A contribution to untangling the confused concept "dictatorship of the proletariat" by a Vice-President of the Communist Party of Australia.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS in the Soviet Union, the cultural revolution in China, the Sino-Soviet conflict and the debacle in Czechoslovakia focus attention upon the structures, mores and theories of socialist society. It is asked, from the negative side, whether the divergences exhibited in contemporary socialist countries are inherent in the socialist system or even in the very theories of Communism. Socialist experience together with the complexities of modern industrial society have led revolutionaries to ponder old problems anew. To the many anarchistically inclined who desire the free society, the concept of revolutionary government in any form is incomprehensible, for revolution and government, in their view, are incompatible. Hence the vague notion "we'll knock the old society down and then the people will build up a new one without preconceived blueprints of any kind" holds sway among many. Others maintain that complete or almost complete decentralisation and autonomy through workers' control, student power and the like is the solution. For the Communist Party adherents, in the main, the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat with some possible variation from the Soviet model provides an equally simplistic answer to the problem of transition to the good society.

In the Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels advanced the vague yet inspiring outline of a society where class distinctions had disappeared and where all production had been concentrated in the hands of a "vast association of the whole nation". Marx described his ideal as a society where the relations of everyday life "offer man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellowman and to nature".

The life-process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan. (Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, George Allan and Unwin 1946 p.51).

The Communist revolution, claimed Marx and Engels, would constitute the most radical rupture with traditional property rela-
tions and ideas. In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, there would be an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. (Marx and Engels, The Manifesto of the Communist Party).

The path to the new society, in the view of Marx and Engels, lay through a working class revolution which would aim to "raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy". "Freedom", wrote Marx in the Critique of the Gotha Program, "consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinated to it . . ." Between capitalist and communist society would lie the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. There would correspond to this also a political transition period in which the state could be nothing but "the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat". (Karl Marx, Selected Works Vol. 2, Cooperative Publishing Society 1936 p. 577).

Marx pointed out that the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for continuing oppression of one class by another, and that it maintains an order which legalises and perpetuates this oppression by "moderating" the collisions between the classes. This view illustrates a pure or classical view of the state stripped of all complexities.

Historically the bourgeois state has existed, according to Marx, for the sake of private property and provided a "form of organisation" which has the aim of safeguarding the property and interests of the bourgeoisie. The degree of democracy extended to the working people depends on the level of the struggle they wage for democracy and on the democratic requirements necessary to "moderate" the class struggle and to ensure the stable control of the capitalists over society.

Discussing the advanced bourgeois-democratic states of his time Engels observed that, in them, wealth wields its power indirectly yet all the more effectively. In a later period Gramsci pointed out that in such countries having a long tradition of bourgeois rule, that rule did not rest on the open repressive force of the bourgeois state. "Rather it rested on the bourgeois hegemony of political consciousness, that is, on the fact that in hundreds of different ways it had secured the adoption of its own world view by the whole populace". (Alastair Davidson, Antonio Gramsci The Man, His Ideas, Australian Left Review Publication 1968 p. 39). Referring to Australia John Playford argues that capitalism in countries like Australia (or neo-capitalism to use Playford's term) "is not maintained by force of arms or by a repressive state apparatus but because the majority of the people believe that it is the natural
form of socio-political organisation and that it satisfies human needs and provides for the full development of individual talents and capacities”. (John Playford, *Neo-Capitalism in Australia*, Arena Publishing Association 1969 p. 50). Playford goes on to advocate that “one of the big tasks of socialists is to break this ideological hegemony”.

Engels, Gramsci, Davidson and Playford are undoubtedly correct in the point they raise. Yet the force of the bourgeois state remains. Ideological hegemony, or naked oppression (to which the democratic bourgeois state reverts when seriously assailed) the rule is exercised by or on behalf of the capitalist class — *in this sense a dictatorship irrespective of the degree of electoral democracy which may prevail*. Despite whatever political democracy exists a class dictatorship underlies our whole system.

The dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in the modern capitalist state is veiled by the existence of parliaments, political parties, electoral procedures and the like. The ruling class itself usually operates more than one political party. Such parties pursue sectional interests and frequently conflict on even important issues of advancing the interests of the wealthy.

Discussing the views of Marx, Engels and Lenin on how to overcome the problem of the state and the need for a transitional state E. H. Carr interprets their conclusions as follows:

In the long run, the traditional socialist view of the state as an evil in itself, a product of contradiction and an instrument of oppression, which can have no place in a communist order of the future, was maintained in its entirety. In the short run, it was argued that the proletariat, having destroyed the bourgeois state instrument by revolutionary means, would need to set up a temporary state instrument of their own — the dictatorship of the proletariat — until such time as the last vestiges of bourgeois society had been eradicated and the classless socialist order firmly established. A working distinction was thus drawn between the eventual communist society, when all inequalities between man and man would have disappeared and the state no longer exist, and what came to be variously known as “socialism” or “the first stage of communism”, when the last vestiges of the bourgeois order were not yet eradicated and the state took the form of a dictatorship of the proletariat. (E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution* Vol. I, Penguin edition p.242).

Hence the theoretical concept of *the dictatorship of the proletariat* as opposed to bourgeois dictatorship was proposed for the long transitional period to Communism, as the direction through which class divisions would be eradicated and the state eventually would die away.

Marx and Engels made only a few references to the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was Lenin, in *The State and Revolution, The Proletarian Revolution and The Renegade Kautsky* and other works who developed what is now known as “the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat”. 

12
By dictatorship of the proletariat Marx and Lenin meant rule of the working class in contradistinction to rule by the bourgeoisie. The concept envisaged direct democracy, the great development of democracy, eventually leading, after the crushing of the power of the old rulers, to the withering away of the state and all authoritarianism. In *State and Revolution* Lenin wrote that the mass of the population would be raised to independent participation not only in voting and elections but in day-to-day administration. He argued that under socialism “all will administer in turn and will quickly become accustomed to nobody administering”.

Thus the dictatorship of the proletariat referred to the type of society and originally did not formulate concrete ideas as to the form of government this would entail. Neither in Marx nor in Lenin did ideas of obligatory censorship, denial of rights of political association or monopoly of power by one party, emerge.

**Form of the Dictatorship**

Ideas regarding a precise form of government under the dictatorship of the proletariat were developed with the Russian revolution and took the form of the Soviets. The October revolution saw the establishment of the power of the Soviets. The Soviets are a new state apparatus which, in the first place, provides an armed force of workers and peasants; and this force is not divorced from the people, as was the old standing army, but is very closely bound up with the people. From the military point of view this force is incomparably more powerful than previous forces; from the revolutionary point of view, it cannot be replaced by anything else. Secondly, with the majority of the people, so intimate, so indissoluble, so easily verifiable and renewable, that nothing even remotely like it existed in the previous state apparatus. Thirdly, this apparatus, by virtue of the fact that its personnel is elected and subject to recall at the people's will without any bureaucratic formalities, is far more democratic than any previous apparatus. Fourthly, it provides a close contact with the most varied professions, thereby facilitating the adoption of the most varied and most radical reforms without red tape. Fifthly, it provides an organisational form for the vanguard, i.e. for the most class-conscious, most energetic and most progressive section of the oppressed classes, the workers and peasants, and so constitutes an apparatus by means of which the vanguard of the oppressed classes can elevate, train, educate, and lead the entire vast mass of these classes, which has up to now stood completely outside of political life and history. Sixthly, it makes it possible to combine the advantages of the parliamentary system with those of immediate and direct democracy, i.e. to vest in the people’s elected representatives both legislative and executive functions. Compared with the bourgeois parliamentary system, this is an advance in democracy's development which is of world-wide, historic significance. (V. I. Lenin, “Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?”, *Collected Works* Vol. 26, Progress Publishers 1964 pp.103, 104).

