge

“Discover the truth through practice, and again through practice verify and develop the truth. Start from perceptual knowledge and actively develop it into rational knowledge; then start from rational knowledge and actively guide revolutionary practice to change both the subjective and the objective world. Practice, knowledge, again practice, and again knowledge.

This form repeats itself in endless cycles, and with each cycle the content of practice and knowledge rises to a higher level. Such is the whole of the dialectical-materialist theory of knowledge, and such is the dialectical-materialist theory of the unity of knowing and doing.”

# *Test ideas by doing*

Our thinking on doing and the relationship between thinking, theorising, talking and doing in our personal lives and our collective life is a very crucial question, which governs the effectiveness of our work.

Mao Zedong wrote extensively on this subject, because he was well aware that the relationships between what people say and what they do is very often unbalanced, that emphasis is put on talking, theorising and having interminable meetings over some proposed hypothetical line of possible action. This is to the detriment of organising and carrying out that action.

This is still a really big problem in Australia today, as it is elsewhere.

In *Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?*, Mao points out that correct ideas come from social practice. What is this thing called social practice? It is the doing of some activity in our lives with others. It includes thinking about something we might do, organising ourselves and/or others, working out tactics if that is appropriate and then getting out there and putting it into practice.

With some new ideas, there is often no firm basis of experience from which to draw on as to exactly what line of approach to use in today's conditions.

In such cases the line of approach is to stop talking about it, stop theorising in abstract ways about it. The need is plain. The need is to grab what we know, get some initial ideas and put them into practice. Then this practice can be summed up. Strengths and weaknesses will be revealed. Assumptions can be made that

lead to new ideas. They too can be put into practice. This is how knowledge is improved. It is an ongoing cycle.

It requires the guts and sometimes "more front than Myers" to do this. We may make some mistakes. Overall time must be taken for necessary preparation tasks and critical re-evaluation of work.

We need to understand the usefulness of the 'United Front' approach. In our work we need to unite as many different groups of people around a given struggle as is possible. This gives strength in struggle and develops unity between the various groups. It also enables some degree of introducing Marxist ideas into the struggle in appropriate ways. We can do this without losing our independent Marxist methods of work and thinking.

## Doing starts with us

This is an old approach but remains a very effective one. In all these things we learn by doing. We survive by learning from that doing. We are able to have a real, practical basis from which to develop the theoretical side where the theory is founded upon the real experience of that doing, as must always be the case to get meaningful results. We need to remember that theoretical understanding and associated discussions, organisational meetings etc are necessary, but must be to the point and take as little of our time and effort as is practicable.

In short, it is very clear that the principle of doing is the key to working effectively to bring about change, to bring about a better life for all working people. It starts with me. It starts with you.



# *Apply Lenin's principles of mass work*

There are many mass organisations and lobby groups which have been formed in the course of people's struggle around on-going broad issues, such as education, social services, public transport, civil liberties, environmental protection, etc.

Other groups and organisations arise over a particular issue. There are active community groups opposed to freeways, industrial pollution, destruction of the landscape by "developers", loss of open space and community recreation facilities etc. These groups often continue to pursue new or similar issues in their locality.

Groups also arise over one single issue such as opposition to uranium mining, preservation of a national park or heritage building etc, bringing together people from many communities.

There is obviously enormous scope for building the united front by working within and alongside most of these organisations and groups. In some cases, the issue itself is quite closely related to the inroads of imperialism, although not everyone would see it that way, nor would they commonly describe it as "imperialism".

In other cases, the connections are less obvious, but scratching the surface will usually throw up some link that ties in with the agenda of imperialist domination of Australia. In most organisations and groups there is plenty of opportunity to get involved with people who are learning how to organise, how to fight and how to build alliances with similar groups and

sympathisers.

How should Communists work in mass organisations?

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The aim of mass work in the current situation is to implement the tactical policy of building the united front, the policy of uniting the many (the workers, the unemployed, farmers, indigenous people, small business people, professional people, etc.) against the few (super-rich foreign monopolies, their agents, apologists and hangers-on). Only a broad-based united front, led by the working class, can ever hope to overthrow imperialism in Australia and replace it with a people's democratic republic. This is the first stage in the Australian revolution, and sets the scene for the later and higher stage of socialism.

By its very nature the united front is an objective movement, rather than a formal organisation or coalition. It is fluid; it ebbs and flows according to the intensity, the consciousness, and the success of each particular anti-imperialist struggle. In other words, the united front represents the current level of spontaneous resistance of the masses to the increasing domination and exploitation of modern imperialism.

The role of revolutionary work in building the united front is to guide these spontaneous and often haphazard experiences of the masses towards a more focussed and conscious goal. This goal is the forcible expulsion of imperialism and the winning of national independence, and cannot be achieved without working class leadership of the united front. This is the main task and responsibility of revolutionary activists working in mass organisations.

Communists also recognise the need for the establishment of a people's democratic dictatorship to defend and extend this stage of the revolution to the stage of socialism.

### "Left" errors weaken mass work

In the past, revolutionary work inside mass organisations was often seen in terms of "capturing" the leading positions, of favouring the "left" faction against others, or persuading the organisation leaders to endorse policy statements which went far beyond the scope of the particular organisation.

All these methods of work concentrated on the so-called "advanced" workers and leading personalities, and paid little attention to the mass of ordinary members and supporters. These "left" errors often came from an over-emphasis on the importance of well-spoken and educated intellectuals, and the bourgeois ideological attitude that the masses are there to be manipulated. These are still the most common methods of work for most "left" organisations, who are more obsessed with "signing up" members rather than the patient work of linking with the people's struggles.

Another similar and particularly bad style of work is the "blow-in, latch-on" method used by various groups to promote their newspapers and syphon off people into their activities. Even genuine efforts to offer support and solidarity with people's struggles or workers' picket lines are often marred by this self-promotion.

Both methods drive a wedge between the revolutionaries and the people, and hinder the process of building the united front.

### Build the united front within the working class

Trade union activity has always been an important part of Communist mass work and will be studied in much greater detail in future issues of "Marxism Today". Lenin devoted a full chapter of "*Left-wing Communism*" to the errors of ultra-left behaviour in the trade union organisations, putting his position quite clearly. "For the whole task of the Communists is to be able to convince the backward

elements, to work among them, and not to fence themselves off from them by artificial and childishly "Left" slogans."

In many trade unions various competing factions, groups and individuals seek to influence the mass of workers to support them. Whether or not Communists work with such groups depends on whether or not such involvement would assist or hinder the primary task of building the united front. In some situations an elected workplace trade union position may be useful, in other cases it may be better to maintain closer day to day contact with particular workers as one of the rank and file.

But trade union activity is not the be-all and end-all of Communist political work within the working class. Many workers are more or less just nominal members of their trade union, some are cynical and disillusioned with good reason, others work as casuals or in non-union workplaces, etc. Quite often such workers are very receptive to the concept of a united front to win national independence and to kick out the foreign monopolies, and are not held back by loyalty to the Labor Party or the fear of getting "out of step" with the union hierarchy.

Because the working class is the most exploited, the most oppressed class, it is the heart and soul of the united front, the most reliable champion of the people against imperialism. It is crucial to win the working class to the position of conscious rebellion against imperialist domination, and every effort should be made to forge and strengthen the links between the Communists and all sections of the working class.

# Lessons from the Russian Revolution

*“Left Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder”* was written in 1920 by Lenin to sum up the reasons for the success of the Russian revolution. It examines the tactics of the Bolsheviks in the years 1905-20, and from this experience, Lenin draws out lessons of international significance for the conduct of revolutionary struggle. “Experience has proved that on certain very essential questions of the proletarian revolution, all countries will inevitably have to perform what Russia has performed.”

At the time, the “right” opportunism of the Second International was discredited due to their support of the 1914-18 imperialist war, and there was a revolutionary upsurge throughout Europe brought about by unemployment, poverty and oppression. The example of the Russian revolution and the struggle of the first socialist state against the invading imperialist armies inspired and influenced the international working class. In this situation, Lenin strongly warned against the rise of “left” opportunism in the international movement, which would lead to the isolation and defeat of the revolutionary forces in other countries.

