

Attempts to bury Marxism doomed to failure

Those who join the ranks of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) are revolutionary optimists.

Being a revolutionary optimist has very little to do with having a sunny nature as against being pessimistic.

A great number of pessimistic theories are being peddled around Australia and overseas at the moment.

Professional pessimists at a dime a dozen fill the pages of the capitalist press.

Amateurs pessimists crop up, wringing their hands, hankering after by-gone days or sounding like lost souls who've become disorientated in the confusion of events which have bypassed them.

Whichever the category, the end result is the same. Without hope or a goal, they see nothing good. The future is completely black.

But let us return to revolutionary optimism.

One cannot be a revolutionary optimist without being involved in the struggle against oppression or without an ever-lasting consistent battle to grasp the science of Marxism.

The general theories of Marxism were born in struggle against alien views and are a world outlook. They arose from examination of the practice of past struggle and the particular upheavals of the revolutionary period of the 1840s.

Initially they were views advanced by two people, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.

That they still have to be "refuted" in the 1990s says a great deal for their truth and durability.

It is also a great reminder to us, if any were needed that there is nothing much wrong in

being holders of a minority viewpoint.

If the viewpoint is true, if it can stand up to the test of practice, those honest people who cannot accept it today will in due course come to realise its correctness and accept it later on.

The great revolutionary aspect of the theories of Marx and Engels (which incidentally guarantees they cannot be wished away, papered over or violently crushed), is that they are in harmony with the forward march of history. For a short period the sheer volume of opposing views may temporarily appear to push them aside. But life soon asserts itself. It has been said they are omnipotent because they are true. Truth stands supreme.

When we speak of Marx's view we speak of an integrated system of ideas, a standpoint if you like, which, when applied to economic and political life, results in a programme for emancipation from the exploitation of capitalism and for realisation of a new system of socialism.

There were other scientists of genius before Marx and Engels who developed fundamental aspects of philosophy, political economy and socialism.

But to them alone went the task of bringing that which stood the test of practice within all fields, together. Moreover they extended and developed these views, crowning them with revolutionary new discoveries.

If we take political economy for example, before Marx there was acceptance of the view that the value of a commodity was determined by the labour time needed for its production. There was understanding that the profit motive was the intention and aim of capitalist production of commodities.

But classical political economy before Marx found itself mystified by the process by which this profit was gained.

To Marx alone goes the honour of discovering the law of surplus value. To derive surplus value, which is the source of profit, the owner of money must "find in the market, a commodity, whose use-value possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value". (*Capital*, Vol.1)

The commodity so described by Marx was labour power. Labour power, the commodity, is sold by the labourer to the owner of money, for wages.

It is put to work, say for the whole week. In current Australian conditions, on average in about half that time the labourer has produced enough values to pay for the week's wages. But the rest of the week must still be worked out. The values created in that extra labour time constitute surplus-value — the source of the capitalist's profit.

We have spoken of this at some length and will later speak of other views of Marx and Engels in the same way because in the great hurry to bury Marxism, it is not only seldom, it is positively rare, that any of its grave-diggers do us the honour of telling us what actually they are burying. It cannot be otherwise of course. Either they have never fully understood or have completely forgotten what the fundamental principles of Marxism are. For us the essential content of Marxism must be discussed. It cannot be glossed over nor distorted.

The same thing can be said about Lenin's views. This great Marxist, leader of the Russian Revolution of 1917, lived in the era following Marx and Engels.

He not only embraced the main economic and political standpoint of Marx and Engels, he extended and further developed that standpoint with genius.

The years leading up to the 1917 Russian Revolution were years when the commodity capitalism examined by Marx and Engels developed into the monopoly capitalism of imperialism.

It would be in utter conflict with the fundamental concepts of Marxism to fail to examine new growing features of the objective world. Changes in the objective world are inevitably reflected in changes within the minds of the men and women who live and work in this reality. Lenin reacted magnificently to the

task of examining all these changes.

