

EF Hill: Introduction to Joint Party Discussions Between CPA and CPA (M-L)
18 September 1982

It has been agreed that I should introduce the discussion. We regard it as important and exploratory. We can exchange views and then assess our respective positions.

Our starting point is the need to unify all progressive patriotic Australian people. We conceive the central task of the people to be the defence and extension of Australia's independence and sovereignty, resistance to war threats which primarily emanate from the superpowers and connected with both these but also having a separate identity the defence and improvement of the Australian people's living standards.

Fundamental to this is, we believe, the unifying of all those who genuinely embrace the guidance of Marxism. It is confusing indeed to Australian workers and other patriots that there exist three main parties which each claim to be Marxist. One often encounters this confusion. The broad run of progressive people often do not distinguish one from another. Their attraction and respect is to and for Communism to use the word in its most general sense. It is a strange feature of the history of Communism that its adherents when they fall out visited more venom on each other than on the handful of monopoly enemies of the working class and progressive people. No doubt the reason for this lies in history. The early struggles for the victory of Marxism as the leading ideology in the working class movement were unavoidably bitter indeed. The pressure of capitalist ideology was immense. Capitalism seemed to be on the ascendant. In that background the struggle was bound to be bitter in the effort to overcome the overwhelmingly dominant bourgeois ideology in the working class. In consequence, within the ranks of those who sought or investigated Marxism some bourgeois alien ideas were expressed. Lenin was a particularly vigorous opponent of alien trends. His "Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky" is a wonderful classic on the state and its institutions and it contains some fairly unrestrained vituperation. Maybe that vituperation set an example.

Of course we do affirm that here is such a thing as revision of Marxism. We agree with what the same Lenin said on the very first page of "The State and Revolution" about the danger of stripping Marxism of its revolutionary soul. But that does not lead to the need to shout revolution on every possible occasion nor to demonstrate one's "revolutionariness" by vigorous denunciation of whatever offends one's idea of revolutionary theory. Nor does it justify the loose and indiscriminate branding as "revisionist" anyone who opposes our ideas nor as revisionism, ideas that do not accord with ours.

There is in our opinion room for debate about how Marxists go about the whole of people's struggle in Australia and also particular aspects of it. Our idea in a general sense is that the possibilities of socialism over the period of the existence of organized Communism in Australia have been overestimated and too little attention has been paid to finding the correct Australian solution of problems demonstrated by Marxism to exist in Australia. As a corollary to this, proportionately too much time has been given to the attempted "solution" by Australian Communists of problems of Communism in other countries. Positively what is required is to emphasise the Australian content and solution of the problems that face Australians. The solution cannot be looked for in the Soviet Union nor in China nor in Vietnam nor in Korea nor for that matter anywhere else. They can only be solved in Australia. We can learn from all. But we cannot substitute the views of someone outside Australia for what Australian people and Australian Communists must solve for themselves. One consequence of this has been the divisive force of adherence to one or another external Communist Party or Communist spokesman. In consequence two great bugbears, barriers or mountains, have dogged Communism in Australia namely the imposition of what we regard as premature notions that socialism in Australia could be immediately achieved and the notion that this achievement was tied up with adherence to this or that external Communist

Party or external directing centre.

There are many other factors. We have put it in the general because this discussion is not designed to solve these problems but to investigate the possibilities of reaching agreement on more limited aspects of Australian policy. However, it is difficult to understand the exploration for common ground without exploring something of the historical background. In saying this, the last thing we should want to do is to exculpate ourselves and particularly those of us – speaking only for the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) – who are older and particularly those who before the existence of the Communist Party (M-L) have held leading Communist positions over a long period. Moreover we believe that in the period following the 1956 20th Congress of the CPSU, the situation had arisen where it was very difficult to solve the controversial matters within the Communist Party. This too we believe had its roots in history. It is not necessary to go into that now. Besides views may differ and they do not necessarily foreclose present considerations. But at that time on our side, some things were done and said which would be better had they been left undone and unsaid. That too is a matter of history.