## A vanguard party is a fundamental condition

Lenin began his analysis of the history of the Russian revolution with a short chapter in which he stressed the key role of the revolutionary party in leading the proletariat to victory, and in consolidating the gains of the revolution during the period of proletarian dictatorship.

“...absolute centralisation and the strictest discipline of the proletariat constitute one of

the fundamental conditions for victory over the bourgeoisie.”

Lenin attached so much importance to this question that he dealt with the role of the vanguard party at some length, stressing the absolute necessity of another three conditions...

- The “class consciousness” and “devotion” of the proletarian vanguard
- The need to link with “...the broadest masses of the toilers – primarily with the proletariat, but also with the non-proletarian toiling masses”
- The need for correct strategy and tactics “provided that the broadest masses have been convinced by their own experience that they are correct”

These conditions “...are created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience. Their creation is facilitated by correct revolutionary theory, which, in its turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and revolutionary movement.”

## The mass line

Throughout the book, Lenin emphasises the importance of the vanguard party maintaining close contact with the working masses. Communists “...must imperatively work wherever the masses are to be found. You must be capable of every sacrifice, of overcoming the greatest obstacles in order to carry on agitation and propaganda systematically, perseveringly, persistently and patiently, precisely in those institutions, societies and associations – even the most ultra-reactionary – in which proletarian or semiproletarian masses are to be found.”

Only by maintaining and consolidating this close contact can the Communists be in a position to assist the working masses to

analyse their political experience, and to find the way forward in their particular situation.

“...propaganda and agitation alone are not enough. For this the masses must have their own political experience. Such is the fundamental law of all great revolutions.”

#### Learn the characteristics of each country

The main task for the Communists in each country, Lenin concluded, was to determine the exact strategy and tactics for the revolution in their own country.

“Investigate, study, seek, divine, grasp that which is peculiarly national, specifically national in the concrete manner in which each country approaches the fulfillment of the single international task, in which it approaches the victory over opportunism and “Left” doctrinarism within the working-class movement, the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, and the establishment of a Soviet republic and a proletarian dictatorship.”

Elsewhere he states, “To be able to find, to probe for, to correctly determine the specific path or the particular turn of events that will lead the masses to the real, last decisive, and great revolutionary struggle – such is the main task of Communism...”

The concept of Marxist theory guiding the actual practice in a living way, not merely as dogma, was a key issue in the many stages of the Russian revolution. As Lenin put it, “One must use one’s own brains and be able to find one’s bearings in each separate case.”

#### Methods of work

Under Lenin’s leadership the Bolshevik Party engaged in the widest possible range of political activities in order to carry its message beyond the proletariat to the peasants, to the intellectuals, to the middle and more

backward sections of the Russian people. Thus the Bolsheviks were able to fight on all fronts, using a flexible combination of “open” and “secret” organisation, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary tactics, legal and illegal strikes and demonstrations, peaceful and non-peaceful resistance, etc. as suited the actual conditions of the time.

“...the revolutionary class must be able to master all forms, or aspects, of social activity without any exception... the revolutionary class must be ready to pass from one form to another in the quickest and most unexpected manner.”

From this viewpoint, Lenin strongly condemned the “left” rejection of working in reactionary trade unions and other organisations controlled by the ruling class. This would leave “the insufficiently developed or backward masses of workers under the influence of the reactionary leaders, the agents of the bourgeoisie...”

Similarly, he opposed the “left” error of completely rejecting parliament, and pointed to “the experience of many, if not all, revolutions, which shows how very useful during a revolution is the combination of mass action outside the reactionary parliament with an opposition sympathetic to...the revolution inside it.”

#### The politics of compromise

Against the slogan of “No Compromise” raised by the “left” opportunists, Lenin countered with the bitter experience of Russia, “...that victory is impossible unless they have learned both how to attack and how to retreat properly.”

“Every proletarian has been through strikes and has experienced “compromises” with the hated oppressors and exploiters, when the workers had to go back to work either without having achieved anything or agreeing to only

a partial satisfaction of their demands.”

A mature revolutionary party has to distinguish between this type of tactical retreat, between “...a compromise enforced by objective conditions” and “...a compromise by traitors who try to ascribe to outside causes their own selfishness, cowardice, desire to toady to the capitalists, and readiness to yield to intimidation, sometimes to persuasion, sometimes to sops, and sometimes to flattery on the part of the capitalists.”

### Australia

These are some of the main lessons that we can learn from Lenin’s time and the experiences of the Bolshevik Party. What we need to study for our situation in Australia are the principles involved, and then find our own means of implementing these principles into political activity.

# *The role of mass work in the struggle against imperialism*

Fundamental change, such as the expulsion of US, European and Japanese imperialism from Australia, will not happen until the great mass of the Australian people consciously decide there is no alternative. Revolutionary political work must therefore be geared to raising the political consciousness of the masses in struggle.

## The clutching hands of US imperialism

At present there is a sharpening of the contradictions between US imperialism in particular, and the Australian people.

The open and direct hand of US imperialism's domination of Australia can be seen in the slavish political stand taken by the Howard government to each and every foreign policy position of US president Bush – Iraq, Kyoto Protocol, Middle East, disarmament issues, the scandalous Free Trade Agreement, the continuing takeover of Australian armed forces and military hardware by the US war machine, the expansion of US military bases and personnel, pandering to the fascist Indonesian special forces, etc.

Less directly, the hand of US imperialism is apparent in the economic and social policies of the Howard government – policies which favour the corporate monopolies and their rich and powerful friends while attacking the living standards of the great majority of the Australian people. In spite of massive taxation relative to comparable OECD countries, Australia's healthcare and education systems

are falling behind, many social services are in crisis, national infrastructure is neglected, and local industries are squeezed out in favour of imports. Privatisation has undermined the reliability of public utilities such as water, gas and electricity services, as well as public transport in the major cities.

Australia is tagging along with the USA in the introduction of new laws attacking traditional democratic rights and individual freedoms, not only "anti-terror" laws, but laws designed to restrict and weaken trade unions, laws forcing workers into low-paid individual contracts, tougher conditions for welfare benefits, harsher penalties for existing crimes, curfews on young people, insulting conditions for indigenous communities receiving social services – a long list with more to come.

## Social tensions reflect people's anger and frustration

It all points to further polarization of Australian society. The rich getting richer and the poor just cast aside with under-resourced public education and second-rate healthcare.

The Australian dream of owning one's house has never been a possibility for many poor families and part-time workers. It is a fading dream for the working poor, those with unskilled low-paid jobs, and even the middle sections have to battle with huge mortgages and credit card debts to maintain a decent standard of living.

The hopelessness of the very poor, the insecurity and frustration of the working poor, the growing alienation of those sections left behind or pushed aside by the policies of imperialist takeover – all give rise to the social tensions recently expressed by angry young people in various incidents around the country. It is a basic expression of class struggle and will break out again and again, but will only lead to more repression and

violence by the state power. In the era of imperialism, only the ideas of revolutionary change and socialism can solve the problems of the Australian people.

### Peoples' struggle needs revolutionary ideas

At many different levels people are forced into struggle as the system closes in on them. In workplaces, schools and tertiary institutions, neighbourhoods and communities, people naturally get together to express their concerns with the way things are going. In some places, struggle breaks out as people look for ways to resist and challenge the immediate forces against them – the bosses, the government, the banks, the council, etc.

This is where the Communists and other anti-imperialist activists must be. With the people in struggle. Communists can provide guidance and leadership to the struggles of the people only if they are closely integrated within the ranks of the people. This means building respect and credibility through long-term commitments such as being part of workplace and trade union struggles, actively participating in community struggles, and finding ways to link the particular struggles to the general struggle for Australian independence from the grip of imperialism.

The measure of success must be the raising of political consciousness and solidarity, rather than the winning of every battle.

### Mass work pays off

We all know that things ebb and flow. Sometimes there is a lull, sometimes an upsurge of struggle. It is easier to step up when there is a definite issue arousing people, much harder when things are quiet and people more concerned with "getting on with life".

Yet, the idea of mass work requires us to

be with the people, sharing their lives and conditions, their problems and frustrations, always listening and striving to accurately assess their level of political consciousness. If we do this carefully and patiently, we can find the most appropriate way to advance new ideas, to sow the seeds that may flourish when a new issue arises or a new struggle breaks out.