He not only examined the economic and political characteristics of his day. He subjected the view which arose from this new stage to close examination. In the process he took part in the task of fully participating in the struggle to change the old way of life.

He reaffirmed the standpoint from which Marx and Engels had examined past history and early capitalism. His starting point was materialist, that is, he accepted that the real world — nature and society — is primary. Our ideas, knowledge, consciousness, are derived from this world and are a reflection of objective reality in our minds.

Moreover, this materialism realised development was a complex of processes. There was nothing ready-made or static. Everything was many-sided in a process of coming into being or going out of existence. Such a viewpoint is called dialectical. Taken together the standpoint is one of dialectical materialism.

Marx, in immortal words in the preface to his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, applies these principles of dialectical materialism to human society and its history: "In the social production of their existence, men enter into definite, necessary relations, which are independent of their will, namely, relations of production corresponding to a determinate stage of 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 there arises a legal and political superstructure and to which there 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 it is their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production or — what is merely a legal expression for the same thing — with the property relations within the framework of which they have hitherto operated. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. At that point an era of social revolution begins. With the change in the economic foundation the whole immense superstructure

is more slowly or more rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic, in short, ideological, forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.

"Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such an epoch of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social forces of production, and the relations of production ..." (This can be compared with Marx's brief formulation in a letter to Engels dated July 7, 1866: "*Our theory that the organisation of labour is determined by the means of production*".)

All the pundits who bury Marxism should enter into serious intellectual discussion based precisely on what Marx says here. Spare us the clichés, the second or third-hand view. Discuss Marx's own words, please. Refute this magnificent summation if you can!

Marxism not only embraces a general standpoint. If it is valid Marxist theory, it must constantly be viewed against all practice and further developed, consistent with the advent of new facts.

Mention has been made of Lenin's contribution in this regard. Constituting new theoretical achievement in the light of objective development, it has become known as Leninism. Leninism is Marxism in the era of imperialism. Hence the overall philosophy may be generally referred to as Marxism-Leninism.

Lenin's views therefore have great import for the practitioners of Marxism today.

In his *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, with extraordinary understanding and foresight he observed the underlying economic and political characteristics of capitalism up to the 1920s so brilliantly that they stand still sharp and clear in the 1990s.

He set out for revolutionaries everywhere the essential content of the apparatus of the state both within capitalism and socialism.

He subjected the growth of opportunism within the working class movement to merciless examination. He illustrated how these ideas arose from this particular stage of imperialism.

These three areas of work in particular were to have exceptional significance.

In the debates within the international communist movement in the late '50s and 60s, these propositions were to be the corner-stones of either adherence to or departure from the revolutionary road.

To understand today's events — both internationally and nationally — it becomes necessary, however briefly, to look at the substance of those debates. In Australia on both sides many positions were taken and many things said and done which did not assist calm resolution of the fundamental questions.

Generally speaking all debate on fundamental questions should proceed in an atmosphere of calm reason, listening and sifting objective reality from views propounded.

Moreover, practice has resulted in a more all-sided consideration of the issues involved by many of the participants at that time.

However it becomes necessary to restate some of the basic matters dealt with by Lenin in particular, to put the subsequent happenings in proper perspective. The substance cannot be glossed over with vague phrases or the generalities used by those who daily try to bury communism.

Lenin defined imperialist characteristics in the following way. Production is concentrated into a few monopoly capitalist combines which have captured the most important sources of raw materials.

The banks have developed from modest intermediary enterprises to fuse with the big industrialists to become huge finance capitalists upon which all economic and political institutions of this society depend.

In the late 19th and 20th century, this finance capital had extended its grubby fingers and grabbed all the hitherto "undeveloped" areas of the world. Now the only way to achieve access to new sources of raw materials or territory was to re-divide the world, either by direct or underlying force.

Lenin carefully examined each new struggle and area of conflict.

He added to the storehouse of knowledge about the political superstructure which arose from this economic base.

