DISCUSSION:

WORKERS, INTELLECTUALS AND MARXISM

MARXISM, in Marx’s own words, is “not a dogma, but a guide to action”. They are dogmatists, not marxists, who rigorously apply everything Marx said to the world of today; yet, at the same time, changes since he wrote do not invalidate his teachings. It is not revisionism, but genuine marxism, to apply marxist methods of analysis to each new situation as it arises.

Anti-intellectualism in sections of the marxist movement stems partly from a mechanical, un-marxist interpretation of Marx’s analysis of the roles of the proletariat and the intelligentsia, partly from failure to realise that the mid-twentieth century proletariat and intelligentsia cannot be absolutely identified with those of Marx’s time.

Marx knew that socialist ideas very rarely develop spontaneously in the working class, but are usually introduced to it by progressive intellectuals, because the proletarians of his day lacked, not the intelligence, but the educational background and cultured leisure to elaborate sophisticated philosophies.

On the other hand, Marx realised that the intelligentsia of his day could not become an independent revolutionary force, because of its heterogeneity of interests and lack of the necessary numerical or economic strength to influence political events significantly without powerful allies, and that the proletariat was the only potentially revolutionary class, because its interests were diametrically and irreconcilably opposed to those of the ruling class, because its conditions of life forced upon it greater homogeneity than any other class in history, and because it was the most economically powerful class in nineteenth-century society, though not yet conscious of its strength.

To win over the proletariat to socialism, the workers must first be organised around simple economic demands in such a way that the spasmodic, diffuse class struggle of those days would be raised to a level that would bring the proletariat face to face with the problem of State power and who held it.

To these ends, paternalistic associations, in which intellectuals were the messianic leaders and workers the docile and obedient rank and file, were not enough. The proletariat must find socialist leaders from within its own ranks, and these must become the spearhead of the revolutionary movement.

But while the proletariat was the only class capable of becoming consistently revolutionary, it did not follow that every proletarian was a born revolutionary leader, wanting only an act of faith in marxism to develop all his hidden potentialities at one stroke. The intelligentsia could not become a revolutionary class, but it does not follow that no intellectual could be a revolutionary.

On the contrary, the very lack of education and leisure that made it nearly impossible for socialist ideas to originate in the working class also
made it extremely difficult for workers to attain a thorough understanding of marxism while they remained tied to their jobs. It was for this reason that Lenin insisted on strong cadres of professional revolutionaries as the core of a revolutionary party. Only in this way could workers be given the leisure and educational opportunities to master revolutionary strategy and tactics and understand marxist economics and philosophy.

The conditions of the proletariat and the intelligentsia have changed greatly since Marx’s day. In the nineteenth and the earlier part of this century, these were almost hereditary castes. It was taken for granted that a worker’s son would generally become a worker, more often than not in his father’s trade.

Similarly, university students were almost invariably sons of such professional men as senior clergy, lawyers, doctors the upper echelons of the teaching profession and the public service, plus a few studious scions of established aristocratic and merchant families.

Socially and economically, between the two classes was a great gulf fixed. The proletarian lived in ceaseless toil and grinding poverty, and was not even entitled to the prefix “Mr.” before his name. The intellectual was a “gentleman,” accepted almost as an equal by the ruling class, and considered rash and improvident if he married before his income was at least four times that of the average working class family.

There are many obvious and profound differences between the proletariat of Marx’s day and of our own, all of which must be carefully considered in assessing the present political role of the proletariat and the strategy of revolutionary socialism, but, for our present purpose, the most relevant is the vast improvement in the, educational opportunities of workers’ children — due less to any great access of enlightenment and generosity on the part of the bourgeoisie than to its need for increasing numbers of technicians and technologists.

However, even today, the children of the poor do not have nearly the same educational opportunities as those of the rich. Moreover, the broader education and increased leisure of the workers has not done as much as might have been hoped to facilitate the development of socialist ideas among the workers, their education being tailored to increase not only their usefulness but also their conformity to capitalism, and the vastly expanded entertainment industry being more or less deliberately designed to discourage intelligent use of leisure.