Isaac Deutscher comments on the early Soviet position:

In the Soviets the propertied classes were not represented: they were to be disfranchised in the way in which the old ruling classes are disfranchised in any revolution. (This did not necessarily mean that they should also be deprived
of freedom of expression). The Soviets were to combine legislative and executive powers, and the government was to be responsible to them. The electors were entitled to revoke, to change their deputies at any time, not merely during periodic polls; and the Soviets would at any time depose the government through a vote of no confidence. The existence of opposition and the continued contest of parties within the Soviets were taken for granted. That the ruling party alone should be entitled to form public opinion did not enter anybody's mind. (The Prophet Armed, p.318).

There followed a tremendous upsurge of direct democracy, public debate, mass meetings and ideas for workers' control, in which the Soviets were the centre of virile revolutionary activity. At the same time there occurred the civil war, the invasion of fourteen armies of intervention and the struggle for the very survival of the Soviet state. This struggle was successful in the military sense only shortly before Lenin's death in 1924.

Following its formation the Soviet Government had not only to organise the defeat of the Whiteguards and the expulsion of interventionist armies but also the industrialisation of a backward country. Hostile surroundings following the defeat of the revolution in the West made the problems all the more stupendous.

The implication is that the "forced marches" dictated to the new Soviet republic created the material or objective conditions out of which developed the apotheosised marxism later presented by Stalin and the theoreticians trained in his orbit. "Rectilinearity and one-sidedness, stiffness and petrifaction, subjectivism and subjective blindness — voila the epistemological roots of idealism". (See V. I. Lenin, On Dialectics). Out of the by-ways forced on the Soviet comrades grew the caricatures and dogmas which were presented as marxism in the era of socialist revolution.

In 1919 Lenin declared: "In Russia the dictatorship of the proletariat must inevitably differ in certain particulars from what it would be in the advanced countries, owing to the very great backwardness and petty-bourgeois character of our country". (Economics and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, Collected Works Vol. 30 p. 108). Obviously true! However Lenin goes on (and proves that despite being probably the greatest revolutionary planner in history he was still a mortal human being) — "But the basic forces — and the basic forms of social economy — are the same in Russia as in any capitalist country, so that the peculiarities can apply only to what is of lesser importance". This statement cannot be sustained. Russia was overwhelmingly a peasant country with a correspondingly agrarian, peasant economy. In our country and many other capitalist countries there are no peasants and only small numbers of farmers. Lenin in the same article stated that "the whole essence of socialism" (Lenin's emphasis) lay in demarcating the working peasant from the peasant owner, the
peasant worker from the peasant huckster, the peasant who labors from the peasant who profiteers”. Such a problem does not arise in Australia and similar countries (which is not to say there are not other problems) and if Lenin was right about it being the whole essence of socialism in Russia it certainly is not so in Australia. Lenin frequently emphasised that the supreme principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat was the building and maintenance of the alliance with the peasantry. Hardly so in Australia.

From these few examples alone it surely must be recognised that much of Lenin’s writings and polemics applied with main force to the peculiarly Russian situation and cannot be taken as “gospel” for all times, places and conditions. It is tiresome to repeat this but it is still more tiresome that many in the Communist movement internationally and in Australia attempt to force upon us especially that section of Lenin’s writings. It is an irony of history that such canonising distorts and obliterates the revolutionary side of his doctrine, its revolutionary soul, an approach which Lenin himself repeatedly pilloried.

Not long before his death Lenin, in commenting that a workers state is an abstraction, went on to define Soviet Russia as “a workers state with bureaucratic distortions” with the added peculiarity of a predominant peasant population. It is interesting, yet pointless, to imagine how Lenin would have defined the U.S.S.R. in Stalin’s heyday or even now! For the revolutionary dictatorship of Lenin’s time gave way to the totalitarian dictatorship of the Stalin period and then to the bureaucratic, hierarchical institutionalism of today.