He brilliantly established the fundamental character of each form of capitalist state. Whether it be a monarchy, a bourgeois democratic republic, a fascist dictatorship, in essence

its content was that of a class dictatorship, i.e. it upheld the supremacy of the ruling class; in this case, the capitalist class.

Because of the fundamentally repressive, violent nature of this capitalist state with its armies, police and so on he further concluded that its violence must be met and destroyed by the violence of the class which it was exploiting — the working class in alliance with other oppressed sections of the people.

These propositions formed the background to the debates in the communist movement.

They were propositions which had already been put to the test in Russia in 1917, other countries in the wake of the Second World War and in China in 1949.

Understanding well the imperialist nature of the 1914-18 war for a redivision of the world, Lenin led the Russian people to take advantage of the contradictions between the imperialist powers to unite to throw off a system bringing them nothing but starvation and agony.

Against untold difficulty and problems, first under the leadership of Lenin and following his death Stalin the Soviet Union set out to establish the first socialist country.

Of course there were mistakes. In later years Mao Zedong, the leader of the Communist Party of China, discussed the role of mistakes in developing correct practice.

It is not unusual within a broadly correct programme to make one mistake, two mistakes or many more before the experience is summed up, the errors identified, and the correct path taken. In fact more is probably learnt from mistakes than correct work. They are not to be feared.

Mistakes which occur in the process of taking particular steps when building socialism are almost inevitable. The recognition of mistakes made within socialism and proper adjustments to policy in good time as a consequence is one thing. The rejection of the whole system of socialism is entirely different.

Socialism is a system the like of which (the final elimination of exploitation) with the exception of the period of primitive communism has never before existed.

To examine each step, to adjust activity in the light of practice, brings a whole new dimension of understanding to those matters only dealt with in general outline by Marx, Engels and Lenin.

To expect a completely worked-out set of

laws governing the economic and political features of socialism in advance of the practice of socialism would be to stand Marxist dialectical materialism on its head and thereby court disaster. Marx and Engels discovered the laws governing capitalism from an examination of the workings of capitalism. Marxist political economy does equip us to some extent to anticipate steps needed for the details of socialist development. Mistakes will still be made.

Understanding the role of mistakes, their fearless examination and correction, is one of the hallmarks of a serious communist.

Without this style of work no correct advance can be made.

It was a style which in the 1960s a small group of Australian communists led by E.F. Hill strove to take up. Mistakes in the work of Australian communists covering political tasks and form of organisation were publicly acknowledged. Genuine efforts were made to overcome them. Others failed to do so. Some, as experience accumulated, adopted differing positions.

For the present it needs to be said that on the general world scene if there has been any other systematically worked out programme for overcoming the evils of capitalism than by the winning of a socialist system free of great profits on the one hand and devastating poverty on the other, we have failed to hear of it.

If there is such a thing the would-be detractors of Marxism today should introduce it to us, being prepared by argument and practice to demolish the great theories which they try to dismiss with a mere flick of the wrist.

The propositions put forward against the "out-moded" character of Marxism in the debate of 30 years ago were based upon rejection of the fundamental nature of imperialism, a refusal to accept the concept of the basically violent nature of the ruling capitalist class and its bourgeois dictatorship, the need for a working class dictatorship supported by the working people to build socialism, and bound up with these views an estimate of the position of the parties of social democracy or as in the case of Australia, the Australian Labor Party.

The view argued against Lenin's understanding of imperialism which carried with it the ever-present threat of war to redivide spheres of interest in the world was that of basing

revolutionary tactics and policies on striving for peaceful coexistence between nations, particularly between the imperialist and socialist nations.

From this it followed that socialism and capitalism would live peacefully side-by-side. From this it followed that monopoly capitalism had changed its nature. No longer did the oppressed people need to struggle to overthrow a violent state apparatus. Within all the countries oppressed by imperialism, parliamentary politics would transcend class struggle. All that was needed was a majority of parliamentary representatives, with a hoped-for alliance between social-democrats and communists to legislate for socialism.

