AMR

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THEORY
PRACTICE
EXPERIENCE
CLASS STRUGGLE

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Issue #76 – February 2024

Editorial

The editorial board has brought together issue #76 of the *Australian Marxist Review* with a theme on the development of socialism and working-class organisation. This development is both within Australia and internationally, and historically and at the present. We are aiming to introduce to readers articles that will deepen their understanding of the development of socialism both historically and at the present and to consider a range of questions before the communist and working-class movement. We also aim to encourage considerations on some universal challenges faced by communists across the world and at different levels of development in the struggle for socialism.

The editor of the AMR, David Matters, participated in a successful meeting of the Communist Party of Australia with a delegation from Vietnam in November 2023 at the party's HQ in Sydney featuring a member of editorial board of the fraternal journal of the Communist Party of Vietnam, *Communist Review*.

To introduce readers to questions under active consideration by our comrades in the development of socialism in Vietnam, we have selected an article printed in *Communist Review* to feature in this issue of the AMR. "Raising awareness and addressing correctly the practice of democracy – rule of law and social discipline nexus in Vietnam today (Part 2)" by Assoc. Prod, Dr. Vu Trong Lam was published in *Communist Review* No. 987 (April 2022).

The Australian Marxist Review believes this article will be useful in deepening members of the CPA understanding of the development of Socialism in Vietnam and for strengthening the relationship between communists in Vietnam and Australia. *Communist Review* publishes an extensive range of articles in English on its website concerning a range of topics of theoretical and practical significance for the development of socialism in Vietnam and the work of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

The 23rd International meeting of Communist and Workers Parties took place in October 20th to 22nd in Izmir, Türkiye. This meeting was attended by representation from the Communist Party of Australia. The General Secretary of the Communist Party of Australia, Andrew Irving, provided and recommended the publication of a speech presented by the Communist Party of Italy at the conference. This speech contains a Marxist-Leninist analysis of a range of significant international questions that will be of interest to readers (although with some reservations concerning the observations on China, DPRK, etc.). This speech also includes a forward by Comrade Andrew introducing the article.

Next we publish Part 1 of interview conducted with Comrade Sally Mitchel. This interview continues the process of bringing forward interviews with communists outlining their experiences in the communist movement and their accounts of the organisation and activity of the party to develop new material on our party's history. Comrade Sally's interview details her experiences as the daughter of communist parents, going into particular detail about the warm role played by the Eureka Youth League and later the Young Socialist League in the childhoods of working-class children. She also discusses her unique experience of living in the Soviet Union for 18 months as a teenager while her father Jim Mitchel worked as the party correspondent for its newspaper in Moscow. These experiences testify to the depth of experience and broad range of the activity of the party which many new party members may not be familiar with.

Since the covid-19 pandemic swept the world in 2019, international travel and opportunities for exchanges have been limited. With the end of the pandemic and associated public health measures that prevented such exchanges for several years there has now been an opportunity to observe developments that have occurred. Comrade Roland Boer has provided to the AMR the reflective piece "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom: My Experience of China Today" to capture his reflections arising from

returning to China following the opening of borders and of the inspiring changes and developments in the building of a modern socialist country in China today. These changes particularly detail the self-reform processes led by the Communist Party of China in strengthening advances in China's socialist modernisation.

Part 1 of an interview conducted with Comrade David Matters is also presented in this issue. This interview dis-cusses in detail the experiences that led him to the struggle for socialism, and the blind alleys that the trotskyist groups divert young activists down. This highlights the deeply negative role that opportunist politics, including the many flavours of Trotskyism and anarchism, have on the development of the working-class movement and impedes its development of a revolutionary position.

The reflection by William Briggs, the last guardian correspondent to the Soviet Union "To Moscow and back again" brings forward a deeply interesting and illuminating testimony of the Soviet Union and socialist world from the perspective and experience of our party in the years before the counter-revolutionary wave destroyed socialism in the soviet union and eastern Europe. The counterrevolutions which occurred where not historically necessary and it brings light to processes occurring within the socialist world in this time.

The AMR editorial board is thankful to all contributors and readers of the journal and encourages the submission of new articles in support of the development of the theory and practice of the working class struggle in Australia.

Raising awareness and addressing correctly the practice of democracy – rule of law and social discipline nexus in Vietnam today (Part 2)

The current state of the relationship between the practice of democracy – rule of law and social discipline

Although until the 13th National Congress that the Communist Party of Vietnam officially mentioned the practice of democracy – rule of law and social discipline nexus and placed it in the dialectical relationship with other major nexus, in fact, during more than 35 years of renovation, Vietnam has regularly faced this question not only in the building process of the Party, State, and political system but also in every aspect of social life. It can be summarized as achievements and progress obtained in terms of practicing democracy, ensuring rule of law and social discipline in Vietnam in recent years of the renovation as follows:

First and foremost, practice democracy through economic democratization. On the threshold of Doi Moi and in the early years of the renovation process, Directive No. 100/CT-TW, dated January 13, 1981, of the Secretariat on “Improving piecework system, expanding “piecework system” to the group of workers and workers” in agricultural cooperatives” and Resolution No. 10/NQ-TW, dated April 5, 1988, of the Politburo on “Reforming agricultural economic management” have created breakthroughs and made rapid and significant changes in socio-economic development in rural areas of Vietnam. It was the beginning of economic democratization, and also the start of democratic practice in society. Since then, farmers and workers are liberated from the centralized, bureaucratic, and subsidized mechanism. They have the liberty to start businesses and production, and master by themselves their means of production and means of subsistence (They are no longer passive). Reality has shown that the Party's policy outlined in the early years of Doi Moi to liberate the productive forces, mind, awareness as well as all social potentials to comprehensively renew every aspect of life and democratize society [1] is great progress, a great achievement of economic democratization and democratic practice.

At the 5th Plenum of the 12th Central Committee, the Communist Party of Vietnam radically changed its mind about the private economy, advocated the development of the private economy, and highly appreciated the potential and important role of the private sector in the growth of the national economy. It affirmed that the private economy not only exists in the long term but also is one of the crucial driving forces for the development of the economy and the country. The private sector is none other than individuals who do business as the owner and master of society. [2] The unity between benefits and responsibilities, between rights and obligations is realized. All people and all economic sectors are equal before the law and protected by the law.

Along with the elimination of egalitarianism and subsidies, a new perception of social justice has also been formed. In the market economy, competition and wealth inequality is unavoidable, but the distribution of benefits is regulated by laws and mechanisms for the common good of society to maintain stability and prevent impoverishment which can harm vulnerable individuals in the society. Social justice and equality are not only reflected in the distribution of benefits. They are also equality of opportunities. Every citizen and every member of the community can live in an innovative environment to develop. It is the harmonization between economic benefits and humanity in development. In that environment, workers, first of all, farmers, can be themselves. They can live and work as actors of innovation. The mentality, awareness, and thinking of farmers also changed radically, from materialistic thinking (how many kilograms of rice can a pole of land produce) to value thinking [3] (How many million dongs does one hectare of land make?) It is a great

step forward in the practice of democracy in the economy and culture.

Secondly, the practice of democracy in politics, in political participation, in social governance of citizens has the following outstanding manifestations:

Meetings and exchanges between deputies of the National Assembly, deputies of the People's Council, and voters before and after national congresses are organized so that the voices of citizens can be heard, their recommendations on the Party's undertakings and the Government's policies and laws can be listened and deputies can present their report on how they hear the people's opinions. The voice of the people at the grassroots level is heard and respected. Their reasonable recommendations on Government's policies are heard by deputies who submit them to competent authorities to make timely adjustments. It shows that the people's right to mastery, and their involvement in assessing and reforming policies are respected and implemented.

Citizens' petitions and complaints about violations of democracy and laws; manifestations of bureaucracy, irresponsibility; unethical deeds; acts of bullying, harassment, and corruption of public officials have been gathered, investigated, and handled. It is an attitude of respect and protection toward citizens by practical actions. Significant progress has been made in reducing insubstantial meetings with citizens, stopping making empty promises, and shirking duties of public agencies. Citizens can raise their voices to complete draft legal documents and draft documents of the Party through Congress.

Democracy in recent years has also been strengthened by creating an environment and mechanism for citizens to control State power, prevent violations of laws and Party's rules among officials and Party members, interest groups who harm the common interests of society, tarnish the reputation of the Party and cause the decline of State power.

The practice of democracy, therefore, is closely linked to law enforcement and strict discipline. As democratic practice is promoted and citizens' voices are heard, the fight against bureaucracy and corruption has made big progress. Severe penalties for corruption cases have made an important contribution to cleaning up the state apparatus, eliminating corruptors, safeguarding national interests and protecting public properties and fostering people's trust in the Party, State, and regime.

Thirdly, the implementation of the Regulation on Democracy at the grassroots level and the Ordinance on the Exercise of Democracy in communes, wards, and townships have created a driving force for the people to promote their role of mastery and build socialist democracy and socialist rule of law state, consolidate the political system, especially in rural areas.

The implementation of these two important documents has created a positive change in psychology, awareness, and sense of ownership from both citizens and civil servants, contributing to maintaining political stability and promoting economic growth and comprehensive development (social, political, cultural,...). Conflicts between individuals are promptly resolved. The people's understanding of policies, laws, and discipline is improved. The Party and State have promptly supplemented and completed legal documents on local democracy associated with representative democracy and direct democracy – two main types of democratic tools in Vietnam.

Along with the implementation of the Regulation on Democracy at the grassroots level and the Ordinance on the exercise of Democracy in communes, wards and townships, it is created movements where the whole people unite to build civilized society and families as well as new rural areas. This is a very practical solution, creating the momentum and necessary support to promote democratic practice, strengthen the rule of law, and ensure social discipline.

Fourthly, use the method of all citizens' conferences or elected representatives (by

heads of households in each family) so that citizens can directly elect the village head (in rural areas) and the leader of residential areas (in urban areas). This shows clearly the role of citizens who can freely select their worthy representatives to mandate and empower. Thereby, it can be affirmed that the democratic consultation of the Fatherland Front combined with democratic centralism enriches the forms and methods of democratic practice, contributing to building Vietnamese democracy during the process of renovation and democratization.

However, the exercise of democracy, law enforcement, and social discipline in Vietnam today has some inadequacies.

First of all, there still exists insubstantial democracy in the Party's activities, state management, and activities of agencies in the political system. Laws and regulations are not enforced fully in social life. There are still expressions of disrespect for the law, intentional violations of law, or loophole abuse in the legal system that is still incomplete to make profits for individuals or groups and damage national interests.

Secondly, principles of democratic centralism are violated. Many localities do not fully comply rules of law. Some Party committees, organizations, and leading cadres disrespect the right to mastery of Party members, and rarely listen to the voices of mastery of Party members, and rarely their subordinates; Leading cadres in some localities also show signs of patriarchy, authoritarianism, autocracy, democratic deficit, or insubstantial democracy. There is a lack of regulations stipulating specific responsibilities of cadres and party members, leading to both the phenomenon of collective reliance, the uncertainty of individual responsibilities, and the disincentive of enthusiastic party cadres and members, enthusiasm, dare to think, dare to do, dare to break through, dare to take responsibility for the common good. [4]

Thirdly, many cadres and Party members have not set a good example in accomplishing their responsibility and duty. This situation is also associated with ethical degradation among a large number of cadres and party members, including leaders and senior managers.

Fourthly, there is a lack of consistency between the reform of the institutional organization and the institutional system, especially the quality of cadres, and more broadly, human resources in the political system, including the education of political awareness, the compliance of the law, and the respect of morality in society.

Fifthly, the combat against corruption is not drastic enough. During this fight, adequate attention has not been paid to punishing negative acts, especially within the Party system and public bodies.

These limitations and inadequacies in practicing democracy, strengthening the rule of law, and ensuring social discipline result from the following reasons:

Firstly, the leadership of some Party committees and authorities in organizing the implementation of the Party's guidelines and State's policies and laws is still a long-lasting weak point. Some localities are negligent and slow to put in place important policies, leading to inefficiency. Bureaucracy, empiricism, formalism, dogmatism, subjectivity, and voluntarism persist in many areas, exerting a negative influence on the thinking and actions of organizations in the political system and cadres, Party members.

Secondly, due to the negative effects of the market economy, international integration, and materialism, people tend to get rich at all costs and live a hedonistic, pragmatic lifestyle while in some localities, education about moral values for cadres, party members, and citizens is not given due consideration. The building of a new culture and civilized people in many places is not given due attention and is not on par with investment in economic activities.

Thirdly, the shaping of public opinion in many areas has not been done well; inefficient management of harmful disinformation spreading on social media which poisons spiritual life, especially among the young

generation is also a weakness in practicing democracy, strengthening the rule of law, and tightening social discipline.

Fourthly, the Regulation on Democracy at the grassroots and the Ordinance on the exercise of Democracy in communes, wards, and townships are sometimes not well respected. There are inadequacies even distortions in applying the principle of democratic centralism, thus damaging the practice of democracy, and reducing the power of law and social discipline.

Fifthly, the negligence in management, inspection, and supervision, and the lack of responsibility in setting a good example for cadres and party members in terms of morality, respect for the law, and social discipline cause negative impacts on society and individuals. When these bad influences are distorted by hostile forces and political opportunists, they can easily lead to chaos and disorder.

Viewpoints, directions, and some key solutions to raise awareness and properly resolve the relationship between the practice of democracy, consolidation of legislation, and maintenance of social discipline

In order to raise awareness and properly handle the relationship between the practice of democracy, consolidation of legislation, and maintenance of social discipline, in the coming time, it is essential to thoroughly grasp the following points of view:

Firstly, cognitive perception and good handling of the relationship between the practice of democracy, consolidation of legislation, and maintenance of social discipline must be consistent with the principle that personal rights and duties go hand in hand for the sake of national interests.

Today, the cognitive perception and practice of democracy must be based on the principles and spirit of the socialist rule-of-law state where the rights and interests of citizens are associated with the sustainable development of society. Rights, responsibilities, and freedoms go hand in hand – that is a premise and condition to guarantee the well-being of every citizen, community, nation, and all mankind. Legal obligations are an essential element in the interaction between State, law, and individual; Without them, the balance between social relationships, interests of different types, social activities, and social environment will not be maintained. Similar to human rights, legal obligations are also universal and specific, which makes the similarities and inevitable differences of Constitutions around the world. Obligations are the second aspect of a dialectical unity of rights and obligations. Therefore, they are valuable for the existence of human beings and human-made organizations. Legal obligations, especially constitutional obligations, become a legal obstacle in everyday life to all abuses of power, arbitrary actions, anarchy, and all negative phenomena that affect human rights and freedoms.

Secondly, cognitive perception and good handling of the relationship between the practice of democracy, consolidation of legislation, and maintenance of social discipline must be based on political system performance at the grassroots level.

The political system at the grassroots has a great role in raising awareness and exercising democracy at the local level, mobilizing people to strictly observe the law, and maintain social order and safety. Due consideration should be given to promoting the role and reforming the political system locally, especially in the Party committees. The guidelines and undertakings of the Party, policies, and laws of the State on the exercise of democracy in communes, wards, and townships must first be thoroughly grasped by cadres and party members at the grassroots level, creating unity in consciousness and action.

Party committees at all levels must strictly supervise the respect of the law on democracy in communes, wards, and townships; Besides, close coordination between the government, the Fatherland Front, and mass organizations is required to implement effective programs and plans. The Fatherland Front and people's

organizations are not only a bridge connecting the Party and State with citizens and represent the people's right to participate in public management, but also play a vital role in promoting democratic practice. They are forums where citizens can raise their voices to the Party and State and accomplish their role of inspection, supervision, and social criticism toward activities of the Party and State.

Thirdly, cognitive perception and good handling of the relationship between the practice of democracy, consolidation of legislation, and maintenance of social discipline must meet the requirements of respecting and protecting human rights, citizenship, compliance with the law, contributing to nurturing culture, and human morality.

In the context of building a socialist rule-of-law state, the awareness and practice of democracy must be based on law compliance and the maintenance of social discipline. That requirement is not only imposed on the State and the legal system but also all individuals and organizations. It is necessary to build a democratic culture regulated by law to protect human rights and social development.

The perception and practice of democracy must be based on the principles of the rule of law state in which there are some basic principles such as justice and humanity; equality; respect and protection of citizen’s rights and freedom; the primacy of the law and the constitution; the principle of “doing everything which is not forbidden by law” and “doing everything which is allowed by law”; principles of transparency and accountability, etc.

Fourthly, cognitive perception and good handling of the relationship between the practice of democracy, consolidation of legislation, and maintenance of social discipline must contribute to severely punishing abusers of human rights, freedoms, and democracy that violate the law, oppose the regime, and infringe upon the interests of individuals and organizations.

Legislation and social discipline are necessary conditions for the maintenance of democracy in two aspects: democratic values and principles and democratic institutions. That is inevitable as democracy cannot exist without a legal framework. In reality, democracy can only be guaranteed and exercised within a strong legal framework.

The primacy of law is a prerequisite for democracy to be widely and substantively practiced. Accordingly, all organizations and individuals in society, from public agencies, and social organizations to all citizens, must respect and accomplish their legal obligations and be responsible when abusing human rights, freedom, and democracy to violate the law, oppose the regime, and infringe upon the interests of individuals and organizations.

Orientations to raise awareness and effectively handle the relationship between the practice of democracy, consolidation of legislation, and maintenance of social discipline:

Following the Document of the 13th Party Congress, especially the motto and theme of the Congress, the valuable lessons and experiences summarized by the Party from the renovation process as well as the Party's guidelines in the implementation of national strategy from 2021 to 2030, with a vision to 2045 to promote the democratic practice, strengthen the rule of law, and maintain social discipline. Those are major directions, both reflecting the goal orientation and guiding the renovation, especially in the political system to develop the nation, practice democracy, strengthen the rule of law, maintain social discipline, and ensure the well-being and happiness of citizens based on enhancing their creativity. Accordingly, the practice of democracy in association with the consolidation of legislation and the maintenance of social discipline aims to strengthen the great national unity bloc, promoting the people's right to mastery, and their patriotic emulation, building a democratic society and realizing the country’s aspiration to become a prosperous and eternal nation. That is the aspiration and desire of President Ho

Chi Minh and also of the entire Party and people.

In order to raise awareness and properly deal with the relationship between the practice of democracy, consolidation of legislation, and maintenance of social discipline, due consideration should be given to the following solutions:

In the first place, increase awareness of the relationship between the practice of democracy, consolidation of legislation, and maintenance of social discipline.

