

In over 40 years in the revolutionary movement, I have participated in many, many mass struggles of a many sided nature and internal struggles right up to the present time. Since about 1940 and particularly after World War II, with other comrades I have been in the leadership of many of those struggles. They include strikes big and small from the forties, the penal powers struggle of 1969, innumerable court struggles, struggles against imperialist war, support for the then socialist Soviet Union and for socialist China and many other struggles. In the internal struggles, the chief is that against revisionism. In that struggle I suppose I was the initiator and leader. So there is little doubt I have had a good deal of experience. In all that, the main thing is the positive development of the Party and the movement particularly in the last 15 years.¹ All the comrades have developed and new comrades have come into the movement. Today our slogan for independence and on more immediate questions are mass slogans. Along with the development of the struggle and the Party, I too have developed. In that development there are both positive and negative teachers. There is a general document which essays something of a sum up (not an exhaustive one). I should like to look at something of the negative influences on me in order to see the force of negative teaching. What follows deal with a lot of mistakes. I have always believed one's own mistakes must be faced frankly and analysed and I still believe it. I have given the example before in "Class Struggles in the Communist Parties" where I included in my speech on the death of Chairman Mao a sentence about Chiang Ching² and said she was a distinguished member of the Political Bureau, I had praised Chang Chun-chiao's pamphlet on the dictatorship of the proletariat.³ In my pamphlet I acknowledged these errors and others. The fact is I didn't even believe what I said about Chiang Ching at the time, but included it as a matter of protocol as it were. But I think one must face and acknowledge and analyse this sort of error. Where it is done publicly, then one must do publicly what one can to correct it. Lenin many times stressed that one test of revolutionary seriousness, devotion, was a Party's attitude to its mistakes. In order to see the whole question of mistakes in perspective, we can recall Lenin's statement that when the workers make a mistake it is like saying $2 + 2 = 5$; it is easily corrected, but when the bourgeoisie makes a mistake, it is like saying $2 + 2 =$ a box of candles; it is not easily corrected. What follows will be mainly negative from which positive conclusions can be drawn.

Political subjectivism is deeply rooted in me; influences of trade unionism and parliamentarism are included. Throughout my history in the old Party (from 1936 to 1963) I was afflicted with subjectivism – dogmatism, sectarianism, rightism. This took many forms. Examples are the belief that revolution was "just around the corner", that the Soviet Union was perfect, that every Soviet Communist was correct and knew all about Australia, that the essential question in Australia was to control the trade unions, that getting Communists into parliament was the best way to expose parliament. In fact, the Party was largely subordinate to trade unionism and parliamentarism. There is no doubt I participated in all this.

I was very active in the Clerk's Union. Indeed it became for some years in the thirties the main centre of my activity regarded as more important than anything else. When I began to participate in Party leadership in Victoria in 1939 or 1940 - centrally I was elected to the Political Committee in 1956 – the Central Committee in 1948 (I cannot really remember which date it was – I had joined the Party in 1936 but I had participated in Communist activity since about 1932) my main interest was in the

¹ Although this self-criticism is undated, the reference to "over forty years in the revolutionary movement" and "the last 15 years" (Ted joined the CPA in 1936 and established the CPA (M-L) in 1964) would indicate that he was speaking in or around 1979.

² Mao's wife and a leader of the so-called "gang of four".

³ Chang Chun-qiao (Zhang Chunqiao) was another member of the "gang of four". In 1975 he published his article "On Exercising All-Round Dictatorship Over the Bourgeoisie".

trade unions. I knew what trade union each Party member belonged to and his activity. I accepted a statement I heard Dixon⁴ make that if the party had the key trade union positions in Australia, it could win the revolution. Of course it is correct to understand the trade unions. But not in the way I went about in following the Party line – the trade unions were everything. It was a failure to analyse and investigate and to see the supremacy of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought and it persisted until recent times. Such a thing must leave an adverse mark on me. As to parliamentarism, again I went along even though it wasn't with the same enthusiasm as with the trade unions. In short, I wasn't sufficient of a Marxist-Leninist to rise above this sort of bourgeois ideology even though I was quite familiar with Lenin's criticism of worship of the trade union leader and his criticism of trade unionism and parliamentarism. In my own opinion, traces of this wrong approach can be seen in my book "Looking Backward; Looking Forward".

