DISCUSSION:

IN DEFENCE OF WORKERS' CONTROL

TOM SUPPLE (ALR No. 5) seems to consider that in the present situation the concept of workers' control is entirely utopian, and that the only responsibility to the working class is to “build the Communist party, challenge the society, and prepare for final victory.”

Despite his profundity of jargon, he himself indulges in utopian fantasy if he sees the victory over capitalism as the final victory. If we have learnt anything at all, it is that the transition to socialism is not so simple, unless of course one denies the problems and contradictions that so obviously exist in countries where capitalism has already been abolished. We can avoid these contradictions if we understand and acknowledge them, but not if we ignore them, and the relevance and capacity for leadership of the Communist party must consist in not only understanding where it wants to go, but also where it doesn’t want to go. The internationalist responsibility of the Communist Party of Australia is to build socialism, not to distort it.

It is all very well to run up a slogan demanding the socialisation of industry, it is another thing to develop the means by which this might be achieved. Nonetheless, the contribution by Tom Supple does demonstrate the necessity to be aware of the limitations of the concept, both as a tactic and as an objective. We need to carefully delineate between what would be conducive to socialist transformation, and what would be simply anarchism. This is not to underestimate the part that the concept could play in the struggle for socialism within contemporary society, nor its relevance for established socialist society. For socialists, it will be a means, not of reforming capitalism, but for abolishing it. For socialists it will be an industrial tactic and a major stepping stone to socialism: for reformists only an objective in itself.

The concept does have a profound relevance for pre-socialist society. Orthodox nationalisation of industry, where the workers are not prepared for or do not understand, the processes of self-management and workers' control, necessarily leads to the creation of a bureaucracy with conservative tendencies, thus making the transition from nationalisation to socialisation difficult. However, if the Australian working class is fully aware of the meaning of workers' control, industrial democracy and socialism, and this understanding facilitated in practical terms by the existence of “pockets” of industrial democracy within, and perhaps in defiance of, the capitalist structure, then obviously the transition to fully socialised industrial processes is more practicable and much more possible.

Our attitude to this depends on the kind of revolution we are seeking. It sometimes seems that in seeking the creation of a socialist state there is a tendency to over-emphasise the “state” at the expense of the “socialist” content. It will be probable that the transition of industry (from capitalism to socialism) upon the overthrow of capitalism in this country will not proceed along a single front, and
there will be some industries (accord­
ing to the degree of “socialist con­sciousness” of the workers involved) that will lend themselves to immediate socialisation rather than orthodox nationalisation and “State” management. Thus there would exist side by side perhaps, both socialised and nationalised industries. However the obvious significance of the difference between them would tend to expedite the socialisation of all industry.

Workers’ control or industrial dem­ocracy is not posed as an alternative to socialism, or merely as a desire for consultative status or limited partici­pation, for sharing management with the boss, but rather the democratic right of workers to determine and control their own destiny.

For socialists, the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat” need not mean that workers exercise such dictatorship only through elected representatives. On the contrary, such a dictatorship can be entirely consistent with industrial democracy and workers’ control; it can, in short, be a dictatorship exercised directly by the working class in the form of industrial democracy. The relevance of workers’ control as an industrial objective with very wide political and social implications will be readily appreciated by those who genuinely seek a socialist transfor­mation of Australian society. There is an obvious need for greater clarifica­tion as to precise meaning, and the possibilities for its application to par­ticular industries needs to be elabor­ated upon, but the real task that will confront socialists will be to under­stand and overcome the problems in­volved in the organisational and propaganda work necessary for achieve­ment of the objective.

The Australian worker remains overwhelmed by the capitalists divine right to management. To establish in workers a consciousness of their own democratic right to determine and con­trol their own destiny — industrial self-management — is a most difficult task. Yet it is a problem that must be resolved if such a concept is to be realised. This is a fundamental problem for the Left, and a concerted and united effort will certainly be necessary if such a socialist conscious­ness is to be established.

The fact that attempts have been made to create a wider democracy in the industries of socialist states in­dicates that there are divergencies of principle and application. There is no clearly marked path or “model” on which Australian socialism might be based, and there are thus tremendous opportunities for serious discussion as to the kind of socialism we are seek­ing, and the way in which it might be achieved.

The Communist Party of Australia and Australian Left Review render an invaluable service to socialists, the Left generally, and Australian workers, by bringing the question forward for discussion.

H. Austin

WORKERS’ CONTROL TODAY AND TOMORROW

UNDER the appropriate title of “Pol­i­tical Myth or Mirth” Tom Supple has written an interesting comment against the possibility of socialism (ALR, No. 5, 1969).