An important basis for effective handling of the relationship between the practice of democracy, consolidation of legislation, and maintenance of social discipline is a good awareness among each individual, organization, and cadres, civil servants, leaders of party organizations, and mass organizations towards the nature and importance of this core relationship.

It is required to adopt sustainable solutions, including the building of democratic practice and law obedience culture. To help citizens fully exercise their rights and responsibilities, it is necessary to improve their mastery capacity by increasing their knowledge, and skills, changing attitudes and forming habits of exercising democracy. Their mastery capacity directly depends on two factors: their right to information access and their intellectual level.

Attention should be paid to enhancing education for democracy, law, and morality, raising people's intellectual level, and ensuring their right to information access. These are the main measures to improve citizenship and ensure the rights and responsibilities of the people in the exercise of socialist democracy in general and democracy at the grassroots in particular.

In the second place, strengthen the Party's leadership in raising awareness and properly resolving the relationship between the practice of democracy, consolidation of legislation, and maintenance of social discipline.

The Party's leadership plays a vital role in raising awareness and properly resolving the relationship between the practice of democracy, consolidation of legislation, and maintenance of social discipline, and ensuring that the principles of socialist rule of law State are implemented in the organization and operation of the State. All individuals and organizations in society must obey and respect the law.

The leading and ruling party must be clean, strong, exemplary in practicing democracy within the Party and comply with the Constitution and laws. This is the key and decisive solution and also the expectation and determination of the Party and the desire of the whole people.

The Party's leadership over the State must follow the principles of transparency, publicity, and compliance with the law. The Party cannot impose its rules, cover up the mistake of the State or replace the State in management. Party committees and branches at all levels, especially in villages and communes, need to continue to enhance the education and collect citizen's opinions to complete the Regulation on Democracy at the grassroots level and Ordinance on the exercise of democracy in communes, wards and townships so that the practice of democracy at the grassroots becomes more effective.

It is needed to drastically fight against the deterioration of political ideology, morality, and lifestyle among officials and party members. Party committees at all levels need to capture ideological and behavioral changes of officials and party members to adopt appropriate and prompt preventive solutions. It is necessary to regularly organize forums to discuss controversial issues related to the Party's guidelines, policies, and laws of the State. It is also required to take severe punishment for abusers of democracy and human rights to disrupt social order and oppose the country.

In the third place, continue to build and perfect the legal system, contributing to promoting the democratic practice and strengthening legislation, maintaining social discipline.

Building and perfecting the legal system is a particularly important condition for promoting democratic practice, strengthening legislation, and maintaining social discipline. This is an urgent, long-term, and extremely complex task.

The main groups of solutions to improve the legal system focus on the mechanism of assignment, coordination, and control among legislative bodies; on the improvement of the quality of lawmakers; on the control and handling of violations during the law-making process; on social criticism to assess the impact of the law; on quality control of legal documents,…

The practice of socialist democracy through direct democracy and representative democracy has been stipulated in the 2013 Constitution. Therefore, it is necessary to build a clear and effective legal framework to implement it. Continue to amend, supplement and perfect the legal framework for direct democracy and representative democracy to adapt to new situations (5).

In the fourth place, enhance the moral values of public and judicial institutions.

An important condition for practicing democracy, consolidating legislation, and maintaining social discipline is to strengthen the ethical foundation of public and judicial institutions. The reality of law enforcement in Vietnam, especially in the public service and judicial fields, has shown that legislation needs to go hand in hand with other elements and values in society such as ethics, integrity, talent, and devotion. Integrity and a prestigious judicial system are crucial in fighting corruption and maintaining legal order (6).

Improving procedures for a trial of cassation review of the Supreme People's Court by increasing trans-parency, quality, enhancing respon-sibility, and judicial capacity of the Justice Council of the Supreme People's Court so that it becomes the primacy of justice trusted by citizens. This reform orientation is set on the basis of the deep awareness that the settlement of administrative disputes and citizens' complaints against administrative decisions and acts of public authorities leads to minimizing negative phenomena, bureau-cracy, corruption, abuse of power, and avoidance of responsibility in the public administrative apparatus.

In the fifth place, improve citizens' capacity in using and protecting their legitimate rights and interests.

It is needful to increase people's intellectual level and legal awareness. This is one of the top priorities of the Party and State. Legal knowledge and consciousness, attitudes towards the law, and behavior of individuals affect greatly their legal education, helping them obey the law, know how to live and work under the law, be aware of their rights, know how to respect the rights of others, and know how to protect their rights when they are infringed. It is necessary to create a habit of legal obedience and obligation of citizens, and foster their trust in the law and law enforcement agencies.

In the sixth place, increasing people's participation in public governance and the fight against corruption and negative phenomena.

Citizens’ involvement in public governance as well as in the prevention and combat against corruption and negative phenomena has a relationship with the Regulation on Democracy at the grassroots level. Therefore, it is required to add to this Regulation contemporary principles and criteria on people's participation in national governance, prevention, and fight against corruption and negative phenomena. Individuals and organizations should be given full opportunities to involve in policy and law-making. This is a condition to ensure legal democracy during the law-making process and respect standards of publicity and trans-parency from the first stage of the policy-making process. The citizen’s participation in criticizing policies and laws aims to balance interests among members of society, avoiding manipulation and corruption by "interest groups".

To encourage citizens’ involvement in governing the country, preventing and combating corruption and negative pheno-

mena, it is crucial to successfully settle reconciliation at the grassroots to prevent complaints and disunity persisted. Conduct regular supervision and collect people's opinions on the cadres and civil servants. Strictly punish cadres and civil servants who have acts of harassment, and irresponsibility; promptly reward those who have excellent performances. Rationally schedule the meeting, and arrange the place to receive citizens. Apply information technology in administrative management. Prepare technical and human conditions to build e-government to the commune level.

Some essential conditions to enhance public participation in governance, prevention, and fight against corruption and negative phenomena in Vietnam sustainably and effectively are legal framework; access to legal information, transparency, and publicity.

Implement the accountability regime, and organize dialogues between public agencies and individuals, between social organizations and their members. Strengthen the roles and responsibilities of the Fatherland Front and mass organizations in enhancing public participation in governance, prevention, and combat against corruption and negative behaviors.

Renovate methods and contents of propaganda and education on public participation in governance, prevention, and combat against corruption and negative behaviors. Build and nurture sustainable trust by balancing interests, ensuring the interests of citizens when involved in national governance, and preventing and combating corruption and negative behaviors.

In the seventh place, improve the efficiency of law enforcement on citizens' complaints.

Ensuring citizens' right to complain will make an important contribution to the prevention and fight against corruption, wastefulness, and negativity, and to clean up the state apparatus. This must be based on a good awareness of the relationship between the state and citizens and must be carried out simultaneously with the democratization process.

It is necessary to build a complete and legal system on complaints that is consistent with the legal system in general and normative documents on complaints in particular. Perfect the mechanism, and increase the quality of inspection of administrative agencies in ensuring the right to complaints of citizens. Develop and implement a responsibility regime for ensuring the right to complain and strictly handle violations of citizens' right to complain. At the same time, improve the capacity and ethical qualities of the contingent of cadres and civil servants, especially those performing tasks related to ensuring the right to complain of citizens. This is the decisive solution.

Lastly, closely link the practice of democracy with the practice of great solidarity, build a consensus society, and promote the study and following of Ho Chi Minh's thought, morality, and life-style, especially his democratic lifestyle, his closeness to the people, his belief inthe people, his respect towards the people, and his love for the people.

Accordingly, it is necessary to uphold the revolutionary moral practice of diligence, thrift, integrity, and selflessness, and concretize the teachings of President Ho Chi Minh: fighting individualism as fighting the most dangerous "internal enemy." Focus on setting a good example because "a good example is worth more than a hundred propaganda speeches," and "words and actions go hand in hand." Respect the principle of democratic centralism, respect for the law, set a good example in obeying the law and the Party's Charter, and do not do things that Party members are not allowed to ensure the severity of law and social discipline.

Notes

(1) To Huy Rua, Hoang Chi Bao, Tran Khac Viet, Le Ngoc Tong (eds.). *The process of renewing theoretical thinking of the Party from 1986 to present* (third edition), National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, 2011, p. 205

(2) Hoang Chi Bao (ed.). *The political system in the rural grassroots of our country today*, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, 2003, p. 158

(3) To Huy Rua, et al.*The process of reforming the Party's theoretical thinking from 1986 to the present*, p. 205

(4) Vu Trong Lam: “Implementing the principle of democratic centralism in the organization and operation of our Party today”, *Communist Review*, No. 957, January 2021, p. 42

(5) On September 16, 2021, the Politburo issued Regulation No. 32-QD/TW, “On the functions, tasks, powers, working regime, working relationship of the Central Steering Committee Government on anti-corruption and anti-corruption” (replacing Regulation No. 211-QD/TW, dated December 25, 2019, of the Politburo, on “functions, tasks, powers and working regimes, working relationship of the Central Steering Committee on anti-corruption”). The renaming and addition of functions, tasks, and powers to the Steering Committee is a new and stronger step in the Party building and rectification, preventing from the root the manifestations of negative behaviors for the prevention of corrupt practices.

(6) Susan Rose-Ackerman. *Corruption and Government: Causes, Conse-quences, and Reform*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 200–201.

This article was published in the *Communist Review* No. 987 (April 2022)

Speech to the 23rd IMCWP, Communist Party (Italy)

Forward by CPA General Secretary, Andrew Irving

Dear AMR readers,

An interesting contribution from the Party of Communists (Italy) that was submitted to 23rd IMCWP (International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties).

The Party of Communists (Italy) makes a well-researched contribution referencing ML classics. The Contribution goes to the heart of issue in contention in the International Communist and Worker's movement.

This very important contribution analyses the incorrect classification of imperialist states by what they call the Imperial Left offering a more well-rounded examination of what is an imperialist state.

Detailing how a dogmatic and unscientific attempt to classify, by a few parties in the IMCWP, to wedge the communist movement as part of a campaign that is causing disruption and division. Directly leading to isolation of the communists from the people and undermining the building of the working-Class movement for change.

This contribution systematically deals with the arguments made by Lenin and Stalin against those that took leftist positions in the earliest 20 century distorting the classifying of parties, countries and governments based on simplistic economic arguments.

It brings into focus the developmental stages of human society and the transitional stages in the development of Socialism.

I recommend that those who are interested in the transformation of society from capitalism to Socialism pay attention to this article which the AMR board has kindly published.

A well-developed thesis on this question and with educational analysis from an historical perspective.

Andrew Irving

General Secretary

Communist Party of Australia

Speech to the 23rd IMCWP, Communist Party (Italy)

Imperialism

It's widely known that NATO's member states – to which we can add Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand – are essentially dominated by US interests. For example, since 1947 Italy has always shown that it cannot take any diverging attitude from US interests, on pain of blackmail, pressure and even physical or political elimination.

This fact does not conceal the responsibilities of the national ruling classes. On the contrary. It relentlessly denounces them. This denunciation constitutes the creation of a political and ideological gap between the prevailing part of the national upper bourgeoisie, totally integrated into imperialist interests, and a large part of the petty and middle bourgeoisie that only gains disadvantage from that position, contrarily to what the case was in past decades and especially before the Ukrainian crisis.

Do we believe that socialism in a western country can be done *against* the vast middle class that is then in the process of losing prestige, political power and economic strength? Whether this situation can be described as "colonial", "semi-colonial", "vassalage"; it can be a matter for doctrinal debate. This propaganda can attract people, classes, groups that have so far looked to the self-styled "sovereignist" right and that can now open their eyes to the deception perpetrated by the representatives they have elected, consisting in a large part of the Italian working class voting and continuing to vote for reactionary right-wing parties, because of their disgust for the imperial left represented by the Democratic Party. This is the contrary of abdicating the project of socialism or of extending, with all the difficulties involved, the awareness of this real need among the broader masses.

What is imperialism and who is anti-imperialist?

Is it a fact that the US has categorised some countries as "rogues"? Is this only because of an inter-imperialist conflict? What are the parameters for classifying China, Russia and Iran as imperialist? Is Venezuela, with all its contradictions, an imperialist country? Do we also want to classify the Democratic People's Republic of Korea or that of Vietnam as imperialists? Where does this category stop?

Is it a fact that Iran is the one country that is the toughest bulwark against Zionism to be evaluated? Is it a fact that the capitalist front has cracked with the furious quarrel between the US and Saudi Arabia to be evaluated? Is it a fact that the US-led front is suffering blows one after the other to be evaluated? Is it necessary to recall Stalin's assessment of the Afghan conflict between the famous Emir and the British working class captive of British imperialism? Did Stalin confuse imperialism and anti-imperialism, too? [1]

In Western Europe we have no Iranian, Chinese or Russian military bases, nor will we ever have them. We have no governments hetero-directed except by the USA. The task of communists in Western Europe is to fight against their *own* imperialism, as Lenin taught us. Opportunism leads to an alliance with *its own* imperialism, as Kautsky did; we have to do just the *opposite*.

Popular feelings against US dominance in our countries are widespread in broad, even contradictory circles. The anti-Chinese and anti-Russian propaganda is overwhelming and it fuels the people's adherence to align themselves with imperialism in their own home country. Countering this propaganda, destroying the construction of the phantom "imperialist" dangers of China and Russia is the main aim of our propaganda.

The propaganda's vision of the pro-imperialist left that jointly denounces both NATO and China and Russia does nothing but fuelling confusion among the popular masses, leading them to a state of resignation ("they are all the same") that eventually leads to apathy and acceptance of the "inevitable" reality ("we're on this side, because on the other side it's the same or maybe even worse!").

The fact that Lenin wrote his immortal *Imperialism* in opposition to Kautsky, who had only identified the political and not the economic aspects (as Lenin explicitly warned us [2]), does not justify doing the exact opposite, i.e. obscuring the political aspects in order to assess only the economic ones.

We are familiar with the points listed by Lenin. There is no need to repeat them like a prayer. Instead, it is necessary to read Lenin in full and not extract two lines from a much more complex text. Read also the prefaces written later that outline Lenin's thinking not only during the war, but also and especially afterwards. The fact that Lenin in his 1920 "Preface" [3] identifies only three "marauders" in the USA, Japan and Great Britain and no longer France, which came out battered from the previous world, not to mention Germany. All of this, it's indicative of Lenin's tactical pliability, combined with theoretical inflexibility.

We don't mean that *all* second- or third-rate countries in the capitalistic world, as a whole, are victims of the former ones (or the former one), that the bourgeois class in the dependent countries do not find their own interests in part and therefore unwillingly submit. But, however, it is true that within all these countries there are classes that, by their position in the relations of production, are on the side of the exploiters but who, due to national and international relations, see their profits diminished or sometimes cancelled out. What kind of relationship is it supposed to be established with these classes?

As Engels says, "According to the materialist view of history, the deter-mining factor in history is, in *the final analysis*, the production and reproduction of actual life. More than that was never maintained either by Marx or myself. Now if someone distorts this by declaring the economic moment to be the only determining factor, he changes that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, ridiculous piece of jargon." [4]

The purpose of Lenin's writing cannot be rigidified within a formula that would be schematic, not to say mechanistic.

Step towards socialism

In a text written in September 1917, i.e. in the era of the bourgeois republic that emerged from the February Revolution, Lenin clearly criticised the timidity on the part of the bourgeois government to take effective measures against the economic crisis that would challenge the interests of the capitalists. But there are some interesting passages. In particular, Lenin admits the possibility of capitalist but not imperialist states. [5]

We can find one of Lenin's statement declaring that "monopoly capitalism" is a complete material preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a step on the stairway of history between which and the step called socialism there are no intermediate steps. In fact he says:

> Now try to *substitute* for the Junker-capitalist state, for the landowner-capitalist state, a *revolutionary-democratic* state, i.e., a state which in a revolutionary way abolishes *all* privileges and does not fear to introduce the fullest democracy in a revolutionary way. You will find that, given a really revolutionary-democratic state, state-monopoly capitalism inevitably and unavoidably implies a step, and more than one step, towards socialism!
>
> For socialism is merely the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly. Or, in other words, socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly *which is made to serve the interests of the whole people* and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly. [6]

The capitalistic monopoly Lenin refers to, it's the state capitalism of the bourgeois republic which, if implemented consistently, is precisely the *first step* which there is only socialism beyond it. So regarding Lenin's opinion indeed there are steps! There are intermediate stages, such as state capitalism, which by the way was what characterised the NEP, precisely defined by Lenin himself as state capitalism, an intermediate stage, obviously of necessity, between capitalism and socialism, where instruments of the previous relations of production are used, but which are no longer dominant due to the substitution of political power which is now in the hands of the proletariat.

Who can deny that there is no “third way” between the dominant capitalist or socialist relations of production? But does the mere presence of antecedent relations, which are still present in society but are no longer dominant for purely political reasons, entitle one to draw definitive and one-sided conclusions?

To come out of generic assumptions, the fact that in the People’s Republic of China, as in all other socialist countries – such as Cuba, PDRK, Vietnam, Laos – capitalist relations of production are present is an established, recognised fact. [7] The question is whether these relations are dominant or not. This question can only be resolved by taking all other aspects into account, as Engels taught us. We are fully aware that it is not enough that a political organisation calling itself the “Communist Party” is at the helm to solve the problem. Instead, it is a matter of taking a critical look at the whole path of development that society has taken. As Stalin taught us, the class struggle is never as acute as after the proletariat seizes political power.

There is no single model of socialism. The socialist paths must materialistically take into account the starting points and the conditions of the route. Even the Soviet Five-Year Plans did not exclude the use of non-socialist instruments such as piecework, contracts with foreign technicians and – although made difficult by sanctions – foreign trade, which could only take place on a mercantilist basis. But in comparing the two situations, can the USSR’s large supply of arable land and inexhaustible mineral resources be equated with China’s shortages in reference to the enormity of its population?

This can only be more so for socialist countries, such as Cuba, which is trying to extricate itself from an infamous imperialist blockade. Do the tools they use make it a capitalist, and therefore imperialist, country as well?

Let’s come to Russia. Russia is a capitalist country without shadow of a doubt. There is, however, a dividing aspect in the position that connects in relation Russia to the rest of the world. The strategic arms sector is in public hands and there are no private profits in that sector, while it is the whole economy that is impoverished by it. Contrary to what happens in the West. This creates a fundamental difference. The US and western countries are led by political-economic oligarchies that have an interest in waging war because of the lavish profits that private arms companies make. Moreover, the dominance imposed on the world based on the supremacy of the dollar, which is under discussion today, means that these oligarchies increasingly see war as the solution.