Ultimately, people learn from their own experience, often the hard way. (After all, our confronting arguments have to compete with a daily torrent of monopoly media hype and propaganda). But if we have earned some respect, we can help them analyse their experience and move to a better political understanding. We can't do this if we are remote or uninvolved in their daily lives.

Mass work means social involvement with the people. This often means the workplace or community organisations. It can also be through active participation in all sorts of activities that bring people together – sporting clubs, hobby groups, environmental groups, single-issue organisations, music, dancing and other cultural events, etc. Even if there is no outstanding issue for the group, there will still be good opportunities to raise issues of general concern and get a discussion going – interest rates, jobs for young people, pensions, the war in Iraq, the news headlines, etc.

In the process of genuine mass work, there is a long period of investigation, of working out the major concerns of people, of assessing their various levels of consciousness and reliability, of assessing the relative strengths and weaknesses of the people and the forces opposing them. This is the key to integration, the necessary foundation for political activity.

The truth is that Communists are drawn from the working class and other sections but are also different in terms of ideology, politics

and organization. Individual work amongst the people is vital. So is strengthening the collective will of the Communist party so it marches forward in a clear direction, builds collective leadership and mass organization for struggle. Individual mass work and collective mass work are inseparable.

Mao Zedong refers to revolutionary activists as being ‘...like seeds and the people are the soil. Wherever we go, we must unite with the people, take root and blossom among them.’ On another occasion, he compared Communists ‘...to fish swimming in the sea of the masses’. These are good analogies, but we need to be aware of the pitfalls, too.

#### Errors in mass work

A fairly common error is the blow-in method of political work; being very active and vocal for a short time, then disappearing to pursue some other “struggle”. Even if some good work is carried out, and good contacts are made with genuine people, they are never fully developed and the good work is wasted.

Related to this is the error of being “the biggest fish in the pond”; arrogantly pushing one’s views, continually harping and lecturing, manipulating occasions to score points for a factional view, taking over, etc.

The opposite error is to “become the sea, rather than the fish”, as one comrade recently put it. In other words, integration with the masses should not mean lowering revolutionary political consciousness to the lowest common denominator.

Errors are inevitable when trying to find the right balance in mass work. The point is to learn from them, to continuously review and sum up, to try new ways of involving more and more people in activities and struggles that build their experience and maintain their optimism even when setbacks occur.



# *Using Marxist theory to guide practical work*

There is no doubt that 2007 will bring new challenges to the Australian people. It is essential that those who take the side of the working people are prepared to meet these challenges.

This includes being ideologically prepared to overcome weaknesses and finding better ways to assist the struggle. To this end the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) recommends some articles for study:

## The Programme of the CPA (M-L)

The Programme of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) was adopted at the Party's Eleventh Congress in 2005. It is available in a pamphlet, *Power to the People; Independence from US Imperialism* or from the website [www.vanguard.net.au](http://www.vanguard.net.au)

The Programme of the CPA (M-L) is firmly based on the Marxist philosophy of dialectical materialism which recognises that the material world – matter – is primary. Ideas – consciousness – are the reflection of objective reality. Marxism is a guide to action, based on practice. It recognises all things in nature and society as constantly coming into being and passing away.

Using this method to analyse Australian society, the CPA (M-L) has adopted the theory of revolution by stages, firstly assisting the struggles of the broad peoples' movement to win national independence from US imperialism and then pressing on to lay the material and social foundations for socialism

(and eventually communism) in Australia. These basic stages naturally have their sub-stages and their interconnections.

We live in the era of imperialism, which is the stage of capitalism where monopolies and finance capital dominate; when the export of capital is of pronounced importance compared with the export of commodities; when the world has been divided amongst the big trusts and multinational corporations and when there are no longer any new territories to be seized.

Capitalism in Australia is administered on behalf of foreign (especially US) imperialist interests and their local allies, who dominate all the key sectors of Australia's economy and shamelessly oppress and exploit the working class as well as many other sections of the people. Therefore, the immediate stage of expelling imperialism and placing control of Australia's key industries and resources into the hands of the people is a revolutionary strategy aimed at the tallest pillar of capitalism.

## Reform Our Study (Mao Zedong 1941)

Mao Zedong wrote some of his most important works for the Rectification Movement of 1941-44, which focussed on weaknesses and errors in the political work of the Chinese communists. Some of the key issues are also relevant to the political work of Australian revolutionaries.

In this particular work, Mao urged the Communist Party of China to reform the method and system of study throughout the Party. He identified deficiencies in the Party's study of domestic and international conditions, history and the study of international revolutionary experience. These deficiencies, particularly the need to unite theory and practice, gave rise to sectarianism and subjectivism.

To counter these tendencies, Mao proposed

that the whole party should make a systematic and thorough study of every aspect of the situation around it as well as Chinese history and the experience of the world revolutionary movement.

*Rectify The Party's Style of Work* (Mao Zedong 1942)

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Mao gave this speech to criticise the problems that existed with the Communist Party of China's style of study, its style in the Party's internal and external relations and with its style of writing.

Mao identified these problems to be subjectivism, sectarianism and stereotyped party writing. He analysed these problems in depth and set the party the task of rectifying those styles.

*Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing* (Mao Zedong 1942)

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In this speech, Mao elaborated on the question of stereotyped party writing that he had introduced in the previous work. By "stereotyped party writing" Mao meant the style of writing some people adopted in the Chinese Communist Party. These people produced articles that were excessively long but contained only empty, monotonous verbiage, and were written in a style and language that was divorced from the masses and intimidated them by its pretentiousness. Mao mercilessly criticised this style of writing and set out some simple rules to improve the style of party writing.

*The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War* (Mao Zedong 1938)

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Mao gave this report to a meeting of the Sixth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party which decided on the line of persisting in the anti-Japanese united front, but at the same time pointing out that there had to be

struggle as well as unity within the united front.

The following sections of this article are suggested for particular study:

- Consider the situation as a whole, etc
- Cadres Policy
- Party Discipline
- Party Democracy.

The section Consider the situation as a whole, etc spells out the approach Communists must take in leading the masses in struggle. Communists must consider the situation as a whole, think in terms of the majority of the people, and work together with their allies. They must work together with other progressive parties or individuals willing to co-operate with the Communists.

The section Cadres Policy stresses the importance of activists in the revolutionary struggle. It points out that the Communist Party must know how to judge activists, use them well and take good care of them.

In the sections on Party Discipline and Party Democracy, Mao wrote of the need to develop both discipline and democracy in the life of the Communist Party to enhance the responsibility and initiative of all members.

He wrote, "...this initiative must be demonstrated concretely in the ability of the leading bodies, the cadres and the Party rank and file to work creatively, in their readiness to assume responsibility, in the exuberant vigour they show in their work, in their courage and ability to raise questions, voice opinions and criticise defects, and in the comradely supervision that is maintained over the leading bodies and the leading cadres. Otherwise, 'initiative' will be an empty thing."

While the circumstances and problems faced by the working class and revolutionary

organisation in Australia are vastly different from those faced by the workers and peasants of China, there is much to learn from the approach and method of experienced and successful revolutionary Marxists, such as Mao Zedong.

# Lenin on trade union politics

In 1902, Lenin published *What Is To Be Done*, a book written in opposition to the “economist” trend in the revolutionary movement in Russia at the time.

In this work, Lenin examined the issue of trade union struggle and developed guidelines for Communist organisation and activity among the working class and within the trade unions. All quotations in this article are from *What Is To Be Done*. Where Lenin uses “Social-Democracy”, this is the term used by the Russian revolutionary movement for Socialism or Communism.

## Capitalism provokes spontaneous struggle

As a Marxist, Lenin recognised that the very nature of modern industrial capitalism forces workers to rally together in trade unions to resist higher levels of exploitation and to win some concessions from the capitalists. Although this struggle throws up political demands by the working class, they are demands for reform of the capitalist system rather than the revolutionary demand for its overthrow.

“We have said that there could not yet be Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc.”

Revolutionary ideology is brought to the working class from outside, i.e.; its origin

is from the intellectual strata represented by people such as Marx and Engels. Even though the working class instinctively moves towards Socialism, the social awareness is not sufficient to overcome the forces of habit and bourgeois ideas.

