Entrism and Revolution

FOLLOWING THE LENGTHY PERIOD during which their past perspectives and tradition have been examined, the CPA has emerged with a detailed analysis of Australian society as it sees it. It is not my intention to analyse these documents, rather I wish to comment on the issues raised by Eric Aarons in his statement "The Congress and After" (Australian Left Review No. 25). The question concerns the CPA attitude to the ALP. Eric Aarons goes to considerable effort to establish that the Trotskyist concept of entrism "remains unexplained, while its failure to produce significant results over a period of over thirty years is not analysed." As one who has upheld the validity in the past of "entrism sui generis*, it seems necessary that I should spell out in clear terms what is entailed by the above term.

Entrism sui generis is a totality of several modes of work and stems primarily from a realisation of the overall low level of political consciousness in this country at present. Inherent in this realisation is an acknowledgment of the hold exercised over the proletariat by the ALP and the consequent limitation of the likely success of an independent revolutionary movement. The ALP is a party that was created by the proletariat in a period of relative

---

G. Tighe is the pen-name of a member of a 4th International group in Sydney. Although it is a discussion piece on an earlier contribution to ALR, this article is connected with issues raised by a consideration of Communist Party history.
struggle (the 1890-1 strikes); it achieved their support in the succeeding years so that by 1910 it was able to form majority governments federally and in N.S.W. In this early period, when the ALP promised limited reforms and was largely in a position to deliver these goods (pensions, basic wage, Commonwealth Bank, etc.), not only did these reforms reinforce the hold of this mass Party over the working class, but it also had considerable influence over the thinking (and direction) of the working class. I do not wish to labour this point unnecessarily, but later developments only further demonstrate the centrifugal pull of the ALP (e.g. National Labour—1916, Lang Labour—1931 and the DLP—1955); not one breakaway group has managed to survive or develop a party capable of taking the place of the ALP.

Viewed in this sense, it can be seen that the ALP is a mass reformist party that has the loyalty of a majority of the proletariat and in turn the working class expects something of their party. I will return to the reasons for the failure of breakaway groups later. Stemming from the very ease with which the ALP is capable of canalising working-class support, even if a militant stand is required (refer Victorian ALP on the non-compliance issue), it is inadequate for revolutionaries just to remain outside the ALP and expose it (or scream abuse at it). The validity of entrism is contained in the entry of conscious Marxists into this mass milieu to develop a significant revolutionary wing in the ALP, to ensure that a more socialist direction is taken.

However, despite the value of a more leftward-leaning ALP, entrism sui generis involves much more than just entrist work into the ALP. Concurrent to work in the ALP there is involved independent outside work, e.g. the anti-imperialist struggle, union activities. The activities normally undertaken (or talked about) by the CPA would generally fit into this context of independent work, as would the publication of revolutionary material, the establishment of centres such as Resistance and Liberation. Unless revolutionaries approach independent sector work with the realisation of the ALP hegemony, then they run the risk of falling into two major traps. These are (a) the development of a ghetto mentality and subsequent over-estimation of the possibilities, leading on to adventurist actions; and (b) disillusionment of the revolutionary cadres who are unable to give effect to even the most mild of their propositions.

On the other side, independent work is essential and can be of aid to those carrying out entrist work. Independent work is essential to ensure that revolutionary work is carried out in the basic pro-
duction units of capitalism; it is also necessary because it is a simple fact that many revolutionaries could not stomach work in the ALP at any price. The value of struggles against the bourgeois mode of society within factories, schools and universities cannot be stressed enough, but it is also a fact that after contributing to some such struggle the workers will turn around at the appointed time and vote ALP. Independent work has its value because it raises the level of demands that the ALP has to comply with (it also of course produces additional cadres), it does not have great value in exposing the ALP.

Few revolutionaries would dispute that the ALP has been integrated into the system of bourgeois domination in this country; even fewer would deny that the ALP as a mass reformist party is a positive hindrance to the development of a mass revolutionary party. An understanding of the two arguments is essential to comprehend the pattern of work in the ALP, by any person adhering to entrism sui generis. It is a primary task of revolutionaries to develop a significant revolutionary sector in the ALP; the independent work assists this by providing an outside pressure and preventing revolutionaries succumbing to the opportunist dangers. At the present level of the Australian proletariat and their industrial organisations this is obviously a major task. A hard slogging job needs to be done in the branches in opening up revolutionary perspectives for rank-and-file members of the ALP. Progress will be minimal for years, although there are openings that present themselves.

It is necessary to elaborate on the method of entrism into the ALP. Any one individual working in a branch, unless he can build up a local force working with him, will almost invariably succumb to opportunism of one sort or another. Past experience suggests that revolutionaries should colonise a branch, i.e. plan and concentrate their activities in particular areas. The colonisation is carried out by the independent sector and should be subject to constant review to determine its direction and immediate perspectives. Entrism sui generis then is not a sloppy process involving the isolation of scattered revolutionaries in various remote ALP branches.

Inside those branches that are heavily influenced by revolutionaries every effort should be made to link up with and aid any local actions. The experience of direct action, in political affairs, needs to be passed on to the ALP rank-and-file and its working-class base. Direct action here means literally anything from public meetings, collecting petitions through to street blockades. These are activities that revolutionaries have the ability to suggest and
organise effectively, but it is an ability that would be much more valuable in the hands of the working class than in an isolated revolutionary clique.

