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THEORY
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Image credits from “Unsplash”:

Front cover: Socialist realist mosaic in Alexanderplatz, Berlin

Front cover: Earth from outer space

Rear cover: Uluru, Central Australia

Editorial

This issue of our Party's theoretical journal continues the important task of deepening and strengthening the Party's knowledge and consciousness of Marxism-Leninism. Included in this issue are four articles, two of which carry on our project of recording oral histories by long-time Party members, and two of which present important pieces to advance the tasks of our Party in the current historical situation of Australia and the world.

The first article is a reprint of the inaugural issue editorial from the new journal *World Marxist Review*. The editorial makes it clear that communists armed with the tools of Marxism-Leninism never need despair about the state of the world. Why? Scientific socialism and the deep insights it provides inspire confidence to move forward despite setbacks. Most importantly, as we are now in a phase of qualitative changes in the world the tasks of communists become ever more important. To quote: as the contradictions of capitalism become ever more acute, as these "contradictions mature and threaten both people and the planet, the struggle for socialism becomes ever more urgent. As we seek to advance that struggle, we must bear in mind what the past century has demonstrated: that a world ruled by imperialist capitalism can never be peacefully united. As Marx and Engels' 1848 *Communist Manifesto* showed, capitalism made human history a world history for the first time but did so in a brutal and chaotic fashion. As this brutality and chaos scale new heights on the threshold of the second quarter of the 21st century, we insist that the true unity of the world's people and peoples can only be achieved under socialism. The inherent contradictions of capitalism on a world scale constantly create and re-create the conditions for a socialist transformation of human civilization. With conscious theoretical analysis and revolutionary practice, we must base ourselves on these conditions and set the world on the path to socialism." With a truly international editorial board, with Cheng Enfu as editor-in-chief, *World Marxist Review* is a major step in the renewal of the world communist movement. It is published quarterly by Canut Press, based in Istanbul.

Next is the second part of the interview with comrade David Matters (the first part was published in AMR 76). This interview covers the period of the 1980s and 1990s, when comrade Matters worked in the car industry and then the buses. It deals with his experiences of trade union work, the initial encounters with SPA comrades and then the decision to join the SPA. These decades of experience, of learning (and unlearning in some cases) provide a depth from which all comrades can learn. Readers are encouraged to pay particular attention to the advice given in light a history of class struggle.

The third article concerns the history of the national question in the communist movement, a question of prime importance for our Party's policies concerning the First Nations of Australia. Given that such policies can best be made by fully understanding the history of the national question and by paying careful attention to Australia's concrete realities, the article covers the period from the late 19th century until the 1960s. In particular, it notes the movement and development of positions of the national question from initial debates (with class as the key category), implementation of preferential policies in the Soviet Union after the October Revolution, and the crucial breakthrough – in theory and practice – that the national question also includes support for anti-colonial struggles for national liberation throughout the world.

Finally, we include the second part of the interview with comrade Sally Mitchel. The interview covers her experiences as the first fitter and turner in Adelaide in the 1970s, subsequent jobs, involvement in the trade union movement, and experiences of the Party over the long term. Notable here are reflections on a difficult time for the communist movement in Australia, especially the confusion and disarray brought about by the "Prices and Incomes Accord," the role of Bob Hawke in undermining the union movement, and the way seemingly "left-wing" organisations such as the "Association for Communist Unity" (during the time of the "Accord") can mislead for a time even the most resolute communist. That Sally was able to weather such times and remain a communist is a testament to her unshakeable endurance.

We hope that readers – in the Party, unions, and wider afield – will gain much from this issue of the *Australian Marxist Review*.

Inaugural Issue Editorial of *World Marxist Review*

Cheng Enfu and the Editorial Board[1]

The year 2024 finds the nations and peoples of the world more tightly interconnected than ever. We are collectively aghast at the horrors rained on Gaza. We wonder, with international tensions mounting and multiplying on so many fronts, whether we are in a Third World War. We are transfixed by mounting global temperatures that a world at war can only fail to address. This close interconnection seems to lead us farther away from the eternal peace that both ancients and moderns dreamt of. Do we despair? Not for a moment. Rejecting the utopian thinking that leads to despair, armed with dialectical, historical, and materialist, in short, Marxist, understanding, we face up to the existing reality and probe its contradictions. These contradictions, and our understanding of them, make us confident that we can undertake the urgent revolutionary social transformation through our collective efforts and achieve that just and peaceful, in short socialist, world. To advance this world historic effort, we proudly announce this new journal, *World Marxist Review*.

World Marxist Review will develop and elaborate Marxist theories to keep pace with real-world changes and apply them to the revolutionary transformation of the human condition on a world scale. From the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, *World Marxist Review* will become and remain part of the great social struggles that lay the foundation for human emancipation.

In doing this, we are conscious of carrying on a mighty legacy. Being the exploitative and chaotic, unjust and anarchic social system that it is, imperialist capitalism has always faced resistance, in its homelands and, as it spread its tentacles world-wide, far beyond. The Haitian Revolution, the great Indian revolt of 1857, the Paris Commune, the Yihetuan movement (Boxer Rebellion), the list is long. Such resistance reached a major peak when, more than a hundred years ago, the Russian October Revolution led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin created the world's first socialist country and founded a new international Marxist movement to spread the practice of building socialism around the world, including in the colonial and semi-colonial countries.

World Marxist Review is being launched on the centenary of Lenin's death and is committed to carrying on the precious practical and theoretical legacies he left us. The legacy of his revolutionary practice insisted, against the reformism and Eurocentrism that crept into the Second International, that the struggle for socialism had to include anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles for national liberation. His theoretical legacy extended Marxist theorizing to the new stages that capitalism and imperialism had reached and reckoned that they had put the world on the eve of worldwide socialist transformation.

How prescient Lenin and his fellow Marxists were was clear when the following decades witnessed socialism spreading to new countries while the capitalist countries became mired in their imperialist wars, the Great Depression and fascism. Indeed, only the maturation of the forces of resistance to capitalism, imperialism and fascism that Lenin had so ably led saved the world. During this period, the Soviet Union became a major industrial and military force and China emerged as a major anti-imperialist force. Without their decisive contribution fighting alongside the Allies, German, Italian and Japanese fascism could not have been defeated.

These struggles reached a second major culmination in 1949, when Chinese Marxists led by Mao Zedong founded the People's Republic of China, marking a new era in the development of world socialism as the influential US socialist magazine *Monthly Review*, launched the same year, recognized in its founding issue. In its first ever "Review of the Month", amid the escalating Cold War, the world-historical significance of the 1949 Chinese revolution, of China's forthcoming socialist construction and of its implications for the socialist transformation of humanity took center stage.