So we can broadly say that there are countries that have an interest in waging war out of convenience and necessity, countries that have no convenience and would like to trade in peace … if they like it, while continuing to exploit their workers, as usual. The same of course applies to Iran on the one hand and all Western European countries on the other, Germany, France and Italy in the lead.

Africa

In this period, Africa is the protagonist of epochal upheavals. We have witnessed “coups d’état” carried out by militaries who have unseated political oligarchies compromised with the former colonizers. In certain countries the only force that can embody popular national interests is the military. They have the cultural tools that have always been denied to the subordinate classes. Bright examples in the history of Africa are Nasser in Egypt, Gaddafi in Libya, Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso.

Today we are witnessing a not so underground clash between the surrendering French and American imperialism, also in bad shape, but still prevalent compared to the former. It may be in the first instance some African revolt could favour the detriment of the former and latter imperialism. The history of Vietnam reminds us of this.

What should be the attitude of communists?

As Lenin teaches, one must not take sides between two opposing imperial-isms. It doesn't matter in the fight who started first or who is stronger. So the retreat of French imperialism is welcomed. The peoples who free themselves from it, if they had the strength to expel the first imperialism, they will find the strength to expel the second one, as the glorious history of Vietnam once again shows us.

The United States is at the top of the imperialist hierarchy and the other imperialist countries are subordinated and they are today cannibalistically attacked by the former ones (see the war in Europe waged at the expense of the German economy and therefore of the whole of "old" Europe), and these countries take revenge on the imperialist nations even lower down, such as Italy which miserably and illusorily tries to find an ally in the US leader.

Other countries, whether stronger or weaker, however capitalist, if they do not have the expansionist and predatory nature of imperialism, although they also try to pursue their own interests mercantilistically, are not imperialist. Above all, they do not have the propensity to export wars.

The war

Today, imperialist war is a pressing necessity for the United States. His allies or "vassals" are forced to follow them, even against the interests of the vast majority of his people and even large sectors of the ruling classes, due to the political directions is in the hands of the monopolistic oligarchies closely linked to Atlanticism. Among these we can include for example, in addition to our country, South Korea, a country occupied by countless American bases and reduced to a war platform aimed against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China.

The Brics+ countries are not imperialists. It is not Brazil, nor Argentina. But the Saudi and Emirati monarchies have also made a reversal. Saudi Arabia, for example, which "hosts" the important US air base of Prince Sultan – signing the resumption of diplomatic recognition with Iran, agreements on oil production with Russia, accepting the readmission of Syria into the Arab League – is evidence regarding the fact that this country's leadership wants to break away from the US orbit. Considering how the Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, treacherously killed by the Zionist imperialists on 3 January 2020 at Baghdad airport, where he had gone precisely to give impetus to negotiations with Arabia to resolve regional conflicts, had followed this path.

Now it is completely ridiculous to ask the question whether those regimes represent an example of a political system for communists and democrats to take as a model. It is obvious that this could never be the case. But here it is not a question of evaluating this, but the "overall balance" on the world stage that these countries play, whether aimed at stabilizing the world situation or a precipice towards the devastating war that would be fought mainly in Europe, Asia and Africa.

If a generalised war breaks out, or even if this low- or medium-intensity war becomes chronic, is this considerable good or bad? In a militarised and already helmeted society such as ours, will the spaces for political activity of those who oppose it, and specifically the political trade union organisations of the proletariat, be facilitated or severely disadvantaged, if not excluded from being able to operate? Do we think the "so much worse, so much better" mentality will ever work? Lenin boldly said: "Either the revolution will stop the war, or the war will provoke the revolution." Before we experiment with the second possibility, shall we try all avenues to pursue the first?

It is therefore not a question of seeing US-led imperialism as merely "aggression", unrelated to economic aspects. On the contrary! The aggressiveness of the US-led camp, and the non-aggressiveness, but the need to defend itself against all those who have no such interest, ultimately lie in precise economic reasons.

If you don't like the term "anti-imperialist", criticise it, perhaps by proposing a periphrasis such as "countries that don't want or have no interest in waging war and are disengaging from the dominance of US-led imperialist capitalism before the roof collapses over their heads". It would be more accurate but perhaps propagandistically unsuitable.

We can conclude this paragraph by pointing out that it is not true that "all bourgeois classes participate in the sharing of the spoils." There are bourgeois classes that do not participate in the imperialist spoils. And this is the case in the USA, in Europe and in many other countries where there is a bourgeoisie that exploits its proletariat, but which does not participate in the imperialist spoils.

National sovereignty and socialism

How can national sovereignty be set against the struggle for socialism? The second is the essential precondition for initiating the first. We all agree that in Western Europe today there are no objective conditions for the seizure of power by the political organisations of the proletariat. Does the struggle for national sovereignty distance us or bring us closer to creating those preconditions? Posing only the prospect of socialism, without outlining what the concrete steps for that realisation are, makes it an unrealisable goal in the eyes of the broad masses, distances it into a utopian perspective, detaches it from the needs and contradictions actually experienced by most people. The necessity and inevitability of socialism must emerge in the consciousness of the people in the fire of the anti-imperialist struggle. All the communist parties that have won have done so through this path, proving themselves to be the true unbending champions of national sovereignty. [8]

Once again we ask: did Stalin also confuse socialism with national sovereignty?

If we want to replace the term "colonial" with the more precise term "neo-colonial" we can get further in the matter.

Once again, wrong arguments are used by attributing them to the opponent of the controversy and with them an attempt is made to discredit him. The defeat of US-led NATO aggression is the *precondition* for a new season to begin. Certainly not the solution to *all* problems.

China and Russia

Many arguments have been used for classify P. R. of China as imperialistic.

One of these is that it participates to some international organizations, where capitalistic countries are the majority. In fact, it seems to us that the days when there were international fora where China and Russia participated in multilateral meetings with other imperialist countries are long gone. And even if it was the case, does that determine their nature?

Regarding Chinese investments in Africa, we kindly suggest you to read the extensive documentation provided by the Chinese comrades on the subject. The fact that countries receiving these investments enjoy economic development in the form of infrastructure, factories, and increased income is only denied by imperialist propaganda that sees the ground taken from under their feet.

Referring to what Marx says [9] about the conflicts between English and Irish workers, there is no doubt that, if we multiply that proportion by a thousand and project it on a global scale to the present day, Marx's England is today represented by the entire imperialist world that rests much of its profits on the robbery of today's Ireland, i.e. the entire world suffering under their political, financial, economic and military yoke.

We can therefore paraphrase Marx by saying: The ousting of the imperialist financial and economic aristocracy in Africa's conditions (and beyond), in turn, has as a necessary consequence its downfall in the West. This would fulfil the precondition for the proletarian revolution in the West.

Hence the incredibly valuable role that Chinese policy is playing in that chess-board it's not only for China or Africa, but also for Europe and North America.

The crusade launched by self-pro-claimed “democracies” against supposed “autocracies” is a source of grave dangers to stability and progress. The most ridiculous arguments of Western propaganda, claim for instance the military bases of other country. But can one really compare the immense deployment of US bases around the world to any other country?

Capitalist systems barricade themselves behind the most archaic and deleterious protectionism. Those who for centuries starved and exploited the peoples of the world with colonialism and neo-colonialism today are the same who take about a “debt trap” and “resource exploitation” by China. They are terrified by the fact that nations are leaving their orbit and dollar’s monetary dictatorship. They are terrified by the economic development of Africa, Asia, Latin America, which is also setting the stage for the creation of a modern working class in those countries, no longer just colonies to be milked.

Without a modern African working class, which only the system based on the production and exchange of commodities can create given the current conditions, the army of millions of proletarians that will concretely put an end to capitalism on that continent will not be created, according to paths that continent will not be created, according to paths that only history will take charge of writing. The concrete alternative is only the continuation of the under-development, exploitation and corruption that first the colonial system and then the neo-colonial system of the western powers inflicted for centuries.

We beg to take a good look at what efforts the Chinese government has made to prevent in some cases ill-planned investments from plunging the receiving countries into crisis, at the billions of dollars the PRC has remitted to defaulting debtors, and compare it to the loan-shark policies the IMF and World Bank have always pursued. And please stop basing their arguments on the reports of competitors.

The story of China’s holding US public debt also needs to be carefully examined. Some accuse China of financing US imperialism in this way, as if it had no possibility of supplying itself elsewhere. In reality, this linkage has ensured that the PRC, by tying itself to US debt, has not been subjected to financial wars. In reality, it is precisely the opposite phenomenon, that of indebtedness to Western institutions, that makes a country’s economy dependent. The Chinese have helped to dope the US economy, which has accumulated over 12 million million in balance of payments deficits in 40 years (1980 to 2020). This has allowed them to live on top of what they produced, buying goods and services for nothing, but to squeeze that countries that want to get out of this dependency are now putting on this trend is expected to bring the US economy to its knees. The most up-to-date figures say that China is rapidly divesting itself of holding this currency and now Japan is the leading holder.

Another misplaced remark concerns the trade that Russia and China continue to hold with Western countries, notably the US. Is it in the interest of these countries to interrupt these flows or is it instead the Western economies that have pursued the insane policy of sanctions? It is the European countries that are forced to cut their trade with China because of US pressure. So what is being demanded? That China, Russia, Iran, Venezuela should sanction themselves?

The Ukrainian crisis

Saying that the Ukrainian crisis is due to the Russian expansionism for “dividing the spoils of natural resources, energy deposits and freight transport routes” is ridiculous. Although the Donbass region has large mineral wealth, it constitutes an insignificant share for Russia and certainly do not justify such a costly and risky “investment” as the current conflict. Instead, this could be one of the causes, albeit minor, of the interest of NATO’s neighbouring countries, which by now no longer hide their territorial longings against Ukraine.

The position of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) ex-presses the reasons of those who experienced that crisis from the inside and therefore seem to us to be

the best accredited to give an assessment of it.

This is not a question of espousing Putin's arguments in all respects. But the CPRF has made it clear that Russian intervention has been demanded by that party since 2014. The fact that this intervention eventually came, against the interests of the Russian oligarchs, who would certainly have preferred to continue to do business undisturbed with the West, demanded by the citizens of the Donbass who have been fighting since 2014 against Nazi savagery on their territory, supported by the overwhelming majority of the Russian people, who realise that this is not just the war for the Donbass, but to prevent Russia from being fragmented by finding itself in what was done to Yugoslavia.

Final remarks

We submit this document for the attention of the international communist movement.

We want to avoid to throw the controversy into brawls.

We wish to maintain in the channels of frank but fair debate.

Notes

1) "The struggle that the Emir of Afghanistan is waging for the independence of Afghanistan is objectively a *revolutionary* struggle, despite the monarchist views of the Emir and his associates, for it weakens, disintegrates and undermines imperialism … There is no need to mention the national movement in other, larger, colonial and dependent countries, such as India and China, every step of which along the road to liberation, even if it runs counter to the demands of formal democracy, is a steam-hammer blow at imperialism, i.e., is undoubtedly a *revolutionary* step." Stalin, 1924. *The Foundations of Leninism*, In *Stalin: Collected Works*, vol. 6. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1953, pp. 148–149.

2) "Imperialism is a striving for annexations – this is what the *political* part of Kautsky's definition amounts to. It is correct, but very incomplete, for politically, imperialism is, in general, a striving towards violence and reaction. For the moment, however, we are interested in the *economic* aspect of the question, which Kautsky *himself* introduced into *his* definition. The inaccuracies in Kautsky's definition are glaring. The characteristic feature of imperialism is *not* industrial *but* finance capital.*" Lenin, 1916. Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism,* In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 22. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964, pp. 268–269.

3) "Capitalism has grown into a world system of colonial oppression and of the financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the population of the world by a handful of 'advanced' countries. And this 'booty' is shared between two or three powerful world plunderers armed to the teeth (America, Great Britain, Japan), who are drawing the whole world into *their* war over the division of *their* booty." Lenin, 1916. "Preface to the French and German Editions." *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism,* In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 22. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964, p. 191.

4) "According to the materialist view of history, the determining factor in history is, in *the final analysis*, the production and reproduction of actual life. More than that was never maintained either by Marx or myself. Now if someone distorts this by declaring the economic moment to be the only determining factor, he changes that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, ridiculous piece of jargon. The economic situation is the basis, but the various factors of the superstructure – political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, namely constitutions set up by the ruling class after a victorious battle, etc., forms of law and, the reflections of all these real struggles in the minds of the participants, i. e. political, philosophical and legal theories, religious views and the expansion of the same into dogmatic systems – all these factors also have a bearing on the course of the historical struggles of which, in many cases, they largely

determine the *form*. It is in the interaction of all these factors and amidst an unending multitude of fortuities (i. e. of things and events whose intrinsic interconnections are so remote or so incapable of proof that we can regard them as non-existent and ignore them) that the economic trend ultimately asserts itself as something inevitable. Otherwise the application of the theory to any particular period of history would, after all, be easier than solving a simple equation of the first degree." Engels, 1890. "Engels to Joseph Bloch in Königsberg, London, 21-22 September, 1890." In *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 49. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 2001, pp. 34–35.

5) "The following objection might be raised: why do such advanced states as Germany and the U.S.A. 'regulate economic life' so magnificently without even thinking of nationalising the banks? Because, we reply, *both* these states are not merely capitalist, but also imperialist states, although one of them is a monarchy and the other a republic. As such, they carry out the reforms they need by reactionary-bureaucratic methods, whereas we are speaking here of revolutionary-democratic methods. This 'little difference' is of major importance." Lenin, 1917. "The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It." In *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 25, 323–369. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964, pp. 336–337.

6) Lenin, "The Impending Catastrophe," pp. 361–362.

7) Editors: This statement is factually incorrect.

8) "Earlier, the bourgeoisie presented themselves as liberal, they were for bourgeois democratic freedom and in that way gained popularity with the people. Now there is not one remaining trace of liberalism. There is no such thing as "freedom of personality" any more, – personal rights are now only acknowledged by them, the owners of capital, – all the other citizens are regarded as raw materials, that are only for exploitation. The principle of equal rights for people and nations is trodden in the dust and it is replaced by the principle of full rights for the exploiting minority and the lack of rights of the exploited majority of the citizens. The banner of bourgeois democratic freedom has been flung overboard. I think that you, the representatives of communist and democratic parties must pick up this banner and carry it forward if you want to gain the majority of the people. There is nobody else to raise it." Stalin, 1952. "Speech of the 19th Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 14 October, 1952." In *Stalin Selected Works*, vol. 16. London: Red Star Press, 1986, p. 319.

9) "Ireland is the BULWARK of the *English landed aristocracy*. The exploitation of this country is not simply one of the main sources of their material wealth; it is their greatest *moral* power. They represent, IN FACT, the *domination of England over Ireland*. Ireland is, thus, the *grand moyen* by which the English aristocracy *maintains its domination* in England itself. On the other hand: if the English army and police were withdrawn from Ireland tomorrow, you would immediately have AN AGRARIAN REVOLUTION IN IRELAND. But the overthrow of the English aristocracy in Ireland would entail, and would lead immediately to, its overthrow in England. This would bring about the prerequisites for the proletarian revolution in England." Marx, 1870. "Marx to Sigfried Meyer and August Vogt, 9 April, 1870." In *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. 43. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988, pp. 473–474.

AMR Interview with Comrade Sally Mitchel

May 2023

Part 1: Eureka Youth League/YSL/Soviet Union

AMR: CG

SM: Sally Mitchel

AMR: Hello, today we are recording on the 14th of May 2023 just after a very successful party school in Adelaide. I have here with me Comrade Sally Mitchel who is a member of the Central Committee and a long time member here who will speak to us about party history. We are so glad to have you here Sally.

SM: Thank you.

AMR: So Sally, we are wanting to start with how long have you been a member of the communist party, or rather (laughs) based upon the discussion we have had, how long you have been associated with the with the party?

SM: I have been associated with the party arguably all of my life, in that I grew up in a family of communists, and equally had grandparents who were communists. So, it is like growing up with a religion, we grew up with the party. In terms of actually joining, I have joined the party a couple of times though most recently about 6 to 7 years ago, I think it was the case that when I was looking after mum I rejoined the party, but didn't become more active until you know post Briton leaving the party.

AMR: That's great, what were your parents' names and involvement in the party?

SM: Jim Mitchel was my dad, dad passed away in his 90th year in approximately 2002. Dad was born in Liverpool in 1911 or something around that. He joined the party when he was 16, after coming to Australia he was living in Hamilton and joined the Communist Party of Australia at that age. Mum joined the party a bit later, but before she was married to Dad. I think dad might have recruited her mum and dad as well. Her brother was a member of the party. Mum and her brother, they was ostracised from their own family as a result of all that, as was her mother. They kicked them out and didn't do anything to assist them again because they were comms.

AMR: Did you ever hear many stories from your parents about what was going on with the party or did you hear more details later on?

SM: Well, yeah the party and its history. Well the split in 1969 I am aware of that as mum was due to go on an overseas delegation right at that moment, and the delegation was postponed because of it, and so it was delayed. I was aware that there was a political problem going down, but I was only around 9 at that time so I wasn't afae with all of the details that was going on that, other then all the people that we knew were soon thereafter meeting in our lounge room.

AMR: Oh wow, do you remember much about these meetings in your lounge room, and did you witness or see them?

SM: The lounge room would be full, it was like a suburban lounge where lots of the branches would meet, not necessarily in rooms but in people's houses. If you look at the ASIO files of the parents you will find that all the number plates were listed outside those meetings, someone outside was taking down the number plates of attendees. That's in their ASIO files, cross referenced to the appropriate file. They would have discussions, our job as kids was to go around and take the tea and coffee orders and make up the biscuits and deliver supper to the group. We were sort of not participating in the meeting by any means, but were supporting the meeting in that way.

AMR: That's really wonderful, and I guess an effective use of the kids by the parents (laughter).

SM: That extended back even to for example my dad was elected as a local councillor to the Woodville council here, but way way back when I was much younger then that, and as kids we were regularly at polling booths handing out leaflets, if we ran out of the how to vote cards the kids would be sent inside to get them out of the bins and things like that. You know, polling days were always a centre of activity; at one of our houses where everyone would come and get their instructions on how to and where to go. And as kids we were leafleting, we knew how to fold leaflets by the time we were knee height of a grasshopper, we could do it really quickly, letter-boxing all that was just part and parcel of what we did.