Nevertheless, considerable and rapidly growing numbers of workers’ children are able to proceed to tertiary education. This has been very advantageous to academically gifted children, but for the industrial proletariat as a whole it means the loss of some of its best potential leaders, who are being absorbed into the intelligentsia. This, it seems to me, is one of the reasons for the low ebb of proletarian class-consciousness common to most advanced capitalist countries, giving rise to the Maoist view that the proletariat in the capitalist countries is a spent force, and that the new spearhead of the revolution is the national liberation movement in the underdeveloped countries.

But this is only one side of the picture. Let us now look at the new intelligentsia. Not only are increasing numbers of intellectuals drawn from the working class, consciously or unconsciously taking working class attitudes with them into the universities and the professions, but their conditions of life approximate more and more to those of the proletariat. The
average graduate's salary advantage over the average skilled manual worker hardly compensates him for his longer unpaid or under-paid apprenticeship; even the type of work performed by that large section of the new intelligentsia that works in laboratories resembles that of an artisan rather than that of the traditional "liberal professions."

In most industrial concerns and many branches of the public service, all but the most senior professional employees even have to queue up with clerks and process workers to clock on and off.

Yet the modern professional employee is far more essential to the smooth running of modern capitalism than the old-style intellectual, and is increasingly aware of the economic power he can wield. At the same time, the very fact that he has received more education than the average industrial worker makes him more keenly aware of the kind of life that modern technology makes possible, once liberated from the restrictive practices of the capitalist establishment. This is the basis of the great upsurge of revolt in the universities and among other sections of the intelligentsia.

In short, the bulk of the intelligentsia is becoming proletarianised, and the intellectual New Left is not a new phenomenon, independent of the revolutionary working class movement, but an integral part of the continuing struggle. The new intelligentsia is more analogous to the skilled artisans of Marx's day than to the nineteenth-century intellectuals, and, just as most of the best labor leaders of the past were drawn from among the skilled workers rather than the unskilled laborers, so more and more of those of the future will come from the ranks of the new intelligentsia.

If this is "elitism," then elitism is necessary to every developed society.

No sane person objects, for instance, to an "elite" exclusively privileged to put up brass plates and practise medicine; why, then, to an "elite" of those best qualified to lead the labor movement, irrespective of the section of the working class from which it comes? The safeguard against bureaucratic elitism is proletarian democracy, drawing every individual into activity at the highest level of which he is capable, and making the leaders responsible to the class, and subject to recall when they cease to serve its interests.

The important point is that the distinction between "workers" and "intellectuals" is becoming more and more artificial, and the sooner both these sections of the new proletariat realise this, and recognise their community of interest in irreconcilable opposition to capitalism, the better will it be for the labor movement, and hence for the world at large.

ARTHUR W. RUDKIN

HENDERSON ANSWERED

THE DEBATE in recent issues of A.L.R. concerning the principle of self-determination and the extent of its relevance in the occupation of socialist Czechoslovakia by the armed forces of five brother socialist countries, has been a thought-provoking one.

Not only has it been an interesting challenge of differing viewpoints — it deals with theoretical issues of basic importance to any serious attempt to win mass support for socialism in Australia.

It was the theoretical justification of the occupation advanced by J. B. Henderson (ALR 6 of '68) which I questioned in my discussion contribution (ALR 1 of '69). It is disappointing that in his reply, JBH prefers not to pursue the attempted theoretical
justification, merely stating he maintains his interpretation is right and mine is wrong. While he has every right to retain his viewpoint, a mere statement of belief without answering the points raised does not make for any greater clarity on the issue of the rights of nations to self-determination.

The whole emphasis in JBH's recent article shifted to justification on the grounds that events justified what happened. He relies on his statement that "The evasion of the case of the Five has been a marked and disturbing feature of those in Australia who disagree with the action of the Five."

Publications issued by the Five before, during and since the occupation, showed that their "case" varied almost from week to week. It covered the range of threatened West German armed intervention, CIA fostered internal counter revolution, rightwing revisionist elements within the leadership of the Communist Party and Government of Czechoslovakia, the birth of "quiet counter-revolution", and so on. However JBH defines the "case" to which he subscribes as "counter revolution aided by external forces would not be allowed to break socialist Czechoslovakia away from the socialist community."