The struggle for socialism was never going to be easy or linear and, another four decades later, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it faced its first major setbacks. The socialist states of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were overthrown by an alliance of antagonistic domestic and foreign forces. China, however, had already turned decisively towards introducing a socialist market

1 Originally published in *World Marxist Review* 1.1 (2024): 1–4. See www.worldmarxistreview.org.

economy in 1978. While an antagonistic alliance of domestic and foreign forces also sought to shunt China onto an anti-socialist path, China has kept the beacon of world socialism alight.

Little suspecting how brightly it would come to blaze in the coming decades, the triumphalism of the capitalist West in the early 1990s knew no bounds. Not only its monopoly capitalist press, but even its increasingly privatized mainstream scholarship proclaimed 'the end of history', with the combination of capitalism and liberal democracy constituting its terminus. The only task that now remained was their 'globalization'.

However, within the decade, history returned with a vengeance. The 1999 anti-WTO protests on the streets of Seattle highlighted problems with the post-Cold War imposition of neoliberal capitalist imperialism on the world spearheaded by neoliberal international institutions. Since it was launched in the 1970s/1980s, neoliberalism had not only failed to revive capitalist economies, but also reoriented them away from production and towards financialization and ever rising inequality. No wonder that, from its start, the neoliberal capitalist order has been marked by a rising crescendo of multiplying crises in all realms, from the financial and economic, through ecological and political, to diplomatic and military.

As these crises mount, as capitalism's contradictions mature and threaten both people and the planet, the struggle for socialism becomes ever more urgent. As we seek to advance that struggle, we must bear in mind what the past century has demonstrated: that a world ruled by imperialist capitalism can never be peacefully united. As Marx and Engels' 1848 *Communist Manifesto* showed, capitalism made human history a world history for the first time but did so in a brutal and chaotic fashion. As this brutality and chaos scale new heights on the threshold of the second quarter of the 21st century, we insist that the true unity of the world's people and peoples can only be achieved under socialism. The inherent contradictions of capitalism on a world scale constantly create and re-create the conditions for a socialist transformation of human civilization. With conscious theoretical analysis and revolutionary practice, we must base ourselves on these conditions and set the world on the path to socialism.

In this context, we launch *World Marxist Review* as a venue for academics and activists driven by truly revolutionary spirit and inspired by Marxist-oriented transformation of global human conditions in all walks of life and in all disciplines the world over. *World Marxist Review* will disseminate and discuss ideas in a frank and open fashion aiming to advance the mastery, innovation and application of Marxism in service of the emancipation of the world working class and humanity.

We invite submissions of manuscripts focusing on themes including but not limited to the following:

- Clarification of the authentic spirit of Marxism in its classical texts and in its revolutionary practices through research on the classical works, on the development of Marxism by Marxists in various countries and on theoretical contributions and practices of communist and working-class parties in various countries;
- Innovation and application of the working theories of Marxism in the context of changes in the 20th and 21st centuries;
- Connection of Marxist principles to those of other intellectual traditions, whether of the ancient Axial Age or the modern bourgeois epoch that are critical of oppression and exploitation of all sorts, including those arising in the age of capitalism and imperialism;
- Elucidation of the historical-materialist laws of motion governing the evolution of human society as manifested concretely in the histories of various countries and civilizations;
- Analysis of major current affairs from the Marxist perspective that covers changes in the existing global capitalist system in one or more of its aspects—social or ecological, cultural or economic, legal or ideational, political or technical, domestic or foreign etc. and reveals the connections between current aff airs and the innate contradictions of the workings of capitalism;
- Dialectical reflection on past experiences and lessons of Marxist parties and social movements drawing out their implications for the improvement of revolutionary practices in the future;

- Exploration of the conditions of socialist construction in China and other socialist countries, with their implications for the internationalist project of human emancipation;
- Examination of developments in key parts of the world, including but not limited to China, Russia, the US, European Union, Japan, BRICS countries, as well as their interactions with one another, with implications for the preservation of and challenge to the existing global imperialist capitalist order;
- Treatment of issues facing the international communist movement and world socialist development; and
- Assessment of the prospects of socialist transformation in developing countries and in advanced capitalist regions and their mutual influences.

In summary, the themes covered by this journal are broad and significant.

In launching *World Marxist Review*, we hope to become part of the intellectual forces fostering the humanity's ongoing struggles for emancipation in the 21st century following the truly revolutionary spirit of Marxism.

Marxists of the world, Unite! Let us work together to develop and dedicate our wisdom and power to the Marxist, socialist and communist cause!

AMR Interview with Comrade David Matters, Part 2

Conducted in Beijing on 30 September 2023

(For part 1 of the interview, see AMR 76, pp. 39-49)

AMR: What did all that teach you, as a young man in your early twenties, about the struggles between different groups in the unions and the workplace like the car industry?

DM: Look, I was still learning. The best way to say it is that we wanted a better life than the one we had, and we couldn't see the direction for going forward. The Socialist Workers' Party were against running for union positions. This was slightly before Pedro Camejo denounced his own party as a sect. That was a bit of a movement inside the Socialist Workers' Party and the Trotskyist groups. Before that anyone who stood in a union position was a potential bureaucrat. So there was a conflict with the workers needing and wanting leadership, needing to change things.

AMR: If a group like the Socialist Workers' Party wasn't going to take up leadership, how did they see change coming about?

DM: To me now, it's a bit hard to see what they were doing. I think they thought that they would gather the numbers, they'd explode, and it would happen. I'm not sure that the main people pushing the organisation saw that as their task. I think there was an underlying current or direction somewhere else that detected changes coming in the working-class movement and the problems that were coming. So, they assigned the Trotskyist groups in a different direction. Trotskyist organisations were more like anarchists, with circles within circles. Eventually I was not happy. The prospects of socialism out of this course were not there, but then I was living this life.

One day we were watching a guy reading a newspaper, who used to pick us up on the bus. His job looked pretty much better than what we were doing getting dirty in the factory. So, one comrade went off and got a job on the buses, and so we followed and went into the buses.

There was also a strike. I remember them going on [strike] for the 38-hour week. The Bus Union was leading that strike in the Brisbane City Council. There was a series of bus drivers' strikes, so that attracted the Trotskyist group to the class struggle. It gave the gurus at the top something that was useful for us to go and do. So, we were given permission to leave the car industry and go into the bus industry.