AMR: That's really interesting, were you a member of the party's youth league?

SM: Yeah, yep. We all were. The EYL, the Eureka Youth League at the time. My mum was a member of the Eureka Youth League in her time, and um it was great to be able to, I couldn't wait to join. You know, because my older sisters and my brother were all in the Eureka Youth League. I was a bit too young but they were doing all these exciting things and going away to annual camps and having a great time with people and I really wanted to be part of that. So the moment you could, you were there.

AMR: What sort of activities did you do as a member of the Eureka Youth League?

SM: We would meet regularly, when I first joined that and was involved in that we had rooms Hindley street, one of the main streets in Adelaide, one of the busiest streets regarded as a ratbag street. It was where the party had a bookshop as well. And so we would meet upstairs there and hang out and do all that stuff and but we would have schools, we would have camps, we would have discussions we would have social activities, we would have car rallies, we had a basketball team, we had all sorts of activities going on within the league,.. you know, and an annual camp that goes down in history that many people can tell you about.

AMR: Say think of your favourite camp that you went on, what were the activities that you did at that camp along with everyone else?

SM: They used to have a camp based out at second valley, which is down the coast from Adelaide about an hour's drive at the most and it was in a caravan park. At the bottom of that caravan park there was a shed, inside that shed was all of our stuff. It was our (Eureka Youth League) shed! I don't know how that happened and I don't know the history of that, but every year we would go down and we would have big marquees, and we would have to set them up and dig the channels because it would always rain!

AMR: (laughter)

SM: You know! and you would get water right through the tents and the sleeping bags and everything! There was a girls tent and a boy's tent and they shall not mix, and we would have a mess tend for eating, and we would do a camp concert to which the whole of the caravan park would be invited to. And there was people from around the country that you would want on your team as they were bloody good at it, and you could win the competition with it. (laughter). Bruce Hune from Victoria comes to mind with that. And that was it, we would come together with people from interstate regularly every year, and so we had that closeness and that camaraderie across the organisation across the country.

AMR: That's really excellent, and I have heard from comrades that their time in the Eureka Youth League made them want to join the party, did it play that part for you? SM: Very much so! At that time it was the stepping stone and the party's membership was benefited by those coming out of the league, it was all age based you know, so once you got too old for the league then you joined the party and participated within that.

AMR: How old were people when they aged out of the Eureka Youth League? SM: I can't remember that exactly. I think it was on that brochure we were just looking at with Lou Chin's signatory on it. I think the age range

was 16 to….. It must have been twenties, couldn't be any older than that surely.

AMR: I have scanned them so just bear with me for a moment.

SM: Just hold on we will get a date on that. And they went on post that, the venue changed, I think that the caravan park changed, and so we ended up having camps in later years in two different other spots. [Macoldsviles] up in the hills was the location for some time, it was just like a scout camp we used to hire each year, and then another place down [Oldinga].

AMR: So the brochure for the YSL (Young Socialist League – youth league of the Socialist Party of Australia) that we were looking at for the Christmas camp in 1972 had an age range of 16 to 32 years.

SM: There we go, we count the youth young.

AMR: (Laughter)

SM: You don't get out of the youth! One of the great things about the camps was that it wasn't just party members, in particular with the youth camps was that we would look at and get sponsorship from unions to be able to invite along kids that were maybe outside the party but close to the party and give them a chance for a holiday, kids that wouldn't have had any chance for a holiday. This was our annual holidays as kids, you know others would go away to the snow and this and that, we went down to the youth camps and did politics.

AMR: That's wonderful. How old were you when you joined the party for the first time coming out of it.

SM: I must have been in my twenties. It must have been around that time, its going back some years now it would have been forty odd years ago.

AMR: When you joined the party, what branch of the party did you join?

SM: Port Adelaide! Born and bred down this way, it is the only branch I have ever been associated with.

AMR: So tell me about the Port Adelaide branch when you joined it, what was it's area of work, what was it's activity and what did it's members do?

SM: You are racking my brains here! Predominantly I saw that, if I just backtrack here and say that Dad was a major influence in what I did, Mum and Dad. Dad joined the wharf on instruction from the party. If he hadn't of done that he may have became a teacher or something like that. He, like many went where the party needed them to go to organise. So he and the wharfies and the waterside workers union, and the activities around that were very much part of what we did and was interconnected into party work. So at times it really is hard for me to distinguish the two because what we did with union work and later on for me in union work tries to reflect in my mind a party position in that. Later in my life when I was a metal worker I was more aware and participated in the role of the CPA within that union.

AMR: So the port Adelaide branch, it is a locality branch but with a very close association with the port?

SM: Yeah! And at that time when it was first established whether it be in the CPA or whether it be in the SPA it was associated with an area that was fairly high in employment, had a lot of members working in the workforce and they were there doing their job in organising on the job. There had been a lot of years behind them in what they were doing by that point.

AMR: So, while we have been down here we have had a really wonderful discussion where we heard about how you as a teenager went to live in the Soviet Union, in Moscow for a number of years. Could you tell us about that experience and how it came about?

SM: And it was, it was an experience! When I was 15 so in 1975 Dad had retired from the wharf, he took a package off the wharf at 60, there was an opportunity so he did, and he was asked by the party, he had an opportunity, he was asked to be the party's journalist in Moscow for the paper. This is through SPA at

that point. I don't know if there were any journos prior to him, it was a great opportunity and he said that he would do it as long as he could take his kids who were still in school, which is myself and my younger sister, and my mum with him. I was 15, May was 13 and we up and went to Moscow. She and I, mum stayed there for 18 months with Dad, he came home a little bit later then that.

So I ended up in Moscow at 15 years of age and that was an incredible experience to be proud of. So it was during the Brezhnev era, it was as much as I knew and had been around things Russian and Soviet for so many years and we had visited every Russian ship and seen every Russian theatre and performance group that had ever stepped foot in the country, to then be in the country was a whole different ball game.

AMR: What was it like to first go to the Soviet Union and how did you feel?

SM: We knew the basics: 'Hello', 'Goodbye', that was it! We did not speak Russian; they did not speak English. We arrived and got taken to a small apartment, it was in May so it was in that cold time, snow was on the ground, it was grey there was no colour anywhere, and for some reason they had given us a housekeeper for a few days while we settled in. She was trying to give me Russian food and I was going "I'm not eating that" being a precocious teenager. And so we landed and it was a real culture shock basically. Within a month my sister and I were shipped off to a youth camp! In the middle of the forest outside of Moscow. [Zhavinygarodka] camp where nobody spoke English.

AMR: (Laughs) That really would have been quite the experience! What was it like to go to the camp and what did you experience there?

SM: Thank god we had each other I think! Seriously, I don't know how you travel if you don't have hands! How do you point at things and try and explain things, like eating, you use your hands to describe these things. I often wonder how do you travel if you don't have that ability and you cant speak a language? Really interesting, one of the things that I learned from that experience is that our Australian accent is broad and difficult for anyone else to understand. We had an interpreter with dad. At the camp with these kids we formed friendships, we did everything that everyone else did; we didn't always understand… We tried, we didn't know we could take lollies or buy lollies so we tried to get someone to buy some lollies, we used a Russian-English dictionary to try and spell out 'please buy us some lollies', we used all the basic words for it that meant nothing when you put it together! We used the flow of words as how we would say them, that is not how they would say them. They really didn't know what we were doing. Fortunately, one of the nurses worked it out and said 'do you want some lollies', and right we got some! (laughs). We did everything they did, it was an absolute experience, one that we did enjoy very much.

AMR: What was some of the activity that you participated at that camp outside of Moscow?

SM: We went bike riding, we went swimming, we did running, and athletics, this is stuff we never did at school here. We went to a farm and did a day's work; you know doing that rural work. It was just activities constantly; you were not allowed to sit around and do nothing (laughs), you were kept busy! A lot of it was physical activity you were outside, and a beautiful, beautiful environment.

AMR: Did you go to school in the Soviet Union?

SM: Ah now that started in September, we arrived in May, so you imagine somewhere around June we get put into a camp where nobody speaks our language, and then we go to a school, called a 'special English school' not far from us, we could walk to it. We had the uniform, the uniform was a brown dress, you could get different designs of that dress, but brown! Every school had the same colour and you would have a black apron for everyday and a white apron for special occasions. They could be a frilly or as plain as you could wish to choose from the shop. I went to the school, the 'special English school', which meant that they taught English to kids at grade 2 level. That was why it was called that. Not because everyone spoke English, not because the teachers spoke English, only one did and that was the English teacher. So we didn't know Russian still, and we couldn't study the subjects, we couldn't read the textbooks or anything like that, so we looked like every other kid, I would sit at the back of the class, I am not sure what May did, but I would sit at the back of the class with a book where I read every book I could lay my hands on, I read Angela Davis, but teachers would initially go 'Why are you not paying attention'? I didn't know that they were even saying that to me (laughs). So you are going to school for a year, going because you need to, the only subject we could participate in is English, but then we would get asked a grammatical question and to give an example, and we would not know the answer. Only because we didn't know that degree of grammar, we hadn't studied it in the same way. They probably got better marks then I did! And then secondly the sport activities, and that was a new experience. Here, when I was at school here I did basketball and hockey, and those things that we do here in Australia. Netball! They don't play netball over there. They do indoor gymnastics. You see them all at the Olympics. They have uneven bars; they have that little narrow bar that you flip on and all that. We were expected to do that because they had been doing that for all of their school life. And we have just come into it! I did the parallel bars, I don't know how well I did it, I didn't fall off and I didn't break any bones, but um it was a whole new, a steep learning curve. The only bit I didn't enjoy was cross country skiing. Hard work!

AMR: Oh yeah? (laughter)

SM: Oh yeah, its like walking on slippery stuff.

AMR: While you were in the Soviet Union what other impressions did you get of the country did you get during the Brezhnev era?

SM: Listen, it was an exciting time! We used to get sent packages of newspaper cuttings from here so it kept us a little bit in touch. Something I remember is that most letters that we received had been read. We knew that as we all used to mark envelopes to know if they had been opened or not. I think a couple of times we got letters and things had been crossed out. We believe it was at the Australian end of things, not the other end. At the other end we were friends; there was no reason to be concerned. This end of things was where they were wondering what the hell we were up to. We grew up knowing that our phone calls were being listened to, our mail would be read, and that everything that we did was under surveillance. You know.

AMR: Would you receive letters at home in Australia where it was obvious they had been opened and read?

SM: No, not obviously this end, that end they were just not very good at hiding it. So you if you were aware of that, I must admit that I think maybe I'm a bit blasé with some of our younger comrades about this issue because I have grown up just knowing that the government will spy on you, the government are arseholes, they do invade your privacy, they do things that they don't tell the rest of the world that they are doing, they do listen in on your phone calls. I now recall clearly, I was back home here, Dad had gone back and we were not sure when he was coming home. It was around that time that I was expecting to get a call from him to let me know. I got a

phone call from somebody else. ‘I hear that your dad is coming home on such and such a date’. There was no reason for that person to know that sort of information. Absolutely none whatsoever. It was so far out of the realm, I knew that they were family friends that sort of thing, but for them to have that sort of information, there was no way he got it through anywhere else other than ASIO. You know. We always knew that they were doing it. Dad used to say when we were kids ‘no staying on the phone any longer than 2 minutes’, 5 minutes whatever. You would here clicks in the line and things like that.

AMR: That is fascinating. Just to return to back to the Soviet Union, what were you able to do while you were not at school, with your family in Moscow and elsewhere?

SM: It was a great period of time, we went everywhere and we did everything. Never had any sense of not being able to do something. Somebody tried to suggest that everything we did was organised or controlled! I said ‘should that have been the case then by Christ they are good’! (Laughter). We literally lived day to day, we got up in the morning and went and did something. How anybody would be able to plan, to organise that you were only able to see what you were meant to see I think was a bit far-fetched. We lived day to day, we went shopping, we went for medical treatment, we went and did all of those normal things, we got on the train in the metro, a great form of transport the metro. We went to ballet, we went to markets, we did everything you did, we visited with people, we went to the movies. Occasionally there would be a movie in English so you went there so you could hear a movie in English. They would be reading the subtitles for a change (laughter). But yeah, lots of theatre and that kind of entertainment.

AMR: While you lived in the Soviet Union you lived in Moscow, did you get to travel to anywhere else or did you mostly stay in Moscow?

SM: We would frequently go to the outskirts of Moscow, to the river and go picnicking and we would often take other Australians who may have been there on delegations out that way, get a little boat row around. There’s a photo of my sister rowing, I must have organised that well. We also, May and I also had the opportunity to travel through to East Germany. We were put on a train in Moscow and went over to East Berlin and stayed with a comrade, Fred Rose. Fred had been an archaeologist here in Australia who had been blacklisted as a result of the Petrov commission and could no longer work here and ended up working in and living in East Germany for the remainder of his life. Great people, Fred and [Nita] Rose and their kids. They were all grown up by then. We stayed with Fred and Nita and they took us everywhere and it was just a wonderful, wonderful visit.

AMR: What were the differences between East Germany and the Soviet Union?

SM: East Germany seemed to be a little bit more western. It had a little bit more availability of things then maybe they did in Moscow, but I think that’s just the reality of the west being straight across the road so to speak. It felt like it was more modern, It was a little bit closer to what you would expect in the west compared to what Russia was. So the supermarkets in Germany were more like our supermarkets then what they were in Moscow. In Moscow you went to the shop, and it might be the general grocery store, so say we were going to buy cold butter, sausages, and stuff like that. You would go in and you would spot it in the cabinet, you would work out the price, you would go over to the cashier separate, would tell them how much it was that you were getting, they would get out an abacus, I got very good at them no calculators, and pay, get your receipt, go back and collect your goods so only one person ever handled money. That was a whole different style of thing, but you got used to it, and yes you stood on a queue sometimes, but those places worked through them pretty well. You would walk down the street and there would be a truck that would have just unloaded a whole pile of watermelons, and you would just stop and line up and buy them. Or you would walk past a shop and every so often you would struggle to find a few items like washing powder or toilet

paper, they would often be available somewhere, but you saw it you stopped and joined that line and waited. If you saw a line you would stop and ask ‘what are you waiting for’ in case it was something I needed, and you would buy 10 rolls of toilet paper or something and they would tie it all together with string. I learned how to carry a dozen eggs wrapped up in paper, into a cone that they were put in. I learned how to tie things up with strings and paper and carry them long distances, onto public transport and off public transport. Lots of boxes of something all tied together with string.

AMR: That’s very interesting but also very different.

SM: (laughter)

AMR: What were some things that through the process of being able to live in a socialist country like the Soviet Union for a long time, and visiting East Germany that you learned about socialism through living there and being able to observe it?

SM: When we lived there in 1975 I never saw any homelessness and things like that. Listen you saw lots of people [full of the boot], alcohol problems and those sorts of issues. You saw people who were not wealthy in the terms of how we would understand wealth. You never had a sense of people being hungry or things like that. With the population numbers I thought it was remarkable in that regard. Did they have everything that people may have wanted in terms of a western style of economy? Not as much as people may have wanted but it was also a whole range of factors impacting in on that. It wasn’t just one side of the west making it about making sure they were going to make life hard for people. It struck me that we were able to ascertain and obtain and get, find, buy or locate whatever it was that we required really. Just the luxury goods stuff. On the day to day basis, the bread shops were fantastic, wonderful bread.

AMR: There was also the artistic and cultural life as well, earlier you mentioned the theatre and going there quite regularly.

SM: Yeah, working class people, I can’t believe how much we were exposed to art in our lives, both here in Australia initially through the union, the big centre of the union was the hall, and the kids we did ballet there as well. An admin support worker in the office taught us ballet. We put on concerts. There was this view that culture was a really big part of life and should be accessible to workers. When we were in Moscow of course, we went to the best of theatres at the Bolshoi and the palace of congresses, saw the best dancers in the world. That was just wonderful. I have been and seen Red Army Choir more than once. (Laughter). And folk dances. I always remember that the circus was one of the best in the world I have ever seen. I have seen them here, seeing them again in their home turf where they have got their permanent building is a different thing again. Oh, the puppet theatre! The puppet theatre was amazing! This special puppet theatre where you go in for a performance and your in there in the dark and watching these puppets, and the perception that you have that they are life sized the way it is done. I don’t know if it is the way the theatre works or something. I still cant work out how it worked but you are sitting there in this performance and by the end of it you are convinced they are life sized puppets and then they turn on the life sized puppets and bring out the marionette puppets and they are just dolls, and you go wow. That was an incredible theatre and great skill those people had.

AMR: So, after having had this incredible experience living in the Soviet Union for 15 months, what was it like to come back to Australia after that?

SM: We came back because May and I needed something to be done about our education really that was fundamentally it. We returned to Australia with mum and returned to school. I went back to school. I had left around year 9, second year high school, and I went back into class two years later with people who I had been in class within previous years. It was different because I was older. By that stage I was 17. School had changed. I could do technical studies, I couldn’t do that when I

was there previously. Things had started to change with education here. Two things I know when we came back. Firstly we spoke very, very clearly. Our accent had declined at that point in time, its probably come back now. So that was the experience with talking to people whose English was not their first language, you learned to enunciate your words much clearer. Secondly we had come back when we were older, we knew we needed to go back to school and be educated so there was a different approach to it. I only lasted three quarters of the year mind you, because circumstances had it I ended up getting an apprentice-ship and left school.

End Part 1

Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom: My Experience of China Today

Roland Boer

The first version of this article was written after the first three months of being back in China after too long away. The version written then contained many immediate impressions and experiences, which I interpreted on the basis of extensive earlier research. There is an immediacy about such reflections, especially when you notice all that is new and different. Soon enough, however, what seemed new becomes part of the normal fabric of life and is no longer so remarkable. The earlier should have been published soon after it was written, but more than half a year has passed. Now it is time for revisions, and what I seek to is keep the immediacy of the writing then. There will, of course, be some clarifications and explanation, but the sections on socialist rule of law, the greening of China, optimism, and letting a hundred flowers bloom remain largely as they were written. The most substantial addition is a final section on the noticeable effects of the CPC's rectification and reform of the last decade, or "self-reform" as it is known by short-hand.

The basic method used in this material is what is known in China as "what is seen and heard." What you see with your eyes and hear with your ears is the only way to verify what is going on. Hearsay and rumour – the preferred "method" used by Western media – is certainly not the way to understand anything. All that does is lead to a very distorted picture of the world. In the last eight months, I have also been on a research field trip to Xizang (also known as Tibet), have travelled by train to Guangzhou in the south (by a glorious old-style sleeper), Suzhou, and the old Song Dynasty capital of Kaifeng. Above all, I have kept my eyes and ears open, talked with so many people, and discussed the situation in China today. What follows comes from these experiences.