Control of the means of production and society by the working class is a “romantic catchery” in which “objec­tive conditions are glossed over with the spirit of romance.”

Where, Cde. Supple asks, is the State apparatus while the working class is taking over? One might say — in the same place as they were in Petrograd in 1917, when the working class took over.
It is true that modern capitalism poses different problems, and difficult problems about finding the road to socialism (and the CPA is currently attempting to face up to these on the basis of realities.) But it is not true or adequate to pour scorn on the possibility of worker control, and pepper the comment with little homilies about adventurism.

Tom Supple’s approach assumes that advocates of socialism want the workers to take over in isolated pockets of factories, within the capitalist system — but such a road to socialism would be absurd and disastrous. He is reading into “workers’ control” an image of his own.

Workers’ control can be nothing else but socialism. The importance of raising the question of socialism in this terminology is twofold:

Firstly, the idea of workers’ control gives a vital political content to socialism — it distinguishes between sorts of socialism; it establishes the type of socialism for which we aim in Australia, democratic and controlled by the working class; it clarifies our opposition to bureaucratic distortions of socialism, and all its consequences.

Secondly, the question of workers control is an important tactical question, in linking the day to day struggles of the working class with the only real basis for a lasting solution — the establishment of socialism. Because each day to day struggle is in embryo, and spontaneously, a striving, on the given issue, at the given moment, to establish the control of the boss by the working class; it is the basis and starting point for the complete takeover of all social institutions.

To resist raising the question of workers’ control is to divorce the immediate day to day struggles from the winning of socialism; is to treat socialism as something distant, abstract, and separated from present-day class life. It is to become a “reformist” in practice.

To oppose workers’ control must mean ultimately not to be a socialist, to reject the teachings of Marx and Lenin, to glorify the distorted form of State socialism which may have been an historical necessity in the USSR, but is not what we want in Australia.

The anti-working class idea of dictatorship by the elite is well illustrated by the arrogant claim in Tom Supple’s article that the challenge to capitalism “is the property of the vanguard, that being the Communist Party.”

That challenge is the property of the working class, who will decide in accordance with life who amongst themselves will be promoted as a vanguard.

BRIAN T. CAREY

SINO-SOVIET DISPUTE

JOHN SENDY’S article on the Sino-Soviet dispute is at complete variance with the views of the world communist movement and, one must say, with the facts of history.

The article sets out to convince its readers that the Soviet-Chinese antagonism is a normal state of affairs, that socialists should not take sides, and that if villainy exists between the disputing parties then the evidence condemns the Soviet Union.

To substantiate these claims Sendy quotes from official Chinese journals, and from other observers who, however sincere, would be quite unconscious of the relation of class forces operating in China and throughout the world. In this he has the ideological concurrence of E. Aarons.

Sendy says that the Soviet Union has always been activated by its own national interests, its border protec-
tion; that the Chinese revolution took place in spite of the USSR, and that its reverses and catastrophes up to 1958 followed from the advice of Stalin and the comintern. In fact, says Sendy "when the Chinese under Mao Tse-tung went against Soviet advice they won victory, weakened imperialism and seemed to strengthen the communist movement".

A perusal of anything official from Chinese sources up to 1958 would show that this is not true. Every then politician knew that after the revolution in 1949 the United States became obsessed with one idea, the destruction of Communist China, and every material resource was given to Chang Kai-shek to accomplish this. It was the military strength, and firmness to internationalism, of the Soviet Union that frustrated this. In a similar way, but of course in different circumstances, the Soviet Union is fulfilling the same role in Vietnam.

The Chinese always acknowledged this. In his work "The Great Friendship" of 1953, Mao Tse-tung said "Following the teachings of Lenin and Stalin and relying on the support of the great Soviet State, and all the revolutionary forces of all countries, the Chinese communist party and the Chinese people achieved a few years ago a historic victory".

Sendy deprecates the Soviet aid to China. Here again the claim runs counter to the facts and the universal conclusion. China was a feudal country. It is a country of peasants; the biggest in the world, with an industry and a proletariat almost negligible. Its ideological troubles, its strange marxian concepts, have their roots in this. I would suggest to comrade Sendy that a serious marxian analysis of anything Chinese should start not with a criticism of Stalin, the comintern, the USSR or of Chinese leaders (these are incidental) but with the material conditions of life, social practice, the class forces, which alone could help us in understanding Chinese ideas, strange interpretations of marxism and other attitudes.