It seems worthwhile, therefore, to repeat the following points which have been published in numerous articles, including in ALR.

Internal counter revolution which posed a serious threat to overthrow a socialist state of some twenty years' standing would certainly be prepared to engage in armed struggle. Yet the caches of arms which the occupying forces announced they had uncovered in Prague were publicly declared by the head of the workers' militia in Prague to be the property of the workers' militia units in factories, offices and institutions. He demanded their return. Surely these workers' militia units were not the forces of internal counter revolution.

The alleged voices of the counter-revolutionary forces — the clandestine radio stations operating during and following the invasion — were, in fact, the property of the armed forces of Czechoslovakia and were used by Party and Government leaders broadcasting to the people during those turbulent days.

One would be naive not to expect some CIA agents to be active in Czechoslovakia at any time (as they are undoubtedly in all socialist countries). The White Book 'On Events in Czechoslovakia' published by the Press Group of Soviet Journalists and supporting the case of the 5 says: "According to the State Department the number of US tourists in Czechoslovakia stayed around 1,500. By August 21, 1968, the number had grown to 3,000, most of whom as the US papers themselves reported, were employees of the Central Intelligence Agency." As J. R. Campbell of the Communist Party of Great Britain commented (Tribune, 30/10/68): "It would of course help immensely if the White Book could give the names of the US papers which reported that many of the US tourists who were entering Czechoslovakia were employees of the CIA. What US newspapers were kind enough to give the world this propaganda tidbit about the CIA?"

The White Book in the section titled "The Slogan of the Freedom of Speech in the Hands of Counter Revolution", writes: "This was what rang out from the pages of Mlada Fronta (the Czech youth paper GS): 'The law we shall enact must ban all communist activity in Czechoslovakia. We shall forbid the activities of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and disband it . . . We shall consign to the flames the books of the communist ideologists Marx, Engels and Lenin . . ."" The White Book
neglected to explain that the sentences were from a speech by Smrkovsky, published by *Mlada Fronta*, in which Smrkovsky quoted the words from a mimeographed leaflet to show that while the influence of rightist forces should not be exaggerated, it could not be ignored and should be combated.

Perhaps the most striking refutation of the charge of counter-revolutionary and CIA activity on the verge of overthrowing socialism in Czechoslovakia, lies in the fact that there has been not a single announcement of the arrest or trial of a counter-revolutionary or CIA agent since the occupation. Not one arrest has been announced arising from the weapons caches and clandestine radios. The only detentions known to have occurred were immediately following the invasion when leaders of the Czechoslovak Government and Communist Party were taken out of their own country and held for some days.

The claim of an imminent danger of West German invasion does not measure up to the fact that at no time during the period were the powerful Czechoslovakian military forces, who presumably would be willing to resist a German invasion, mobilised for action. It also seems strange that to repel a pending invasion the main forces of the five armies made not for the German border but for Prague, where they occupied the buildings of the Government and Communist Party.

Further doubt is cast upon the case of the five when some eight months since the invasion, the Czechoslovakian Government and Communist Party leaders who allegedly called upon the five for assistance, have still not come forward.

The foregoing are only a few of the points which have been widely published and, at the very least, show certain claims in the case of the five are incorrect. Yet those supporting the intervention in Czechoslovakia make no mention of these refutations. One may certainly choose to ignore facts and maintain one's position in spite of them, but it is not honest then to assert "The evasion of the case of the Five has been a marked and disturbing feature . . . ."

The recent Sino-Soviet armed clashes yet again give warning that it is essential that the socialist countries act only upon agreed principles based on mutual respect for the full sovereignty of each socialist state. It matters little whether JBH and I agree with the recent Soviet claim that China has ceased to be a socialist country; nor whether we believe China's estimation that the Soviet Union is an imperialist power. What does matter tremendously for the cause of socialism is how these two strongest nations of the socialist camp resolve their disputes — by further armed conflict, or by actions governed by the principle of the right of nations to self-determination.