“The working class spontaneously gravitates towards Socialism, but the more widespread (and continuously revived in the most diverse forms) bourgeois ideology nevertheless spontaneously imposes itself upon the working class still more.”

For Lenin, trade union politics meant a political outlook that saw the need for political change, but confined that change to mere reforms of the system such as higher wages and more democratic legislation – a better deal for the workers as an oppressed class, not the revolutionary change that would overthrow the class system forever.

If the struggle never goes beyond the limits of trade union politics, no matter how militant or successful, the working class will always be bound to capitalism.

“The spontaneous working class movement by itself is able to create (and inevitably creates) only trade unionism, and working class trade unionist politics are precisely working class bourgeois politics.”

“Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement”

Lenin emphasised the need for workers to understand the whole workings of the capitalist system and its effect on all sections of society. Only by this deeper understanding would the working class be able to move beyond the limits of trade union consciousness to embrace the need for revolutionary change.

“The consciousness of the masses of the workers cannot be genuine class

consciousness, unless the workers learn to observe from concrete, and above all from topical (current), political facts and events, every other social class and all the manifestations of the intellectual, ethical and political life of these classes; unless they learn to apply in practice the material analysis and the materialist estimate of all aspects of the life and activity of all classes, strata and groups of the population.”

### Communist work among the working class

For activists organised among the working class, Lenin clearly placed the priority on political rather than economic work.

“Social-Democracy represents the working class not in the latter’s relation to only a given group of employers, but in its relation to all classes of modern society, to the state as an organised political force. Hence, it follows that Social-Democrats not only must not confine themselves entirely to the economic struggle; they must not even allow the organisation of economic measures to become the predominant part of their activities. We must actively take up the political education of the working class and the development of its political consciousness.”

While Lenin always maintained that the economic struggle was a “training ground” for the workers in struggle and that Communists should play an exemplary and leading role in these struggles, he stressed that the “...task is to utilise the sparks of political consciousness, which the economic struggle generates among the workers, for the purpose of raising them to the level of Social-Democratic political consciousness.”

### The role Of Communists

With this attitude always in mind, Communists should carry out their everyday political work both within and beyond their individual

workplaces and local communities, bringing the issues of the working class to other sections and the issues of the whole society into the working class.

“The Social-Democrats ideal should not be a trade union secretary, but a tribune of the people, able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it takes place, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; he must be able to generalise all these manifestations to produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; he must be able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to explain his Socialist convictions and his democratic demands to all, in order to explain to all and everyone the world-historic significance of the proletariat’s struggle for emancipation.”

Communists recognise that many honest trade union officials are frequently bogged down with the detail of their workloads and are frustrated by the limitations set by both anti-union legislation and the trade union hierarchies. Trade union politics can suck working class activists into endless factional meetings and isolate them from the rank and file workers. Inevitably, a few cave in to the subtle pressures of media flattery or (ALP) pre-selection, and a few become outright corrupt servants of the ruling class.

Communist work in the trade unions must find ways of maintaining close ties with all sections of the workers, the backward, the middle and the advanced, with the objective of assisting their long-term political development and class consciousness. This is the priority task from which Communists should not be diverted.

It is all too easy, as Lenin warned, to “degrade our political and organisational tasks to the level of the immediate, “palpable”, “concrete” interests of the everyday economic struggle...”

# Ted Hill on Australian trade union politics

Ted Hill's book "*Looking Backward, Looking Forward*" was published in 1965, and remains the most searching Marxist analysis of the history of the Australian working class.

Hill was particularly concerned to examine the role and style of work of the former Communist Party of Australia which he categorised as revisionist in its world outlook, especially on the key issues of the state, trade unions and parliament.

Since 1965 events have proven Hill's analysis to be correct over and over again – and if anything the complete disintegration of the former CPA occurred sooner than predicted! While it is beyond the scope of one article to cover all the issues and historical examples raised by Hill, it is timely to revisit some important things he had to say about the ideology of trade unionism and the relationship of Communists to the working class.

## The economic basis of trade union politics

Hill's approach to the task was anchored by his Marxist understanding of capitalist exploitation ie, the economic base being the determining factor from which the structures and culture of society develops. Hill was always mindful of the fundamental exploitative nature of capitalism which constantly engenders the class struggle.

"The capitalist makes his profits because labour power has one distinction from all other commodities. It has the capacity to produce value in excess of its own value."

Writing on the role of the arbitration system in setting the wage rates of workers, Hill refuted illusions of so-called "wage justice" and demonstrated the operation of the basic laws of capitalism as revealed by Karl Marx.

Caught up in these fundamental economic laws, the workers trade union struggle has only limited scope. It can only "fiddle" at the edges to gain a temporary improvement in their situation, but it never changes their exploited position within the system.

Hill recognised that the trade union struggle of the working class is always overshadowed by the reality of the laws of capitalism. "... the value of labour power is determined in the same way as the value of all other commodities, ie, by the amount of socially necessary labour time used in its production. That is to say the value of the workers labour power is determined in the first place by what it costs to feed, clothe, house him, etc and to produce children who will take his place as a worker. That determines the primary level of his wage and nothing else, and no tribunal can alter that social law even if it wanted to. The very function of the tribunal is to keep wages as near to that subsistence level as possible. The trade union struggle has been to raise it above the bare subsistence level, but even when it is raised considerably above that level, still the basic determinant is the amount of socially necessary labour time used in its production."

## The merry-go-round of reformism

From his study of Lenin's work "*What is to be Done*", and from years of ideological struggle within the former CPA, Hill was convinced that purely trade union struggle, in itself, even the most militant struggle, would never shake the grip of the capitalist class and would only perpetuate capitalism.

"The struggle to improve wages, to improve

conditions, to resist victimisation, though vitally important, does not of itself challenge capitalism and does not of itself in any way strengthen the socialist consciousness of the working class. On the contrary, unless it is handled in a particular way, it can strengthen trade union politics, ie, the acceptance of capitalism by the working class. Though it always fights to resist working class demands, the capitalist class is never really threatened by trade union politics because they never really challenge the capitalist system itself. By trade union politics we mean the preoccupation imposed by the conditions of capitalism on the trade unions to confine themselves to trade union demands.”

The theories of social democracy and reformism which led to the establishment of the Australian Labor Party arose from the very nature of trade union politics which was based on “the acceptance of capitalism by the working class.”

Hill noted “Thus they accepted capitalism in two ways, (1) their demands accepted the social system of capitalism, (2) their method of achieving them accepted the social institution of capitalism – parliament.”

As to the reasons why reformism has such a strong hold on the working class, Hill found not only an economic basis, but also the conscious intervention of the ruling class.

“What is the basis for the maintenance of trade union reformist ideology? The capitalists look to the higher paid workers as the reservoir from which to recruit those who will serve them in the name of labour in the trade unions. Deliberately the capitalists pay more wages to certain sections of the workers. Deliberately they flatter, cultivate and foster certain trade union leaders and certain workers.”

The capacity of the ALP to deceive the workers

Because trade union politics holds no real threat to the capitalist system, the bourgeoisie have been content to allow the ALP to hold government from time to time, particularly during economic crisis, war, or whenever the usual conservative parties are totally discredited. History has shown that Labor governments have always introduced measures that increase the exploitation of the working class, restrict workers rights and prepare the ground for a more open onslaught by the Liberal mob.

“The natural end of trade union politics, left to their own spontaneous development, is a bourgeois political party administering the capitalist state in the name of labour and the trade unions, against the workers and trade unionists themselves.”

Hill noted some of the “firsts” chalked up by the Chifley government, which went to extreme lengths to counter the popularity of communist ideas in the working class.

- Sent armed forces into the mines during the 1949 coal strikes
- Froze union funds
- Gaoled union leaders
- Imposed government ballots on trade unions
- Established the anti-worker secret police ASIO

In this way, Hill noted, “... the labour government paved the way to the greater attack on trade unions and workers’ struggle by the Menzies government.”

Wasn’t this also the experience of the Hawke and Keating governments, paving the way for greater attacks when the Liberals had regrouped?