Did the dictatorship of the proletariat operate during the Stalin era in the U.S.S.R.? That it obviously did not has been revealed by Soviet Communists themselves because there existed, for a long period, the virtual dictatorship of one man. When the dictatorship of one man did not operate there has tended to be the rule of the Communist Party because of the omnipotence of the party in Soviet society. From the early thirties Communist Party leadership was effected in all spheres of political and social life — in the sense that no decision of major importance in any sphere could be taken without the endorsement of the Party, its leading circle or, most often, its leader. One may call this exercising of the dictatorship of the proletariat through the proletarian party or the dictatorship of the party or whatever, but it certainly was not evidence of the proper or extensive operation of socialist democracy where the working people were masters of their actions and destinies; more particularly when that party was of the most highly centralised, monolithic character with little or no freedom for real ideological debate or right for dissenters and minorities, where in fact dissenters and critics were eliminated on a vast scale in a most arbitrary and brutal fashion. Was the Soviet Union under Stalin a million times more
Lenin's views on democracy and on the dictatorship of the proletariat have held sway in the Communist movement for generations. Many regard Lenin's works as being the last word on the whole subject. Unfortunately the happenings in socialist countries since Lenin's time indicate the tremendous theoretical and practical problems remaining. So that the subject is not a "closed book". It is one which must occupy the attention of socialists on a wide canvas both summing up the experiences of the past 50 years in relation to the socialist countries, the developments of bourgeois and "third world" democracy AND to a re-examination of the various marxist writings on the subjects with the use of an exceedingly critical eye.

In the minds of many Communists the concept of proletarian dictatorship conjures up pictures of establishing the rule of the industrial workers (only one section of the proletariat) through the complete and absolute domination of the Communist Party. This in their minds is not only for the purpose of building a socialist economy and defeating bourgeois opposition and backlash but also for the purpose of crushing opposition, criticism, alternative methods and ideas of building socialism advanced by any section of workers or intellectuals, of crushing any deviation from the line of the traditional Marxist-Leninist Party. Such constitutes a caricature of the whole concept (particularly with the re-structuring of the proletariat in modern society) and has led or will lead to the direst consequences eventually wherever it is practised. For those who hold such views in Australia it can only mean eternal isolation and failure, fully deserved.

An Elusive Concept

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. Certainly in practice, it is, at very least, extremely doubtful whether the dictatorship of the proletariat has been ever accomplished. Lenin described the dictatorship of the proletariat as working class rule replacing capitalist class rule. He further indicated its great democratic character; the overwhelming majority of the population would rule over the previous exploiting tiny minority instead of vice versa as in all previously existing societies. The rule of the working class would represent the last act of class society as its purpose would be the elimination of all classes and exploitation of man by man. A number of obvious queries arise. In almost all the countries where socialist revolutions have occurred the working class was NOT the majority of the population but very
much a minority — a sea of workers in a great ocean of peasants as it were. Therefore could the present rule existing in Mongolia, China, Vietnam, Korea, Cuba, Albania, Rumania, etc. really be the dictatorship of the proletariat and subscribe to the general theory? In 1917 Russia's rural population numbered 82 per cent, so that the working class there also constituted only a small percentage of citizens.

Furthermore Lenin claimed the dictatorship of the proletariat was an alliance of the working class with the peasants and other middle elements of the population. So the question again can be posed “what is the dictatorship of the proletariat?” “It is power in the hands of the working people, led by the working class and having as its aim the building of socialism” answer the Soviet theoreticians. (Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism, Foreign Languages Publishing House p.625). So therefore it apparently isn't simply the dictatorship of the working class but of the working people led by the working class!

