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THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF NEW ZEALAND

(The following report was presented to a meeting of the National Executive on April 5.)

It is important for us to have a full assessment of the Communist Party of New Zealand, because Maoism is our main opponent to the left of the Labour Party, in terms of cadres we meet day to day, and in the political movements and student movement. This is despite the fact that the Socialist Unity Party has some important trade union leaders, who are well-known, and have considerable influence on union and political matters.

At this time there are increasing political opportunities for us to deal blows to the Maoists, and win some of their members and periphery. Maoism is in crisis because of the reversal under the post-Mao regime of the domestic policies which were instituted at the time of the Cultural Revolution a decade ago. These policy reversals, combined with a major leadership purge, have seriously weakened the credibility of the regime, particularly among those who became Maoists during the time when the Mao faction's policies (or those of the "Gang of Four") were being implemented. Secondly, Peking's foreign policy is now so openly right wing that it is difficult for most radicals to stomach. In defining the Soviet Union as the "main danger" they have allied with the most right-wing forces in the West (recently criticising Carter for not going ahead with the neutron bomb), and opposed pro-Moscow CPs and allied workers parties. (A recent article in the Victoria student newspaper Salient argued that the defeat of the CP-SP in France was a good thing because the CP and SP were softer on the Russians. In New Zealand this would mean opposing the election of a Labour government.)

The CPNZ is in continual crisis, both politically and in terms of its leadership, even if this crisis is not always visible. The internal crisis began in 1956, following the 20th CPSU Congress revelations about the repression under Stalin, which were followed in late 1956 by Moscow's crushing of the Hungarian revolution. The CP lost about one third of its membership, including most of its intellectuals. Those who left during the fifties included such capable people as Gordon Dryden, Jim Delahunty, Shirley Smith, Paul Potoki, Con Bollinger, Noel Hilliard, Elsie Locke and Sid Scott.

The CP turned inwards, and in the early 60s the leadership looked to Mao as the new saviour. This inward-looking tendency was reinforced by the split-off in 1966-67 of all the most prominent unionists (and party leaders like George Jackson and Ted Hunter), to form the Socialist Unity Party.

This split coincided with the move towards ultraleftism and sectarianism in China, through the Cultural Revolution, and it pushed the CPNZ onto a similar course, making effective electoral, union and united front work very difficult. A series of divisions followed. On the one hand there were those who wanted to go the whole ultraleft hog, such as Taylor and Dickson's "evolutionary Committee of the Communist Party", which split in 1968, and on the other hand there were those who wanted to do union and other work on the more traditional conservative Stalinist basis, such as the Wellington party

leadership, which was expelled in 1970, taking most of the Wellington branch with it. This group itself split into two, one group led by Jack Manson and based in Porirua, the other led by Terry Auld and Ron Bailey and based in Wellington.

Through the 70s there have been further losses. In Auckland, Alec Ostler (a former People's Voice editor), and Ray Gough (a National Committee member) drifted away in sympathy with the Wellington group. Hugh McLeod (a former People's Voice editor) left, and the party's National Organisational Secretary, Ralph Hegman, was expelled. In 1974 one of the chief hatchetmen, Bill McAra (who also edited NZ Communist Review in the early 70s), was himself expelled, followed by the "Revolt" group of Neil Wright and Jim Winter in Wellington and Ivan Devreaux in Christchurch, who went on to form the "Communist Party Of Aotearoa", a weird plaything of Neil Wright. The McAra and Wright expulsions represented the expulsion of a sectarian tendency which wouldn't go along with the CP's movement towards slightly more rational united front work. In 1976 Steve Hieatt was expelled, taking the South Auckland branch with him. The political differences here are not clear, except that the CP attacked him for concentrating on trade union work. (He leads the MUR branch at the Otahuhu Railway Workshops). Around this time other trade unionists like Terry Creagan (who was the "Red" in the 1977 Ngahere strike in Fiji) and Tommy Heptinstall (who was the CP's candidate for national president of the Seaman's Union in 1972) also drifted away.