Trade union politics denies the need for revolutionary change, because an elected

ALP government would reform capitalism. There is no need for mass movements and revolutionary war. This all has the effect of disarming people both literally and ideologically, and leaves the ruling class with a monopoly on violence. Hill noted the position of the former CPA leadership on this vital issue of the role of the state. "To limit the perspective of the working class and working people in advance to peaceful change is to deny the facts of history."



# *Build Fighting Trade Unions*

Trade unions are essentially defensive organisations of the working class. They are formed to resist constant attempts by the capitalists to increase the measure of exploitation of the workers.

## Limitations of trade unions

Marxists call this measure of exploitation “surplus-value”, which is defined as value produced by the worker over and above the value of wages paid. The capitalists commonly use three methods to increase the “surplus-value” generated by workers, and hence boost their profits...

- Extending the working day by paid or unpaid overtime and shorter breaks.
- Intensification of labour by speed-ups, new technology and job cuts.
- Direct reductions of pay and conditions through individual contracts and re-classifications.

The foreign multinationals and bankers who dominate Australian industrial and rural production are setting the pace in finding new ways to screw more profits out of workers. Much trade union activity is concentrated on repelling their attacks. In the boom times when there is more competition for labour, some stronger unions may win a few minor gains to get a breathing space, but all too soon the workers have their backs to the wall again.

Communists recognise the limitations of trade unions in bringing about fundamental change on the scale of national independence or socialism. However, they also acknowledge the critical role of trade unions in teaching

workers the importance of organisation and the need to use their collective strength in struggle.

## Political leadership

Communist work in trade unions is concentrated on extending and deepening day-to-day connections with workers. Undoubtedly, workplace-based trade union positions can assist this work – job delegate, shop steward, OH&S, workplace committee, etc. When Communists use the mass line method of political work, they can find many ways to consult and involve the workers in activities and decision-making. This approach is much better than the usual line of “Leave it with me...” where individual ego takes over and the workers are shut out.

Effective Communist work requires a long period of consistent mass work which includes consulting with and learning from the workers, as well as study and analysis of the relevant ideological and political issues. Only then have Communists earned the credibility and respect to offer political leadership to the workers.

Political leadership means making political issues a mass question for workers. Issues such as...

- Globalisation, and the US, European and Japanese takeover of Australian companies
- Republic, and the role of the States in keeping Australia weak and divided
- National sovereignty, and sucking up to US foreign policy and military agenda

Lenin dealt with the issue of political leadership in his work, *What Is To Be Done?* written in 1902. “The Social-Democrats (Communist) ideal should not be a trade union secretary, but a tribune of the people, able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression,

no matter where it takes place, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; he must be able to generalise all these manifestations to produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; he must be able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to explain his Socialist convictions and his democratic demands to all, in order to explain to all and everyone the world-historic significance of the proletariat's struggle for emancipation."

a good stand against foreign imperialism, and support and provide expression to the struggles of workers give other trade union activists great encouragement and win wide respect among other sections of the people.

### Trade union politics

In contrast to this approach, trade union politics puts almost total reliance on trade union officials and sharp lawyers to defend the workers. Much of the time these people are bogged down with the daily details of administration, legislation, legal constraints and endless meetings and conferences. The higher the position, the more isolated from regular contact with rank and file workers.

Many higher-level trade union officials go along with the line of electing a Labor government. They end up putting the brakes on struggle. "Don't rock the boat in an election year..." They apologise for imperialism. "We need foreign investment to create jobs..."

They are terrified of anti-union laws and trot out complicated legal arguments and rave on about tactics and timing and not getting out of step with other sections of the people. "We can't do that, I'll go to jail and they'll seize all our funds!" They promote the illusion that all will be OK if Howard is kicked out and Labor elected.

At present only a few trade union leaders are prepared to stand up to the pressures to conform. They refuse to be bribed by the perks of office or Labor pre-selection, and are not intimidated or silenced by threats of legal penalties when they stick up for the rights of workers. Trade union leaders who take

# *Organisation – A weapon to serve the workers*

The need for organisation is impressed on the working class by the very nature of capitalism, by the need to collectively fight the capitalist owners for better wages and working conditions and to continually defend any concessions won by struggle.

Without collective organisation workers are left isolated and divided, easily exploited and ground down by the bosses.

The current push by Howard and Andrews to ram through changes to the Industrial Relations laws is geared to forcing workers to sign individual contracts (Australian Workplace Agreements). These AWA's have two objectives. In the immediate term, they are designed to boost profits for Howard's foreign monopoly mates by slashing wages and conditions. The longer-term aim is to cripple the collective strength of working class organisations by making union activities and struggles virtually illegal.

## Trade Union organisation

In Australia, working class organisation has often been provided through trade and industry unions. Initially trade unions were centres of working class rebellion, completely illegal, their members persecuted.

Over time, concessions were forced on the capitalists and trade unions became legal and to a large extent, institutions of the system.

Thus trade unions have a dual nature; they combine elements of struggle and rebellion within a general acceptance of the

permanence of capitalism.

The political expression of this is "trade union politics" which confines the working class to a never-ending struggle for reforms rather than the revolutionary overthrow of the class system. In the context of the present day, trade union politics translates into trying to accommodate, or at best "regulate", the dominant foreign and local monopolies which control Australia's economy.

In contrast to this, revolutionary politics are not simply a question of working class militancy, but of moving from sectional economic demands (pay, conditions, etc.) to wide-ranging political demands such as people's ownership of multinational-controlled critical industries and resources, the expulsion of foreign military bases, the nationalisation of banking and finance, public ownership of health and education services, etc.

These are demands that require a drastic change in the way society is managed, a complete turnover, essentially the winning of genuine national democratic independence from US and foreign imperialism. They are revolutionary in scope and constitute a necessary first stage of socialist revolution in Australia.

## Non-Union workers

Trade unions are an obvious and important area of work for revolutionary activists, but the concept of working class organisation is much broader than purely trade union ranks.

There are many workers, a majority in fact, who are not organised in trade unions or belong to weak and apathetic unions, but who meet together in meal-rooms and work sites and inevitably discuss their situation. They are organised by the work structure itself.

The absence of trade union organisation

should not necessarily be regarded as an indication of their terminal “backwardness”. There is no rule that says workers must be in a union to struggle against the boss, or that only union members can understand the need for national independence. Revolutionary work among the working class should take advantage of the “natural” organisation of workers as well as the formal existence of trade unions.

In some situations the absence of formal union organisation can assist the formation of what Lenin referred to as “an organisation without members” where there is a floating informal membership of more advanced workers who can organise across traditional demarcation lines.

In similar fashion, workers and their families frequently come together with friends and neighbours in community events, activities and struggles. At this level too, there is organisation, collective strength and collective action.

Many community groups are heartened by the support of unions and union members. They recognise the leading role of the organised working class as a key point of resistance to the power of capital and dictatorial governance. The alliance of the unions and the broader community is one that the ruling class rightly fears and constantly seeks to disrupt.

#### Lenin on revolutionary organisation

“In its struggle for power the proletariat has no other weapon than organisation. Disunited by the rule of anarchic competition in the bourgeois world, ground down by forced labour for capital, constantly thrust back to the “lower depths” of utter destitution, savagery and degeneration, the proletariat can become, and inevitably will become, an invincible force only when its ideological unification by the principles of Marxism is consolidated by the

material unity of an organisation, which will weld millions of toilers into an army of the working class.” (V. Lenin *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* 1904)

In this famous quote, Lenin was referring to the highest stage of working class organisation, the revolutionary party. Lenin had developed his ideas on revolutionary organisation in his earlier work, *What Is To Be Done?* published in 1902.

The chapter on “The amateurishness of the Economists and an organisation of Revolutionaries” sets out the major principles of Leninist organisation in opposition to the “right” trend towards parliamentarism and trade union politics, and the “left” trend towards conspiratorial sects. In the period leading up to the 2nd Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Party, there was a great debate as to the form that party should take. Lenin argued for a party of dedicated, activist “professional” revolutionaries to act as a “vanguard” of the working class, while others wanted a more open, mass style party which would also include non-active members.

Against enormous odds, Lenin succeeded in building the Bolshevik Party and in leading that organisation through to victory in the great Russian Revolution.