In the People's Democracies of Eastern Europe we are informed that people's democracy performs the functions of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Therefore apparently it isn't exactly the dictatorship of the proletariat but performs those same functions! Many other examples could be given to illustrate the verbal and theoretical gymnastics which plague this whole question. When coupled with the practical application of the theory to date, one certainly becomes more than a little perplexed and resolves to take the advice of the Irish poet William Butler Yeats given in another context, to lay aside the patter built up for years and “seek the brutality the ill-breeding, the barbarism of truth!”

Today Soviet theoreticians claim “the state of the whole people” has replaced the dictatorship of the proletariat, but if this is so why the harsh censorship, the insistence on the authority of the party in most spheres of Soviet life, and the great fear on the part of the leadership of the influence of bourgeois, “revisionist” and critical ideas? The concept of the “state of the whole people” implies completion of the lower stage of communist development and nearness to the higher stage — the stage of greatly developed human freedom and abundance — certainly not within immediate sight in the Soviet Union despite the claims of Krushchov and others since his time. It also implies, at very least, a lessening of internal state operations, rather than their strengthening.

The ill-fated Rosa Luxemburg in her German prison cell in 1918 whilst giving unstinted praise to Lenin and the Bolsheviks made serious criticisms of the infant regime of which the following long passages are but important examples:

But socialist democracy is not something which begins only in the promised land after the foundations of socialist economy are created; it does not come as
some sort of Christmas present for the worthy people who, in the interim, have loyally supported a handful of socialist dictators. Socialist democracy begins simultaneously with the beginnings of the destruction of class rule and of the construction of socialism. It begins at the very moment of the seizure of power by the socialist party. It is the same thing as the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Yes, dictatorship! But this dictatorship consists in the manner of applying democracy, not in its elimination, in energetic, resolute attacks upon the well-entrenched rights and economic relationships of bourgeois society, without which a socialist transformation cannot be accomplished. But this dictatorship must be the work of the class and not of a little leading minority in name of the masses, it must be under their direct influence, subjected to the control of complete public activity; it must arise out of the growing political training of the mass of the people.

Doubtless the Bolsheviks would have proceeded in this very way were it not that they suffered under the frightful compulsion of the world war, the German occupation and all the abnormal difficulties connected therewith, things which were inevitably bound to distort any socialist policy, however imbued it might be with the best intentions and the finest principles . . .

. . . Everything that happens in Russia is comprehensible and represents an inevitable chain of causes and effects, the starting point and end term of which are: the failure of the German proletariat and the occupation of Russia by German imperialism. It would be demanding something superhuman from Lenin and his comrades if we should expect of them that under such circumstances they should conjure forth the finest democracy, the most exemplary dictatorship of the proletariat and a flourishing socialist economy. By their determined revolutionary stand, their exemplary strength in action, and their unbreakable loyalty to international socialism, they have contributed whatever could possibly be contributed under such devilishly hard conditions. The danger begins only when they make a virtue of necessity and want to freeze into a complete theoretical system all the tactics forced upon them by these fatal circumstances, and want to recommend them to the international proletariat as a model of socialist tactics. When they get in their own light in this way, and hide their genuine, unquestionable historical service under the bushel of false steps forced upon them by necessity, they render a poor service to international socialism for the sake of which they have fought and suffered; for they want to place in its storehouse as new discoveries all the distortions prescribed in Russia by necessity and compulsion . . . (Rosa Luxemburg, The Russian Revolution, Ann Arbor Paperbacks 1967, pp. 77, 78, 79).