The Party had a habit of presenting a programme at each Congress – "The Australian Path to Socialism". These programmes were quite schematic and arbitrary and had very little relation to reality. Also they based their approach on the view that Australia was an independent imperialist power in its own right. The conception was subjective but for my part, I accepted it. These programmes remained a dead letter because of their lack of connection with reality. This can be contrasted with the way our draft provisional programme⁵ with its demands for independence and socialism has become a mass matter.

On the transition to socialism, peace was emphasised, at least particularly towards the close of World War II. In addition, the Party leadership accepted the bourgeois promises of a "new order" after the war. The Party leadership was greatly influenced by Browder.⁶ I opposed this but again did not really fight. Personally I had misgivings about a new order, but lacked the conviction and strength to oppose it vigorously. At the time of the 20th Congress of the CPSU, again I had misgivings and perhaps began to express them but still lacked the conviction and strength to fight hard about it. After 1956 I spoke and wrote in favour of the Soviet Union as a socialist country. I can recall as late as the latter part of 1962, particularly with Comrade Miller⁷ in a "unity" discussion with Dixon. In retrospect it is quite clear we were influenced by Liu Shao-chi's revisionist line on this and at that time had we correctly analysed it, it was clear that there was no way back for Dixon, Sharkey⁸ and Co. nor for the Soviet revisionists. In any event, I had no clear idea of the struggle for socialism.

By 1960-61 my differences with the other Party leaders had become acute. However I did not carry out a struggle except in the four man central leadership and in the Political Committee and to some of my more intimate friends in the Party. This was born of a misconception about democratic centralism and unity of the Party which were the products of subjectivism. When a Party deserts Marxism-Leninism, it cannot use these Marxist ideas to suppress Marxist-Leninists. When the position became irreconcilable, it is true that I fought but in my innermost being, I was reluctant to

⁴ Richard Dixon, whose background was as an official of the Australian Railways Union in NSW, became National President of the Communist Party of Australia from 1948 to 1972.

⁵ The CPA (M-L)'s program was released as a "draft provisional programme" in April 1979.

⁶ Earl Browder was General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USA. In 1942, influenced by wartime cooperation between the US and the USSR, he wrote a book called "Victory and After" which promoted class collaboration. His position was one of out-and-out revisionism.

⁷ Ken Miller was a leading Victorian Communist and member of the CPA's Central Committee. He was one of the first to criticise that Party's descent into revisionism, but died in 1963, before the formation of the CPA (M-L).

⁸ Lance Sharkey was Chairman of the CPA from 1930 to 1948, and Secretary-General of the CPA from 1948 to 1965.

take the responsibility for leadership of the struggle against revisionism and also was still the prisoner of subjective ideas about Party “loyalty”, “unity” and many other things.

When I did accept the responsibility, I was far from clear about what to do and the correct line of struggle. Had I not had immense assistance over the years from other comrades and particularly from the Chinese Party, especially Chairman Mao, I should simply have repeated in a new form, the errors of the past. Gradually (and it was gradual) I came to understand something of my own subjectivism, the subjectivism of the old Party, and to learn to seek truth from facts. Yet this was fairly late in life. In short, what was really at stake was philosophical idealism or materialist dialectics. Philosophical idealism is the philosophy of the bourgeoisie, materialist dialectics the scientific outlook of the proletariat. In the final analysis I was at least deeply influenced by philosophical idealism.

Even after a certain emancipation from this, I persisted in serious errors. In preparing this, I reread the stenogram⁹ of a television interview, which from its context must have been in 1963. In it, I was still asserting Australia was an imperialist country and I was still at least influenced by parliamentarism.

Right up to the present time the type of error born of this approach, profound as these errors are, influences me. For example, I still in my heart have great respect for militant trade union leaders. I am not saying that one shouldn't have respect, but it is a question of the content of that respect. Moreover the real test is the devotion of comrades whether trade union officials or not to the Party and the people, the supremacy of the Party and the people.