That was the beginning of my time as a bus driver, in 1981. I was taught to drive a bus at the Toowong Bus Depot. That was one of the hardest things I had to learn to do. The buses were then pre-select, that is, semi-automatics. They were very old vintage British buses.

AMR: With the big steering wheels?

DM: Big steering wheels, little levers for changing gears, plastic seats for the passengers and a cane seat for the driver. You'd stand up at the traffic lights and put a newspaper under the cushion to try to give more cushioning. The Panther buses were a little newer. There was some power steering in the Volvos. In the British Panthers, they were automatic, but still manual steering. This meant there was no power-assisted steering, so it was a physical job. The routes didn't go very far.

I ended up at the Carina Bus Depot. We (the Socialist Workers party) had changed our policy and we were starting to look towards moving to union positions. There was the beginning of discussions between the Socialist Workers' Party and the Socialist Party of Australia, who I'd never heard of before.

AMR: So this was the first time you heard of the Socialist Party of Australia, the SPA.

DM: There was a young comrade when I was in Parramatta, who used to go and sit in their office. But to me they were still a mystical organisation.

We started to have some joint meetings with the Socialist Party. The approach of the Socialist Party was very distinct. They insisted on a level of professionalism from the comrades. They didn't regard an organisation as proper unless it had letterheads, had proper addresses. At that time, I think Jim Henderson was a leading figure in the branch in Queensland. We had comrades such as Edgar Ross around.

I began to work with Socialist Party of Australia comrades in at least two organisations. One of them was the SEQEB dispute in 1985. The other was the Palestinian Human Rights Committee. We were also doing joint work on the [Prices and

Incomes] Accord. The Socialist Party was working very hard to build Left and Progressive Unity. This was around the same time as the Nuclear Disarmament Party was formed.

AMR: Can you say what the SEQEB dispute was about?

DM: It was the Southeast Queensland Electricity Board. For the whole period I was at General Motors Holden, and even in the buses, the most powerful union was the Electrical Trades Union. They had been waging a series of disputes, strikes, and struggles against the repressive Bjelke-Petersen government. The strikes were pursuing income gains and against the contracting out of work. The ETU had won at least twice against the Bjelke-Petersen Government. The final straw was in 1985 when over 1000 linesmen were sacked.

Arriving in Queensland was a different experience. You were coming up against political police. They were a bit heavy in NSW, where they would stop you and arrest you. I got arrested once in NSW. But I got arrested again in Queensland selling *Direct Action* in the pubs of Ipswich. Pretty courageous stuff: we were selling newspapers supporting a beer strike, in pubs. Or crazy, if you like.

AMR: (Laughter).

DM: While people were trying to swallow West End beer in preference to XXXX beer. You can see we would have got a little bit of razzing.

AMR: Going back to the meetings between the SPA and the Socialist Workers' Party, there's two questions. Did you know at the time the reason for discussions between the SPA and the Socialist Workers' Party? If not, when did you find out?

DM: There was a meeting led by a woman called Pat. She led it for the Socialist Workers' Party and explained the [Prices and Incomes] Accord to us. I had a feeling that Jack McPhillips and Peter Symon were meeting with the Percy brothers. They came back and explained, and we took a decision to support the SPA's position.

We had a series of big strikes. In the 1980s the TWU broke through the wage restrictions and there was a good pay rise. Prior to my experience in the trade union movement, wages were set by the Metalworkers Union. They used to set the margins, and everyone would follow through. That was the wages system. At that time, I can say I had very little understanding of this. It's worthwhile noting that when we're talking with people who have the political persuasions of the Trotskyists, it's an alien world to these comrades. They don't know the foibles and the differences of the working class. It happens all around them, but they don't see what's going on. I was in a similar position.

I was very unhappy inside the Socialist Workers' Party. I found the factionalism, [especially] the last faction that formed before a conference, was stifling. I knew the course of events that was going to unfold, that the comrades were going to be expelled and that another Trotskyist organisation would be born. I thought it was a futile argument over futile points of view. It was not going to change the situation or improve the organisation.

I was considered to have gone what they called "funny." They sent Jim Percy to talk to us, because the whole branch was "infected" by whatever "disease" I had. He gave a long talk, which I thought was spectacular. Until I went up to the next comrade and asked what they thought they had heard. They had heard something completely different. They'd heard what they wanted to hear.

I was working with comrade Ray Ferguson, at that stage in the Palestine Human Rights Committee. This was a couple of years after the terrible events with a massacre in Beirut. I was very heavily influenced by this and had come to work with the Palestinian Community. It was very small in Brisbane, but I had the great pleasure to work with the Afifi family. We were pro-PLO but they were pro-Hamas, but this did not stop us from working in a very united manner. The differences were beyond me; I just liked the people. And I enjoyed the food. I used to be the secretary of the Palestine Human Rights Committee and people left me alone. We were supporters of the workers during the SEQEB dispute, so our organisation got named in the parliament by Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

At that point, I had started to want to join the Socialist Party of Australia.

AMR: You made a very important comment earlier, that you were impressed with the professionalism of the SPA. Can you say a bit more about that?

DM: One of the most impressive things I noticed was their care for working people. They took the time to talk with workers. In the SEQEB strike,

there were a couple of workers who had influenced the strike in the wrong way. They'd gone in an anarchist way. All the political groups were active in the SEQEB support group. The old Communist Party was there, the Anarchists, the different Trotskyist groups, and the Socialist Party. But the Socialist Party, in my opinion, did the most practical work to assist workers: to get food, to get support, and they talked in a careful, measured way so as not to expose workers to troubles that they didn't need to be exposed to.

AMR: Would you use the word "discipline"?

DM: The discipline was enormous. The fact was that they were the only party that had the courage to tell the workers that the strike had been defeated. The Labor Party didn't have the courage to tell the workers and let them get on with their lives. That fact will never leave me.

The support for the Soviet Union: we were involved in debates concerning "Solidarity" in Poland. My position had begun to change in relation to the work that I was beginning to do. I was further recruited to the Socialist Party and became a member of the Party. I started with a view that it would be a better experience, but then the positive outcomes were the way the Party assisted me in my union work. The other comrade who was with me in the Socialist Workers party was insistent that he was going to be the (bus) depot delegate, even though the majority of union members in the bus depot thought otherwise. I had thought to run for vice-president, but the good advice that I got from the secretary of the (Brisbane) branch of the Socialist Party, Ray Ferguson, was that I should contest the delegate's position. He felt that I would be somewhat more amenable to the workers.

By that time, I'd switched over and joined the Socialist Party: July 1985. I wrote in my diary because I thought it might be important.