It is all too easy to dismiss this critique as failing to appreciate the hardships and difficulties of the times or of lacking a realistic estimate and of the ruthlessness of imperialistic capitalism (as evidenced by her own brutal murder a few months later). The fact is that her criticisms were ignored and her fears were proven justified, for Stalinism did eventuate and in that period socialist democracy and “proletarian” rule became a horrible mockery. Her comments in the same pamphlet about what would happen if socialist democracy was not rigorously promoted proved amazingly accurate. Public life she claimed would fall gradually asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience would direct and rule. Among them she declared only a dozen outstanding heads would do the leading and an elite of the working class would be invited from time to time to meetings where they
would applaud the speeches of the leaders and approve proposed resolutions unanimously — at bottom then, a clique affair a dictatorship to be sure, but not the dictatorship of the proletariat (ibid., p. 72). This is precisely the problem that arose only in worse form than she predicted. The most extreme features have been overcome but an enormous legacy remains and is tackled less than half-heartedly by the leading circles. (The observations made here emanate not from a desire to “knock” the Soviet Union, or from lack of appreciation of the positive achievements and role of the Soviet communists past or present. They are made as a contribution towards an understanding of the phenomenon of Stalinism and its aftermath which has grievously harmed the cause of the socialist movement and of the Soviet Union and from concern at the degree of unthinking acceptance and advocacy of only national variants as a universal model).

It has been alleged that Bukharin shortly before his trial and execution maintained that the growing deformities of socialist principles were due to a single mistake — the identification of the Party with the state. While this may be an oversimplification it is undoubtedly a major aspect of the problem as implied above. As indicated by E. H. Carr the one-party monopoly of the Bolsheviks cannot be laid fairly at their door for no opposition party of the time was prepared to remain within legal limits. (E. H. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution Vol. 1, Penguin edition p. 190).

Yet contemporary Soviet writers approach this matter dogmatically and again advocate their experience as good for every socialist revolution. A recent article “The Origin of the One-Party System in the U.S.S.R.” by P. N. Sobolev (reprinted in Marxism Today, April 1969) is most interesting and informative on the Bolshevik coalition with the Left Socialist Revolutionaries and its failure which resulted in only one party in the country. It is hard, indeed, to see how the Bolsheviks could have acted other than they did in the circumstances. However Sobolev writes:

In examining the multi-party system in the Soviet Union it must be borne in mind that it is not identical with the multi-party system in bourgeois states. One of the main conditions of the existence of a multi-party system in a socialist state is recognition of the leading role of the working class and its Party by any Party which helps in governing the country. (My emphasis).

Let it be appreciated firstly that Sobolev is not speaking here of the Soviet Union only but of “a socialist state”. Secondly Lenin and the Bolsheviks did not lay down that the Left Socialist Revolutionaries (representing sections of the peasantry) in 1917 should recognise the leading role of the Party. They called, correctly, for the L.S.R’s to support the decisions of the Soviet Government as expressed in the Decrees on Land, Peace, etc., to recognise the necessity for ruthless struggle against counter-revolution, to recognise the Soviets as the sole source of power and to submit to the
majority within the Soviets — quite another question! Thirdly it would seem ludicrous to call on another party to recognise the leading role of the Communist Party i.e. for complete submission. If they did then why exist at all as a separate party? Fourthly such an approach entirely excludes that there ever can be more than one party which represents the working class, a circumstance denied by the facts in many countries. Fifthly Sobolev confuses the issue of parties maintaining a legal existence and parties being represented in the Government — two quite different matters. A multi-party system does not necessarily mean a multi-party government.

Such dubious theories were not formulated by the Communists of 1917 but the Communists of a later stage in order to give theoretical justification to the Soviet experience as a universal model. So it is that while allegedly multi-party systems exist in most of the socialist countries today, based on the above theory, the other parties are in effect the shells of parties. For example in Czechoslovakia under Novotny it has been said that if the Communist Party sneezed the other Parties caught cold! What is their function if they merely give the rubber stamp to each and every decision of the Communist Party? Issue is not being taken here with the tactics of the Bolsheviks in 1917 nor with the description by Sobolev (and Carr) as to how the one-party system arose in the Soviet Union, neither is a call being made for a multi-party system to be introduced in the U.S.S.R. But issue is taken with the kind of theoretical advocacy which would, if implemented, virtually mean a one-party system in all countries taking the socialist road. This advocacy distorts the whole question of proletarian rule and socialist democracy.