As to the character of the revolution in Australia, I would say I did not understand this in any real sense well after the break in 1962. In my mind were ideas of Australian imperialism, no history of feudalism, hence no intermediate stage. These ideas were mixed up with the beginnings of comprehension of the question of independence. In the original draft of a preliminary programme quite late (maybe 1970 or 1971) the formulation of national independence as a stage to socialism appeared. This was correct but it was not clear. It was assailed by Langer¹⁰ who insisted on immediate socialism and also adding a reference to the determining position of the Chinese Party. I felt the latter was wrong, but I did not vigorously oppose it and I was persuaded that the former was correct. Only after a very helpful discussion with the Chinese comrades did I come to a better understanding and a bit of lead was put in my pencil. I do not mean that the Chinese Party leaders said what we had to say. On the contrary. But by examples and general review, they wakened me up on this matter. This shows the deep persistence of subjectivism. Probably in every respect this hangover persists.

I have read a good deal of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Tsetung. This began in the late twenties. Although it is now very useful, I regard myself as still a comparative beginner in the real study of Marxism-Leninism. For years (decades) I “understood” the generality, could recite passages (not now – too old). I still didn't understand Lenin's proposition that the living soul of Marxism is the concrete study of concrete conditions. This is a very serious matter and is profound subjectivism. Again it persists though I have come to what I think is a much better understanding of it.

⁹ A transcript, usually from a shorthand original.

¹⁰ Albert Langer, a prominent student radical based at Monash University, contributed to the growth of the Party's influence within the student movement of the late '60's, but later attacked Hill and the Party from an ultra-left point of view.

Product of subjectivism was sectarianism. In the Clerk's Union, for example, our ideas were a sectarian "left bloc" ranged against the "reactionaries". They were reactionaries all right – there is no doubt of that. But what we didn't see first of all was that a union meeting composed of perhaps 100 or so wasn't all that important, that it was necessary to isolate enemies and unite all who could be united (and there were many). Most important, we (I) failed to combat trade union politics except in the most general way. This was no more than "militant" trade unionism which could be traced to the influence of the IWW, OBU, etc.¹¹

The origin of my subjectivism lies, I think, in the all-round seemingly peaceful atmosphere of Australian society including parliamentarism and trade unionism, my background and my own intellectualism, the separation of physical and mental labour (in effect, I have never worked physically – what I have done is infinitesimal). Australia is an isolated country geographically and there has been an all-pervading bourgeois atmosphere which has affected me. If one does not analyse it, one thinks Australia is the world. The abnormal separation of town and country means that I have a blind spot on rural matters (again I have never except in the most minor degree been mixed up in agricultural pursuits, although my early life was in country towns). I have not had any economic difficulty except in the thirties and to a degree, in my 14 years as a Party functionary but even then it was not serious. My profession has a negative influence in addition to a positive.

As to conceptions of the Party, I subscribed to all that was wrong in the past. This is a heavy burden of influence. I have adverted already to democratic centralism and unity of the Party. The actual fact was that I did not put ideology in the first place and investigate correct politics and organisation. On these matters I was blind and even where I differed, lacked the conviction and strength to do anything about it. One matter I should particularly mention is the case of Johnson.¹² I was warned about him in the forties and explicitly in 1956 and even more insistently after that¹³ yet I persisted in my own view that he was all right until 1963-4 despite more warnings. Anyway an analysis would have shown the position but I explained it all away. This reflects a subjective obstinacy, both political and in the sense of personal loyalty.

Now I think I must constantly pay attention to all these negative features in me as a Communist (and there are more along similar lines) and struggle harder to understand Marxism and Australia's reality. My work must be harder, more persistent and more efficient. I must make stricter demands upon myself. The test for Communists is whether or not they are prepared to give their all in the revolutionary cause.

I should like to say something about the Chinese Party. I have received immense assistance from it. In my early association with the Chinese comrades, I had something of an attitude similar to my previous attitude to the Soviet Party. I believed the Chinese Party had all the answers. I believed that they could solve the problems of the Australian revolution, know all about Australia, every Chinese Communist was correct and so on. This persisted over some years. Actually, of course, I now think the Chinese Party is a mighty Party historically and at the present time. From the time of Chairman Mao's assumption of leadership in 1935, it has been and is, in my opinion, the best Party that has ever been known in the world. It is still so and is developing. But the Chinese comrades, particularly

¹¹ In the late 19th and early 20th centuries militant workers sought to overcome the craft divisions embedded in the union movement and argued for industrial organisation to replace those craft divisions. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and One Big Union (OBU) were representatives of this trend.