I remember sitting in a meeting chaired by Jim Henderson of the Industrial Committee of the Party. We were discussing how to tell the workers that the [SEQEB] strike was over. The way that Jim chaired the meeting, the way he gave a say to everybody ... what I found was that you didn't have to form a faction in order to have an opinion. What was scary was that we all had to have an opinion. When a report was given, everyone was expected to speak for a short period of time to express their point of view. The two things you dreaded most were not getting mentioned in the sum-up or getting mentioned but in unfavourable terms.

AMR: Comparing your earlier comments about the organisation of the Socialist Workers' Party, it seems to me that the SWP's organisation doesn't sound like democratic centralism. When compared with the Socialist Party, as you've just observed, everyone was expected to put forward an opinion.

DM: Backtracking again for a moment: one of the things that got me most into trouble in the Socialist Workers' Party was when we'd begun working the bus industry. In the bus industry we were working with a group of people, who were more right than the right-wingers: the AWU, the Australian Workers' Union. There was a fellow called Gino Musemici, who had associations with Rolly Livingstone, a professional industrial advocate, who was brought in to tackle the union movement during the Mt. Isa strike. Gino had been brought to us by Sue Bolton, who is still now a council member in Malvern, in Melbourne. She had come along and said he was our own direct "Lech Walesa" (from Poland). Sue Bolton had been [put out] – it's not sour grapes but it sounds like sour grapes – because I had said we should work with the current secretary of the trade union, Tom McHenry. He was a big shock to me, because he was everything that the Socialist Workers' Party said didn't exist he was a militant, a trade unionist, and a communist. The first time I had heard him speak at a (bus) depot meeting; I was in a state of turmoil. He was saying things that were quite a shock to me, which according to the sect didn't exist. This was beginning to get me in trouble with the Socialist Workers' Party, because I suggested at a fraction meeting that we should work with this comrade. That was apparently a heresy. From that point on I was considered to have begun to go "funny."

The other thing that was very active while working in this group was that I was given the job of being the "left cover," which suited me because I was left. They would give me the job of moving strike motions against a particular working condition, for example, when the employer used to take our overtime and use it to pay us for public holidays. So, you were short-changed in a week when there was a public holiday. My job was to get up and move that we strike. Tom McHenry, who was then the secretary, while saying the right things and doing the right things, probably tactically had become stuck in the position with

other right-wingers around him, so he couldn't lead us into a strike. And I kept moving for strikes. The peculiar thing was that I attracted both the left and the right in the union as supporters. I came to the view that I needed to shift position, and that was part of the problem that I had with that section of the Socialist Workers' Party.

We had joint meetings. I remember one when I was in the Socialist Party, meeting in Sydney, and John Percy turned up with half the library and piled it in front of him. I could see the comrades in the Socialist Party groaning, “let's hope he doesn't read all that.”

AMR: (Laughter).

DM: They tried to outwit the Socialist Party. I think what the Socialist Workers’ Party wanted from the Socialist Party were the international contacts. To some extent they were successful in gaining some [contacts]. They wanted to improve their position, in [the sense of] not being regarded as a serious party in an Australian context.

I went through the whole period, including attending one conference, as Peter Symon’s sidekick. The Socialist Workers’ Party had a conference during the Gorbachev period in a hall in an agricultural college in Hawkesbury. They were in a religious fervour, the Socialist Workers’ Party. I remember looking in some of their eyes, and the look I’d seen in born-again Christians was in their eyes. They were stomping the ground and chanting and screaming “Gorby, Gorby, Gorby.” We were at that stage becoming extremely suspicious of Gorbachev.

AMR: So, they were openly supporting not just a non-communist but an anti-communist, who had managed to come up in a degraded Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and who was in the process of dismantling the Soviet Union.

DM: Yes. They introduced us to people like the Croatian Socialist Party, who I think were outright fascists. I tend to think in hindsight that the approaching counter-revolution was a part of this process.

Jim Percy, in one of his attacks on me when I left [the Socialist Workers’ Party], asked me why I was joining a “dying organisation.” “We've got everything we can out of this,” he said – that was the approach they were taking. It took me a few years, and I’ve always remained open about my origins, to dismantle the Trotskyist way of thinking. This is very important, to understand the differences deeply.

AMR: I would like to ask you about the process of learning to become a member of a Marxist-Leninist Party, in other words, unlearning what you had learned and assumed when you were a member of the Socialist Workers' Party.

DM: It’s a very prolonged process and every now and then you can get caught with a thought bubble that remains from the Trotskyist positions. Even as late as 2011 in the union, I still had some residual thinking that went down to the concept of rank-and-file activity. Not fully understanding – or understanding in principle but not in practice – that wildcat strikes are undisciplined actions against the whole union. As a union official, I probably had too much tolerance for wildcat actions. The last one was a right-wing activity designed to bring our leadership undone. I should have been harsher in the centralisation of the struggle. Democratic Centralism is our democracy and each component of this concept ensures the other there is no effective centralism without democracy and no democracy without centralism. This seeming contradiction is at the heart of the process. The Trotskyists present a form of centralism which destroys the rights of their members.

There were a range of things, and it started with understanding the Soviet Union and anti-Sovietism. I’d been brought up with the idea that the Soviet Union was a bureaucracy. I was in shock when I came into the Party and comrades began to say some negative things about Stalin. I thought it was simple: I’d just have to embrace Stalin and everything would be fine and my Trotskyism would be cured. I threw all my Trotskyist books into a pile, with the intention of getting rid of them. Comrade Eddie Clynes was most insistent that I shouldn’t. He suggested that I needed to read them and be able to debate them. I’m grateful to him for that advice.

We also had these strong lectures by Jack McPhillips. One of the peculiar features of the Socialist Party was that it was a bit territorial, in that some comrades had different access to different territories in the Party. Jack McPhillips had significant access to the trade unions and Peter Symon more towards the social activists. That gave me a bit of worry, because I thought that it was factionalism, and I didn't want a bar of it. Maybe that had a negative impact on my life in

the Party, but I was also concerned that I didn't want there to be factions.

The process of coming into the Party involved learning to think for myself. I remember the sectarian blinkers coming off. Part of building me towards the Party was the activity of Tom McHenry. Although I'd heard of a group, the National Civic Council, I wouldn't have known [who they were] and that I was working with them. I couldn't recognise them, and it was a big shock when Tom McHenry said, "you know you're working with the National Civic Council – the 'Groupers'?" They didn't know they were working with someone heading towards Communism either. So, I'd technically infiltrated the Right.