The Italian Communists call for a pluralistic socialist society in their country.

... The participation of a plurality of forces in the struggle against monopoly capitalism is an essential condition if socialist society is to be a pluralistic society with a rich democratic structure, a society that is not centralised, not controlled by bureaucracy and not identified with the power of a single party. (From the Preparatory Theses of the 12th Congress of the Italian Communist Party", Marxism Today, April 1969, p.120).

Australian Communists in their draft Charter of Democratic Rights advocate that after the Australian bourgeoisie have been deprived of their economic power and their control of the state and mass media, citizens should have the freedom of political association including engaging in election activities and political campaigning provided that the new socialist constitution and laws are observed. Notwithstanding that advocacy, Australian Communists should not see such propositions as holding good for the Communists in other regions of the world where different conditions apply.
**Tentative Conclusions**

One of the huge theoretical and practical problems confronting the communist movement and all socialists is: what sort of society in the transitional period between capitalism and communism? After the elimination of bourgeois rule and the bourgeois state, what sort of governmental and state apparatus? The answer may only be provided by the people faced with the concrete task but the concept enunciated by Marx on the revolutionary transformation necessary to achieve the transition from capitalism to communism and its correspondence to "the dictatorship of the proletariat" seems generally correct so long as it is treated like all other theoretical prognostications — as a guide and not a dogma — and providing a number of things are remembered.

Firstly Lenin commented that a workers' state i.e. (in his terms) the dictatorship of the proletariat, is a theoretical abstraction. Therefore it would be hard to achieve in pure form. He also pointed out that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" was "a Latin, scientific, historical — philosophical term".

Secondly there is no model in existence clearly representing a state of proletarian dictatorship. Practical life emphasises strange lessons. Even with wide departures from the theoretical principles the fundamentals of a socialist economic base can be built and achieve high degrees of advance without a proper socialist political system existing. Experience demonstrates that this has happened and can be maintained at least for a lengthy period but requires a harsh, authoritative political system to enforce it. In this connection it should be recalled that the capitalist system in the advanced countries took from two to the three hundred years to mature. There should be no dogmatic copying of the forms of rule existing in present socialist states.

Thirdly the proletariat, the class of modern wage workers and their families constitutes the overwhelming bulk of the population in Australia (unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled manual workers, clerical and sales workers, professional and technical workers comprise 86.5 per cent of the workforce). Furthermore in such countries the technical and scientific sections are rapidly growing.

When Marx spoke of the proletariat as the revolutionary class of bourgeois society he had in mind the modern wage worker as distinct from the shopkeeper or the lumpen-proletarian for example, or from the peasants, artisans or other groups more typical of the period of feudalism. He was not, in this context, distinguishing between manual and mental wage workers, or production and clerical or sales workers, categories which were, incidentally, by no means so large then as they are today. He was speaking of the "collective laborer" in which he saw changes according to changes in production e.g. from hand manufacture to machine production. Today this is the view prevailing among Marxists, though contrary opinions are not lacking... and the practice of many more is to take the "leading role of the working class" as referring to the manual

Lenin claimed that only the "urban and industrial workers in general" could lead the struggle for the overthrow of capital. He thus distinguished between "industrial" workers and other workers in my opinion because of the class composition of Russia at the time.

Fourthly the essential requirement seems to be the rule of the working people (as opposed to the rule of the capitalist class) which eventually becomes the rule of mankind "when the curse of class distinctions from our shoulders shall be hurled" (*The Internationale*) and where, as Marx indicated the state is converted into an organ *completely subordinated to society*. Such a situation would constitute a big step on the road to a communist society.