The Chinese problem is basically one of transforming the country into a modern socialist industrial state, and whatever be the difficulties and complexities, she cannot do this alone, and in isolation from the socialist world. It's a tragedy that leading communists here cannot understand this. This was recognised and acted upon up to 1958. Of this there is not the slightest doubt.

Up to then the Chinese were fulfilling realistic plans, with appropriate aid from the Soviet Union, with the help of ten thousand technicians and with a like number of Chinese experts being trained in the USSR. So much so that the Peking Review of April 1958 spoke out — "The backbone of the Chinese socialist industrialisation was being erected".

What happened to China since then and why she has insulated herself and become hostile to the world, and in particular to the Soviet Union, is not answered objectively, correctly, by Sendy.

Nor can we go along with his endorsement of a bourgeois writer's assertion that the main thing about the Sino-Soviet dispute is the struggle for leadership. When Sendy says that this is the "crux of the matter", and when Aarons agrees, one is tempted to ask them which side do they support?

What we have here is a right revisionist line. Neither can one go along with its opposite, the dogmatic line which defies change and denies that China is a socialist country and identifies Maoist policy with the true revolutionary aspirations of the Chinese people.
New facts emerge and will continue to emerge, compelling re-thinking about the problems of socialism and the relations between socialist countries, and as is often the case when something new has to be explained we have departures in thought, in politics towards extremes. John Sendy belongs to the extreme which has the endorsement of his party, but which nevertheless is, under the pretext of developing marxism, losing sight of the class struggle and its international manifestations in the conflict of two world systems. Socialism is on one side. Imperialism is on the other.

G. Burns.

IN DEFENCE OF THE DICTATORSHIP

AN ARTICLE by Communist Party of Australia Vice-President John Sendy (ALR Aug.-Sep. '69) is headed "Dictatorship of the Proletariat?". The significance of the question mark becomes more obvious as one reads the material for, in fact, Cde. Sendy sets about to undermine the whole concept of proletarian dictatorship, one of the most important in Marxism-Leninism. One method of doing this is throw a heap of confused ideas on to the question in an article listed as "a contribution to untangling the confused concept dictatorship of the proletariat".

Developing his assertion that the concept is confused, Cde. Sendy says: "What is the dictatorship of the proletariat? As one examines the development of the theory from Marx's time to the present it's like chasing a mirage — one can never quite get to it." His very next sentence reads: "Certainly in practice, it is, at very least, extremely doubtful whether the dictatorship of the proletariat has been ever accomplished."

How is Cde. Sendy in a position to make such a judgment about practice when he admits he doesn't understand the theory?

But is Cde. Sendy really so unknowing about the dictatorship of the proletariat? If so, it seems remarkable to say the least that a national leader of the Communist Party should be in such a position. Or could it be that the Party leadership is now in the process of abandoning the dictatorship of the proletariat, and Cde. Sendy's article is to be seen more in the light of this than as an expression of one comrade's barrenness of thought?

One cannot help but make this suggestion in view of the CPA national leadership's behaviour. For example, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Central Committee (see Nov. '68 resolution) condemned the right wing of the Party which advocated pure democracy and a free play of political forces. But the CPA leadership supported the right wing because such a free play approach fitted in with its own non-Marxist ideas of a fair go for all class forces — worker and capitalist alike — under socialism contained in the Draft Democratic Rights Charter.

At this point it is worth recalling Lenin's statement in State and Revolution: "Only he is a Marxist who extends the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is what constitutes the most profound difference between the Marxist and the ordinary petty (as well as big) bourgeois. This is the touchstone on which the real understanding and recognition of Marxism is to be tested."

Cde. Sendy suggests that the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot exist in a socialist country where the working class is a minority of the population. He refers to Lenin's statement that the dictatorship was an alliance between the working class and middle class sections and is struck with won-
What Cde. Sendy appears not to understand is that under the dictatorship of the proletariat, the working class establishes itself as the ruling class for the purpose of:

1. Suppressing the capitalist class which will inevitably and constantly offer resistance, and

2. Leading the great mass of the people, the middle class sections of society, in the building of socialism.

In both tasks the working class has to rely upon the support of the working people generally. Hence the dictatorship is an alliance between the working class and the middle sections. Therefore, the dictatorship of the proletariat is dictatorship as far as the capitalist class (the minority) is concerned, but democracy for the working people (the majority). Why does Cde. Sendy stumble over this concept? Why can’t he see that even if the working class is minority, the dictatorship can be achieved by the simple fact that the working class forms an alliance with the middle sections?