That was part of the trouble I was going through at the time. I was regarded by the Right as a renegade, and I was regarded by the Trotskyists as a renegade. And they were suspicious in the Socialist Party because I had Trotskyist characteristics back then.

There were some people who joined at the same time, a couple Alan and Dianne Muir. They were close friends with Bill Dawson, the Party's state president. I managed to get Dianne Muir onto the bus-driving job. I have to say there were leftist tendencies in that group. They did not have a practical understanding of Trotskyism. I found that comrades – when they were talking with me about Trotskyism, even comrade Ray Ferguson – didn't read the key sentences as to what was being said. Having experienced it, I knew what these people were saying. The comrades were often generous in how they read material from the Socialist Workers' Party, they would read the left camouflage and think that was what was being said. They would miss the right turn in the material. But I had to be polite.

The process of the Gorbachev developments: I had suspicions about Gorbachev, but again I was not trusted because I'd been a Trotskyist. Even Jim Henderson was hostile to Ray Ferguson for bringing me to the Party. At one stage when I was becoming a friend of the Party, I wasn't allowed to use Party equipment to print a Palestine Human Rights Committee leaflet.

AMR: With you coming from a Trotskyist outfit, what were people suspicious about, what were they watching for?

DM: I'm not sure, perhaps because I identified myself as having broken with that. I think I was an easy target.

AMR: It wasn't because they suspected you were part of one of these efforts to take over the SPA?

DM: They wanted to be sure. The interesting thing is that I was also trusted. I was moved into the branch secretary position of the Rocklea branch and worked with great treasurers like Tom Simmons.

AMR: Did it make a difference that you were open about having been a member of the Socialist Workers' Party, but that you'd made a break with that?

DM: I felt I had to be careful not to be labelled a "former smoker." Because the relationship was developing ... and even the bourgeoisie was worried about a significant boost of youth to the Socialist Party through some sort of merger between the Socialist Workers' Party and the SPA. The alliance that was formed included the building of a more united left position. As a Party member I was active in supporting – and this was as late as 1988-1989 – Drew Hutton as the lord-mayoral candidate in Brisbane. We toured him around bus depots as our part of a contribution to a joint effort between the Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers' Party, and the Greens. We ran Ray Ferguson for the Logan City Council, and the Greens assisted us in that campaign. Part of the work that was going on was to try to build a Left and progressive United Front. The Socialist Workers' Party infiltrated these organisations and attempted to take them over. The Socialist Party comrades were critical of how the Socialist Workers' Party had interfered with the development of the Nuclear Disarmament Party. The SWP later changed its name to Democratic Socialist Party and changed the name of the paper from *Direct Action* to *Green Lef*t. They went into the Greens in a big way.

All this was happening at the same time as the [Prices and Incomes] Accord, which was a part of the counter-revolution unfolding and was its representation in Australia. The Russian slogans "glasnost" and "perestroika" meant openness and restructuring; the slogans around the Accord were "openness" and "restructuring." The idea was created that you could have a pluralist government in the Soviet Union, so the dismantling of the Soviet system had already begun before the counter-revolution struck.

This process was occurring in unions as well. When I joined the Socialist Party, it had just been

through a massive split, a devastating split. A large [part], probably 600-800 trade unionists, had been ripped out of the Party, including large sections of the transport branch.

AMR: This was over the Prices and Incomes Accord?

DM: It was over the Prices and Incomes Accord, and the devastatingly bad behaviour of the Clancy forces. I know there are comrades who found their way back. If we re-examine the split historically, we may be able with hindsight to say that some things were necessary and some things were not. But these comrades went through this bitter experience. The comrades I met were still shell-shocked, were still disappointed. The Party that they had begun to rebuild after the split with the [old] CPA (which had been foisted on them) and was going somewhere was then ripped to pieces.

AMR: To clarify: so the split was over whether to support the Accord or to oppose the Accord, is that correct or not?

DM: In the end it came down to behaviour within the trade unions. The approach that was taken was that the Clancy forces would say that Jack McPhillips was trying to interfere in the different trade unions, and that the Party was interfering with their right to conduct their own business in the trade unions. Comrades like Jack McPhillips were trying to say that class collaboration is a fraud, that class collaboration will lead to the workers losing ground.

The imposition of the Accord was an aggressive act. It caused a massive amount of division within the working-class movement. It took six ACTU congresses to quell the opposition to the Accord in the trade union movement. There were some right-wing trade unionists who were opposed to the Accord.

AMR: Would you say that a main aim of the Accord was to split the working class?

DM: I think the main aim of the Accord was to disassociate the working-class movement from the struggle for socialism. The splitting [of the working-class movement] was a part of that process.

People talk about authoritarianism, well the behaviour of the forces around [ACTU secretary Bill] Kelty and others was authoritarian. They expelled and sacked union leaders for opposing the Accord. People who spoke on joint platforms with us lost their jobs. There was already a habit in some unions, where they would stand over Party members and ask them to leave the Party and join the ALP. There was a fellow called Albert in the Miscellaneous Workers' Union, whom the comrades continually talked about: he'd made that choice and gone to the ALP. There were militant unions led by our comrades and some of them were dissolved. The Food Preservers' Union was heavily attacked.

At the same time as this process was occurring, the amalgamation process was beginning. Part of the threat to the trade unions was your position and your list of callings. A list of callings is the occupations which [a union] can cover. It is an agreed demarcation within the union movement. One of the things that was going on during this whole period – and this was the latter part of the Accord [process in] 1989-1990 – was when they began to attack organisationally. Unions were separated into principal, significant, and other. You didn't want to be "other," because "others" were to be liquidated and completely absorbed into other unions. "Significant" meant you could stay a union, but you had to amalgamate.

Jack McPhillips gave us a lecture on these questions of restructuring and amalgamations. By then I was a union secretary of the Tramways Union. Jack's advice to us was that we needed to restructure the awards and do as well as we could out of that, because the workers would expect some gains in wages and conditions. There was some value to simplifying job classifications. His instruction was also that we should hold onto positions if we could, because the way they were treating the unions meant they would not let communists back into the leadership if we lost any positions.

The amalgamation process had some merit to it, but it needed to be about uniting forces that were related in the industries and developing industry unionism – not conglomerate and not amalgamated unions that had no industrial basis to work together. We should be pursuing the struggle in that direction – that's how Jack was leading us. This is the direction we took in the Tramways Union, which led to us beginning to form the Queensland Transport Unions Federation, amalgamating with the Australian Railways Union, and so deepening that industry struggle and trying to unite workers.