¹² Frank Johnson and Flo Russell were CPA officials with responsibility for the Party's work in trade unions in Victoria. Both supported the struggle, led by Hill, against the CPA's revisionism and supported the formation of the CPA (M-L). However, both rejected the organisational principles of the new Party and subsequently left.

¹³ One of those who criticised Johnson in alleging that he was a police agent, was the wharfie Ernie O'Sullivan.

Chairman Mao and comrades Chou En-lai, Kang Sheng and Teng Hsiao-ping (I mention the last, not because of the controversy over him but because I recall a discussion with him in 1965. In this discussion, what he said made me suddenly see with far greater clarity what Chairman Mao was saying in material like "Reform Our Study", etc. A great light dawned on me) gradually awakened a new approach in me, greatly assisted in my education. It was Comrade Chou En-lai who criticised a Party in a given country such as Australia having in its programme a reference to a virtual leadership of the Australian revolution by the Chinese Party. Chairman Mao was by far the most profound Marxist-Leninist I have ever met. If I did not agree with his analysis of "genius"¹⁴ that is how I would have described him. The way in which he always approached all questions in true materialist dialectical manner taught me a great deal. In the course of these discussions I made serious errors and mis-statements such as one I remember, I think in 1963, when I told Chairman Mao that 10% of Australian workers supported Communism and I meant in the sense of "embracing". Of course, this was subjective nonsense. If it had been true, then the Australian revolution would be well on a successful path. This was not the only error I made in various discussions and I still make them. Nowadays I do not believe in the perfection of the Chinese Party and even then, except in the case of Chairman Mao, I did not agree with everything that was said to me. I think the present leaders of the Chinese Party are first class Marxists and devoted to Mao Tsetung Thought and I have got great assistance in discussions with them. To this day there remain comparatively small matters where I retain disagreement. This is not to say that I am correct. The matters are minor. No doubt my position should be much better than it is having regard to the sort of advantage of such discussions I have had. I get refreshed each time I talk to the Chinese comrades.

I do not make any further mention of any positive contributions I may have made, not because I do not think it does not exist but I find it helpful to make this statement and to think about these matters. I think that no Communist and particularly no Communist leader should in any way try to cover up his errors no matter how much he wished them to go away. By frank analysis of all errors (I have only scratched the surface of mine) a great deal can be learned. As it is in fact wrong wholly to negate our work or ourselves, I would not want any comrade to be depressed or oppressed by what I have said. I refer to what I said earlier. Nor do I regard it as breast beating. My errors in fact happened and happen and it does not preoccupy me nor depress or oppress me. It is a matter of learning and learning is a process in which necessarily one of the teachers is by negative example.

It has been said that I am too modest about my contribution. Actually I do not think I am too modest. I have a certain confidence and can be very decisive as comrades know. Anyway, to put it in Mark Twain's words, I have plenty to be modest about, as can be seen from the above.

Nor have I made mention of personal traits, faults, such as my tendency to mumble in discussion and conversation, to be laconic, sometimes abrupt, sometimes flippant, etc. These are matters that have their importance and comrades ought to draw my attention to them when they occur. I regard them somewhat in the light of which Chairman Mao spoke in "On Correcting Mistaken Ideas in the Party" under the heading "On Subjectivism" and they are subordinate matters compared with the ideological and political errors.

¹⁴ Lin Biao promoted the cult of Mao Zedong at the beginning of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. He constantly referred to the "genius" of Mao Zedong as a cover for his own ambition, as Mao's successor and "closest comrade-in-arms", to inherit the status and accolades surrounding Mao. After his attempted assassination of Mao and death in a plane crash, Mao criticised the "theory of genius".

Maybe the whole development can be put in an analytical basis such as a rough 10% Marxism-Leninism for many years changing step by step in later years to a rough say 60-70%. Really it is for others to say.

I would warmly welcome criticism by any comrade. There are many matters on which there is plenty of room. Some I am aware of. But no doubt there are others to which I should give attention.