Since then 26 years have passed and more than 20 years have passed since the most acute phase of the argument. In that more than 2 decades, momentous changes have come over Australia and the world. These changes have extended to the Communist Parties and in particular the Communist Parties in Australia. In the light of those changes our Party decided to seek discussions as to how best to work for the unity of the Australian working class and people and for the development, strengthening and unity of the Communist movement in Australia.

What I will say is not put in order of importance but simply in order of convenience. Our view about the international Communist movement involves a departure from the past. Historically a directing centre in one form or another existed for what was referred to as the international Communist movement. In various stages some achievements were recorded. At the same time difficulties arose. Over the last several years the idea of a central directing body has been seriously debated. That idea is definitely on the decline. Our view of this is that it is a good thing. There is no room for a single directing centre for Communist Parties. They may have had their historical uses and their existence is understandable historically. Our emphasis now is on Australia and the Communist solution of Australia's problems. It is only by that approach that the guidance of Communism can be effectively presented and accepted by the Australian people. It is Australia's own conditions in which the socio-economic laws revealed by Marxism express themselves and point the way to action. It is only Australians who can and will take that action on the basis of correct Australian Marxist understanding. It is the Australian people and no-one else who will take the steps necessary on the path to a socialist Australia. We accept without qualification the important position of bilateral discussions and relations between Communist Parties and indeed between Communist Parties and other Parties. Such discussions can achieve very much in the way of enlightenment of each side and perhaps also in the enlightenment of others. Such relations are very different from acceptance of superior and inferior Parties or Parties taking direction from other Parties. Genuine inter-Party relations are based on equality, independence and refraining from interfering in or pronouncing on each other's affairs. Consequently while maintaining relations with numbers of Parties we maintain those relations on that basis. We regard our responsibility in the very first place to be a responsibility to the Australian people and in our relations with other Parties that Australian commitment is in the first place. It is in order to best serve the Australian people that we maintain relations with other Parties and learn from them. Of course we regard proletarian internationalism and international solidarity of the working class as vital. Our best contribution to it lies in the very best service of the Australian Communists to the Australian people. Consequently we will pursue our present international

relations and seek to extend them. We would like to propose that one of our considerations in our present discussions should be the operation of similar principles in our respective relations now in the Australian context. That does not preclude mutual independence and initiative of our Parties nor the right to advocate differing policies. It possibly contemplates discussion from time to time on matters of mutual interest. This can be discussed. Where agreement can be reached that will be good; where it cannot be reached, disagreement should not become the main thing nor the adherents to the differing positions treat each other as enemies. From what either of us regard as fundamental departure from our conception of Marxism then exposition of what we regard as the Marxist position must be permitted. That is to say we adhere to what we regard as the fundamental teachings of Marxism on materialist dialectics and within that the Marxist analysis of capitalism and the state with the ultimate achievement of classless Communism through various phases in which the dictatorship of the proletariat in appropriate Australian form would operate. That form involves the rule of the great majority of Australians over the tiny minority. This reasoning goes too far for imperialism and its nature and indeed for the whole of Marxism. These things however are not the present consideration. From our point of view they govern our present approach far short though it be of socialism let alone Communism.

In that connection our immediate analysis is that it is necessary to defend and extend the degree of independence and sovereignty so far won by Australia. It is unnecessary to go into detail about Australia's history. Probably it is common ground. Dispossession of the black people I am sure we would each condemn. Evolution from colonial status has been a slow and painful process. Our belief is that the struggle for the attainment of full independence and sovereignty even within capitalism (working class) is a central task in Australia. Just as in other countries phases of capitalism or previous social epochs preliminary to the ultimate battle for socialism had to be gone through so we see this phase in Australia. There are unfulfilled working class tasks in the development of capitalism. Restrictions on Australia's sovereignty and independence arise from its historical dependence financially and diplomatically on Britain, financial and diplomatic dependence now largely usurped by the US. In its achievement of a measure of independence and sovereignty from Britain, Australia was left with considerable colonial barriers. One of them we saw used, largely at US instigation, in 1975 in the sacking of the Labor government through the mechanism of a survival of colonialism in the Governor-Generalship. Another is the acute State rivalries and their exploitation by the big imperialist powers. These divisions weaken an independent Australia, strengthen multinational interference and are used to divide the workers and other people. There are other dangerous colonial relics. We regard recent decisions by the Australian governments on these matters as progressive. Thus we regard the development of Australia as a single unitary nation as a vital step and indeed as a fundamental phase in the approach to socialism. Lenin in his article "In Australia" written in 1913 and commenting on the Labor Party pointed out that the establishment of Australia as one nation was a role assumed by the Australian Labor Party. He said that when that had been achieved the liberal bourgeois Labor Party would give way to a socialist workers party. His analysis provides food for thought. We accept that insofar as the Labor Party has and does stand for one unitary Australian nation it has been and is progressive. On that basis (and others I shall explain) there can be a wide unity of the Australian people. Indeed our experience is that there is a very deep interest in Australia as a nation, its history, its independence and sovereignty. Many young people have taken this matter up seriously. Independence activities of one kind or another attract wide support. It follows from that we give prominence to this programmatic aspect of our policy rather than putting socialism and its immediate achievement in the first place; this latter, we think is premature and contains elements of division. Assuredly as a general propaganda matter there should be socialist explanation and popularization. As an