Socialist Rule of Law

Let us begin with the comprehensive consolidation of the socialist rule of law. Some may find this a somewhat strange development to notice, but I begin with rule of law since it is vitally important for socialist construction. Among the many aspects of rule of law that I have noticed, let me give four examples.

To begin with, in the early days of my return some people complained of what they saw as increasing "bureaucracy." It may be a new Party secretary for an educational institution, who observes that the old "work style" is no longer adequate and must be changed. It may be all the new forms one has to complete, whether for work approval, organising a conference, rescheduling a class, and so on. It may be new requirements for outsiders to be admitted to a university campus. The list could go on. As time moved on, I began to realise that people had become used to the old way of completing tasks. Now, they actually needed to learn how to follow correct procedures and processes. Overall, it seems to me that the procedures are more efficient and rational, although on occasion a further improvement could be made. Lest we think of "bureaucracy" as a negative term, we need to remember Max Weber's point that socialism would require a qualitatively more efficient and rational bureaucracy than what may be experienced in a capitalist system. [1] The reader may think: did not Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and others rail against "bureaucratism"? Yes, they did, but "bureaucratism" is a different beast. This is an inefficient, over-burdened approach that clogs up processes rather than making them happen. By contrast, a properly functioning "bureaucracy" is rational and efficient.

Further, the former "grey area" between the law and observance has gone. One of the effects of the "wild 90s" was this large "grey area." Moving in this "grey area" became a necessary skill for living, but it also bred significant social mistrust. Fast-forward to the present. Counterfeit products: gone. Fake student IDs for cheaper tickets on trains and so on: gone. Scams on Wanfujing St in Beijing:

gone. Extravagant meals to impress guests for favours in return: gone. Malpractice by large enterprises: gone (due to comprehensive processes of rectification and reform). Again, the list could go on and on and on. The “grey area” has become very small indeed, if not completely gone.

Further, I have noticed a significant return of social trust. The value of social trust comes out of China millennia-long cultural tradition, in the sense that you can trust the person with whom you are dealing. Of course, China’s history has had periods when there was a distinct lack of social trust, most recently the “wild 90s” and its aftermath in the first decade of the new century. For most people, this loss of social trust was an affront to deep cultural values, so they have welcomed in so many ways the return of this value into daily life. Whether I visit the campus hospital, local dentist, hearing-aid specialist, or optometrist, they have the very refreshing – especially for one too used to Western contexts – approach of knowing what they are talking about, of a comprehensive gathering of scientific information so as to make the correct recommendation, and a concern that I am happy with what they have recommended.

Finally, I have noticed that everyone is subject to the rule of law, from common people going about their daily lives to the highest levels of leadership in the country. When you have ensured and strengthened the leadership of the Communist Party through rule of law, then it becomes possible for all to be subject to the rule of law.

We have come to the point where some background and theoretical explanation is needed. As for background: although the step-by-step development of rule of law dates back at least to the late 1970s, and arguably further back to the very first days of the New China from 1949, the most significant developments have taken place since the CPC’s Eighteenth Congress in 2012 – now known as the beginning of the New Era. [2]

As for theory: we are speaking of a socialist rule of law, which is qualitatively different from a capitalist rule of law and its supposed “separation of powers.” How is a socialist rule of law defined? It ensures both the “people-centred” reality in China today, the reality that the “people are masters of the country,” and strengthens the leadership of the Communist Party. For readers accustomed to think in terms of either-or – as in “either the people are the centre or the Communist Party leads” – you will need to put aside such thinking and try to understand this vital point. In other words, the reader will need to exercise some dialectical thinking: a socialist rule of law ensures and strengthens the leadership of the Communist Party precisely through ensuring that the people are masters of the country. But how does this dialectical relation work? The rule of law comprises a core feature of the mechanisms – the technical term is “statutory processes” – through which the will of the people is connected with the will of the Communist Party. Other aspects of these statutory processes include the constitution and China’s robust socialist democratic system, but I have noticed most at a day-to-day level how much the rule of law and the associated legal system have been enhanced and strengthened.

A final note: since we have not seen until today the reality of a socialist rule of law, it could not be instituted immediately. Such a rule of law must be developed, through pilot projects, through trial and error, through crossing the stream by feeling one stone at a time. It also requires learning best practice from every other country in the world, discarding what is unsuitable and adapting the best in light of China’s concrete conditions.

The Greening of China

The second feature that has struck me is the greening of China. Upon returning to Beijing earlier this year, I immediately encountered greenery at every turn and in every corner. To set the context: some years ago, I decided to get to know Beijing somewhat better. So I set out on ever longer hikes covering the length and breadth of the city. It was not uncommon for me to walk 15-20 kilometres or more on each hike.

Back then, I could see clearly the greening process already underway. Yet, that experience was nothing compared to what I encountered this year. Green belts running through the city, clean waterways, and trees, trees, trees. Every resident is now able to gain access to green space within a short distance from their residence. Simply put, Beijing has become a garden city. I have since found out that a rather innovative approach to cities has been developed in China: their drainage, waterways, and green spaces have been redesigned to capture all of the precipitation that falls. This "water sink" approach has many purposes. For cities along major rivers, it means the cities can more water into their systems so as to assist with flood mitigation. For dry cities like Beijing, it means seeking to fill the water table under the city to capacity, so as to assist the flourishing greenery even more.

Even more, Beijing's sky is blue almost every day, except when it is raining. True, a very occasional smoggy day might still happen, but these are few and far between and nothing like what is was before. When I first visited Beijing in 2009 people used to joke that they may have seen the sun during a brief period in the previous year (the 2008 Olympics), but by 2009 the situation was back to "normal": you could not see a clear sky or the sun. Weather reports included statistics on the level of air pollution: light, moderate, heavy, hazardous or very hazardous. All manner of air purifiers were common in homes, dust masks were common on the streets, and I had to exercise by running up stairs wearing a dust mask. The rare clear day was due to the wind. Today, not an air-cleaner or dust mask is to be found. To repeat, the norm in Beijing is a blue sky, except when it is raining.

The reader may wonder whether these environmental projects are to be found only in Beijing? I have travelled through the countryside and cities by train to see some friends in Guangzhou, Suzhou, and the ancient Song Dynasty capital of Kaifeng. When I asked people concerning such matters, they confirmed that there had been significant improvement. I have also been on a week-long research field trip to Xizang (also known as Tibet) and found that afforestation projects are to be found all over the region. For example, the mountains surrounding Lhasa, which rise to over 4000 metres above sea level, are well on the way to being forested with trees that flourish in such conditions. These mountains have always been bare of trees. Now they are being forested.

To understand how China has been able achieve such a turnaround and become a world leader in environmental protection and development, we need to consider some of the key policies and projects. For example, the phrase "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets [绿水青山就是金山银山 *lüshui qingshan jiu shi jinshan-yinshan*]" has come to sum up the whole range of environmental projects across China. One may wonder whether economic development and environmental protection are compatible with one another. This question arises only if you adhere to an either-or approach to contradictions. Instead, the Chinese approach is thoroughly dialectical (and this is a millennia-old approach): it is precisely economic development that enables more effective environmental measures, and vice versa. In this sense, it becomes possible to understand the concept and reality of "green growth." All of this may be summed up in the term "ecological civilisation [生态文明 *shengtai wenming*]," which is very difficult to translate. While 生态 *shengtai* concerns the way an organism's mode of life relates to its environment, 文明 *wenming* concerns the essence or the best of a cultural tradition. Together, the two words mean that "civilisation" is not simply a human endeavour, but is rather a comprehensive, holistic, and environmental endeavour.

One of the features of China that impresses me the most is that no matter how good a project is, no matter how much has been achieved, it is always in process and much work needs to be done. For example, in the General Secretary's report to the CPC's 20th National Congress in October of 2022, it was noted that significant achievements had been

made in the last five years in ensuring "stronger ecological conservation and environmental protection across the board, in all regions, and at all times." All of this has led to "historic, transformative, and comprehensive changes in ecological and environmental protection and has brought us bluer skies, greener mountains, and cleaner waters." However, a much longer section later in the report outlines how much still needs to be done after achieving zero emissions: this is nothing less than a project of environmental restoration in the framework of "ecological civilisation."

A Quiet Optimism

A third feature of China today is a quiet optimism. There is an energy and vitality about everyday life, a distinct optimism that shows itself through all manner of daily interactions. And this optimism rubs off on the many foreigners who are flowing to China as I write. Talking with an English colleague from Peking University: he points out that being back in China has been very good for his view of the world. Meeting an old Australian friend in Beijing (who was quite down for some time): I see his renewed smile, his energy, and the bounce in his step (he is in his 80s). My spirits too have been lifted, to the point of taking up running again and other exercises I thought were no longer suitable for my age.

There are so many reasons for such optimism as the New Era (from 2012) has unfolded. We may put it in negative terms: about 15 years ago the effects of the "wild 90s" were still felt in many areas. Today these effects have either been comprehensively solved or are well on the way to being resolved: the chaotic situations for workers – whether losing jobs without compensation, major delays in pay, and illegal flouting of labour laws – have been resolved; the wide gap between wealthier and poorer regions has been reduced through the success of the anti-poverty campaign and now the growth of a middle-income group to about 500 million; the problems with air, water, and land pollution are well on the way to being resolved (see above); the absence of medical, unemployment, retirement, and disability insurance schemes has been resolved with the largest welfare scheme on the planet now basically implemented; and the wide gap between the CPC and the common people has definitely been resolved through the most resolute, thorough, and long-lasting anti-corruption campaign of the New China; the lack of knowledge of Marxism by even leading cadres in the CPC has moved to a point – through regular study sessions and much more – where cadres are ever more knowledgeable; and the disjointed nature of the CPC, between central and local bodies, of 15 years years ago has turned into a Party more united than it has been since before 1949.

However, the negative approach reveals only so much. I find it better to focus on the positive dimensions. Perhaps I can sum it up best as follows: when I return to China I am stepping into the future; when I visit a Western country I am stepping into the past. It is common in some quarters to focus on a few areas of technological development, where China has taken a major leap forward to lead in almost all areas. But the future I mention is evident everywhere: visit the local dentist and you will see high-end equipment (which I do not find in, for example, Australia or Denmark) that provides accurate assessment in seconds; visit a medical specialist and you are told that the "latest treatment" in a Western country was abandoned five or more years ago since it is not so efficient; travel through the countryside and you will see that the standard trains crisscrossing the whole country are the older "Harmony" high-speed trains which travel at "only" 300 kilometres per hour (the newer "Fuxing" trains of 350 km/h are beginning to replace the older ones). At so many levels, China has not "caught up" but has already taken a dialectical leap forward. The contradiction here that sometimes I need to tell my students, comrades, and friends that the situation in the West is worse than they imagine and that China's situation is better than they think.

At a social and political level, the country is not falling apart but is moving forward at notable speed that is also stable (dialectics!). My assessment is that China's socialist democratic system is now more mature and developed than any political system you will find elsewhere. And at a cultural level, there is a creative energy that is increasingly being called the new "liberation of thought" (see more below).

By now some readers may have a question or two. What about the Western-hyped "slowing" of China's economy? This would have to be the great myth of this year. True, the vast ocean of the Chinese economy had a few small storms in some parts, but the extraordinary planning economic capacity has ensured that the concerns have by now been overcome and that China will achieve the targeted growth for 2023 of 5.5 percent. Further, we need to set this in context: averaged over the last four years, China's economic growth was 20 percent, the USA struggled to make 8 percent, and the Eurozone 3 percent. Finally, one way say that ten or more years ago China's growth was running at about 10 percent, and now it is below 6 percent. Yes, but the size of the economy is now many times larger than it was ten or more years, so 5.5 percent means far more than 10 percent a decade or more ago. A final thought: historical estimates indicate that before 1800 China contributed to more than 30 percent of the global economy of that time. At the time of writing, China's economy – a socialist economy, mind you – has surpassed that earlier figure. Perhaps now the reader may understand at least one dimension of the phrase, the "great renewal of China."

Another question: some may be wondering what China thinks of the few countries of the world that make up the "West." To be clear, the causes for optimism I have discussed here are primarily internal, to which external factors add another dimension. As for the West, at an everyday level people are neither interested in nor afraid of the West. It rarely comes into discussions, and the news outlets may have an item from time to time but it is well down the main page on the website. In other words, for ordinary people the West has become irrelevant. The real world and the most important developments are elsewhere. BRICS 11, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and much more has seen to that.

As for experts and policy-makers, the assessment now is not that the West is in decline, but rather that it has hit the wall. Fifty years of economic decline, stagnation, and fragmentation have increasingly evident effects on political systems and societies. Stagnation and fragmentation at these levels have now become tears in the social fabric, evident breakdowns of old political certainties, and waves of social unrest. Having ceased to innovate, all that the West can do internationally is attempt a feeble and "outdated Cold War thinking," without any economic substance and in response to China now setting the agenda. As for a supposed "containment" or "encirclement" of China, this is laughable. Any Communist propagating such terms should be ashamed of themselves. From personal experience, I can attest to these realities. Coming from China to Western Europe, I am struck by how degraded, fearful, and isolated Western countries have become. We are in a time of the pessimism of the West and the optimism of the East.

However, it is important to note that unlike many in the world who would like to see the West collapse entirely, a Chinese approach is to hope that the West can find the resources for social, cultural, and political renewal. It will no doubt take a long time, and it will require initially a full acknowledgement that the West has hit the wall. The next step is to dig deep into Western traditions to find the resources for renewal. I am not speaking of some conservative approach that seeks to reinforce the "either-or" or "zero-sum" approach to the world; I am not speaking of a "chosen people" who try find renewed justification for war-mongering and seeking to impose hegemony on others; and I am certainly not suggesting a renewed emphasis on the possessive individualism. The resources for renewal need to be quite distinct. The process, from a

Chinese perspective, is not to recover old values and reclaim them, but to find other values that can then be transformed in a very different context. However, by the time the West manages to do so, the world will be a very different place.

Finally, I would like to explain a few key phrases that sum up the Chinese approach. Each phrase carries a wealth of connotations that do not need to be repeated, for they sum up the breadth and range of scholarship and assessment on such matters. The first is "qualitative change [质变 *zhibian*]," in the sense that the world is now undergoing qualitative and not quantitative transformation. More fully, we are now witnessing "profound changes unseen in a century [百年未有之大变局 *bainian weiyou zhi da bianju*]." Think back a century or so and we are in the time of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath. Although the times are quite distinct, the depth and breadth of changes underway now are analogous. The third phrase is "a new form of human civilisation [人类文明新形态 *renlei wenming xin xingtai*]," which expresses the clear awareness that a different structure of the world is emerging out of the qualitative changes underway and that this provides unique opportunities to which China is already contributing. The reader may be familiar with other ways of the expressing this awareness, such as a "multi-polar" world, and that the US-led West is exhausting itself trying to roll back the clock.

Perhaps the reader can see now why there is a quiet optimism in China, whether we speak of everyday of common people or the assessments and policy decisions being made. In short, the times suit China very well, as indeed they suit so many developing countries.

Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom and a Hundred Schools of Thought Contend

The fourth feature I have noticed is the extraordinary ferment of ideas, proposals, and plans. This truly is a time – to quote an expression from millennia ago – of "letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend [百花齐放百家争鸣 *baihua-qifang, baijia-zhengming*]." There are so many examples, ranging from the inherent innovation of Chinese culture as it is integrated with Marxism, the writing of a whole new chapter of Marxism from the midst of the mainstream, and the energetic development of existing and new international projects as China engages ever more deeply with so many countries in the world.

Writing now, after about eight months after returning, I can say that I am truly exhausted by my involvement in some these "hundred flowers" projects. So many forums, seminars, conferences, focused on realistic and practical problems and their solutions. There are simply too many events in which you can take part, and in each one I have met many foreign specialists participating, making suggestions, putting their heads together for solution (and I include here some leading and articulate Australian policy-makers). I now need to step back a little, since I prefer to study, think, write, and work behind the scenes.

Perhaps the best way to indicate this ferment of ideas, proposals, and plans is to mention a couple of the "hot topics' in China today. The first concerns "justice [正义 *zhengyi*], which initially appeared about a decade ago and continues to be a topic of much discussion and debate. The first is to develop further a socialist approach to justice, in the sense that justice is absolutely central to a whole range of questions on the socialist road. The second is a comprehensive and very practical approach to justice. Thus, justice involves: the imperative that no-one should live in poverty, which has been a core dimension of the immense project of lifting 800 million Chinese people out of poverty; the fact that no-one is to be left behind on the path to common prosperity; the core human right as the right to socioeconomic well-being, from which flow civil, political, cultural, and environmental rights; access to quality education from the cities to the remotest high-altitude regional areas; a medical insurance scheme that covers all of China's 1.4 billion people, with a focus on primary care at local hospitals (such as the

very competent one on my campus) to specialised care in major hospitals – so much so that the policy is to ensure that no-one needs to leave their province for a full range of medical care; livable retirement pensions, which come alongside the many other aspects of care for the elderly; and so on.

A second focus of much attention concerns the "two integrations [两个结合 *liangge jiehe*]," in the sense that Marxism needs to be combined or integrated with China's concrete realities and the best of China's traditional culture. The first integration may be dated back to the late 1930s, when Mao Zedong spoke of the need for communists to understand the whole history of China, from Confucius to Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen), of the need for concrete Marxism in light of China's actual conditions, and the need to develop Marxism in terms of China's specific characteristics. [3]

However, it is the second integration that is drawing most attention. While the integration of Marxism with the best of China's traditional culture has been a feature since the beginning of the CPC, it has only recently been specifically identified as such. The first moment was in the CPC General Secretary's rallying speech at the Party's centenary celebrations in July 2021. [5] Since then, there have been a couple of very important explanations and elaborations.

Thus far, we find two main moves: the one seeks to identify the essence of China's traditional culture and the compatibility of this essence with scientific socialism. The other seeks to identify the process by which this is done. These include: 1) the need for a good fit between two approaches that come from different sources; 2) the organic unity of the two, in which Marxism has become China's Marxism, and China's traditional culture has become modern; 3) while Chinese culture has given Marxism a much longer and broader historical road, it is Marxism that has led to the renewal of Chinese culture, giving us Chinese-style modernisation and thus strengthening China's traditional culture; 4) since China's traditional culture is inherently innovative, Marxism has and continues to provide the impetus for enlightenment, renewal, and innovation of that culture; 5) the integration of the basic principles of Marxism with China's traditional culture has consolidated the distinct identity of China on the world stage today.