G. SANDERSON

HUTSON'S VIEWS CONTESTED

THE FACT that the Left Action Conference decided to call a Conference on Workers' Control and Self-Management in August this year prompts me to reply to some of the points raised in Jack Hutson's comments on the symposium on workers' control in ALR (April-May 1969), especially as the main comments concerned my own contribution to the symposium.

Jack Hutson states that I "appear to be moving far too quickly" in advocating workers' control and self-management as slogans which can be raised immediately. As to my proposition that the Left should have advocated in the recent rail strike that the workers run the trains themselves instead of simply walking off the job,
he suggests I would have been “regarded as a bit of a nut”.

I first of all want to state that I do not conceive of workers’ control and self-management simply as slogans to be waved around. Rather they have to be concretised in particular struggles, around particular issues that directly concern the workers. While generalised revolutionary propaganda explaining the full implications of these slogans must continue at all times, there must be a conscious effort to see how such slogans can be applied to particular struggles.

Second, on the example of the railway workers. Let’s take another. The bus and tramway workers are threatening strikes if unionists are jailed for refusal to pay fines imposed under the penal clauses.

Is it really so ridiculous to advocate among the bussies and trammies that, instead of simply walking off the job, they run the buses and trams themselves but refuse to collect fares? Wouldn’t that also overcome the antagonism naturally aroused in the commuting work force when a walk-off strike takes place — besides its other implications? And even if only a small minority of workers were convinced in the first place, isn’t it obligatory to sometimes be in a minority, and go against the traditional accepted pattern? Anyhow, I don’t think one would be regarded as such a “nut” as Jack suggests.

On Jack Hutson’s second point of disagreement (that workers’ control has not arisen before now because of the “objective conditions”), I think we should clearly differentiate between the gap in discussion of workers’ control and self-management here compared with overseas (perhaps 4 or 5 years) or the gap on student power (perhaps 3 or 4 years, but rapidly catching up), and the fundamental reason why workers’ control and self-management haven’t featured in Left discussion for the past thirty years. The reason is not “objective”, but simply the domination of the Left in past decades by reformist and stalinist dogmas, all of which idealised centralisation and the State, and to which workers’ control and self-management were foreign. The change in the past year or so in Australia has been due to the retreat of stalinism and the development of new, revolutionary ideas.

On the third point — the relationship of the trade unions and workers’ control. Here, I agree with Jack, is a very important difference.

Workers’ control and self-management will be raised through union structures, as well as through directly political channels. But all bodies to implement or even fight for workers’ control and self-management as such must be independent of the union structures and hierarchy — left, right or centre. Otherwise, they run the danger of becoming just another sub-committee under the control of the union hierarchy and the real meaning of self-management and workers’ control — the direct management of a whole industry or enterprise or the direct control of a sphere of production etc. under the control of no boss, be he a union boss or otherwise — will be lost. Action committees set up in factories etc. to fight for workers’ control and self-management must be independent of the union — which does not mean necessarily hostile to a particular union leader or leadership. The fight has, of course, to be fought out inside the union, as well as on the shop floor. But to fight inside does not mean to submit to union control. Maybe such independent committees directly responsible to the workers on the floor — be they democratic shop committees, “action committees” or committees applying workers’ control or self-management in a given instance and period of time —
will be the best means of ensuring that real "workers' control" applies within the unions themselves... As for the "dangers" of such committees developing into an "unofficial" union leadership, rather than this being "dangerous nonsense" as Jack claims, it would, I believe, be the best thing that could happen to some unions, some of our corrupt union bureaucrats, and to some of our routinist and cautious "left" union leaders... Final point: with all due respects to Brian Mowbray, I could also quote to Jack Hutson workers (including shop delegates) who would support my point of view. I don't think quoting "ordinary workers" proves much.

Denis Frenéy

WORKERS' CONTROL AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY

I WOULD COMMENT as follows on the concept of "workers control" as outlined in ALR 2/1969:

WORKER PSYCHOLOGY — The Australian worker really believes in the "divine right" of capitalists to OWN and MANAGE their respective holdings. In the case of government owned industries, such as the railways, this "respect" is transferred to the bureaucratic administration.