To counterbalance these losses, the CP has recruited a number of younger people, some of them quite capable, including Bill and Barry Lee and Roger Fowler in Auckland, Peter Wilson in Wellington, and Tony Currie in Christchurch. I would estimate the CP's present membership to be about 150, insofar as you can estimate the size of an organisation with a large number of paper members and partially active members. There would be at least 50 in Auckland, at least 20 in Christchurch, 10 in Wellington, half a dozen in each of Hamilton, Dunedin and Whangarei, plus a scattering including such towns as Rotorua, Tauranga, Palmerston North, Napier, Greymouth, Tokoroa, and Kawerau. Add to that a considerable number of sympathisers who have been hardened over the decades, and you still have quite a major force. It is still able to churn out a weekly paper, run the major left-wing bookshops in Auckland and Christchurch, lead a quite sizable China Society, and intervene in a number of political areas.

However, the strength of the Socialist Action League (and the SUP) is obviously causing them problems, particularly as up until the formation of the SUP in 1967 they were not used to arguing with groups to the left of Labour. A new factor is the existence of other Maoist groups they have to deal with, such as the Wellington Marxist-Leninist Organisation (MLO) (Auld-Bailey), the Struggle group (Manson-Ostler-Gough), the NZ Marxist-Leninist Party (Hieatt), the McAra group in Whangamata, and now something called the Northern Communist Organisation, based in Auckland and Hamilton (which may involve ex-student Carl Gordon).

What are the political differences between these organisations? The central debate is how to define the NZ state, and the nature of the revolutionary process in this

country, and this debate has been proceeding in a semi-public way for about 5 years. The Communist Party of Australia (M-L), supported by MLO, Struggle and McARA, have argued for a two-stage revolution, the fight for national independence being the first stage. The CPA(ML)'s analysis of Australia and New Zealand is that they are virtually colonies, despite the fact that they are defined as part of the "Second World".

The CPNZ has taken a position which on the surface has much in common with ours, although they give it a NZ nationalist twist. Their position was developed more concretely in the debate with McARA in 1973-74 (which was indirectly a debate with the CPA(ML)), and its latest and most precise elaboration is in the July 1977 NZ Communist Review. The CPNZ is clear that New Zealand is an imperialist power, which exploits the Pacific. It says NZ capitalists and foreign capitalists have a common interest, and act in partnership in New Zealand. "National independence" is "not a separate stage of the revolution", and "genuine national independence or other goals and aspirations of the people is only possible with the victory of the socialist revolution". "To insist on creating two stages, an anti-imperialist stage and a socialist stage raises illusions about the features and nature of classes other than the working class."

Flowing from their position, the CPA(ML) is fully in support of the Theory of Three Worlds, which praises the role of the "Second World" bourgeoisie in a supposed struggle against the superpowers. The CPNZ has not heralded this theory, or gone out of its way to praise right-wing regimes the way China does, and in this sense it has more in common with Albania. However, the CP does run intensely anti-Soviet articles every week in People's Voice, although not to the extent of the CPA(ML)'s Vanguard. The CPNZ increasingly accepts the view that Russia is the "main danger", but they haven't yet given any ground in the direction of supporting Anzus or the strengthening of NZ's armed forces, which is the logical consequence of Peking's (and the CPA(ML)'s) position.

There are rumours of an Albanian faction within the party, and the People's Voice still runs favourable articles on Albania, and it is noticeable that although the Chinese press seems to give some attention to the CPA(ML), I can't recall seeing anything on the CPNZ for some time, nor seeing any mention of a CPNZ delegation visiting China. However, when you look at the narrow interests of the CPNZ (the vastly greater size and political influence of China compared with Albania, the large and active China Societies, and the ties most members have with China through having visited it) a break with China seems unlikely. But it is not excluded. The CPNZ leadership is so small and narrow-looking that the outcome is uncertain. In trying to straddle both Peking and Tirana the leaders are playing with fire. We shouldn't rule out the extent to which the leadership could move. A number of Maoist groups in Europe have lined up with Albania, and recently the biggest Maoist group in the US (the Revolutionary Communist Party) has split, with the majority supporting the "Gang of Four".