Allow me to summarise these dialectical formulations. Marxism is often described as China's "Enlightenment," in the sense that it has enabled China to grasp the laws of historical development and profoundly shift the direction China is taking. Further, the second integration is described as another "liberation of thought" (after Mao Zedong in 1942-1945 and Deng Xiaoping in 1978). [4] As I write, there are the beginnings of a comprehensive assessment of how modernisation and traditional culture relate to one another, how to identify the essence of traditional culture, and how all of this has contributed to Chinese-style modernisation as well as a new form of human civilisation.

Finally, not all of traditional culture can and should be carried forward. So how does one identify the dross to be discarded and the essence that is to be creatively developed? The debate has only begun, but I would like to emphasise that the phrase "优秀传统文化 [*youxiu chuantong wenhua*]" is increasingly translated as the "best of China's traditional culture." In this way, the dialectical process of discarding the feudal and indeed bourgeois dross and developing the "best of" that culture can be indicated. All of this can be summed up in the observation: "The best inheritance of history is to create a new history; The greatest respect for human civilisation is to create a new form of human civilisation."

The Party's Leadership in a New Light

This section I have added after more careful observation. It concerns clear evidence of new forms of Party leadership and should be of particular interest to comrades in the CPA. By way of background, in preparation for the last chapter of my most recent book (*Socialism in Power: On the History and Theory of Socialist Governance*, 2023), I engaged in some in-depth research concerning the comprehensive process of rectification and reform in CPC

grassroots branches and regional committees. A specific task force was set up after the 18th Congress in 2012 to deal with such matters, and it promulgated document after document – some for the first time – concerning structures, practices, and leadership in grassroots Party branches. Initially, these were all "trial" guidelines, meaning that they were implemented for a while, feedback was sought on effectiveness and problems, and revisions made. Some were more generic guidelines, while others had a specific focus, whether non-public enterprises, state-owned enterprises, educational institutions, government organs, Party organs, village branches, and so on. Provisions were made for retired and mobile cadres, and there has been a particular concern with the quality, workloads, and roles of Party branch secretaries.

Why was this rectification and reform implemented? A notable problem that had grown until the 18th Party Congress in 2018 was lack of Party unity. We should understand that back then the CPC already had about 90 million members, and if you pause to think for a moment you will appreciate the enormity of the task at hand. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Party branches exist across the country, in every single community, enterprise, educational facility, and much more. With such a large Party, the problem of unity became acute. The Central Committee found that carefully considered decisions would be filtered, delayed, blocked and not implemented by the time the decision went through the city or provincial committees, regional committees, and so on, so that by the time the decision reached the grassroots branch it was often not implemented at all. Anyone who knows Communist Parties will recognise that this situation simply could not continue. Hence the rectification and reform, the ultimate purpose of which was the restore Party unity in both robust democratic practices and centralised decision making. I could say much more about the process, but perhaps it is best to refer the reader to the final chapter of Socialism in Power.

The catch with the book was that I researched and wrote the chapter at some distance from actual events. I had not yet been able to return to China and relied on information from Party building journals, articles, and experiences as they were written by those involved. Now that I am on the ground in China once again, I have been able to observe closely how the rectification and reform has produced concrete results. Let me put it this way: a decade or more ago, the assumed approach was that the Party branch would deal with Party matters, but that it would leave the affairs of the village, enterprise (state-owned or non-public), government organ, educational institution and so on to the people responsible for those matters. Much of this has changed. My most immediate experience is the university environment and it is very noticeable that the workplace Party secretary of the university as a whole, as well as the many branch secretaries in the schools and faculties play a much greater role in leadership and decision-making. Branch secretaries are now publicly present and involved everywhere, and the university workplace Party secretary is a very competent person of significant substance and competence. This development has of course required a clarification of the roles of the Party and educational leadership, but it is very clear that the Party has once again taken the leading role.

I am told that this applies across the board, and – especially for my interest – to non-public enterprises. The Party no longer sits by and keeps its focus on Party members. Instead, leadership in decision making in these non-public enterprises is increasingly a Party matter. Needless to say, this is an extraordinary development, and raises the question as to what the role of non-public enterprises is these days. From my perspective, they are no longer "private," at least as those who live in Western contexts think about such matters, since the Party is in the leadership position. As for an abiding interest of mine: in village Party branches in the many country and remote areas, the fact that it has been the grassroots Party branch and its secretary that has spear-headed the final phase of the poverty alleviation project

means that now the Party branch clearly plays the leading role.

Thus far, I have written of rectification and reform. Of course, this is internal Party terminology, and the more common short-hand is to speak of “self-reform” or “self-revolution” of the Party. When you come across such terms, these are not vague terms but rather very concrete references to a decade-long process.

Conclusion

To sum up: I have written of five features that have struck me, initially upon returning to live and work in China this year and then in light of further experience and reflection: socialist rule of law; the greening of China; a quiet optimism; the ferment of ideas, proposals, and plans; and the leadership of the Communist Party. On each topic I could have given many more examples, and provided more theoretical discussion, but the points are clear as they stand.

There is one final feature that I mention here by way of conclusion: I continue to note an extraordinary flow of people to China, to study (Marxism as well), to work, to live, and simply to visit. Not only is China increasingly open to the world as it has stepped onto the world stage, but people are drawn to the country. I am especially struck by how many people from countries in the Belt and Road Initiative are now in China. I regularly meet people from Africa, Latin America, the Pacific, Southeast Asia, the Subcontinent, Russia, and much more. Most notably, I have begun to meet leaders, scholars, and students from India. India? Yes, India, especially members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which is not only the largest Party with a proud history, but also the Party that had held and holds governance in three of India’s states. That they are here to learn from the experience of Chinese socialism and the Chinese model for India’s experience is very heartening. Who knows? Next stop may well be India.

Notes

1) Weber, Max. 1922. *Wirtschaft und Gesell schaft* (Science and Society). Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr.

2) Xi Jinping. 2017. *The Law-Based Governance of China*. Beijing: Central Compilation and Translation Press.

3) Mao Zedong. (1938) 1991. “Lun xin jiediuan” (On the New Stage). *Zhonggong zhongyang wenjian xuanji* (Selected Documents of the Central Committee of the CPC), Vol. 11, 557-662. Zhonggang zhongyang xuexiao chubanshe, pp. 658–659.

4) Deng Xiaoping. 1978 (1995). “Liberate Thought, Seek Truth from Facts and Unite as One in Looking to the Future (13 December, 1978).” *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol. 2, 50–63. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press.

5) Xi Jinping. 2022. “Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects: Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, 16 October, 2022.” *Qiushi Journal* (English Edition), 12 Nov 2022. http://en.qstheory.cn/2023-01/06/c_845251.htm.

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Interview with comrade David Matters, Part 1

Conducted on 30 September 2023, in Beijing

DM: David Matters

AMR: RB

AMR: Let's begin with a few basics, where you were born, grew up, schooling, early work, and that sort of thing.

DM: I was born in Grafton, NSW. I'm the son of a railway worker, and also the son of a woman who came from probably rich origins and "unfortunately" married a worker. That had significance in my education. She was the one that more intellectually stimulated me, whereas my father gave me the class instincts.

We were not rich; we were quite poor. I learnt later that the effect of the loss of the Communist leadership in NSW railways union was most undoubtedly the cause of the lower wages and conditions we experienced, and what my father experienced.

The railways was a very feudalistic system. My father used to live in dread of what they called "bungs," and my mother with her education would have to write the replies. A "bung" could be for anything, such as for the kerosene lantern going out in the signal. At one stage we had moved to at least six other locations. We were in Coffs Harbour, or just south of Coffs Harbour. There was an argument with a railway inspector for some reason and we were transferred straight into the middle of the Illawarra Ranges, in a little railway settlement with no electricity. Then we moved down to Wollongong and to the steelworks.

I went to schools like Unanderra, Coniston, and eventually came into Sydney when I was just emerging into my teenage years and ended up first into Hurstville and then into Bankstown.

AMR: Were either of your parents in any political parties?

DM: My father was a "thug" for J. T. Lang. He was born in Auburn; my mother was a Lidcombe girl. Lidcombe was the slightly wealthier suburb. She met him at a dance, her father and mother were High Church of England. Her father was from Lincolnshire had come here on the recovery as a paying passenger. He was in the English orders of the Masonic lodge. My mother came into society as a debutante of the "Eastern Order" of the[Masonic] Lodge. She was Protestant and he was Catholic.

AMR: Back in those times that meant a lot.

DM: Family history has it that my father's uncle was an archbishop in Sydney, and that [the family] had land around Edgecliff. He gave it to the church, but he [the uncle] also visited the family to inform my mother and father that the children they were going to have would all be "bastards," because it wasn't a church-sanctioned wedding. They did the Aussie thing and let the blue cattle dog after them.

AMR: (Laughter)

DM: And there goes our inheritance. Reflectively, it was a bit more savage, because my father was actually born out of wedlock to his mother. We found that out when we buried my father, that his mother was one of those "Sydney widows." It was 1910 when he was born. In 1913 he was adopted by the man she married, and who gave us this name, Matters. Shortly after, 5 or 6 years later, she was divorced, and that man went off to have another 13 children with another woman. This was pretty common in Sydney in that period.

AMR: Yeah, it was.

DM: My parents lived through the Great Depression and I was raised on stories about how horrific it was. One of the stories was how they tried to force the price of oranges up. They took tonnes of oranges and poured kerosene over them and threw them into the harbour.

My mum grew up as a young, reasonably wealthy woman, despite the fact that her father went broke during the stock market crash [at the beginning of the Great Depression]. But "broke" for a capitalist is different than broke for a worker. He managed to buy a job in the railway workshops as an engineer.

The stories she would tell of people coming begging for food at the door. She would have been about 14 or 15 in 1929. So this is how I knew about those tragic events.

AMR: You would have heard about these things firsthand, as a kid growing up hearing about this sort of thing.

DM: I paid attention. Our family was one that discussed things. Events and politics were not banned from children. Difficulties of the family were not banned from children – the difficulties of renting houses, the different behaviours. One instance was when we were moving from a housing commission. My father had a rather bad temper, picked a fight with a guy inspecting the house. Of course, that bureaucrat took away our bond. So you can see these instances of injustice.

We rented a house thereafter from a Salvation Army woman. We had aunties and uncles in pictures in the Salvation Army. But she basically put us in a slum tenancy, right outside the door of the steelworks. I ended up with bronchial asthma out of that adventure. She would sit and talk to us about God, and I looked but I couldn't see him. She said heaven was up there in the sky.

You would meet people in your life ... I remember up near Summer Tank there was a woman living in a house. She may have been First Nations – I don't know. But my first experience was with what the treatment was like of "the others," so to speak. I remember my parents tugging at me when I was about 5 or 6 years old, saying "don't touch them, don't touch them." Being a child, you do what you do – you touch. And some dust came off and I thought I had broken one of the First Nations people. Because that was how alien [they seemed to be]. Although the practice of sneaking into the settlements by white men was very common. And that formed part of the family history, although we don't necessarily need to go into that.

My father would tell me how – when they were living in Burke – that these inspectors, the railway inspectors, would bash an Aboriginal person for three shillings or less – threepence I think it was – for the [train] fare. The injustice towards First Nations people was apparent in the bush.

AMR: You grew up in the bush too.

DM: I grew up in the bush. I was brought up with an understanding that they [First Nations people] were a people. We had pictures of people still living in tribal society. When my family was there in the rural areas, there were tribal Aboriginals. I think one person – I don't know whether it was a nickname or a real name – was called King Billy. That was around the Burke area.

Coming into the schools in Sydney, there was one Aboriginal young person in our high school and he was copping it. They were giving it to him because he was supposedly from La Perouse. There was a terrible persecution and racism.

AMR: You mentioned that you went to a couple of schools in Sydney.

DM: In Sydney, I started at Hurstville Primary School, which was quite an advanced place. I qualified to go to Sydney Technical High, but my father got geeed up by his work mates and moved us to Bankstown. Although I'd qualified to go to that school, my parents weren't prepared to pay for the bus fare to go there. The Bus Fares were expensive I got a free travel on Eldridge Transport to Bankstown High School.My father ended up in a week-long dispute with the Education Department, because he thought Punchbowl High was a more progressive high school than Bankstown. So he held me up, which impeded my education a little. It also made me stand out, because I was a bush kid and because I spoke "Strine." So I would get a lot of "how ya goin' Daaave" - from the "Dad and Dave" movies. I

was taught “English” by the migrant Children, who spoke better English than I did.

AMR: What age did you leave school?

DM: I left school when I was 18, but I'd left school twice before based on annual jobs in the Public Service. My sister was influential in the Public Service, and I sat the exams and passed them twice to become a clerical assistant first at the Department of Civil Aviation and then in the Department of Taxation. Then a third time, which I think was the final time, and I moved from Taxation to Medibank. When I was at those places, it was to get some money. I was able to continue high school because I was on a scholarship. I was able to pass some exam and they gave the family $400 a year for me to go to school.

At Bankstown Boys High School, I was in the group of top-performing students. Then my mother became ill with cancer. That had a deleterious effect on my education and my life. I hate watching those Smith Family ads, because they never came for us even though we donated furniture to them. I took over the running of the house when I was about 16 or 17, did the cooking, put my fathers bets on at the TAB, all those sorts of things.

AMR: How old were you when she died?

DM: I was just approaching 16.

AMR: Wow.

DM: Which is a pretty harsh thing in your life. The problem we had was that health care was not really free in NSW. I was surprised to learn during one of the party campaigns that it was once. My mother was worried about the cost of going and getting treatment, and doctors weren't like they are today. Doctors were considerably middle-class and arrogant. They wouldn't talk to families, they wouldn't talk to people about illnesses. It was a big thing seeing a doctor. I never saw a doctor until I was about 15, apart from when I was born. I never when to a dentist until I was 18. I stopped seeing him, so I've kept some of my teeth.

The diet for working people was pretty awful. For our family at least it was pretty ordinary. It was nothing to consume two kilograms of sugar [a week], which of course is what affects the teeth. Pork mince was pretty common and the use of dripping as an oil.

I can remember when the Whitlam government was elected, there was a huge change in our lives. It was the first time I ever tasted beef. We used to have lamb, and most families would buy – when we lived in country areas – a side of lamb. Refrigeration wasn't very good, and I can tell you the lamb would smell a little bit by the end of the fortnight.

I remember my father talking about the 1917 general strike. My father's father was a 1917 striker, and he talked about them starving nearly to death during that strike and he talked about them eating rotten meat. Now, most people will think, oh yeah …

AMR: It's a "bit off."

DM: You think about what I've just said about what we thought. Most people would think that what we were eating was rotten. But we would think it was just OK, passable, edible. The rotten meat was at the stage of the maggots. Given everything probably would have been better to cook up the maggots.

My father wasn't a pleasant person for my mother to live with. We did want her to leave him, but there were no single mothers' pensions. We weren't like the current prime minister – connected. That's why I find his stories interesting, and hope that he at some time comes clean and says that his mother claimed a widow's pension and had no other choice. Now, I don't condemn her for that, knowing how hard life was for my mother. Women were treated much more differently in that period. My older sister was put into a home, because she would truant and run away from Burke and go to Sydney. We were always told that she was in boarding houses, but she'd virtually been pushed into a certain industry and worked her way up into management. Some people on the Left might find that a hard way of looking at things, but that's my sister.

My other sister wasn't very good at nursing. She got pregnant to a few doctors, or at least one of the doctors, and two of the children were adopted out. But that was very common for working class women in country areas.

AMR: That was not that uncommon for working class women.

DM: Taking the children was common. The best threat that our parents could make to make us behave was "the government will take you away." We believed it, because they had already taken our older sisters.

Boys could get into a lot of trouble. My brother got into a fair bit of trouble in Wollongong. He unfortunately won a "ballot" and it got him a uniform. It probably destroyed a part of his life, because he wasn't the kind of young man that should have been put into the military. He ended up dishonourably discharged, because he took off to see a woman that he'd married as the marriage was breaking up. The experience in Wollongong was that my brother had joined a bikie gang and got in with a group of people. He got arrested first for breaking and entering. What had actually happened was that he was as drunk as a skunk, and his mate was knocking over the local Woolies, and he'd gone and helped his mate get caught. The times being what they were, the aristocrats in Wollongong, in *The Mercury* – a horrible tabloid – would write the story up and you would have to deal with the family issues at school. The judge made himself famous by offering two dollars for a haircut for my brother's mate. That was in the [tabloid] article and I remember reading that.

Wollongong was an interesting place, politically very active. I am sure the Party was there, although my knowledge of the Party was very scant.

AMR: We're talking about the general students' strike.

DM: I think it was around the 1968, there was a Democratic Labor Party Council elected in Wollongong. Anyone that thinks that a right-wing government doesn't have an impact on the people is mistaken.

AMR: This is Bob Santamaria's bunch, isn't it?

DM: Yeah, this is Bob Santamaria's bunch. The process of council elections, particularly – that I know of – in NSW was that property considerations were the basis of council elections. There was not actually a franchise for everyone. I can remember a discussion between my parents over this issue. They made the election for the council non-compulsory. Mainly the more conservative Catholics in that city organised and succeeded in getting the Democratic Labor Party elected to the council. When they did that, one of the things they did that first had an impact on me – I was only a young student at Thirroul Primary by then, which was a bit more of a wealthier area around Wollongong – was to put a charge on all sporting fields. So we turned up for our Friday sport and there was a council inspector looking for a fee from the teacher. We're looking in our pockets and we've got no money in them. Teachers got no money. So of course, no sport. They must have done the same to the Wollongong High School.

AMR: These were school sports.

DM: School sports, weekly school sports. I remember when the whole of the Wollongong High School emptied out and marched on the City Hall. I think there were probably other comrades in the area, but when you are looking at these events as a young child you don't see the organisation, you just see the spectacle.

While all this was going on the Vietnam War was raging; conscription – as I said my brother was conscripted. The violence of the ruling class was still unrestrained. Hangings were still a thing. I remember the last hanging was of a fellow called Ryan.. who was the brother, it turned out, of the secretary of the Tramway Union. The police weren't your friends. The police were an alien class force. You lived in fear of these things. The process that was going on at the time – we were watching television, and television had just come in – and you would nightly – and I was a young child under 12 – see American soldiers murdering Vietnamese. The interesting thing

about the Vietnamese was that they were like me. They had poor clothing. They were poor people. We didn't identify with the Americans. They were rich; they were fat. This was having a dramatic impact.