Unfortunately, the workers doubt their competency to manage their own affairs, a feeling engendered by a society, which alienates the worker from the product of his own creative effort, and which insists upon industrial discipline and subservience.

The worker has to understand not only the industrial processes, but also the concomitant social fabric arising therefrom. Shortcomings in this respect can be directly attributed to the failure of unions to deal with the problem of worker education.

NATIONALISED INDUSTRIES AND WORKERS' CONTROL — In relation to the government owned industries, such as railways, the objective is a more immediate possibility. However, experience shows that the railway bureaucracy (and the government) is very jealous of its right to manage, or mismanage, as it thinks fit; and the unions are consulted as little as possible, despite the fact that prior consultation could obviate subsequent disputes, for which the bureaucracy is thus entirely responsible.

It is, I believe, necessary to distinguish between nationalised and socialised industries. Quite clearly, nationalisation without EFFECTIVE worker participation, is not socialism, and it is on this point that the ALP must do a lot of hard thinking, otherwise it has not the right to claim leadership of, or affinity with, the workers, or the trade union movement.

TOWARDS A SOCIALIST CONSCIOUSNESS — Right-wing union leaders do not want to draw (for their members) political lessons from the industrial struggles; and their organisation at work, or the lack of it, testifies to this.

The organisational work, and campaign of explanation must be such that the workers will not only understand the struggle, but also care. This is not an issue to be dealt with by the Arbitration court, which has been constituted for the express purpose of preserving the "rights" of capitalists in a capitalist orientated society, rather will it be fought out in the open; a contest between the "divine right" of capitalists and bureaucrats, and the collective strength and determination of the workers. The Left ought not be deflected from the fundamental objective: — the socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Workers' control must be seen, not as an end in itself, but as a stepping stone to that objective.
We can predict that unions will be increasing their more militant demands, and that workers, provided it is pointed out to them, will be able to see that industrial objectives DO have political consequences. And as these seemingly simple issues assume social, and therefore political, significance, the "coalition of the left" becomes more concrete, unified, and an effective threat to the establishment. At a time when this "coalition of the left" is assuming significance and importance; when unionists, students, peace workers and other dissidents, are beginning to perceive and react to the fundamental contradictions in contemporary capitalist society; when it is already apparent that this movement will assume massive proportions, that it will need to know where it wants to go, and how to get there — we must ask: Where will the Communist party be — at the lead, or submerged by the general morass of protest.

It seems to me imperative that the Communist party, because it has the policies and the philosophy; because it sees the problems of capitalist society in their totality must assume leadership of this quickening movement. And it must be a leadership earned, deserved; completely free of any suggestion of infiltration or behind-the-scenes manipulation.

Many communists, as individuals, are doing a fine job in the unions, and other organisations, but far too many work in the shadows, and whilst they gain respect as individuals, and possibly support for their views, it is not support for the communist party as such. Is it sufficient to acquire respect as an individual who HAPPENS to be in the Communist party?

If the party is to grow, and grow it must, if it is to be truly effective, then a more open stance is required, not only in unions or other organisations, but in the community at large, communists must develop a greater affinity with the people, and the people must be able to see this affinity.

This requires, not arrogant self-assertion, but the ability to set examples of honesty and political understanding.

H. Austin,
State Councillor,
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LETTER TO THE EDITORS

My attention has been drawn to an article by John Playford, "Civilian Militarists", in the Australian Left Review, December 1968. This article makes references to alleged statements and assurances by me, and I defy Mr. Playford to produce any evidence whatever for their truthfulness. The article virtually implies that I have been a liar or at least a flagrant breaker of assurances given. Naturally, I reject such imputations.

At no time did I say that the Strategic Studies Centre in ANU would not be supported by a Ford Foundation grant. On the contrary, it has been. However, I did say — and repeat now — that this grant carried no strings whatever from the Foundation. The Centre has been allowed to develop in accordance with the normal and proper rules of academic development followed in any university. That is, the Centre which is governed by an academic committee has been able, within the limits of finance (ANU and Ford) available to it, to develop its methods and subject of enquiry as has seemed best to it. The Centre and its members have established a solid reputation for competence, relevance and objectivity.

Yours faithfully,
15/5/69
J. G. Crawford