

## **E.F. Hill's Speech at the History of Communism in Australia Conference, August 1980**

It is puzzling to many Australians that there are three Parties said to be Communist and various Communist groups. The workers, as Marx and Engels put it, will be impelled to revolution. They will find a revolutionary party by their own experience; they will be the judges.

More than once there have been splits in the 130-odd years of the Communist movement. The fundamental principles of the 1848 Communist Manifesto which remain entirely valid today prepared the way for the First International founded in 1864. It introduced the ideas of scientific socialism to many people. It collapsed in a split over principle. Marx and Engels upheld revolutionary principle. In 1880, foundations were laid for the Second International. The opposition to the imperialist war declared in Basle in 1912 by the Second International was forgotten in the 1914-18 war. That led to split. Under the leadership of Lenin, revolutionary principle was upheld. Lenin's teachings on imperialism and imperialist war, on the state and its nature, on socialism, developed and enriched Marxism.

In 1919 the Third International was founded. During World War II it was dissolved. A central directing body for world Communism was inappropriate. In a sense the Soviet Party de facto substituted for it. It all ended up in great division in the sixties.

Marx pointed out that the immediate arena for the struggle of the working class was its own country. In 1920 the Australian Communist Party brought together groups which had espoused various brands of socialism. It existed in an all-pervading capitalist environment of social democracy, trade unionism, parliamentarism, legalism. They quite heavily influenced the Party.

The Australian Party did quite magnificent, heroic work in introducing Marxism-Leninism to the Australian working people. Through such things as the 1926 Crimes Act, economic crises of the thirties, the struggle against war and fascism, the second world war, the post-war struggles, the ruling class provocations of the fifties, it maintained its integrity and devotion to struggle. It upheld Marxism-Leninism as it saw it. No doubt there were many shortcomings. They arose from the social environment and from politically subjective ideas- the wish for socialism being father to the thought – rather than a sober analysis of the facts.

Proportionately the Australian Party paid too much attention to Soviet affairs and *too little to working out revolutionary theory for Australia*, for as Lenin said, "without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement." It looked to the Soviet Party to solve even Australian problems and the Soviet Party leaders laid down a supposed general line. Another shortcoming was that the Party insisted on a rather rigid adherence to what was called the "line". The "line" was what the Soviet Party and some authoritative Australian Party leader said it was. This is not to denigrate the Soviet Party nor the Australian Party – it is to point out what I think was an error that had the seeds of serious consequences.

The Party also made the error in its program of what has come to be known as the peaceful road to socialism. A peaceful road to socialism is desirable, and even in certain contingencies, possible, but it is quite wrong to ignore historical experience where even mild social reform, far short of socialism, has been resisted with reactionary violence. The workers and their allies must be prepared to crush that violence. If violence never comes, so much the better. Bound up with this was very heavy reliance on parliamentary methods. Use of parliament is not to be excluded, but over emphasis on it is not in accordance with Marxism. It is an institution of the capitalist class which in certain circumstances the workers can use. Neither parliament nor the trade unions are the be all and end all of working class political struggle -they are incidents of it. Great damage is done to the workers by

the conception that given trade unions are the possession of this or that political Party and divisive, factional fighting for the leadership of the trade unions is a very dangerous thing. I think the Communist Party contributed to this error. Sooner or later the chickens had to come home to roost.

Errors were *Party* errors and we all bore responsibility for them. No one who was in the Party should stand off and say it was all someone else's fault as though one had no responsibility.

In 1956, the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Soviet Party took place. Khrushchov developed into "theory" the parliamentary way, peaceful achievement of socialism, healing the split in the working class – a desirable thing and certainly there should be unity amongst the rank and file workers, but in Khrushchov's conception, a process that sought to reconcile social democratic bourgeois ideology with working class Marxist-Leninist ideology. He espoused the idea of peaceful coexistence of countries with different social systems - again desirable - but in this case in a way which involved the conception that the nature of imperialism and monopoly capitalism had changed so that imperialism no longer meant war. His attack on Stalin was really an attack on Marxism-Leninism itself. A great debate ensued in the world Communist movement. Australia was no exception.

Khrushchov attacked the very basis of Communism and fed the errors in Australia. If these ideas were adopted, then to use Lenin's words, Marxism was stripped of its revolutionary soul. After the immediate upheaval caused the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress subsided, an uneasy uncertainty prevailed in the Party and in left ranks generally.

Sometimes in Australia aspects of these differences surfaced, but not, I think, in conscious comprehensive realization by any of the disputants of *all* that was at stake.

At the 1961 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the CPSU, Khrushchov and the Soviet Party further systematized their "theory" – an essential basis as I believe, for the development of the Soviet Union as an imperialist power. Now, in our opinion. Under Brezhnev there is rank imperialism disguised by a few Communist phrases.