AMR: Back then it was just the ABC in black and white.

DM: In black and white. You probably heard that Skyhooks song “Horror Movie”. The line goes. “it’s the 6.30 news.” People paid a licence fee. We lived in the bush near Coff’s. When visiting relatives in Sydney you would hear a lot of scurrying around. People would cover their sets with doylies and hope the set would go cold. They could not afford the licence fee. The Menzies government had signal detecting vans circulating the suburbs and fining people for not paying their fees.

AMR: I remember the first television set on the street, and my parents got one about a year later and it was just the ABC.

DM: There were commercial channels. I saw the execution on TV of the Vietnamese hero, executed by the American soldiers. The hatred for the American soldiers was palpable. I was brought up, and my father was brought up, with a fairly anti-American sentiment. I think some of that was residual from the behaviour of US troops in Australia during the second world war. I think it is sanitised in those articles, but some of the outrages that occurred in Brisbane would have concerned atrocities against women.

AMR: In regard to the student strikes in Wollongong, were they successful in getting the policy to pay for sporting facilities overturned?

DM: I can't quite recall, because I think there was an election again and the (DLP) council was forced out. I don't think they needed to bring in compulsory voting. I think most people turned up to vote to get rid of that council.

AMR: So all of that left quite an impression, being a school student and seeing whole schools go out on the streets.

DM: The impression stayed with me, because when I moved to Sydney the moratorium movement was further developing. But before that, when we were going to primary school you would see the name of a draft dodger written in chalk outside the schools. That had an impact on you, because you knew what they were. As a young man, you are getting older and you are getting closer and closer to that magic age. So these were very much a part of the psychology of the generation I grew up with. They were facing these prospects.

The situation changed with the election of the Whitlam government. I was very excited. We thought it was almost a revolutionary government. By then we'd formed a little group of communists in the high school and two or three of our friends had declared ourselves and we were about 15 years old. I had received a book prize being good at economics, or commerce, and the prize I got was *The Birth of Communist China* and the *Communist Manifesto*, edited by A.J.P. Taylor.

AMR: Can I ask a bit more about that group. You say you had formed a communist group and declared yourselves as communists, but can you say what that means?

DM: We probably didn't know. We thought we were going to change the whole world. Being young, we thought that our ideas were unique. We didn't think that other people had the same ideas.

AMR: Were you aware that there was a Communist Party of Australia at that time?

DM: One of the friends in the group, his mother was a member of the Communist Party. There was also an old guy that sold the Moscow news in Bankstown. Still we knew very little.

This was when we'd moved to Bankstown and the Communist Party had a significant presence in Punchbowl. We didn't know the differences within the parties. My mother bought me a book to try to turn me away. She found a book on sale in Woolies, *Once a Jolly Comrade*, written by a renegade John Sendy who was president of the party I think, which I

didn't read until much later when I knew people and I found it invaluable as an insight into the Party and the differences. It was an attempt by my mother to reverse my thinking. The reason I did not read it at the time was because he was obviously a rat and I was not going to cop his nonsense.

AMR: That book was on sale at Woolies?

DM: At Woolies. It was very cheap, otherwise my mother wouldn't have bought it. It was in the discard section.

AMR: That's very interesting. So there was an awareness as a teenager in school that something was going on and that you would identify as communists. As you say, at that age you think you know everything and you look back and you think you probably didn't know much, but there was something already that was directing you …

DM: Poverty.

AMR: Poverty? Life experience? Family experience?

DM: The reactionary teachers were better at recruiting us towards communism than the progressive ones. In Primary School, when we in South Berkeley, we had a Social Studies teacher who was a full-on liberal, so we hated him from the beginning. He would give us a lecture on the dangers of the Soviet Union. When I first heard about the Soviet Union I was 10 or 11 years old and I wrote a little paragraph, which for me was extreme writing, and I wrote that Communism was a good idea because the people won't go hungry anymore. I've experienced hunger.

AMR: Direct life experience. You've been reflecting on the name of the draft dodger written in chalk out the front of the school, getting up to that age when you realise the brutality of the ruling class, poverty in the family, and so on. All of this brings out that the observation on communism is a logical and rational outcome. If you stop to think about for a moment, that's the answer.

DM: When I got sent to Bankstown, it was a punishment school. The NSW Education Department used to punish teachers on certain grounds because of politics and on the basis of union organisation. Bankstown was the sort of school where they would punish teachers by sending them there. The attitude towards the working people was that we couldn't be taught. A lot of the teachers took the view that we were just there for factory fodder: get us through, do these classes, they found people like me to be troublesome.

At school, this friend whose mother was in the Communist Party thought he'd found a group we (our group)) could take over. He's still with the Trotskyists, by the way. It turned out to be a group of Trotskyists called the Communist League. We went to meet them in the back of the Baby Health Centre in Glebe. They were a group of university students who seemed quite elderly to us.

AMR: (Laughter).

DM: We were convinced we were going to take them over. I remember at one stage that I'd come across the East Wind Bookshop and bought a whole library for about two dollars of Marxist classics. I started reading them and explaining them to the university students, who couldn't be bettered by a young high school student so they had to go off and read them for themselves.

There were some interesting people in the group. There was a doctor who worked with the Aboriginal Health Service. Marcia Langton was a member, and I still regard Marcia as a friend. Her experience in life was totally different from mine. There was John McCarthy, who was the principal of the group and eventually became an anaesthetist at Prince Charles Hospital in Brisbane. We still have kind feelings for each other, although our politics differed.

They didn't seem to have any direction, but they were quite capable of writing, of putting newspapers together. We were at a meeting – they called them "conferences" – and that's when the Socialist Workers' Party arrived and started setting up another Trotskyist group. There's a lot of internecine behaviour amongst the Trotskyist groups. There was another

group that used to pester the people in Bankstown and they were called the "Healeyites." They tried to make themselves more "workerist."

AMR: I'd like to ask you to explain a little about these various groups, since not all readers will know who the "Healeyites" are. I think more people will know who the Socialist Workers' Party was. Can you tell us a bit about the nature of these groups, their history, and how they became involved in this sort of activity? You were starting to say something about the "Healeyites," but why were they called the "Healeyites"?

DM: It was after a British fellow called Jim Healey, and he was their guru. All of these groups were formed out of splits in the so-called "Fourth International." They each had different names and different approaches. There was another group called the "Canonites" and they were the Socialist Worker's Party group. Another group were the "Mandelites" and they were the Communist League, a minority group. And there was another group who were followers of Michel Pablo, which were related to the group around Balmain that attacked comrades Jack McPhillips and Bernie Thornton in the Ironworkers' Union. They were closely related to Bob Gould.

All these groups had their start in the radicalism of the Vietnam War. I think a lot of them started out in the same grouping, with a terrible name, "Screw" (an acronym). There was a fight between Jim Percy, who was one of the main gurus (the Percy brothers) of the Socialist Workers' League, as they were then, and Bob Gould. [The fight] was over the assets in the bookshop, which originally belonged to that group. Gould taught some good political lessons: how to take a dive. They had a television crew filming the argument in the bookshop and one of the Percy brothers threw a punch at Gould, but didn't get him. Gould did the job, dived, and got the bookshop.

AMR: A question about the different groups, with the constant changes among the Trotskyists: would you say that in each case they were following a particular person, a "false prophet," guru, rather than anything that was based on principles. Was it more about the person they were following or was it more about party principles and the sense of the following the "correct path"?

DM: They had all the hallmarks of sects. They were grouped around individuals, with different interpretations of the same material. It was almost a religious organisation. They would split hairs, with eternal arguments over whether the Soviet Union was a form of workers' state, or a state capitalist society. [One time the argument] went on for eight hours in the back of the Baby Health Centre. All I got out of that was a headache, and a disdain for that sort of hair-splitting.

There was a process that was initiated somewhere ... by then I was still very strongly Trotskyist. I had to read lots of Trotsky's works. The Socialist Workers' Party probably had better collections of them. The process was an operation called "fusion," where they would take two groups and put them together. It didn't matter whether they were related or not politically, but it was just to force them together. Usually as a result of that [process] some people were expelled, some people were thrown into different places. They had the belief that factions were important, but they formed factions only in the time leading up to a conference. But factions often lead to splits. The issue of factions was not resolved and the usual result was that the group was expelled. That was also a way of identifying people who were "heretics" to the sect. So I learnt a lot about factionalism.

I ended up in the Socialist Workers' Party after a "fusion." The person I was living with, my partner at the time, was very heavily into the Trotskyist groups. She came with a view that we were taking a "turn to industry." Until that time, I was employed in the Federal Public Service and I was working for Medibank. I had been active in the forerunners of the CPSU, the public sector union. I had been an activist and led the march to Town Hall for the Medibank strike in 1976. Being an 18-year old, I was enthusiastic to get the general manager

off the footpath and onto the street. Some of the political activity was my spontaneity and creativity.

AMR: Comrade, you said you wanted to step back a little.

DM: Well, I should explain that when I entered the workforce I started in taxation. I worked in taxation before it was computerised. It was all paperwork, and I started in the records division. Then I worked in the Other Taxes Ledger Division (OTLD), and the responsibility was collecting these taxes and paying out government incentives. Our job was to collect revenues from miscellaneous taxes, like withholding tax, and also to pay export incentive grants. I did try to offset some export incentive grants to some large companies, because that was my job, to cover taxation bills. And I nearly terminated my career there, because tax lawyers employed by the large companies whose payments I offset the grants against went ballistic apparently they don't pay tax if they can avoid it, or by avoiding the payment for quite a long time they invest their tax bill on the short term money market.

The other issue I found had was with regard to farm revenue. When an investor usually what are called Hunter Street farmers bought a farm, the first five years of income was averaged and that's what they paid tax on for the rest of the operation of the farm. This often resulted in no income tax from corporate farms as they ran at a loss for the establishment period of the farm So there was a range of those things that we were dealing with in that area. You were always told to be non-sympathetic to anybody not paying their tax bill, no matter whether they had brain cancer or whatever. One of the worst calls I got was a person who had brain cancer, and I ended up just talking for quite while. That was taxation. The exit from taxation was to move to Medibank.

AMR: Soon after the election of the Whitlam government?

DM: No, this was well after the election.

AMR: Correct me if I am wrong, but the Medibank legislation actually required a special sitting of both the lower and upper houses to get the legislation through. So it was actually later, after the initial election in 1972.

DM: I can recall being on one Medibank strike when I was still in taxation in 1975-76. I didn't go to Medibank until 1976, I think. There were two general struggles around Medibank. The first was to get it instituted, and the second was to keep it, Fraser ran the coup in1975 while I was in High school I attended all the big rallies in Hyde park and the Domain, Medibank was still becoming operational under Fraser and the ACTU was leading a struggle. By that time, I was working at Medibank, which was the Health Insurance Commission. This was the actual employer. Around that time, they brought in Medibank Private. The Health Insurance Commission was one of the more political organisations to work for. There were some of the best public sector organisers I ever met in my life. Bert Coates was the general manager and one of the best organisers.

AMR: Were you a member of the union at that point?

DM: Yes, I was a member of two unions. I was a member of the Federated Clerks Union Taxation Division, and a member of the Australian Commonwealth Employees Association. I couldn't see the sense in having two unions, so I joined both. I couldn't pick between them. I was also a member of the Labor Party at the same time. After Whitlam's overthrow, I joined the North Bankstown branch of the Labor Party, which was Paul Keating's branch.

AMR: What was the union density in the workplace of those two unions at that time?

DM: 60-80 percent, maybe 60-70 percent. Most people were members of the union. The union practice on the job: what mystified me was that the way we were organised was that someone would come along and say, "we're going to have a council meeting." I went to this meeting, and I was elected to this council. They did it in a more surreptitious way. The

operations of unions couldn't really be in the open, but they didn't seem to be opposed. So there seemed to be a de facto arrangement. Certainly nothing like the era that came later. I was working at Medibank, and I kept paying two union dues. I was pro-union. I worked with whatever union would work with me. The presence of the union on the job was not high, but they did meet and had organisations.

The same occurred in the Labor Party. Factions were banned in the Labor Party. I remember being invited to join an organisation called the "Steering Committee," which I think was the Left. This must have been interesting then, because I'd come from a right-wing branch, which was the Paul Keating branch. Keating had very strong control over the branch, but it seemed like there people who voted on those things who weren't alive. The organisation was mostly old people. Labor party branches can move a lot of motions but the political or parliamentary party is a different party. Keating was a good orator. I remember him giving an anti-war speech on ANZAC Day at our local school.

AMR: What prompted you to join the Labor Party?

DM: The Trotskyists always practised what they called "deep entry." There was a view that they should join either the Communist Party or the Labor Party and work to take over the organisation. The job as a Trotskyist was to build support. Quite often they used to influence Young Labor organisations to their side.

AMR: I think I know the answer to this question, but you would have identified yourself as belonging to one of these Trotskyist organisations when you joined the Labor Party?

DM: You would join as a member. They never proscribed the Trotskyists; they proscribed the Communist Party.

AMR: So while the Labor Party and the Communist Party were fighting it out with each other, the Trots tried to get, you know …

DM: It was part of the thinking. That's how they would develop the revolution. They would take over the Labor Party. It wasn't always clear.

AMR: When you were part of the Socialist Workers' Party were you aware of its particular orientation?

DM: Well, they had to convince you that if you worked hard and built the organisation that the revolution would follow. It was only a matter of how hard you worked. So when we were working on campaigns, for example, we worked on the anti-uranium campaign, and I was heavily involved in the movement against uranium mining. That was a mixed movement. At times it had people like Jack Mundy. A lot of those comrades were not as active in the organisation. Whereas the Trotskyists were active, all the time. So we would do a lot of the hard-yard work, like painting banners and that sort of thing, and effectively building the demonstrations.

I can remember having a stoush with Jack Mundy at one of the meetings. We were also active in Chile solidarity. We had a demonstration of Solidarity with Chile and we had our slogans another group what might have been the Socialist Party and Communist Party of Chile came with different slogans. We were shouting at each other and trying to shout each other down with slogans just outside Martin Place. That was the bizarre behaviour that came out of this. But the Trotskyists never seemed to go anywhere, never seemed to get any further.

AMR: What was the nature of the membership of the Socialist Workers' Party? What kind of jobs were people doing?

DM: Many of them were students. Some of them were professionals. Very few of them were workers. When they did the "turn to industry" that was the first time. They had members like (Michael) Costa, who became an MP in the NSW government. He was a particularly obnoxious person.

AMR: He became a minister in the NSW (Labor) government as well.

DM: He was obnoxious when he was in the Socialist Workers' Party. I can't say that I liked him. I think I came close to an encounter with him at one stage.

AMR: Even with a name like "Socialist Workers' Party," there were actually relatively few workers in the party.

DM: It was a big change for me to go to the Socialist Party from the Communist League Socialist Workers Party background. I had to learn to live in a different class milieu in the Trots fairly Petty- Bourgeois some might say, and when I came back I had to lose some of the behaviour that they instilled in me. The thing about them as an organisation was that they were demanding poverty, virtually, of their members, because they demanded a lot of money. They called it "Bolshevik discipline."

The other thing about them was the organisational structure. There always seemed to be people who could rise to the leading positions very quickly. I can remember holding up one of the youth conferences; it was held up for a long period of time, because there were some comrades who knew how hard I worked and who wanted to put me onto the national committee. But they were not having a bar of me on the national committee. So I wasn't in the favoured style.

I probably should jump to when I went to Brisbane. It was part of the "turn to industry."

AMR: With the "turn to industry," did that entail a change of jobs?

DM: Yes, I had to leave the public service, which horrified my family. I had no job. When I arrived in Brisbane, I had to find a job. We thought we were going to become workers. With all our audacity, we drove up in my car to the gates of General Motors Holden, in Acacia Ridge. The security guard must have had a laugh for quite a while and showed us where the car park was. Then we came in to get the interview with the employment manager. He said to us, "we're not employing clerks." So we pumped out our chests, the group of us, and said, "we're not clerks." I imagine the man had a lot of fun.

AMR: How many were in the car?

DM: There were four or five of us. One was an Andrew Honey. He got a job in spot- welding, later in the red oxide booth. He would be covered head to foot in red oxide. Those that worked in Spot Welding had burn marks on their overalls. I got a job on the wet deck. Another couple got jobs in that area, and one got a cushy job. Within a week, at least two of them had been sacked by the management. The approach of the Socialist Workers party was that we would not take union positions, the leadership wanted us to tell the workers about sexism all the time and correct their language.

The thing about General Motors is that they were very careful about organisation. No two workers working beside each other spoke the same language. They all communicated with hand signals. At one stage I was coming to work with a group of Greek comrades, who were talking about the Communist Party. Our chief shop steward was a Socialist Party member, and he built a team up and wanted to take leadership over the union. The union was run by a group of right-wing trade unionists, who had all been to the Harvard Trade Union School. Interesting for comrades to note is that had the chief shop steward any political sense, he would have seen how green we all were and would have had himself a bevy of new recruits to follow him everywhere. What he did though was form an alliance with the right wing against what they thought were the Trotskyist rabble.

We actually came into a general meeting of the union, and they hadn't had a quorum for ages. We didn't know the meeting procedures or anything. If we'd done any study, we'd have done enormous damage to the right wing. They were having an election and they said we needed to confirm it. Had we been organised; we would have helped them not confirm their election and force them out. We were at another meeting where there had been a strike

at one of the bigger truck building companies. A group of workers were upset at the outcome where the strike had been busted by the Union Officials. Because they'd been smart enough to count the bundy cards the workers had found that more people had voted in that strike return than were actually on the bundy clock.

The vehicle builders ended up amalgamating into the AMWU and taking it over with a turn to the right. I got close to being elected as a shop steward in that place, but they closed that whole section, or put two sections together, amalgamated them, so there was no election for the shop steward's position. General Motors sacked another worker who had nominated for the delegate’s position. The Union leadership were in cahoots with the company.

It was a steep learning curve. I was 21 years old. The workers were looking for leadership and they were willing to elect us as shop stewards. The conditions were atrocious. The plant was archaic. Word got back that the Japanese were laughing at the "working museum," and it really was. We were doing things that robots were doing in Japan.