There are other factors causing divisions in the party. They involve how to relate to union and political struggles

in a more rational and united front way, and how to deal with features of the new radicalisation, like women's liberation and the Maori struggles. There has been a noticeable shift in these areas from the sectarian ultraleftism of the early 70s towards our positions, at least on the surface. This is noticeable both in what the People's Voice prints, and in the activity of the CP branches. It has been quite a shift, even if they still have a long way to go.

There are obviously some members resisting the changes, with the older members being more conservative. The old-young conflict is the most obvious, with the older members hanging on to the reigns of power, even though it is the younger members who are pushing the party forward. The party hasn't had a national conference since 1966, so the younger party members haven't been able to express themselves to the membership, and in the leadership, to the extent that they would like. This has been a continuing gripe. There has been some transition of leadership, however. Barry Lee has been working on People's Voice for some time (and there was even a rumour that he had displaced Rex Hollis as editor). Barry Lee often represents the CP at public gatherings. However, we don't have any precise information on the composition of the leadership. There is a strong rumour that Wilcox has been displaced as leader and that Harold Crook (a National Committee member I think) has taken over. Is this true? What is the exact role of older leaders like Dick Wolf (who was Wilcox's second-in-command a few years back), Alec Rait (who was Auckland District organiser), Ray Nunes, Rita Smith and Mat Gould (NC members) and Len Parker (the Progressive Books manager)? And are the younger members like Bill Lee, Anna Lee, Roger Fowler and Joan Eastwood moving up the ladder? These are some of the questions we want answers to.

In my opinion the crisis in the CP will deepen. They can't easily resolve their leadership crisis; they are off-side with China at least to a degree, and under challenge from other Maoists; and there will continue to be a range of views on how to relate to political questions (like women's liberation). Also, as long as they retain their abstentionist position in relation to the elections (and their complete rejection of Labour) they will remain in a sectarian strait-jacket. It would be very difficult for them to change their position on elections and the Labour Party, because they have banked so much on it.

The comments on the CP's crisis apply to a considerable degree to the second strongest Maoist group, MLO. This group has moved closer to our position on abortion, treating it as a major priority, and we have been working relatively harmoniously with them. We have a real chance to get close to MLO members and their periphery and influence them particularly as MLO's all-out support for China's policies is undermining their credibility on the left. We want to step up our polemics with Maoist positions on domestic and international questions, through getting them into discussions and debates, and using Socialist Action newspaper. The series

of public discussions which has begun in Auckland involving official representatives of the CP, SUP, and League, under the sponsorship of the WEA, is a very positive step, and one which we want to build on.

I would also suggest that we make a probe of Maoist groups, particularly the CPNZ, (which we are the least well-informed on). We need this information if we are to take full advantage of the present divisions, and openings.

Postscript

Shortly after this report was given, the April 3 issue of People's Voice arrived in Wellington, confirming the deepness of the crisis. The People's Voice carries a front page article condemning a "scurrilous attack" on the CPNZ which appeared in the March 2 issue of Vanguard, the organ of the CPA(ML). The Vanguard article, headed "Unite all Marxist-Leninists in Oceania" indicated that there were differences between the CPNZ and the CPA(ML) over the three worlds theory, and implied that V.G. Wilcox had been suppressed.

Significantly, the People's Voice criticised Wilcox for not turning up to certain party meetings, and said that he had been "under criticism over some questions of principle". So it is clear that Wilcox, who at last mention was General Secretary of the party (and has been for about 30 years) is no longer leader, and in fact is in a battle with the leadership.

The People's Voice says the differences with Wilcox "have nothing to do with questions such as the theory of the three worlds", and they may be over questions such as how to relate to political movements such as the women's liberation movement and the unions. However, if Wilcox has any fight left in him, and really wants to make it back, then he could well use the "I'm loyal to Peking" card. Even though Wilcox has been rather detached from the day-to-day leadership of the party for some time (through ill-health) he could quite easily play on the membership's support for Peking. As further evidence that the CP leadership is not blindly following Peking, the People's Voice says "The question of the CPNZ's attitude towards the theory of three worlds is one which it will resolve in its own time..."

One thing that could happen is that the efforts of a "loyal to China" minority could shift the party further away from Peking's positions.