IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED that the article “Socialism: Only One Party?” by Eric Aarons (ALR No. 4, 1966) and the concept projected in the Documents for the 21st Congress of the Communist Party of Australia relating to socialist political democracy, would have received more comment. This is an area over which socialist thinking will be forced to range for a long time. On this question we are confronted by the experiences of the USSR (all of which should be carefully analysed in this 50th anniversary year), China and other socialist countries, the fears, misconceptions and hostility of many Australians, the large remnants of bigoted, rigid attitudes among most leftwing advocates of socialism, and the fact that socialist transformation has yet to be embarked upon in the circumstances of a country like ours.

Communists daily meet with the argument that socialism as yet practised in the world seems to mean, as well as economic advances and elimination of exploitation, a monopoly of political power in the hands of the communists, a lack of democracy, political opposition and real rights of criticism. Surely such questioning must be seriously regarded in the light of the democratic abuses under Stalin and the current happenings in China!

The criticism of Stalin, there is no need to hide this, has left rather deep traces. The most serious thing is a certain degree of scepticism with which also some of those close to us greet reports of new economic and political successes. Beyond this, must be considered in general as unresolved the problem of origin of the cult of Stalin and how this became possible. To explain this solely through Stalin’s serious personal defects is not completely accepted. There is an attempt to investigate what could have been the political errors that had contributed to giving rise to the cult . . . We do not discourage it because it helps towards a more profound awareness of the history of the revolution and its difficulties. However we advise prudence in coming to conclusions and the taking into account of the publications and research in the Soviet Union. (The Memorandum of Palmiro Togliatti, Foreign Bulletin C.P.I., August-September 1964).
The reasons for the rise of Stalinism, within the development of socialist society in the USSR, seem to me clearly to reside in the conditions which gave rise to the revolution, the type of country Russia was up till then, the way in which developments occurred in the early years after seizure of power and the external threat which existed for the new socialist state in its formative years, a threat which resulted in the terrible devastation of the country in World War II.

Russian communism was born and developed as a decisive political force in conditions of tsarist autocracy. Features of that society were the lack of democratic political institutions and rights, savage reprisals against political opponents, poorly developed industry, the cultural and material backwardness of the huge mass of the population. As Lenin described, the Russian Communist Party organisation grew in conditions of revolutionary upsurge in autocratic conditions, requiring the utmost tightness of organisation, secrecy and considerable centralisation of authority.

The carrying through of the revolution, the waging of the civil war and the war against foreign armies of intervention, followed by the stupendous problem of restoration of the economy and building industry in a backward country already devastated to a considerable extent by ravages of war, in the FIRST country of socialism, extended the period of austere and harsh conditions in which the survival of a socialist government had to be secure.

The establishment of the Soviet government in 1917, contrary to popular belief, was not a very bloody affair.

The almost effortless success of the Petrograd coup . . . seemed to show that it indeed had behind it the vast majority of the population. The boast of the Bolsheviks that the revolution itself cost remarkably few lives, and that most of these were lost in attempts by their opponents to wrest the victory from them when it had already been won, was justified. By one of those acts of generosity which often attend the first hours of a revolution, the young officer cadets captured at the Winter Palace were allowed to go free on promising not to ‘take up arms against the people any more’. Krasnov, the ‘white’ general . . . was released on parole—which he broke a few weeks later to participate in the civil war in the south; and that this clemency was no accidental freak is shown by a statement of Lenin ten days after the Bolshevik victory:

“We are reproached with using terror. But such terror as was used by the French revolutionaries who guillotined unarmed people we do not use, and, I hope, shall not use . . . When we have made arrests we have said ‘We will let you go if you will sign a paper promising not to commit acts of sabotage’. And such signatures are given.” (Lenin: Collected Works, Vol. XXII.)


However, sabotage, political assassination, disruption and uprisings followed.

Faced with treason on this large scale at a moment when allied forces were landing in Murmansk and Vladivostok, when the Czech legions had begun open hostilities against the Bolsheviks, and when the threat of war
was looming on all sides, the Soviet Government was under no temptation to resort to half measures. (Ibid.)

It was with that background and in those conditions that the Bolsheviks found themselves in a position of political party monopoly as the civil war drew to its close.

The fiction of a legal opposition was, however, long since dead. Its demise cannot be fairly laid at the door of one party. If it was true that the Bolshevik regime was not prepared after the first few months to tolerate an organised opposition, it was equally true that no opposition party was prepared to remain within legal limits. (Ibid. p. 190.)

Carr goes on to claim that the three main developments marking the period between the revolution and Lenin's death were the increase of authority in the hands of a small central party leadership; the transformation of the party from a revolutionary organisation directed to the overthrow of existing institutions into the directing nucleus of a governmental and administrative machine; and, finally, the creation for it of a monopoly position through the elimination of other parties. (Ibid. p. 191.)