General Motors were introducing “just in time” method. This meant that parts were arriving as they were assembled to the cars. This made for lower costs but made supply chain issues more important.

Those who may not be familiar with an assembly line would not understand how it reduces the number of movements of the worker thus saving time for the company. Tasks are reduced to the simplest and most boring repetition. You are controlled by the line.

Of interest to us was a tour that proposed ending the assembly line and introducing a full assembly as a way of diversifying tasks. Volvo was in the forefront of this. I am still fascinated by how robotisation and automation has changed the whole process.

Part two of the interview will continue in the next issue of AMR.

To Moscow and back again: an ex-ex member's story

William Briggs

In late 1985, an Aeroflot flight left Moscow. It marked the end of three momentous years for Rose and myself. I had been sent to Moscow to work as correspondent for the party paper, The Socialist, which later became The Guardian. Rose was, at first, part of a student group at the party school in Moscow, then with Moscow News and for nearly two years as a broadcaster with Radio Moscow.

When the plane left Moscow, I had no idea that I would be the last Guardian correspondent in the Soviet Union. But then, I had no idea that just a very few years later the Soviet Union would cease to be.

The physical journey to Moscow was in 1982, but the story started earlier, when we joined the party. We were living in Hobart and had become involved with the Australia-USSR Friendship Society. There were a few older former SPA members in the Society. They encouraged our reading and were among the finest people we had ever met. We also had contacts with a couple of ALP members who were also Society members.

We began a sort of discussion group. It was the pre-Congress period ahead of the party's Fourth Congress. We had been sent the draft documents and after a month or so we made the decision to form a branch. It was a big moment for us and it proved to be a life-changing moment.

We could not have had any real conception of just how important that Congress was, not just for us, but for the communist movement in this country. Another comrade from Hobart and I were watching the debates unfold.

Comrade Eddie Clynes, from Sydney, sat with us and made an oblique reference to the fact that we were part of an historical moment. The prescience of his comment only became fully clear a little later. The stakes were high. The party's future was at stake.

In the lead up to the Congress, the party had been enjoying a growth spurt. New branches were being formed. A vibrant youth wing was seizing the day. However, the party was in the middle of a convulsive inner-party struggle. The party split. The issues being fought out were ideological. A right-opportunist grouping based around party president Pat Clancy and Bill Brown that had influence in some of the more important unions were pitted against the General-Secretary, Peter Symon and the party centre.

Among the issues that divided the party was the attitude to the party. What sort of organisation was needed. Right opportunism is essentially a liquidationist tendency. In the case of Clancy, Brown and their supporters, it was manifested by subsuming the work of the party, its members and the central role of the party into the mass movements. The party was of almost secondary importance in their estimation. They countered the accusation of opportunism with the counter-accusation that Symon and the centre were becoming left-sectarian. What the party leadership was seeking was the construction of a Marxist-Leninist organisation. It was striving to build the party, win the political leadership of organisations where possible, set goals that were achievable, and to support the mass organisations, while maintaining a visibly party presence.

Who was right? Who was wrong? Ultimately this can only be tested by looking back.

Globally, the communist movement was being swept up in Eurocommunist ideology. This was a multi-faceted theory that consciously acted to downplay the leading role of the working class, and rejected inner party discipline by rejecting the concept of democratic centralism. Although the name Eurocommunism was novel, the practice was not a new one. Evet since the 1920s European Marxism had been weakened by those who sought to 'rescue' Marxism and make it 'relevant' to changing conditions. The Frankfurt School, neo-Marxism, the New Left, all played their role in weakening classical and orthodox Marxist theory. The first casualty was always the working class.

The old CPA, from which the SPA was born, was a spectacular casualty of Eurocommunist ideology, turning the party into a shell, that was at best, a left-social democratic party. The right-opportunist faction within the SPA may not have been consciously abandoning Marxism but the result was the same.

For comrades, like ourselves that were new to the party, it was a rapid-fire introduction to theory and polemic. The split saw nearly half of the membership lost to the party and a gaping hole in mass work was left. Symon, Jack McPhillips and the cadre around the party centre that won the day had described the oppositionists as liquidationists. It was not long before that claim was proven. The party was weakened but survived. Today it is in good health. Those who left made feeble attempts at re-organising but silently slipped away.

Those that left the party sought to reorganise themselves. They formed the Association for Communist Unity (ACU) and when the disintegrating CPA sought to re-badge itself, along with other groups and individuals into the New Left Party, they thought they had found a home. The new party was an abject failure and quickly sank below the surface, without leaving a ripple.

These former comrades enjoyed extremely good relations with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In particular this meant the International Department of the CPSU. The apparent influence that the opportunists brought to the USSR was a powerful connection to key unions, and in mass organisations that included peace, friendship, women's and youth movements.

When Pat Clancy spoke with ACTU Presidents, or was consulted by the Prime Minister, it was seen as ‘proof’ of the influence the party had. That same influence led Tom MacDonald, a comrade of Clancy and a leader of the Building Worker’s Industrial Union, to co-author of the Hawke Accord that emasculated the Union movement in this country.

There was a lack of integrity that ought to have been clear to all. The Soviet party was happy enough to go along with the charade. Philosophically and organisationally the CPSU, and the USSR as a whole, were beginning to unravel. It had been a long time coming but Rose and I had no idea of this, and no idea that we would, in quick time, find ourselves in Moscow and in the middle of the dispute.

A few months after the 4th Congress, we were sounded out about my taking on the job of travelling to Moscow to be party representative and correspondent. We jumped at the chance, although we were inexperienced.

We flew out of Australia in September 1982 and into an exciting but unknown future.

We bumped up against the inner party struggle and its implications as far as Moscow was concerned, pretty early on. The International Department comrade responsible for Australia, made it clear that the CPSU were firm backers of Clancy. I was assured that we would be given all assistance that was necessary, but that no extra yards would be taken. The same comrade visited Rose while I was out of Moscow to see if she would be happy about exchanging dollars for roubles. She gave him short shrift. The few dollars we did have were expressly earmarked to get little extras when visiting comrades came through Moscow. They were not ‘our’ dollars.

We were, briefly assisted by allowing us some of the ‘perks’ that were given to foreigners and to some elites within the party. We soon called a halt to this. We had no special privileges. We lived, as much as was possible, as Muscovites, although not always as successfully! We did not have any special network or knowledge of how the city worked, but we learned on the run and managed well.

What it meant for us was that we dug in, and, as best as we could, got on with the job. The degree of standoffishness that we experienced from the International Department meant that we got to experience the reality of life in Moscow and that was, in retrospect a blessing. We were the only foreigners in our block of flats. As far as we could tell, we were the only foreigners within a goodly radius. Apart from our work, we lived, shopped, queued, delighted in finding that little unexpected treasure in a shop or stall, and lived as Muscovites for three years.

It is a sad fact of life but the extraordinary all too easily becomes ordinary. Those first weeks were extraordinary. The first time I saw Red Square at night. The thrill never left me.

And so, the days unfolded. Work, for me was a largely ordered affair. I waded through TASS reports, to find material for the international news that I had to file each week. I would also write about Soviet reality as magazine-style articles, and submit material for the AMR on a regular basis. In the early days I had to file my stories via telegram. Complaints were made about the cost of these. Eventually a telex was installed. In the last year I began writing and presenting a weekly Radio Moscow broadcast. Rose was usually in the studios at the same time but our paths in Radio Moscow seldom crossed.

I would go to press conferences fairly regularly. Sometimes more for the company of fellow correspondents and for a beer and a chat afterwards. Very occasionally these conferences were useful but not often.

It was at a press conference that the famous Mike Davidow, the veteran American communist, broke the news to me across the hall that Wilfred Burchett had died. Mike was much older than me but with more zeal than almost anyone I had ever met. He died in Moscow, years after the collapse of the USSR. When in October 1993, Yeltsin moved the armed forces against the Russian Parliament,

Davidow got a cab to the ‘White House’ and joined the doomed forces before the building was shelled. Few people showed that sort of courage.

Part of our job was to welcome any visitors, show them around, take them to our flat, feed and generally entertain them. A lot of people came our way during those years. Party delegations, rest and recreation groups, trade union delegations, peace activists, and the occasional economist, all found their way to our place. There were student groups, studying at the Komsomol school and for a period, Rose’s fellow students from the Lenin School. Politics was always present, although often in a low-key way.

This manifestation of the political in a social setting was best shown through our connection to John Bizzell. He was a central figure in the Canadian Party, after a forced migration from Apartheid South Africa. He was a communist activist in the South African Communist Party. There is a park in Johannesburg named in his honour. He introduced us to a group of South African communists studying in Moscow. Members of three communist parties were sitting around a dining room table in a flat on a quiet street in Moscow. Flat 46, number 9 Krasnoproletarskaya Street, that translates to the ‘street of red proletarians.’ As I say, the extraordinary becomes the ordinary.

There were also occasions when visitors to Moscow presented a challenge. I got a call from the International Department telling me that Bill Brown was in town. By this stage he was no longer in the party and did not have my telephone number. The call was to advise me to give him a call and to arrange a meeting, as he wished to see me. I was not in a position to decline. We met, chatted for a little while, danced around things of substance, but finally had the talk that he had wanted. At the end of the discussion, he asked what made me think that we were right and they were wrong. I should have opened up more of a debate but fell back on a possibly trite, ‘the next 10 years will decide for us.’ He was dismissive of this and we parted. The jury was back in a lot less than the 10 years.

My job took me out of Moscow on a regular basis. Mostly this was to visit other cities, regions and republics. There were also specific visits outside the Soviet Union. One significant trip was to Kabul.

The SPA had been engaged in discussions with the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The government, with Soviet support, was waging a fierce battle for survival against the US-funded Mujahadeen. The CIA had recruited, trained and funded numbers of future terrorists and tested them in the war against Afghanistan. Their most infamous recruit was Osama bin-Laden. I spent 10 days in Afghanistan and was able to report on how the country was making such strides in so many ways; not the least in education for women and girls. I asked my interpreter about the future. Despite the war, there was an optimism. We often think of those days and of the crimes perpetuated by imperialism against the Afghan people. We also think of what might have been, had the PDPA been able to build a decent future for the people.

In 1983 I had a surprise visit from three representatives from the embassy of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea with an invitation for me to attend an anti-imperialist conference of journalists in Pyongyang. It was a fascinating experience. Kim Il Sung was still in power, although it was Kim Jong Il who was most prominent during the conference. As with the Kabul experience, our party was regarded well and I was able to speak at the conference and give an overview of both the political situation and of our small contribution to the fight against imperialism and for peace.

At the time I visited Pyongyang, I was an accredited journalist in the Soviet Union but not a member of the International Organisation of Journalists. The organisation had 150,000 members in affiliated organisations around the world. It was based in Prague and predominantly covered socialist media. It was decided

that I should become a member which would allow the party a small degree of recognition.

The only other Australian member was Bill Brown, who had left the party after the split following the Fourth Congress.

I travelled to Prague to formalise this membership and to make contact with the organisation. There was always a political aspect to these visits beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. The SPA had suffered losses from the split. These were not just from within the membership and the unions but from non-party organisations which were based in the socialist countries. All comrades who had an opportunity, pushed the credentials, the record and the commitment to Marxism-Leninism of the party.

This also carried over to official ‘holiday’ time as well. We had a break of a few weeks each year. Our first was to Sochi and also later in Jurmala, in Latvia. While we holidayed, we also had talks with comrades from other parties to explain the SPA’s position in relation to the split and the slightly strained relationship with Moscow.

In late 1983, the USA invaded the tiny island of Grenada. It showed the world that it would stop at nothing to crush socialism. At the time of the invasion, Grenada’s ambassador to the Soviet Union was in hospital, recovering from surgery. An impromptu office was set up in his ward, and his ‘desk’ was his hospital bed. He maintained contact, with Grenada, as best he could. A short-wave radio with an aerial had been hung out of the widow. I spent hours with him, sharing information, and relaying that back to Sydney, where protests and rallies were being held. Socialist Grenada was overrun. Its forces were no match for US imperialism. Many Cuban volunteers and building workers died alongside their comrades in Grenada. In the face of barbarity, socialist internationalism remained firm, and the US covered itself in shame once more.

These were difficult times in the world. The Cold War had become fiercer. Ronald Reagan was expending vast resources to bleed the Soviet economy that was forced to match the American spending. In 1983 there were demonstrations across Europe against the deployment of missiles. The Soviet Peace Committee organised a march in Moscow. 800,000 took part. The Western media claimed this was a highly exaggerated figure. It wasn’t. I was one of the 800,000. Columns marched from all quarters of the city, converging on the centre. Muscovites, had a real stake in building for peace. A year later, Reagan made his ‘joke’ on air that he had signed the order and that ‘bombing will start in five minutes.’ A day or two later, I was in a queue in a bottle shop. The queue was barely moving. A customer, just a little the worse for wear, and about two ahead of me in the line called out that he was nearly sober but that if Reagan was about to bomb us, he’d rather not be and so could we all hurry up. The spontaneous uproar of laughter at this black humour said a lot about the Soviet people. They were later let down so terribly.

The people we met, the ordinary Muscovites in shops, on the street, in restaurants, might have been a little cynical about their government. They certainly didn’t hold back when making jokes at the expense of their leaders. We also had the great privilege of meeting some outstanding communists. These were men and women who sincerely believed in the socialist future

When Rose and I first arrived in Moscow, we didn’t register with the Australian embassy. We just didn’t feel the need. About six months later an election was called in Australia. It was the Hawke election. We tossed up for a while but chose to go to the embassy and arrange for an absentee-vote. I don’t know whether the embassy staff were aware that we were in the country. Nothing was officially said on the matter, but it led to a strange relationship. Apart from embassy staff we were probably the only Australians permanently in Moscow at the time. From time to time, to mark those most ‘important’ Australian celebrations – the running of the Melbourne Cup and Australia Day, we would receive gilt-edged invitations to attend the embassy. These were peculiar affairs. Finnish waiters would cruise about with silver trays laden with Four-and-Twenty party

pies and cans of Fosters Lager. The hosts were pleasant people but the image that was presented was a surrealist one.

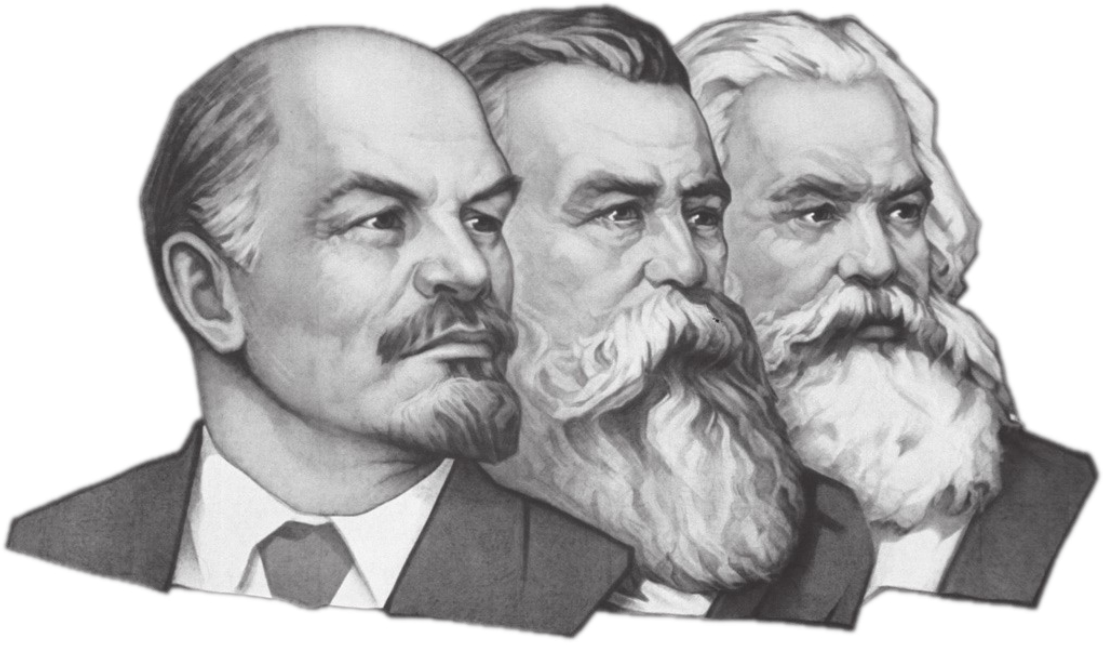
Other invitations were also delivered to our flat. These too were gilt-edged. They had much more significance to us. They were to view May Day parades and November 7 parades on Red Square. There were other, more sombre invitations that we received while in Moscow. I attended three state funerals; Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko. The deaths, so close together, and then the coming to power of Gorbachev were, in their own way, metaphors for what was happening in the Soviet Union. We left soon after Gorbachev came to power and were spared the ignominious end of the Soviet Union.

And so, we packed our cases, shipped some things back to Sydney, said our farewells and boarded the Aeroflot flight.

When we got back, we went to work. Rose in the party bookshop, while I started to write for the Guardian in Sydney. We were very different people to the ones who had left three years earlier and we had very real difficulties settling back into life in Australia. I was unaware at the time, just how changed we were, but we were not coping with life under capitalism and the alienating nature of that life. Time goes by and the carapace reforms. The alienating nature of that society, however, has become more acute. I recently read a book about a young woman who had been brought up in the DPRK from childhood. She was a refugee from civil war. Kim Il Sung was her guardian. When she was getting ready to leave Korea for the West, Kim took her aside and asked her if she was strong enough to live in that harsh capitalist world. I understand completely what he meant.

We had difficulties with the party and eventually left. Bourgeois ideology infuses just about every aspect of society and as a consequence it affects the outlook and world view of the individual. This is not an original idea. It sits at the core of Marxist-Leninist philosophy. I always accepted it in the abstract but could neither recognise this truth in myself nor how it had affected my thinking. I spent years convincing myself that the party was at fault and not me. In the end, and after a long time of thought and study, I came to realise a very simple truth. It is a shame that it has taken me so long to accept this truth, but the party, as a representation of theory and as a collective consciousness is greater than my, or anyone’s individual perspectives.

The SPA suffered losses from the aftermath of the split, but its theoretical position remained firm. While numerically weaker, it kept the flag aloft. Today the CPA is in a far healthier position. It survived the worst days. The importance of that historic Fourth Congress is clear for all to see. The party not only remains but is growing. New branches have formed. New members are joining its ranks and I am happy to say that the party has found space for an older recruit such as myself; now an ex-ex-member



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