This was very difficult, because there was the government's battle against the Builders' Labourers Federation (BLF). The BLF had really

annoyed the tradesmen's union, which was the Building Workers Industrial Union. The BLF used the leverage they had acquired because of changes in the production process. In the 1980s, concrete pouring had become a very important part of the building industry. Control over when you could pour the concrete or when you decided not to continue pouring had damaging effects on the employers. So, the builders' labourers, who were considered to be unskilled, were getting paid more than the skilled workers. It was craft unionism versus industrial unionism, and it has taken a while to resolve. And later there were changes again in the industry.

RB: Comrade, I want to ask you about all of the different things that were happening when the old CPA was breaking down for some time, dissolved, and liquidated itself, and then the SPA reclaiming the name Communist Party of Australia. What did all that mean at the time and what was involved in the process?

DM: I think it was a prolonged period. It goes right back to the formation of the SPA: the comrades prepared for the eventual liquidation of the old Communist Party, they were that convinced they wrote it into the constitution, and I was impressed by that foresight and understanding. I was aware of the Communist Party's existence when I was in with the Trotskyists, particularly in Sydney, and they were always excited that they had a Trotskyist faction inside the old Communist Party. But they were very insular as a group, the old Communist Party, they didn't talk to anybody other than people they already knew, so that was one aspect of the impression then.

When I came to Brisbane, I came across old Communist Party comrades, and they didn't have the same approach industrially as the Socialist Party. In fact, they were terrified of anybody young, I think they accused me of being a thug, and they were more likely to be supportive of the class collaboration of the opportunists. During the period of the fall of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party of Australia was beginning to shift even further to the right. First, the Bernie Taff group left. Most of the Trotskyists thought that they were right wingers, in fact most people thought they were right wingers, in the sense of their lack of social feeling. The situation was like this: some went from the Trotskyists to the International Socialists, then to the Communist Party, and then they moved into the Labour Party right. A number of these comrades that were in the old CPA were gleefully, happily visiting me, when they dissolved the Communist Party, to tell me their new ministries, or their jobs in the ministry for the Goss government. So, I was meeting these political people who were major figures at the time.

I was getting to form an impression of where they sat at the same time as we were in the struggle to try and protect working class conditions to create, to protect unionisation rates/rights, and we were in a deep struggle to stop privatisation from happening in our industry. We had massive meetings with Bill Kelty and others. They were running re-education camps for workers, for union officials, trying to educate us into thinking about Australia reconstructed, and to try to imbue more class collaborationist thinking in the trade union leadership. All this was happening during the period of the Hawke-Keating government, and they were a significant part of this activity.

AMR: In the eighties?

DM: The eighties and into the nineties. The outcome was devastating across the whole country. I can remember going to Melbourne after the first public transport commission privatisation push, and we got taken on a tour of Transport House in Melbourne. There were hundreds of empty desks, we met an official from the Clerical Union and he was in a great deal of stress, worn out. Many of the officials of my industry were fighting these privatisations.

All this is going on at the same time as parties were dissolving and they were trying to create an idea that communism is finished, and that socialism has no future. Employers came to me to tell me that Todds, the big Brisbane bus company, had won the contract to put in the bus-service in Hanoi and that therefore you should give up on socialism. So, we had to hold our line. We had different groups being formed, and I can't say that I understood each of them. Peter Symon would talk about these different groups, such as the Socialist Forum, and many different people – some of them are still around – were trying to form different organisations because they thought they were different ways to do things.

The principal suffering was in the organisation of the working class and the lowering of the activity of the class. There were struggles over shorter hours, against privatisations, contracting out;

working days were increased up to 12 hours and this has had devastating effects in the coal industry where black lung disease is killing workers again. The 1908 Broken Hill miners strike had won a 35-hour week as part of their struggle against this insidious disease. The strikes that we held in that period: when I was shown statistics from the council, our union was like a very tall skyscraper in amongst some very small tents. We would have 1200 days lost and some people might have two days or a day as a group. This was the turmoil that was going on, and they were trying to convince us that the whole concept [of socialism] was a failure.

The ACU, the Australian Association of Communist Unity, were hostile to our party, and so were other forces like the Maritime Union Socialist Activities Association. But I would have to say that our comrades were very militant in trying to force the development of unity, in bending over backwards to find what they could agree on and set aside the differences. It was the hostility coming from the ones heading towards collaboration that was creating the most division. They were accusing the Party of being left sectarian and I think that this is just not true. So, the dissolution of the old CPA was a big blow even though it wasn't a loss for our Party. It meant that workers began to think that Communist Parties don't exist anymore. And so, we had many difficulties.

[As for reclaiming the name of the Communist Party of Australia,], we gave the process about four years. Peter Symon was very insistent that we allow a lot of space, and we had the added complication of the CP Marxist-Leninist. We wanted to talk to everyone to make sure that they understood we weren't just trying to assume a dead body, but that we were stepping forward because this had [always] been our intention. It wasn't something that had gone through our congress without contest. Sections like the Ipswich branch around Bill Dawson and Allan Muir and others had come down [to Sydney], and I think even to some extent some comrades who left after the 1992 congress remained of that opinion. Some of those comrades held a funeral for an old comrade and used the old Socialist Party flag and, were opposed to the Socialist Party becoming the Communist Party. They thought that we should remain the Socialist Party of Australia. That was in 1996, some comrades had left the party in 1992 and some of those who remained left the Party after the decision to resume the name.

AMR: What was the 1992 Congress like?

DM: The 1992 Congress was so divided. [There was] the coming up of hostility in what I regarded as a very good organisation. I thought I had found a great place for socialism and then there began to be rumours, tittle-tattle about different comrades. One comrade would say something about one comrade and the other would then say something about the other and eventually it would get beyond a heated exchange, and I don't think that was very productive for the Party. We had such great figures, Edgar Ross and Jim Henderson, in the Party and they were brilliant to listen to and to hear their stories. They gave a brilliant wrap of the Communist Party. But we got to a position where those comrades were getting hostile with each other, and this was not a good environment.

AMR: So you think they were egged on?

DM: I think they were egged on, and I think that the comrades who were running tales should have been stopped. I sat on the state committee, and we had five comrades on the state committee.

AMR: In Queensland?

DM: In Queensland. [The state committee] had Bill Dawson and Allan Muir, myself, Ray Ferguson, and Ian McCloud. There were all these bluster-type moments. There was always this view that Lenin had managed to force the revolution by standing up and blustering and threatening. There was a wrong attitude in that regard around, and I remember a state executive meeting when two comrades attempted to split the state executive. I said: just sit down; you are not getting any support from me for that sort of behaviour. I tried to join Jim Henderson's branch, because tales were being run about Jim and he was rightfully firing back again, but this wasn't helping the situation.