In addition to what I have already stated there is another essential component of entrism sui generis. Because of the inadequacies that are inherent in a mass reformist party such as the ALP it is the eventual aim of revolutionaries to take any significant revolutionary wing with them together with as large a working-class base as possible. Careful attention to detail would be required in any such differentiation inside the mass party. In the eyes of those workers who had faith in the ALP (at present a very large number) it would only be justifiable after the ALP had failed to fulfil those hopes, i.e. some period after an electoral victory. The result of such a differentiation is not necessarily (and is most unlikely to be) the revolution: it is designed to break the present isolation of the revolutionary Left from the masses in this country, to provide a milieu that will go past the ALP when considering its political options.

Even after such a differentiation, which would be accompanied by extensive political work, it is almost certain that the workers would continue to have some illusions about the "parliamentary path to socialism" and electoral work would need to be continued and its limited possibilities exploited to the full. However, revolutionary Marxists should be with the class — not sharing their illusions but identified with a struggle that the masses understand, so that every opportunity to utilise frustration can be seized and mass political consciousness brought to a higher level.

Before going on to an analysis of the past period I will make a brief summary of the postulates of entrism sui generis as I see them.

(a) Acknowledgment of the political primacy of the ALP.
(b) The emphasis on independent work designed to assist entrist work into the ALP.
(c) Realisation of the basic reformist nature of the ALP and low political consciousness of the Australian proletariat.
(d) Realisation that in its present form the ALP is part of the capitalist system of domination and a hindrance to the development of a mass revolutionary party.
(e) That the ALP is seen by workers as adequate for their needs.

Why has entrism sui generis failed as a tactic over the past thirty years? This is the second part of the question posed by Eric Aarons.
A number of alternate answers pose themselves. It would, however, take a much larger work to fully examine them. I will attempt to do justice to the major answers however. First there is the small number of revolutionary cadres devoted to this style of operation. This answer is obviously inadequate; Aarons would argue that if the tactic was valid it would have gained a large number of adherents. The additional cause of seeming lack of success lies with the independent sector itself.

For many years the CPA acted as a brake on the development of a revolutionary movement in Australia. Leaving aside its alliance with Stalinist states, work was carried out that had little real relevance in the development of socialist consciousness in the working class. Bernie Taft in his article "The Working Class and Revolution" (ALR No. 25) states: "Today, economic demands can generally be absorbed and integrated. In fact today, unlike the past, economic militancy often goes hand in hand with support for the existing system, as the one which makes such a struggle for a greater share possible. Militancy has become quite respectable." Until the last several years there has not been so much as a glimmering of a realisation of this in Tribune (and still it is not predominant). All the past strategies have tended to reinforce bourgeois ideology in the Australian proletariat. Proceeding from this basis it is logical to state that very little real pressure has been applied on the ALP from a revolutionary proletariat, i.e. the ALP leaders have not had to respond to a militancy going beyond "fair shares".

The two arguments so far are (1) the scarcity of revolutionaries working in the ALP and (2) the incorrect policies and attitudes of both the CPA and union leadership generally. Also to be added to these is the fact that during the 1950s and early 1960s capitalism had a virtually unchallengeable hegemony. In the late 1940s a strong force was carrying out entrist work of a classic nature from the Right — the National Civic Council. The effects of their white-anting are still obvious both inside and outside the ALP. The development of the cold war externally, and the 1954-55 ALP split internally, have kept even the reformists from power. Several developments have now started to operate to counteract that long period of bourgeois triumph; the approaching victory of the social revolution in Vietnam and the growth of educational institutions are but two. That the situation is now changing does not alter the fact that during the previous twenty years objective conditions were not favourable.

Any analysis of actual results achieved by entrism sui generis must take into account the fact that the ALP has been out
of government federally since 1949, that no senior personnel in NSW (e.g. parliamentarians) had a revolutionary perspective and were prepared to pressure the State Government from the Left. All through this period it was not possible to cause a differentiation in the ALP that would have opened up mass support for a new socialist party. There is, however, one example that does demonstrate the type of thing I mean, that is the example of Leichhardt Municipality. Aldermen Origlass and Wyner in the Balmain ward, by breaking Caucus on an important issue, were able to gain considerable local support and were in fact seen to be more Labor than the Labor Party. What in fact they did was to pick an issue or issues that directly concerned people and to mobilise people on those issues. The whole range of issues (chemical tank farms, container wharves, etc.) demonstrated to people who automatically voted Labor in the past that something was wrong with the system. Important forms of direct action were used, e.g. a street blockade against trucks, and recently a strike by container workers whose cars had been damaged by local residents. This is not to claim that Balmain was an earth-shattering victory; put in its perspective it shows how traditional Labor voters can be won over from passive acceptance of bourgeois democracy to support for militant action, and it demonstrates no more.

However, the situation in Balmain further highlights an earlier problem that I mentioned — how to overcome the continued centrifugal pull of the ALP. Given that a substantial (majority if possible) number of Labor supporters can be won away from the ALP by entrist tactics it is not just sufficient to carry on the traditional style of Left-wing politics. It would be necessary to mobilize this mass political base in the same way that revolutionaries are able to work in certain trade unions and on certain university campuses, i.e. to "raise such questions and demands as will bring the workers up against the system, that can't be absorbed or fully absorbed, that involve them, develop their initiative and awaken their revolutionary potential."

In other words, unlike National, Lang and Democratic Labor, it would be our aim to organise a mass party so as to involve people, not just to get them to vote away their involvement every three years. Because of its short length this article is necessarily sketchy in places. However it does, I feel, describe what is meant by entrismsui generis and also gives a justification of that concept at this period in Australia.

G. TIGHE