Cde. Sendy plays down the role of the industrial working class. But the 21st National Congress CPA resolution referred to the great significance of this section in social change, and an examination of Australian reality today shows the industrial working class is indeed growing absolutely and is holding its own relative to the whole work force. Apparently Cde. Sendy is one of those who distort the real effects of the technological revolution in order to bolster and push un-Marxist views.

A particularly interesting feature of Cde. Sendy’s article is that it categorically denies the leading role of the Communist Party in the building of socialism. In dealing with a multi-party socialist government, he says “... it would seem ludicrous to call on another party to recognise the leading role of the Communist Party ...” Up to now the national leadership has only hinted that it had abandoned the concept of Communist Party leadership under socialism. For example, in the Draft Democratic Rights Charter, although it is not said in so many words, there is a strong suggestion that Communist Party leadership in a multi-party socialist government is wrong while a one party socialist government is outrageous. Pressed on the matter of the leading role of the Party, national leaders have dodged the issue by claiming that they are concerned only with the way the leading role was exercised under socialism. It was suggested that leadership had to be ideological and not administrative as if there was some kind of wall between the two. However, Cde. Sendy has brought this smooth performance to a close with his categorical statement.

One wonders at this stage whether Cde. Sendy’s article is more suitable for Readers’ Digest than a publication claiming to promote Communist ideas.

Soviet experience has revealed that the dictatorship of the proletariat was certainly established and the howls of the international bourgeoisie provide cogent evidence of this. Soviet experience has also shown that the dictatorship has achieved the building of socialism and has now developed to a state of the whole people which has the task of building Communism. One must remember that the state of the
whole people is still a state and still uses methods of compulsion, not against the exploiting class which has disappeared, but against individuals who defy the will of the whole people. Under Communism even this state will disappear.

Soviet experience also revealed violation of collective leadership and excesses during the term of Cde. Stalin’s leadership. These were serious and damaging to socialism, but the socialist system was strong enough to live through these distortions. Criticism at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Party and since was part of the clearing away of obstacles to the building of Communism.

Further, Soviet experience has shown that in the whole process of building Communism, the leading role of the Communist Party is essential. Cde. Sendy, however, in his article quite clearly objects to Party leadership in Soviet life.

Cde. Sendy’s whole article is part of the opportunist line of the CPA leadership, a line which tries to gain popularity by discarding Marxism-Leninism. However, the result is that good workers lose confidence in such a leadership and the middle sections are never won to socialism by those who desert their working class position.

Alan Miller

THE CASE OF SOLZHENITSYN

SOLZHENITSYN, who hasn’t been published in the USSR for years, has now been expelled from the Soviet Writers’ Union. Some will justify this. After all he was a political prisoner in the Stalinist camps (and these days writers who praise Stalin don’t have to wait for publication) and with freedom regained he wrote books critical of the system that jailed him and some of these books have been printed and praised in the West. (One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich was published in the USSR but has since been withdrawn, even from libraries, Cancer Ward was set in type and then broken up, The First Circle and other works have been refused publication).

The problem is that Solzhenitsyn won’t repay society for restoring his freedom with his silence. Since he believes there are flaws in a system that placed millions in camps, including 600 writers (and without protest, indeed with the support of the Writers’ Union of that time) he is accused of “maliciously slandering the Soviet system”, of being — would you believe — “anti-Soviet”.

Soviet writers are continually asked to write “from life” but the life which sent more communists into prison in the USSR between 1935-40 than in all the capitalist and fascist countries taken together, which led to the physical destruction or imprisonment of a majority of the central committee from the 17th Congress of the CPSU are banned subjects. And only Solzhenitsyn’s novel exists to record a small part of the post war terror when entire peoples were exiled and most prisoners of war as well as those who were inmates of fascist camps were condemned for “high treason”.

The dilemma of Soviet writers, and indeed of all communists is that if one accepts the ideals of communism one cannot at the same time accept these events as part of communist reality, but the reality of the camps prevents one from realising the communist ideal.

The theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat proclaimed the aim of man’s liberation but Soviet practice too often means an actual dictatorship over dissenters. The distortions occurred, and continue to the extent that Stalin-
ism continues to be justified. They cannot be silenced out of history or literature or men’s minds. They have to be examined and understood to ensure their eradication. Administrative measures against Solzhenitsyn solve nothing, they simply postpone solutions.

What is already known of the case is serious indeed: the seizure of his manuscripts, the slander of him as “unbalanced” and “psychologically disturbed” (interestingly he works as a teacher), the refusal to print his letters repudiating foreign publishers did appear in the USSR after it had been printed in l’Unita’ some weeks before), his plea, so far ignored, for the Soviet Government to join the International Copyright Convention to ensure that Soviet writers are not published abroad without their permission.