When I see that happening in the Party anywhere, it is important that it is stopped, because it led to the dissolution of our branch. The other things that comrades were doing was bringing back tales from the Central Committee. I'd sit through a branch meeting – and to stay in the Party I had to stay in a little Rocklea branch with around 4 people who were left. They would start these speeches about the Mensheviks and go on for an hour. These were good comrades,

who I had great respect for, but this was nonsense, and it created an atmosphere of inability to be able to build the Party. We had comrades that we have had to let go because their attitude when a recruit comes in is that they start a fight and the objective of that is to get the new recruit to leave. That doesn't help build the party.

AMR: To say the least.

DM: We had to find our way in this difficult set of circumstances. This was going on all over the Party, but the most pronounced and devastating place was in Queensland.

AMR: Can you say what the situation in Queensland was for the Party in the late 1980s and the beginning of 1990s? What was the situation after all of these breakdowns?

DM: We had branches: a branch in Collinsville, just west of Townsville, which was a mining branch, where we had 7 or 8 comrades, and an industry branch. We had a branch in Mackay, we had a branch in Rockhampton. I think we had a branch in Townsville, we also had one in the tablelands, we had four to five branches in Brisbane, and we had a branch in Ipswich. So you can see that we had a reasonable [organisation].

AMR: Yeah.

DM: We weren't huge, but we had a state structure and an office. We had a professional approach; we had a full-time state secretary and we had standing within the union movement. So, it was a lot to throw away.

AMR: After all that?

DM: We lost the branches. We lost good comrades; they would walk out of the Party. We ended up losing completely the Ipswich branch apart from one or two older comrades. We lost the branch in Collinsville, who went and joined the Labor Party except for one or two comrades. Obviously, the Labor Party got a very good branch, but it left the Party without the ability to do the work it needed to do.

AMR: Was there a Brisbane branch after all of this and then isolated comrades in different parts?

DM: There was originally, I think, a central Brisbane branch and in the end, we ended up having to merge most comrades into the central Brisbane branch. We did build up to three branches at one stage where we had a Latin-American branch, and a Brisbane branch and a transport branch, but then troubles happened in the Brisbane branch and we had to let go of the transport branch to keep the Brisbane branch alive.

AMR: Two questions: how did the dissolution of the Soviet Union affect you personally? And what was it that kept the SPA and then the CPA going?

DM: Personally, the loss of the Soviet Union produced a devastating grief. Many other comrades, I understand, were in grief. Some of the behaviour of comrades I took as grief, because the Soviet Union was such a powerful force. We used to host the Moscow variety theatre. We used to come out and we'd raise funds for *The Guardian* for assistance, we had the Soviet friendship society, with a good organisation. A lot of people had put a lot of life and energy into those projects.

The way to cope was that for a couple of years I didn't read anything socialist, because everyone was telling me to give up, and you didn't want to open your mind for that barrage. It was like a wave coming over you and rolling you over and over again, like when you are caught in the surf. It took a while for that wave to dissipate and then we started to try to get to our feet.

How the SPA survived? Only with the hard work of quite a few dedicated comrades. And some of the inspiration of some of the older comrades, like Tommy Simmons. Most comrades in the country probably don't know who Tommy Simmons is, but he was the branch treasurer, he was a fellow who took this as just a setback that we had to recover from. Jimmy Henderson wrote some pamphlets to explain that socialism has a future, then there was a meeting with the comrades from the Central Committee like Jack McPhillips and Peter Symon and others, who put in a lot of work. There were comrades who bought out *The Guardian,* or back then *The Socialist,* and kept that going.

But all the time we were losing comrades in lots of places. Comrades [used] to be able to drive to Sydney and go get a shower on the docks after having arrived from the trip. Only a working-class Party can organise those things. That was our attitude in Brisbane. I think when my wife joined the union, she had the General Secretary in the corner of the room while I was doing the sign-up. This kind of behaviour is not understandable for younger comrades. These workplaces were our work-places. People we worked with were our comrades, and they followed the Party. To lose

the ability to lead as Party, to have to work as individuals in order to sustain and maintain the position – that's the part that makes it harder.

And I think the other thing that comrades don't pay enough attention to is that we lost what we call the norms. There was a set of cultural standards. Being a Party member meant there were things you did and that you must do: you must pay your dues; you must pay your pledge; you must distribute *The Guardian*; you must talk to workers about the Party; you must play a leading role in the organisation of which you are a member; you must seek to influence and bring Party policy to those organisations; you must follow the discipline of the Party fraction, so you don't go and have a different view than the Party fraction at a public meeting; you save your differences until we get back together; you turn up a the time you say you are going to turn up; you do the jobs you say you are going to do; you don't put forward things [you can't follow-up]: you don't speak disrespectfully of other comrades; and you always respect the person giving the report.

These are just a few of the things that were norms, normal behaviour, which I think our Central Committee is trying to begin to establish once again. But we must understand that these things are learnt by years of discipline. As for the concept of discipline, you don't desert your post. When I later stepped down from the union position, I was worried that I would be shot for desertion, because it was a very important thing to stand up and carry the Party position forward and have respect for the Party. They are the things that are part of the discipline of the Party. They was there when I joined the Party, was inculcated in us as a Party, as Party norms. We can't have that casual attitude that says we set aside some behaviours for some people,

AMR: Because of personal ...

DM: … glory.

AMR: Yeah.

DM: No comrade is more equal than any other comrade. Sometimes some comrades have got to remember not to act in a less than humble fashion. We are all comrades, and comrades do things for comrades. This is a very important thing to remember, and yes of course you are vulnerable to comrades, and I had some trouble in the industry because some people who were comrades were not [really] comrades.

AMR: You are talking about the question of trust between comrades,

DM: Yeah. When I came to be elected to the union position, the right was of course after me like a posse, and we had a person who should have been a comrade in the depot. But this person managed to persuade the workers to launch a stop-work meeting, but their personal objective was to pass a no-confidence motion against me as the secretary of the union. This was because they had lost the election. We managed to use the majority support we had in two other depots to change the nature of the stoppage to make a gain for the workers and to bring the stoppage meeting to a close. When they attempted to disrupt the meeting, on television I looked like the typical union bureaucrat shutting down the meeting to get away from the striking workers, when what we had done was achieve our success. The militant work force shut down the anti-union workforce, led by the rabble, who unfortunately had sections of our Party in it. One of the comrades was jumping the fence, along with some other comrades, and I was very naïve. I said to the comrades who were part of my alliance, supporting me: why are you standing either side of me now, because you're about to get bashed and we're not gonna let it happen. That gives you an understanding of the loyalty of the working class to their leaders, and they knew that I was their leader, that I was their property, and no one was touching me.