The Leninist principles of organisation were further verified by the victories of the Chinese Communists under Mao Zedong.

Where Leninist organisation was not implemented such as in Chile and Indonesia, disaster followed.

#### Political consciousness

The measure of success in revolutionary work is primarily the raising of political consciousness, whether it is an individual worker, a section in a workplace, a whole

industry or the working class in general.

In the long run, lessons learned from defeats and setbacks can raise political consciousness just as well as victorious strikes and large demonstrations. What is important is that revolutionary activists are closely linked to the struggles of the workers to assist in examining the lessons of those experiences when they do occur.

# *Maintaining the political independence of the Communist Party*

The political independence of the Communist Party is embodied in the Party Programme which sets out the strategic aim of revolution by stages. The current stage is that of winning national independence from imperialist control and placing Australia's major industries and resources under the control of the workers and working people. This will establish the necessary economic, political and social basis for the later stage of socialism.

## Broad unity for National Independence

In the struggle against imperialism and to build a broad movement for national independence, there is much emphasis on the need to unite people from all sections of society, with all their different levels of political consciousness. The problems of building this unity and the need to maintain it and encourage it are, quite correctly, foremost in our minds. In the day to day political work we strive to develop a style that is positive, that seeks out points of agreement.

We are careful not to turn people off by ramming our views down their throats and loudly proclaiming our opinions on everything. Sometimes, in the interests of seeking unity on more immediate questions, we refrain from open criticism of backward ideas, and find less antagonistic ways to continue the discussion. This is not being shifty and manipulative, it simply means trying to find the most effective level of communication.

## Ultra-left exclusiveness

If we are really serious about changing political consciousness, we can't do that if we're not talking to people! It is easier and more comfortable to talk to people with whom we agree, but it changes very little and isolates the revolutionaries from the masses. Quite often we limit the opportunities to establish connections with good people because of their perceived loyalty to other political agendas, or their connection to a particular group or individual. This sectarian behaviour has often diminished revolutionary work, and requires constant vigilance to resist falling into an isolated style of work.

The litmus test of whether we should unite with somebody should be their attitude to the fundamental issue of Australian politics – the domination of Australia by US imperialism. If they are prepared to take a stand against this domination, there is a basis of unity.

If they do not yet see the need to oppose imperialist domination, there can still be unity on the host of issues which imperialism imposes on the working people. The only ones to be excluded from the broad movement for national independence are the tiny handful of outright agents and apologists for imperialism.

## Mass connections

During an upsurge of struggle, whether in the workplace, community or general society, we can often extend our circle of connections and build on previous ones. This is how the Communist Party exerts an influence far beyond its actual membership.

All the good work goes for nothing, however, if there is no follow-up when the upsurge has passed. Mass connections are extremely valuable, and have to be revisited, maintained. This is the most important aspect of our political work. From a myriad of

mass connections, the Party can determine the main concerns of the people, the most appropriate political activities and the most effective tactics in each situation. It is much more than just “keeping a finger on the pulse”, it is a vital part of the long-term building of revolutionary organisation.

### The independent position of the Communist Party

From the above it can be seen that there are three good reasons to emphasize unity and points of agreement...

- To build a broad movement for national independence
- To oppose left-bloc exclusiveness
- To maintain mass connections

At first glance, raising the independent position of the Communist Party would seem to cut across and hinder the achievement of these three objectives. This is certainly the case if it is done in an arrogant and heavy-handed way.

On the other hand, if the Party programme is not promoted, there is no alternative to the merry-go-round of parliamentarism and the dead-end of trade union politics. The whole point of our careful mass work is to achieve sufficient respect and credibility to be taken seriously when we raise the prospect of fundamental change in society.

We should not expect people to immediately agree with us, no matter how progressive or militant they may be. Experience alone will not change people's thinking, nor will propaganda alone. Yet we need to plant the seeds and give people a vision of a different future. The Party Programme is the summary of our independent position and should be the ultimate goal of our mass work.

# Compromise and principles

In a non-revolutionary situation where the practical political work is focussed on building the peoples' movement for Australian independence, it is critical to maintain revolutionary principles. This can only be done through regular study and constant summing up of experience.

## Compromise – dealing with reality

It is relatively easy to wrap oneself in a red flag and proclaim “pure” Marxism to a few isolated friends, however this does not build the peoples' movement against US imperialism and does not advance the Australian revolution one bit. In fact, such activity only drives a wedge between revolutionary activists and the broad mass of people who do not as yet see the necessity for fundamental change.

Day to day political work among the people requires Communists and other advanced revolutionary activists to deal with reality, the reality of a relatively advanced, stable, and peaceful capitalist society. These circumstances mould peoples' thinking, their outlook on life, their aspirations and expectations.

On the other hand, the growing domination of Australia by US imperialism drives more and more people into poverty, destroying their hopes for the future. Many want to fight back, but cannot see beyond reformist parliamentary politics. This is even more the case when a Federal election is looming and the mass media is flooded with speculative articles and “polls” designed to limit people's minds solely to the “choice” between Liberal and Labor.

To maintain close links and connections to the people in their day to day struggles, it is essential that political activists appreciate the need for compromise on tactical demands in order to build the base of support among even broader sections of the people. Only actual experience in struggle changes people's outlook, words alone never will.

Lenin took up the issue of compromise in his article *Against Boycott*, written in 1907, when the Russian revolutionary movement was in retreat and split on the issue of whether to participate in the reactionary Duma (parliament).

“Marxism's attitude towards the zigzag path of history is essentially the same as its attitude towards compromise. Every zigzag turn in history is a compromise, a compromise between the old, which is no longer strong enough to completely negate the new, and the new, which is not yet strong enough to completely overthrow the old. Marxism does not altogether reject compromises. Marxism considers it necessary to make use of them, but that does not in the least prevent Marxism, as a living and operating historical force, from fighting energetically against compromises. Not to understand this seeming contradiction is not to know the rudiments of Marxism.”

Lenin always distinguished between unavoidable compromise brought on by the actual conditions, and unprincipled compromises which amounted to selling out to the class enemy. He had great confidence that the workers in particular, would readily be able to discern the difference and would not be disheartened by the need to retreat when necessary.

“Every proletarian – owing to the conditions of the mass struggle and the sharp intensification of class antagonisms in which he lives – notices the difference between a compromise enforced by objective conditions (such as lack



of strike funds, no outside support, extreme hunger and exhaustion), a compromise which in no way diminishes the revolutionary devotion and readiness for further struggle on the part of the workers who have agreed to such a compromise, and a compromise by traitors who try to ascribe to outside causes their own selfishness (strike-breakers also enter into “compromises”!), cowardice, desire to toady to the capitalists, and readiness to yield to intimidation, sometimes to persuasion, sometimes to sops, and sometimes to flattery on the part of the capitalists.” (V. Lenin “*Left-wing Communism*”, an *Infantile Disorder* 1920)

### Principles – not for sale

While degrees of compromise may be forced by tactical issues from time to time, the basic long-term strategic issues of the revolutionary movement do not change. These are articulated in the Party Programme which characterises the Australian revolution as a revolution in two stages; the current stage of winning national independence from imperialist domination, thereby setting the pre-conditions for the second stage of socialism.

In this struggle, the leading force is the working class which attracts and rallies other sections of the people to build a broad peoples’ movement for national independence – this movement is the revolutionary power that will overthrow imperialism and place control of the country into the hands of the working people. These principles are the core of Australian Communist strategic outlook and are never compromised.

### Study and summing up

Therefore, political work should strive to strike a balance between the practical requirements of the immediate situation and the longer-term objectives of the revolutionary struggle. It requires close study of the actual

contradictions in each situation, of the relative strength of forces involved, the level of consciousness. It means focussed ideological study of Marxist texts with specific problems in mind, as well as clarity on the fundamental issues of the Australian revolution.

It calls for disciplined summing up of all experience and the following up of links and connections with people who have advanced in the course of struggle. As Lenin put it, “One must use one’s own brains and be able to find one’s bearings in each case.” (V. Lenin “*Left-wing Communism*”, an *Infantile Disorder* 1920)

This is not as easy as it sounds. It is a continual problem to be wrestled with, to learn bit by bit through repeated efforts. It requires persistence and determination, but is the only way to advance.