Little wonder that after 30 odd years of practice based on such a line of fantasy, some of its most ardent supporters are either presiding over the break-up of the Soviet Union or countries of Eastern Europe or holding public wakes to bury their own phantoms in the capitalist countries. The result has brought horror and dismay to many sincere dedicated communists who believed 30 years ago that the Communist Parties had always been and would always be 100 percent.

It is essential that each Communist Party within its own national boundaries, determines its own road to socialism. This is one important principle emerging strengthened from the debates of those years.

The roads to socialism will be infinitely varied. But just as the natural laws governing the rotation of the earth can be positively proclaimed as objective truth, so can the general principles, the underlying laws of social change only be understood if based upon the science of Marxism. It is these laws which must be applied to the national features of each of the world's countries. The basic laws stand unaltered. Their form will be expressed in great variety.

Confidence in this science allows us to conclude that if incorrect paths are temporarily taken even though disaster may occur, sooner or later, new forces will enter the stage, look at the experiences of recent years, sum up the practice and adjust policy accordingly. It must be so. The people who continue to suffer from exploitation and oppression will demand it. Where there is suffering, there will be struggle and rebellion.

No amount of endless debate from afar

will turn those overseas who rejected the path of Marxism to change course.

But the people of each country based on the practice of their daily lives will eventually do so. If need be they will advance new leaders from their ranks who will correctly analyse the real nature of capitalism, so-called Western democracy and freedom and finally sort out their real friends and enemies. In the process they will distinguish genuine Marxism from pseudo-Marxism. The time and the circumstances are decisions for each nation free from outside interference.

It is necessary to return to an important field of Lenin's work.

Because he lived and worked in the era of imperialism, a great deal of Lenin's theoretical work is concerned with the labour movement of that time and the development of opportunism within the working class movement. In many important works — *What is to be Done?*, *"Left-wing" Communism*, etc. — he set out clearly the need for a strict line of demarcation between reformist social democratic theories and communist theory, the former being limited within capitalism, the latter calling for a complete change of system. At the same time he called for the utmost unity in struggle of the people who suffer under the capitalist system, irrespective of whether they follow reformism or communism.

Lenin analysed the position of the Australian Labor Party in 1913. He designated the ALP as a liberal-bourgeois party concerning itself with the development of a central capitalist state, not as a socialist party striving for socialism.

Many years ago the Communist Party in Australia under the leadership of L. Sharkey had described the Labor Party as a "two class" party.

This incorrect description went unchallenged for some years, until E.F. Hill corrected his previous support of that position to substantiate the view that the ALP is a parliamentary party administering capitalism.

The fact that it has electoral support from many workers in no way alters its basic role.

Central to the proposal for "peaceful coexistence" and "peaceful transition to socialism" was the theme of reconciliation between the Labor Party and the communists in Australia. According to the view accepted by a majority of communists in the debates inter-



E.F. (Ted) Hill addressing a Melbourne public meeting in 1986.

nationally, a common platform and parliamentary representation of these two parties would legislate for socialism.

An incorrect evaluation of the Labor Party was bound up with this proposition.

The Australian labour movement has been greatly influenced by British trade unionism. Britain's early imperialist development enabled certain sections of British workers to be bribed to support that country's position. This opportunism which saw the interests of the exploiting class and the workers as being identical was carried over into Australia.

Examining the practice and make-up of the ALP, E.F. Hill and the group of communists who established the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) in 1964 concluded that the Labor Party as an institution had set out to build and administer capitalism in Australia. The absolute limit to which its policy could aspire would be that of winning some reforms within this capitalism. Irrespective of the desires and hopes of the bulk of the Labor Party's membership, basically it stood for capitalism.

To seek political reconciliation with this party would be to seek to reconcile the ideas of reformism with revolutionary change. In the final analysis it would mean confining all struggle within the surrounds of parliament and

the existing system. It would completely subordinate communism to reformism.

Ultimately it would spell betrayal of those oppressed and exploited, who yearned for a change of system.