It is interesting to note that political opposition existed, and was allowed to exist, during the blackest days of the civil war. Carr devotes many pages of his history to demonstrating this point. The Kadet newspaper Svodoba Rossii was still being published in the summer of 1918, Menshevik papers likewise. The Mensheviks had party offices in Moscow in 1920 and in local Soviet elections of that year 46 seats in the Moscow Soviet and 250 in Kharkov. In August 1920 a Menshevik Congress was held in Moscow and reported in the Soviet press.

However, the bulk of political opposition took the form of armed revolt and was dealt with accordingly.

The association between party and state directly involved the party in every national crisis, and transformed every call for national unity and national leadership into a call for party unity and loyalty to the party leader. To close the ranks was, for the party as for the nation, the natural reaction to the national danger. Nor was it possible to separate Lenin the party leader from Lenin the leader of the nation. The ascendancy which he exercised was one of moral authority rather than of external power. But it helped to establish in the party, as well as in the state, a tradition of personal leadership which it was difficult to shake off. (Ibid. p. 192-193.)

Thus the foundations of the one party system arose on the basis of particular historical conditions in the first country to undertake socialist transformation. It was against the background of all these circumstances that the distortions of the Stalin period emerged, distortions which are not at all inherent in socialism, inevitable or desired. But the existence of the one party system in the Soviet Union had a deep effect on the world communist movement and the subsequent development of its ideological outlook because of the prestige of the Soviet Union, its tremendous successes, and the dominance of the ideas of Stalin over a long period.
The controversy with the German Communist leader Rosa Luxemburg in 1919 reveals both aspects of the problem. On the one hand, Lenin and others felt that she assisted the ideological campaign against them by giving inadequate weight to the fact that the Bolsheviks had no alternative at the time to the course of action they took. This view is supported by Carr, reviewing the events from a non-communist standpoint years after, and the brutal murder of Rosa Luxemburg herself by German reaction in 1919 was a further stark revelation of the realities of the times. On the other hand, Rosa Luxemburg’s warnings on the dangers inherent in the measures taken, unless they were very consciously seen as being a particular response to particular conditions, were very prophetic.

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 fought and suffered; for they want to place in its storehouse as new discoveries all the distortions prescribed in Russia by necessity and compulsion—in the last analysis only by-products of the bankruptcy of international socialism in the present world war.

Rosa Luxemburg: The Russian Revolution. (Extract from The Marxists by C. Wright Mills).

With the emergence of Stalin’s ideological dominance the weakness noted by Rosa Luxemburg did great harm to the communist movement, giving rise to dogmatic ‘copying’ which led many influential communists to believe that the ‘classical’ Russian methods of carrying through a socialist revolution, consolidating its strength, the method of party organisation, Stalin’s attitude to opponents within the party, etc., was holy writ.

Such ‘old’ conceptions are now greatly shaken. Of necessity much re-thinking is occurring and there are serious attempts to return to the really classical approaches of Marx, Engels and Lenin. It is characteristic of Lenin’s range of vision that in November 1918 while vehemently defending the Bolshevik policy from the criticism of Kautsky he wrote:

It should be observed that the question of depriving the exploiters of the franchise is purely a Russian question, and not a question of the dictatorship of the proletariat in general . . .
And it must be said now that the question of restricting the franchise is a nationally specific and not a general question of the dictatorship. One must approach the question of restricting the franchise by studying the specific conditions of the Russian revolution and the specific path of its development. (The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky—Lenin's emphasis)

Lenin was here writing of the franchise, but the same attitude surely should apply also to political parties, opposition and the rights of criticism.

Enforced curtailments of democracy such as these enacted after the revolution in Russia must be of only a temporary character and need only arise in particular circumstances.

Freedom for supporters of the Government only, for the members of one party only—no matter how big its membership may be—is no freedom at all. Freedom is always freedom for the man who thinks differently. This contention does not spring from a fanatical love of abstract 'justice' but from the fact that everything which is enlightening, healthy and purifying in political freedom derives from its independent character, and from the fact that freedom loses all its virtue when it becomes a privilege . . .

The suppression of political life throughout the country must gradually cause the vitality of the Soviets themselves to decline. Without general elections, freedom of the Press, freedom of assembly, and freedom of speech, life in every public institution slows down, becomes a caricature of itself, and bureaucracy rises as the only deciding factor. No one can escape the workings of this law. Public life gradually dies, and a few dozen party leaders with inexhaustible energy and limitless idealism direct and rule . . . in the last resort cliquism develops a dictatorship, but not the dictatorship of the proletariat: the dictatorship of a handful of politicians, i.e. a dictatorship in the bourgeois sense, in the Jacobin sense . . .

(Rosa Luxemburg: The Russian Revolution, quoted in Rosa Luxemburg by Paul Frolich.)

Despite the by-paths along which the Bolsheviks were forced, and the additional serious distortions and malpractices developed under the Stalin regime, socialism of the USSR demonstrated during that time phenomenal virility and viability. In his famous criticism of Stalin and the Stalin period in the USSR, Isaac Deutscher in 1948 made this point very clearly.