“Capitalism would not be capitalism if the “pure” proletariat were not surrounded by a large number of exceedingly motley types...if the proletariat itself were not divided into more developed and less developed strata, if it were not divided according to territorial origin, trade, sometimes according to religion and so on. And from all this follows the necessity, the absolute necessity, for the vanguard of the proletariat, the Communist party, to resort to manoeuvres, arrangements and compromises with the various groups of proletarians, with the various parties of the workers and small masters. The whole point lies in knowing how to apply these tactics in order to raise, and not lower, the general level of proletarian class consciousness, revolutionary spirit, and ability to fight and win.” (V. Lenin “*Left-wing Communism*”, an *Infantile Disorder* 1920)

# *The Marxist attitude to criticism*

Mao Zedong wrote many articles on the Marxist attitude to delivering and receiving criticism within the Chinese Communist Party organisation. Many of Mao's principles can also be applied to political work within broader peoples' organisations such as trade unions, issue-based organisations and community campaigns.

## Struggle of ideas

No organisation, including the Communist Party, is monolithic in its level of knowledge, its understanding of events and its approach to dealing with issues. Even when there is consensus and general agreement, there are always differing interpretations of what is required, what should be emphasised, when to act, etc. While some of these differences are expressed as "practical" differences rather than "differences of principle", they nevertheless have their basis in competing ideologies within society and their influence on the thinking of people.

"Opposition and struggle between ideas of different kinds constantly occur within the Party; this is a reflection within the Party of contradictions between classes and between the new and the old in society." (Mao Zedong *On contradiction* 1937)

In a society dominated by the values of capitalism, there is a tendency to regard all differences of opinion as antagonistic; the opposition is worthless and must be totally discredited and crushed! One should never admit to mistakes; a basic sign of weakness! Both these positions are reflections of the

competitive, selfish value-system of today's modern imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism.

It is to be expected that disagreements will arise in the course of struggle. It is not cause for dismay, but rather an opportunity to develop the overall level of understanding, of raising political consciousness. What is important is to deal with these differences in a constructive manner so that organisations emerge more united and stronger, rather than divided and weaker.

## Why criticism is necessary

When we come across ideas and activities which we consider harmful to the principles and objectives of the organisation, we have an obligation to argue our case critically and to listen to the counter-arguments of those who disagree. In this way ideas and concepts are clarified and any misunderstandings can be cleared up relatively easily. Often the differences cannot be immediately resolved, but can be put aside in the greater common interest until further experience validates one position or the other.

Sometimes, however, the differences are more substantial, even acute. In this case, it is most important that criticism of the opposing side focus on the political ideas rather than the personalities involved. Principled and constructive criticism is necessary to get at the substance of the differing opinions and to maintain unity on a higher plateau of understanding. Failure to handle differences in this manner can cause division and disillusion among the members and supporters of the organisation, and turn allies into enemies.

"We stand for active ideological struggle because it is a weapon for ensuring unity within the Party and the revolutionary organisations in the interest of our fight.

Every Communist and revolutionary should take up this weapon.” (Mao Zedong *Combat liberalism* 1937)

### Self-criticism

“It’s no good dishing it out, unless you can take it” is a pretty true Australian saying. It expresses the idea that no single person is perfect, that we all make mistakes, that we all are sometimes wrong. Self-criticism is not breast-beating or false modesty. It is an attempt to be ruthlessly honest with oneself and one’s comrades about shortcomings and errors. It is a good place to start before thinking about ripping into others.

As Lenin wrote in *Left-wing communism – an infantile disorder* (1920), this approach applies equally to political organisations and to individuals.

“A political party’s attitude to its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest ways of judging how earnest the party is and how it fulfils in practice its obligations to its class and the working people. Frankly acknowledging a mistake, analysing the conditions that have led up to it, and thrashing out the means of rectifying it – that is the hallmark of a serious party; that is how it should perform its duties; that is how it should educate and trains its class and then the masses. (Lenin *Left-wing communism – an infantile disorder* 1920)

### Making criticism of others

When this becomes necessary, it should be done in an open and forthright way, neither beating around the bush, nor going for the jugular. Sometimes, criticism can be delivered more effectively in private if the issue touches only a small number of people, but on other occasions it must be done publicly whenever the issue affects the whole organisation. It is important, wherever possible, to leave an opening for the other side to move, to find a

new point of unity.

“The unity of opposites is the fundamental concept of dialectics. In accordance with this concept, what should we do with a comrade who has made mistakes? We must first wage a struggle to rid him of his wrong ideas. Second, we should also help him...The aim of struggle is to uphold the principles of Marxism, which means being principled; that is one hand. The other hand is to unite with him. The aim of unity is to provide him with a way out, to compromise with him, which means being flexible. The integration of principle with flexibility is a Marxist-Leninist principle, and it is the unity of opposites.” (*A dialectical approach to inner-Party unity* 1957)

### Mao Zedong on inner-Party criticism

Within the Chinese Communist Party, Mao proposed a number of strict guidelines for the conduct of criticism. As the following quotes show, he attached much importance to this matter over many years. It stands in sharp contrast to the dog-eat-dog attitudes of capitalism.

“In inner-Party criticism, guard against subjectivism, arbitrariness and the vulgarisation of criticism; statements should be based on facts and criticism should stress the political side.” (*On correcting mistaken ideas in the Party* 1929)

“To check up regularly on our work and in the process develop a democratic style of work, to fear neither criticism nor self-criticism, and to apply such good popular Chinese maxims as “say all you know and say it without reserve”, “Blame not the speaker but be warned by his words” and Correct mistakes if you have committed them and guard against them if you have not”... (*On coalition government* 1945)

## *Unity of the left*

The concept of unity of the left is sometimes put forward in good faith, as an ideal to which all left parties, groups and individuals must aspire.

This theory promotes the idea that by openly uniting all the left forces, there could be a more effective voice for socialist and progressive opinions, and a better use of limited resources. In support of this objective, it promotes a style of political work based mainly on organised public activism and the open distribution of left newspapers and other publications.

All of this sounds quite reasonable, but history shows that this approach is both naïve and dangerous, and ultimately doomed to failure. It is not a question of the honesty or sincerity of those who practice this style of work, but whether or not this is really the best and most effective way to do political work.

### Sectarian left bloc activism

The real problem with the theory of unity of the left is that it draws active people away from their normal involvement with their fellow workers and community into a relatively small circle of like-minded left activists.

The focus of attention is the left movement itself rather than the struggles and demands of the working people. Because they are divorced from the day to day problems and concerns of the working people, this left bloc then seeks to impose its own demands, slogans and priorities on every strike, picket line, demonstration or community meeting.

In the name of providing political leadership, they descend like vultures with newspapers and pamphlets, often barely touching on the issues at hand. They organise large conferences where the competing groups

can parade their intellectuals. Their links to the masses are largely confined to a few left trade union officials and activists who operate in similar circles.

This arrogant behaviour does considerable damage. In the first place it alienates workers and people in communities who resent having their struggles high-jacked by outsiders and blow-ins. This often fails to take account of workplace or local history and experience in struggle, let alone the level of political consciousness of the people involved. It pushes the working people into the background while elevating the political activists.

Secondly, the obvious competition between the various left groups is a turn-off for many working people who find the different political lines confusing and irrelevant to their issues. They are wary of being manipulated by someone else's agenda.

Thirdly, militant and spectacular activities appeal to young workers and others who want to struggle, but instead are drawn away from their base areas and their mass connections into left bloc activity. Because much of this is dominated by articulate intellectuals and they can't get a word in, there is a great turnover of people attracted to the left and then disappointed and alienated by it.

Finally, it facilitates surveillance by the secret police. In this environment, even the most passive spy can easily gather names, sift the gossip and note organisational and personal connections. More sophisticated provocateurs can do even greater damage.

### Mass line method of work

In contrast is the style of work which Mao Zedong called the Mass Line. The starting point is listening to people, investigating facts and understanding the trend of development in situations, while taking account of the

relative strengths and weaknesses of the forces involved.

The only way to do this is by building close links to the people in struggle, by being immersed in their day to day lives, whether in the workplace or in the community. Without a good feeling for the level of political consciousness, it is hopeless trying to inject political leadership from the outside.