Unity in struggle to change the system with members of the Labor Party who genuinely seek to serve the mass of the people is another matter altogether.

E.F.Hill's correct estimation of the character of the Labor Party together with the repudiation of the decisions abandoning Marxism on the international scene were significant for the direction of class struggle in Australia.

From the summing-up of experience of Labor governments in office in Australia, the C.P.A.(M-L) has been able over the intervening years to develop tactics to further the understanding of Labor's role in this country.

Central to real progress, to victories against foreign domination for national independence, for real advancement in living standards, is an understanding of the direction of the correct path for people's struggle.

Reliance on the Labor Party and parliament over the years, time and time again, has resulted in betrayal of the people and often disastrous defeats.

The correct tactic for future victory demands the people rely upon their own activity outside parliament. At the same time to help more and more understand the real position of the Labor Party as an institution administering capitalism, it is necessary that Labor should remain in office. Otherwise it moves to Opposition benches, rebuilds credibility which it loses whilst in office, and the movement for real change is postponed accordingly. Experience indicates this is the correct path for exposing parliament as an institution of the capitalist dictatorship in spite of its democratic appearance.

As the years have passed, some of those who tried to impose the ideas of peaceful transition to socialism upon the communist movement more and more vigorously opposed class struggle. In the last seven years of Labor Party government in Australia, some have become the most ardent advocates of "consensus" and "restructuring" within the working class movement. As more and more inroads into living standards have taken place under these slogans, the base of the advocates has narrowed and narrowed.

Preaching false ideas about Marxism, they then decry the fact that there is no support for these false ideas, claiming it is Marxism which is refuted. Now many years later summing up the practice of the intervening years, many are re-examining the situation and setting out to study Marxism anew.

Marxism has never been refuted or rejected. Those who deserted Marxism becoming apologists for capitalism, seeking to dampen down class struggle, are the ones whose only possible fate is rejection.

Unable to accept the reality of the predatory nature of imperialism they are unable to see and join the great movement against the largely foreign-based monopolies and for national independence developing under their very noses. They talk of the Australian people being without hope. It is they who are without hope or faith in the future.

The experience of the C.P.A. (M-L) is entirely different. Certainly mistakes have been made. Reference has already been made to some. There are others. When they occur, if we honestly sum up experience, strive, without fear, to adjust policies, the Australian people benefit

and the C.P.A. (M-L) becomes a bit more mature. There is a very long way to go. The Australian movement of struggle basically for independence and socialism has taken some important first steps. It is an honour to be part of the process. But they are only the first steps.

No one person or group has a monopoly of Marxism. The most that can be hoped for is to strive continuously for a better grasp of this revolutionary science. In the final analysis the Australian people will decide what is or is not correct leadership in all their struggles.

We can say though that each passing day adds to confidence and optimism.

The turmoil and instability throughout the world and within Australia bear powerful witness that it takes more than the subjective desire for peaceful coexistence to hold back the reality of imperialism. The fundamental laws of capitalism, the laws of surplus value, the law of maximum profit, the anarchy of production, remain firmly in place. They are behind all the chaos both here and overseas.

Many write to the C.P.A. (M-L), send splendid financial assistance and the most experienced join the Party's ranks. The achievements may still be small. They only occur if we continue without fear or favour to serve the Australian people and strive to master the ideas of Marxism.

These latter are readily available in books in bookshops listed on the back cover. We would suggest all who can obtain them do so.

There can be no solutions to the many international or national problems without the fullest participation of the majority of the people.

Once this fact is ignored, once any ideas of elitism or any divorcing themselves from the people creep into a political party's style of work, that party and the revolutionary movement suffer serious consequences.

Whether the immediate task is that of challenging capitalism or striving to build socialism, reliance on the wisdom and invincibility of the majority of the people is the magic ingredient for victory. They will determine the steps and the pace for change.

Marxist theory and practice is inexorably bound up with this truth. There can be no departure from it.