Meantime in the name of “communism” or “the motherland” censorship is tightened and as with all bureaucratic authority funny incidents lighten the generally tragic consequences. A play was banned in Leningrad and given permission for production in Moscow, a film shown in Moscow was banned in Gorky and another released for general distribution was banned in the army.

One is reminded of the television advertisement where a woman who is trying to buy a particular brand of vacuum cleaner is shown various models but keeps asking “Yes but is it an Electrolux?” The difference between the socialist society as conceived by Marx and the models on offer provokes the question: But is it socialism?

KOLLANTAI

PAGE FROM A DIARY

IN 1964, I went to Perth for the ABC in connection with the production of the Billy Borker series which was produced in their TV studios there. While in the West, I paid a brief visit to Katharine Susannah Prichard at her home at Greenmount.

When hearing the news of her death I had a vague memory of having written a diary note about the visit. Searching through the diary I found this entry for Monday, October 12, 1964, written that evening at my hotel in Perth:

“This afternoon, I visited KSP at Greenmount.

“She looked frail and her right hand was trembling and withered, the result of a stroke. She wore a pink robe.

“Bert Vickers and his wife were with her when I arrived. We talked about Billy Borker and traditional Australian humor. Bert began to tell yarns. I had not seen him in that mood before. He spoke in a loud voice, at times shouting. I became a little alarmed for KSP.

“I walked down the yard to a room — a shed really — where she had often written these forty odd years. I had a feeling about the great labor that had gone on there and felt ashamed of my own recent lack of creative output.

“And I felt the presence of ghosts from the past, remembering stories I had heard about her life with Throsell, V.C. and their last period of tragedy.

“When I came back to the house, the Vickers had gone.

“KSP began to tell me about a new play written by her son Ric Throssell, called A Cat’s Eye View I think she said, about the first Australian soldier killed in Vietnam.

“I wrote to Ric criticising the play”
she told me: 'He failed to sustain the Cat’s Eye View motif'.

'She spoke of the play and of the Vietnam war, at times appearing to overlap the play with reality, fantasy with life.

'I wondered if she was rambling.

'She then told me she was going to write to the Tribune to criticise a point made by Jack Beasley in a pamphlet he had written about her work.

'He said that I should have introduced a new revolutionary hero in the last part of the trilogy.'

'KSP said this would have been a distortion of history. ‘No such hero emerged in life’. She did not want to discourage Jack Beasley but a matter of principle was involved and young writers should not be influenced to think schematically.

'She had spoken in a firmer voice than earlier, something like the younger KSP: defensive about her own work and keen on ideological debate.

'She stoked the fire with a small bellows. After a long silence, she said it was fine to see me reaching a wide new audience through television.

'I regret that TV came too late for me to write for it,' she said.

'I was working on a novel about the peace movement when I became ill,' KSP showed me her crippled hand, massaging it with her left. 'I doubt if I’ll ever finish the novel now, although the doctors say I might recover the use of my hand.'

'She said she had told the doctor: ‘Why did you delay the rehearsal?’ The doctor had replied: ‘I have a duty to save you.’

'Your work is receiving a great deal of recognition,’ KSP told me. ‘Of course, I’ve always recognised it ever since Power Without Glory. I liked even the book the Party criticised. (She always was a bit of a rebel against Party narrowness.) The one about horse racing. A valid social novel.’

'She began to speak of the distant past, as old people will, wandering from subject to subject. I noticed that her voice now seemed to take on the mellow sweetness I remembered from our first meeting in Melbourne twenty-five years before, educated but not mannered or affected.

'She told me her child had been born on the table in this living room, where she had done much of her writing, working in the back yard room only when her child was young.

'When I said I had to leave to keep an appointment at the ABC she offered me sherry as if reluctant to let me go.

'She rose unsteadily and poured the drinks, refusing my offer of assistance, her right hand trembling.

'She sat down again and we sipped our drinks in silence.

'At last taking my leave, I walked to the door.

'KSP stood up and made to follow. She stood in the middle of the room.

'The dull light of late afternoon played tricks as I looked back from the doorway: she looked like a slim young girl instead of a frail old woman.

'I went back and kissed her on the cheek.

'Blessings,’ she said and it seemed a strange word for her to use.

'At the door, I turned again. She was still standing there, tears in her eyes.

'Blessings,’ she repeated.

'I stepped towards her. ‘Blessings to you,’ I replied lamely and kissed her on the lips.

'I hurried away.

'We each knew we would never meet again . . .

FRANK HARDY