immediate objective it is premature. Our aim is that a correct scientific analysis requires immediate and intermediate phases in the achievement of socialism in Australia to be correctly evaluated. But whether or not we are correct in this we estimate that on the issue of Australia's sovereignty and independence there is a good deal of common ground between us. On this, we can, as we see it, exchange views.

Bound up with this is the struggle for better living conditions for the Australian people and the struggle for democratic rights. At the present time an acute crisis of overproduction has gripped Australia. This arises from capitalism in Australia. It is certainly heavily affected by capitalism elsewhere and particularly by British, US and Japanese penetration of Australia. The more powerful Australia monopoly capitalists have thrown in their lot with the US multinationals. That means the infringement of that degree of independence and sovereignty that Australia has attained. Hence there is an essential interrelationship between the struggle for decent economic conditions with democratic rights on the one hand and independence and sovereignty on the other. The exponents of exploitation, of attacks on living conditions and democratic rights, are pre-eminently the US multinationals. They maintain restrictions on Australia's independence and sovereignty precisely as par of their exploitation and with them goes a traitor Australian ruling class. We believe this interconnection is being increasingly seen by wide sections of Australian people. It extends to many fields such as the environment, nuclear power and missiles. It may be said "but assume some success then you are still left with capitalism in Australia." Very true. But we envisage a continuing process certainly not one in a straight line but a continuing process of which this essential phase and this essential aspect of this phase are gone through. This we believe is reality. We will not now expound how we see development through this phase into thoroughgoing anti-imperialist independence and then socialism. The dominance is there and anything that weakens it serves the cause of independence and sovereignty and lays the basis for further advance. The working people, and indeed sections of the capitalists, are suffering acutely. More and more they pinpoint their hostility against the multinationals and their Australian partners. The economic crisis is the product of capitalism and capitalism in Australia is intimately tied up with these multinationals. Our slogan of "Make the Rich Pay" serves we believe to mesh with our overall emphasis on defending and extending independence and sovereignty. In the deepening of crisis – it is bound to deepen – the people will act more and more. They will get experience in struggle. A vast extension of struggle and attempted suppression of struggle can be anticipated. That certainly calls for unity of the working class and people and earnest exploration of ground common to the Communists. On this matter, too, even if there is disagreement as to the basis of our approach it is certainly worth investigating how far there is agreement on immediate economic demands and immediate issues of democratic rights. We regard the trade unions as the most important mass organisation of the working class. All workers who are Communists should work in their unions. Our belief is that in Australia there has been much confusion on the relationship of the Communist Party to the trade unions. In this introduction it is not necessary to go into the ins and outs of this. Suffice it to say that our position has been that it is not the function of the Communist Party to interfere in the internal affairs of the trade unions or to attempt to manipulate them for narrow Party political purposes. We believe great harm has been done by this in the past and great use made of it by the enemy. That does not at all preclude the Communist members of the unions devoting every effort to the service of the unions and where that service demands and will appropriately sustain Communist leadership, that leadership. Where attained, that leadership should not attempt to impose Communist Party domination or Communist policies in advance of the overall understanding of the trade union members or the trade union. Amongst the trade unionists the Communists will work appropriately might and main to win the workers to Communism. That is a question different from the old position. Because of some