If one leaves aside the problem of the people who look at existing socialist states through rose-coloured glasses there is the additional phenomenon today particularly among the more anarchistically (in the philosophic sense) inclined on the so-called new left. Idealistic dreamers aplenty dismiss the problems of transition to the free society as being capable of taking care of themselves. Come the revolution we'll wake up one fine morning to a gargantuan feast of mass meetings with the populace flocking to participate in running the P.M.G., General Motors and the local council etc. The only problem however is that great numbers of the "masses" may prefer to study the form guides, dig the garden or lie on the beach!

Lenin was extremely optimistic on this question at the time of the Russian revolution, but he found great problems in achieving this aim and in his last years acknowledged the difficulties (and the utopian approach) involved, in his writing on the growing bureaucracy emerging in the Soviet Union. In 1921 he wrote

> Can every worker know how to administer the state? Practical people know this is a fairy tale . . . The trade unions are a school of communism and administration. When they (i.e. the workers) have spent these years at school, they will learn, but it progresses slowly . . . How many workers have been engaged in administration? A few thousand all over Russia and no more. (Quoted in E. H. Carr's *Bolshevik Revolution*, Penguin edition p.254).

L. G. Churchward writes that Soviet authorities today claim that activists involved at the local government level represent one in six of the population. He continues:

> My own view of the matter, based on a careful reading of a wide range of material over many years and some direct investigation of the problem during 1965, is that the Soviet system has achieved considerable success in its development of mass participation, especially in the countless petty tasks of local government. This has enabled a substantial reduction of paid officials but it may not have reduced Soviet bureaucratism. The Party has been directly
responsible for much of this development so that the so-called "voluntary organisations" are not voluntary in the full sense of the term. Furthermore, Party control, while it has often encouraged new activities and organisations, has sometimes curbed local initiative and enthusiasm. (L. G. Churchward, Contemporary Soviet Government, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1968 p.271).

From a slightly different angle Radovan Richta discusses these problems:

There is nothing to be gained by shutting our eyes to the fact that an acute problem of our age will be to close the profound cleavage in industrial civilisation which, as Einstein realised with such alarm, places the fate of the defenceless mass in the hands of an educated elite, who wield the power of science and technology. Possibly this will be among the most complex undertakings facing socialism. With science and technology essential to the common good, circumstances place their advance primarily in the hands of the conscious, progressive agents of this movement — the professionals, scientists, technicians and organisers, and skilled workers. And even under socialism we may find tendencies to elitism, a monopoly of educational opportunities, exaggerated claims on higher living standards, and the like; these groups may forget that the emancipation of the part is always bound up with the emancipation of all. Government under socialism belongs to all working people and not to the professionals alone. Yet the working community cannot "govern" in a truly socialist manner without the aid of professionalism, of science. Ultimately the only solution will be to make professionals of us all (while simultaneously abolishing by degrees the need to govern at all). Every step in this direction will facilitate further progress. And when the goal is set in these terms, the coincidence of the scientific and technological revolution with revolutionary social changes is essential. (Civilisation at the Crossroads p.215).

Such problems indicate the necessity of some form of governmental apparatus and state machine for a long period after the ending of bourgeois rule.

Discussion of all these problems needs to be developed within the left in order to overcome conceptions that emphasise, onesidedly, the coercive aspects of proletarian political power. For advanced capitalist countries Marcuse has expressed ideas for their revolutionary transformation through an interim educational dictatorship of high minded intellectuals, of philosophers preparing the free society. Personally I regard this with just as much disfavor as dictatorships by Stalins, Novotnys or Mao Tse-tungs. Preferable would be, it seems, the view advanced by Engels in 1891 in his criticism of the Erfurt Program, that the workers can only come to power "under the form of the democratic republic" and that this would be "even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat . . .". Rather than rule by high minded philosophers or Communist presidents or benevolent or paranoic dictators why not a working peoples' democratic republic which sets out not only to eradicate the vestiges of exploitation, class distinction and possessive individualism but also seeks and establishes facilities for the widest participation of its citizens in running society and their own lives in which there exists freedom of operation for various parties and groups existing within popularly agreed laws?