The nation has, nevertheless, advanced far in most fields of its existence. Its material apparatus of production, which about 1930 was still inferior to that of any medium-sized European nation, has so greatly and so rapidly expanded that Russia is now the first industrial power in Europe and the second in the world. Within little more than one decade the number of cities and towns doubled; and her urban population grew by thirty million. The number of schools of all grades has very impressively multiplied. The whole nation has been sent to school. Its mind has been so awakened that it can hardly be put back to sleep again. Its avidity for knowledge for the sciences and the arts has been stimulated by Stalin's Government to the point where it has become insatiable and embarrassing. It should be remembered that, although Stalin has kept Russia isolated from the contemporary influences of the West, he has encouraged and fostered every interest in what he calls the 'cultural heritage' of the West. Perhaps in no country have the young been imbued with so great a respect and love for the classical literature and art of other nations as in Russia . . . Nor can the fact be ignored that the ideal inherent in Stalinism, one to which Stalin has given a grossly distorted
expression, is not domination of man by man, or nation by nation, or race by race, but their fundamental equality. Even the proletarian dictatorship is presented as a mere transition to a classless society; and it is the community of the free and the equal and not the dictatorship that has remained the inspiration. Thus, there have been many positive, valuable elements in the educational influence of Stalinism, elements that are in the long run likely to turn against its worst features.


The period since Stalin's death has been marked by strenuous endeavors to overcome whatever deficiencies hampered socialist development in the earlier period.

Today Communist Party policy in Australia must be based on the concrete situation of Australia, which is vastly different from the Russia of 1917 or the China of 1949, and on the fact that world politics and the international situation, because of the strength of socialism in the world, have changed greatly since the revolutions undertaken in the abovementioned countries. Realisation of this has, perhaps, been slow in crystallising.

Additionally many communists have in practice assumed a marxist approach to be merely the understanding and implementation of the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao Tse-tung. Such a view is in fact contrary to marxism which demands the concrete examination of concrete facts; its founders always warning that their outlook was not a dogma but a guide to action needing application in constantly changing circumstances. Until such misconceptions are overcome, 'marxist thought and analysis' will be a caricature of marxist thought and analysis.

Hence in an advanced, highly industrialised, capitalist democracy such as Australia, it is necessary to view the transformation to a socialist society and the process of building and consolidation of socialism as being undertaken not by the Communist Party and its supporters alone, but by a coalition or alliance of parties and groups, and that political opposition and political party opposition must be guaranteed. The laws of the day will have to be observed. Those who break them will have to be dealt with.

The Italian Communist Party speaks of the prospect of a socialist, pluralistic, democratic society, not a centralised one, not controlled by bureaucracy and not identified with the power of a sole party.

We propose the collaboration of several parties, as we believe that this collaboration is not only important at this stage of striving for power but also in the holding of power. These are all elements which guarantee democracy and also guarantee that the economic, political and ideological necessities of the working class will be expressed in this alliance. (Luigi Longo: *Foreign Bulletin I.C.P.*, October and November, 1966.)

The resolution of the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of France held in January this year states:

In its 16th and 17th Congresses (the Communist Party of France) declared
itself for a lasting co-operation between Communists and Socialists, not only in the present fight for a genuine democracy but tomorrow, in the setting up and building of socialism. It rejected the thesis of a one party system as a necessary condition for the socialist revolution and declared itself for a plurality of parties, guaranteed by the Constitution of the new regime.

The rights of the minority will be exercised within the framework of the new legality established by the majority in a democratic way.

Australia is neither Italy nor France, but both are countries similar in many respects to our country.

Before socialism becomes a possibility here, and indeed before a 'coalition of the left' to work for socialism is realisable, vast changes in political thinking and alignments need to occur. Nonetheless, clarification of attitudes towards the long range objectives is essential in order to 'free' thinking, attitudes and actions to make the objectives realistic. Therefore communists desire and work for dialogue amongst all left forces, unity in action around programs for reforms of all kinds and debate about ultimate objectives and the ways of their possible fulfilment. In all this the problems concerning democracy under the new society envisaged must loom large.

DECIPHERING THE GENETIC CODE

... we know chemically the material of the genes ... (and) we know how this chemical structure enables them to store all the information which directs the inherited development of the individual. In other words, we have some very definite and important clues about the code—the genetic code—in which the information is stored and used.

(This) represents a triumph of investigation, thought, logic and reason ... this triumph of thought, logic and reason represents to my mind the antithesis of appeal to the superstitions and supernatural. It shows us the place of life as part of the atomic and molecular universe, and the place of man as part of nature. Therein it represents the proper intelligent advance over the beliefs in the gods of the Greeks. All the birds in ancient Greece sacrificed to Aesculapius would not have one iota of effect on an hereditary disease, but now we understand the nature of the deficiency, and some day may be able to do something about it.

From an article by R. N. Robertson, Professor of Botany with the University of Adelaide, in the Medical Journal of Australia, October 1, 1966.