Mao grappled with this issue in his article *Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership*, published in 1943.

“In all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily ‘from the masses, to the masses’. This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action.”

This method of work requires patience and perseverance, it requires following up on initial contacts and maintaining those contacts during quiet periods as well as during an upsurge in struggle. It requires building trust and credibility through reliable and consistent participation in struggle. It requires paying attention to the different sections involved in struggle, not just the advanced sections.

“The masses in any given place are generally composed of three parts, the relatively active, the intermediate and the relatively backward. The leaders must therefore be skilled in uniting the small number of active elements around the leadership and must rely on them to raise the level the intermediate elements and to win over the backward elements.” (Mao Zedong *Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership*)

## Public activities

Marxist-Leninists believe that the main area of political work is among the working people in their daily work or community environment. Political leadership takes the form of encouraging people to analyse their experiences in struggle, to draw out the lessons both positive and negative, and to return to the struggle with a deeper understanding of the political forces in society.

The necessity for a revolutionary change in society only comes from disillusionment with the day to day struggle for political reforms and decent living standards. Present day capitalism, dominated by US imperialism, cannot satisfy the aspirations of the working people who have to fight the same battles again and again.

From time to time there is a mass upsurge of struggle over an issue. Recent examples include the MUA dispute, the East Timor campaign, the WEF rallies and the Reconciliation marches. In these situations of ongoing mass involvement it is certainly appropriate to distribute leaflets and newspapers to the participants, but even this need involve only a few people rather than drawing every Tom, Dick and Harry into the activity.

# *Reformism – a revolving door with no way out*

Arising from objective historical conditions, reformism is deeply entrenched in the political consciousness of the Australian working people. It is represented politically by the left factions of the ALP and Democrats, as well as the Greens Party.

Reformism is based on acceptance of the permanence of global capitalism. It is a major obstacle in the way of Australian national independence and socialism.

## Positive and negative

The positive aspect to this is reflected in workers' willingness to struggle to maintain (and sometimes even improve) basic wages and working conditions, and to protect hard-won democratic rights. In broader community struggles, people look for the support of fighting trade unions to provide reliable support and "clout" to their campaigns. There is recognition of the fact that whenever the working class is prepared to "have a go", there is a much better chance of winning. This is well summed up in the popular slogan, "If you don't fight, you lose!"

However, the dominating negative aspect is that reformism channels all struggles into the double safety-valve of trade union politics and parliamentarism. Trade union politics are only concerned with the day to day issues of wages and conditions, what Lenin called "economist" demands. Parliamentarism looks after the political issues, which are reduced to half-hearted deals between the bourgeois parties and minor legislative changes designed to take the heat out of immediate issues.

## The fight for National Independence

Neither trade union politics nor parliamentarism ever acknowledges the fundamental question of imperialist domination of Australia, let alone offers any alternative. At best, bourgeois reformist parties mumble about "regulating" foreign multinationals and of "fair trade" arrangements with US, European and Japanese imperialism. If such things were possible, imperialism wouldn't be imperialism and pigs could fly!

Nor do the ideologues of reformism ever acknowledge the role of the state as an instrument of class repression. They pretend that the State apparatus of army, police, law courts, public service, etc. is "above politics". The reality is that the State apparatus of any society serves and defends the ruling class – in our case, the ruling class consists of mainly foreign monopoly capitalists and a few local collaborators.

"The socialists teach that revolution is inevitable, and that the proletariat must take advantage of all the contradictions in the life of society, of every weakness of its enemies or of the intermediate strata, in order to prepare for a new revolutionary struggle, to repeat the revolution in a broader arena, with a more developed population. The bourgeoisie and the liberals teach that revolutions are unnecessary and even harmful to the workers, that they must not "shove" towards revolution, but, like good little boys, work modestly for reforms." (Lenin *Reformism in Russian Social-Democratic Movement* 1911)

The way out of economic crisis, unemployment, loss of control over national resources, destruction of the environment, foreign takeover of basic industries, denial of Land Rights, etc. is to kick out imperialism once and for all. This means revolutionary change, not merely reform, because it confronts the issue of state power. Revolutionary change seeks to smash the state power of imperialist-

dominated capitalism and replace it with the state power of the working class, small and medium farmers and other working people. In other words, the democratic state power of the majority rather than the minority.

Communist analysis, these lessons are partial and temporary, leaving workers doomed to an endless cycle of defensive battles.

#### Communist attitude to reformist demands

Reformist demands arise spontaneously from the class struggle of workers and working people within the system. Communists did not invent class struggle, nor do they invent reformist demands. What Communists do is to actively participate in class struggle, including struggle for reforms, striving to assist the workers and working people understand their experiences, and providing timely ideological and political leadership to lift political awareness to the next level. This is a protracted process that requires consistent mass work and follow-up, listening and questioning, learning before teaching.

In this critical mass work Communists are guided by the words of Lenin who cautioned, "Revolutionaries, of course, will never reject the struggle for reforms, the struggle to capture even minor and unimportant enemy positions, if these will serve to strengthen the attack and help to achieve full victory. But they will never forget that sometimes the enemy himself surrenders a certain position in order to disunite the attacking party and thus to defeat it more easily. They will never forget that only by constantly having the "ultimate aim" in view, only by appraising every step of the "movement" and every reform from the point of view of the general revolutionary struggle, is it possible to guard the movement against false steps and shameful mistakes." (Lenin *Collected Works Vol.5*)

Participation in struggle teaches workers and working people a lot about tactics, organisation, the importance of allies, the nature of trade union politics and parliamentarism, and the role of the State apparatus. Without the injection of

# *Fighting Programme of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist)*

The Communist Party of Australia (M-L) strives to strengthen and expand the fighting capacity and organisation of the Australian working class and its allies.

This Fighting Programme arises from the reality of economic and political domination of Australia by US imperialism on the one hand and the struggles of the people for a just, democratic and independent Australia on the other.

It upholds the principle of serving the people and stands against oppression and exploitation. The programme sets out immediate and intermediate objectives for the current stage of the Australian revolution. The Party's immediate objective is to assist in the building of a broad people's movement against imperialist domination and fascism.

We're fighting to:

- Build people's power in society as the foundation stone for a democratic people's republic uniting all anti-imperialist classes and sectors.
- Build workers' strength and organisation as a force to win independence from foreign multinational domination.
- Defend and extend people's democratic and civil rights.
- Put industry sector workers and communities in control of key services to the people.
- Nationalise key industries and infrastructure to ensure national economic development improves the lives of the people and protects the natural environment.
- Implement an independent foreign policy based on respect for all humanity, fair trade and opposing aggression.
- Support indigenous people's right to self-determination politically and materially.
- Raise living standards with a progressive tax system.
- Promote Australian people's culture respecting diversity.
- Repair the damage done to Australia's unique environment by greedy profiteers.

All these things are possible in Australia. They are the basis on which the Party seeks to unite workers and other people and progressive organisations in the on-going struggle against exploitation and oppression.





The Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist)  
can be contacted c/- Vanguard newspaper at PO Box 196 Fitzroy, Victoria 3065

See also [www.vanguard.net.au](http://www.vanguard.net.au) for regular updates of  
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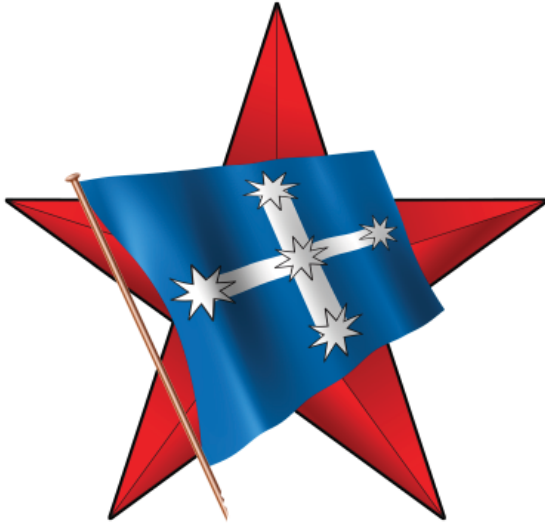
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