recent controversy we want to make it clear that we do not regard the struggle by the trade unions for improved economic conditions for the workers as economism or trade union politics. We believe an essential function of the trade unions is indeed the fight for better living conditions for their members. No doubt here will be a coincidence of Communist and trade union demands on many of these questions. In the leadership of the unions by avowed Communists there are problems left over as it were from history. Some of these, maybe we can discuss. As to the bigger questions upon which we have touched, maybe we can over a period exchange opinions and learn from each other.

To talk about the trade unions raises the matter of the Labor Party. Already reference has been made to that aspect of the Labor Party which serves the development of a single unitary nation and the degree of coincidence of objectives that that raises. The question goes much further than that. On this matter we have committed many errors in having an approach that was too far left. There is a wide body of workers and people influenced by the Labor Party. In the immediate sense they see the Labor Party as their salvation even though it may in many cases be a belief tinged with cynicism or even heavily impregnated with cynicism.

Nonetheless people adhere to it in large numbers even in times of betrayal of Labor Party leaders. This we accept as a fact. Hence great attention must be paid to it and particularly to united action with those with whom united action arises or can arise. Because of history in Australia it is difficult to reach formal agreement between Communist Parties and the Labor Party. But that does not preclude good relations with the Labor Party rank and file and recognition of common positions with the ALP or sections of its leadership. If the well known example of the 1975 sacking of Whitlam is taken then there was wide unity of the Labor Party, Communist Parties, patriotic and democratic people of various shades of opinion. If we take the great penal struggle of 1969 again that unity existed. On various greater and lesser issues such situations arise. At all times, there is an underlying unity of demands between Labor Party members, Communists and people of no Party. This perhaps we can consider. We believe that it is wrong to attempt to manipulate or dictate to or pronounce upon the Labor Party as an organisation or sections of it. But we believe that advancement to more radical positions of many people involves their going through the Labor Party and having experience of it. It is our view that the Labor Party rank and file in present conditions is moving to the left and the Labor Party leadership is moving to the right. This has occurred in past critical circumstances. It is a process that enlightens the people. Predominantly the Labor Party leadership at least and many of its rank and file, see parliament as the vehicle of social advance. While we do not see parliament in that way but see it as the deception rather than the reality of democracy, we respect the confidence that many people have in it. So we do not reject parliamentary interest and activity. Maybe this too can be discussed.

The shadow of world war hangs ominously over the world. Our analysis is that the fundamental cause of this is the struggle between the Soviet Union and the USA. Probably there are considerable differences between us about the Soviet Union. We recognise this and are quite happy to explain in detail our attitude to this matter. This goes for what we regard as Vietnamese aggression in Indo-China. However differences do not preclude discussion of those differences and more importantly discussion of common ground. Each of us is opposed to US interference in Australia. Each of us stands for peace. Some put their emphasis against the USA. We do not wholly disagree with this. Some put it against the Soviet Union and in a global sense we agree with this. We are concerned with Australia and Australian independence and saving Australian people from war as part of a world wide struggle against war. While our analysis may be different and our emphasis may be different still a great deal of peace activity is activity in common. Hence this too should be explored.

There are many other matters both of general concern and particular concern. On each of the general questions dealt with, there are questions of detail over which our discussions can

range.

On what we regard as fundamental questions of Marxism we are perfectly happy to discuss them. They should not necessarily be put on one side and hidden as though they don't exist. If discussion shows greater importance should be attached to agreement on given questions then differences can be placed in a subordinate position. Differences on many questions doubtless exist and their resolution or ultimate critical disagreement may be a fairly long process. The search in our opinion should be for common ground, the narrowing of differences and joint efforts in unity in the struggles and demands of the Australian people. Sooner or later the Australian people will insist upon one Communist Party that upholds in Australian conditions the fundamental principles of Marxism. Hence our proposal about this discussion. Every effort ought to be made at least in exploring the ground for agreement both for our two sides and others who avow adherence to Marxism.

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