Some speak of the Sino-Soviet split. But what to us were at stake were fundamental Marxist-Leninist principles – such as the dictatorship of the proletariat during socialist transformation on the one hand and on the other hand under capitalism, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie as the reality with democracy as the veneer, the nature of imperialism, the correct view of peaceful coexistence and the method of winning socialism, namely both peaceful and violent but insistence on the probability of counter-revolutionary violence and how to deal with it.

Within the Australian Party the errors I have mentioned instead of being secondary to the striving for Marxism-Leninism as they had been, became primary in the minds of some Party leaders while Marxism-Leninism receded. On the other hand, striving for correct principles got more sharply defined and defended by others. Personal abuse has no real place in such a dispute. But we generated a hatred for each other more furious than the hatred we should have for the real enemies of the people. It is fruitless to assign personal responsibilities. The whole thing had its roots in the history of Communism amidst the all-pervading capitalist environment. After World War II, there had been a long period of apparent capitalist stability which influenced some to lose faith in socialism. There was rather severe repression and intimidation such as the 1949 Coal Miners' strike, gaoling of Sharkey, Communist Party Dissolution Act, amendments to the arbitration Act, the Petrov Commission.

Details of Party expulsions and other organisational measures that occurred in Australia in the sixties are beside the point. Those who look to me for scandal will be disappointed. I believe most of what

we said was and is correct. I personally said some things I would not say today. I say nothing of what was said or done about adherents of Marxism-Leninism as I believed them to be. Within a Communist Party it is essential that there be discussion about Marxism-Leninism and is correct integration with Australian reality. The old idea of an all-embracing "line" which could not be debated had to die. On the other hand, the conception of a Communist Party which allows itself to be infiltrated in whatever guise by bourgeois ideas must be rejected. The Party is a Marxist-Leninist organization. The development of the Communist Party of Australia made very difficult the proper resolution of the great issues that arose and the correct building of the Party ideologically, politically and organizationally.

No way was found of resolving the differences.

The Communist Party of Australia (M-L) was founded in 1964. That Party had rather crude beginnings. Only gradually did it get down to the job of really setting out to develop *Australian* revolutionary theory. It tried to put Marxist-Leninist ideology in first place in its Party building, to work out an Australian Party political line and to build up an organization that took correct account of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in Australia. In making much progress, we have made errors and have shortcomings. We strive to overcome them.

We strive to adhere to Marxist-Leninist scientific socialist principle which far from being out of date, is daily confirmed by life. We recognize that *the* essence of the transitional form of government from capitalism to socialism *is* the dictatorship of the proletariat and that it will only be won in revolutionary struggle, probably resisting counter-revolutionary violence with revolutionary violence; we recognize the leading role of the working class, the class most directly attached to the most advanced means of production, most cohesive and disciplined and led by the Communist Party and we uphold the correctness of the world outlook of Communism. In the same sense we put to the fore what we consider to be the global menace of the Soviet imperialists, the threat of world war which emanates from them, the defence of Australia's national sovereignty by the widest possible united front in the context of superpower contention and struggle. We recognize the domination of Australia by the US-based multinationals. Their exploitation and rape of Australia must be strenuously combated. The defence of living standards and democratic rights stands, too, in the forefront of our policy. There is no present revolutionary situation in Australia and no question of any immediate taking of power by the working class. Sooner or later a revolutionary situation will develop when anti-imperialist Australian independence will be achieved and in the struggle for which, wide sections will unite – then the issue to be resolved will be whether or not to go on to socialism.

On important issues there are substantial differences among us. Our attitude towards differences is itself different from that in the past. Our most furious hatred is reserved for the superpowers and particularly Soviet imperialism and internally in Australia, for the multinationals and local monopoly capitalists. We are happy to unite on issues on which there can be unity. We warmly welcome the well-known opposition by many present to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan; we warmly welcome struggle in defence of living standards and democratic rights. On many issues we can act in common; other issues can be put aside for the time being. On our overall approach to Soviet imperialism we have irreconcilable differences with a few. We regard a handful of people as actually fostering Soviet influence in Australia to the detriment of Australia's sovereignty and independence; with others there is an old-time loyalty to the Soviet Union born of its socialist days when we valiantly defended it. Today facts have accumulated and it is easier to discern the imperialism of the Soviet Union. We believe a great united front must be built up against its menace. We hold that its activities in the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea are simply another

aspect of its imperialism reaching right out to this part of the world. Our opposition to Soviet imperialism is not negotiable but we are prepared to discuss it.

We are concerned to develop in every possible way the unity and integrity of the Communist movement. There must be exchanges of views and the deepest possible study of Marxist-Leninist general principle in order to guide actual struggle in Australia.

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