The unfortunate thing is that it was part of the internal difficulties going in the Party, because the comrades weren't being honest about such bad behaviour. They were allowing comrades to act in undisciplined fashion, and they didn't bring it to task. Which is why, as much as people might find my behaviour not what they like, if I don't agree with something or don't think something is following the correct behaviour for the Party, then I will say so. No matter who you are, I will tell you that you are wrong, including sometimes to Peter Symon himself. But only because I love the Party, and because I supported him as a comrade.

AMR: You know what, I think this would be good point to finish the interview for now.

DM: It would be.

On the History of the National Question

Roland Boer

This study provides an overview of debates and policies concerning the "national question" from the late nineteenth century until the 1960s. The reason for undertaking this study is not for the purpose of returning to the past, and especially not for taking models of a century or so ago and applying them today in different conditions. Instead, the reason is that by understanding past developments and debates in the world communist movement we can learn valuable lessons and principles, as well as avoid mistakes. Above all, we need an in-depth understanding of past experiences in the communist movement so as to prepare and plan better for the future.

The following has six sections: 1) debates at the turn of the twentieth century; 2) developments in the Bolshevik Position (Lenin and Stalin); 3) resolutions and constitutions; 4) structures of governance; 5) preferential policies for minority nationalities; 6) anti-colonial struggles for national independence.

1. Debates at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

To begin with the important question of terminology. The terms "nation" or "nationality" – *natsiia* and *natsional'nost'* in Russian, 民族 *mínzú* in Chinese – designate not what has come to be called in a Western context a "nation-state,"[2] but a particular group with common characteristics within a state. At times, one will find the term "ethnic group" used in English, but this is misleading since a nationality is not determined by its ethnic identity. For this reason, we will use the term "nation" or "nationality," which is the common term in all the material from the debates at the turn of the twentieth century to the realities in China today.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the national question was a topic of considerable debate among a number of socialist organisations, especially between Austrian Marxists, Caucasian Mensheviks, and the General Jewish Workers' Union of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia (known as the Bund), and the Bolsheviks. Their debate turned on how socialism in power would deal with the many nationalities within a state. Notably, the debate took place not in the smaller countries and city-states of western Europe, but especially in Austria-Hungary and Russia—both with significant landmass and multiple nationalities. In this section, I deal with the most prominent of the Austrian Marxists, Otto Bauer, major representatives from the Bund, and the Caucasian socialists.

The key questions in these debates were:

1. The understanding of a "nation."

2. The form of socialist governance to come.

3. Whether the approach to nationalities would take a "cultural-national" approach or a class approach? In other words, what came first: a) nations as defined by their cultures and then class, b) or class as the basis for dealing with nations?

1.1. Austrian Marxists

Otto Bauer (1881-1938) was the leading theorist among the Austrian Marxists. For Bauer (2000, 117), "a nation is the totality of human beings bound together by a community of fate [*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*] into a community of character [*Charaktergemeinschaft*]." By "community of character" Bauer attempts to indicate what distinguishes one nationality from another, and he tries to identify distinct differences in ways of thinking, behaviour, and assumptions. However, this character is neither a given nor a cause of the assumptions and behaviours of individuals within a nationality.

Instead, we may understand a nationality's community of character by considering the community of "fate" or "destiny." This term means the long and complex historical process that produces a community of character. Bauer emphasises that such a community is always relative, to other communities and between individuals within them, and that it is subject to change in light of historical developments. Much of Bauer's investigation is devoted to identifying how a nationality's community of character has developed over time, how it changes, and how it

2 Benedict Anderson's widely-read *Imagined Communities* (2006) is, despite its initial quasi-Marxist appeal, quite misleading in theoretical and historical terms.

entails a constant interaction with historical and contemporary forces. There is no such thing as an unchanging national spirit, since each generation inherits a distinct cultural framework which is modified in light of experience and events. Thus, the "character of a nationality" is not an explanation of distinct characteristics, but a reality that needs to be analysed in historical terms.

1.2. The Bund

A second major contribution to the debate came from the Bund (General Jewish Workers' Union of Lithuania, Poland, and Russia), which was engaged in constant debate and struggle over the national question. There were two main emphases.

1) The internationalists, such as Leon Goldman and Dovid Kats, who argued strenuously that the major concern should be the international working class and not "cultural-national" interests. They saw the latter as divisive, risking a diversion of working-class interests away from the primary struggle against capitalist exploitation.

2) The second grouping – including John Mill, Yekutiel Portnoi, and Vladimir Kossovskii (Nokhem Mendl Levinson) – argued just as strongly for Jewish identity as a nationality. For these nationalists, a nationality should be defined in terms of culture and language.

Between these two sides were some other theorists, especially Vladimir Medem (1943), who argued that "national character" – a term drawn from the Austrian Marxists – was a cultural content common to all human beings, but that it took distinct forms due to historical reasons and the intersections between social forces in a specific location. It followed, Medem argued, that citizenship of a "state of nationalities" should be neutral in terms of one's identification in terms of a nationality: all should be included, and a person's nationality should not be identified. While Medem's proposals may have been an effort to overcome the struggles in the Bund concerning the national question, his proposals did not resolve those struggles.

Now one side, and now the other gained the ascendancy and influenced the Bund's program. For example, those in favour of identifying the Bund as the representative of Jewish workers were able to get the Fourth Congress of 1901 and the Sixth Congress of 1905 to adopt resolutions concerning the Jews as a "nationality," the need for "cultural-national autonomy," and for the future socialist state to be a "federation of nationalities" in which self-government was to be transferred to the "nationality" so as to enable "free cultural development." In response, the "internationalists" in the Bund worked hard to ensure that the statements of principle were lacking in terms of a concrete program and could not be enacted. They also persuaded the majority to overcome the 1903 split with the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party and re-join that Party in 1906. The story continues with the Bund yet again breaking away, only to participate significantly in the October Revolution and then dissolve itself. Most of its members joined what was soon to become the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) and not a few took up leadership positions.

1.3. Caucasian Social Democrats

The dominant Menshevik section of the Caucasian Social Democrats adopted an extreme "cultural-national autonomy" position, arguing for the determining influence of cultural factors over history and economics. The complex political and economic history of the Caucasus meant that class aspirations were usually expressed in cultural and national terms (Suny 1992; 1993, 20–83). Thus:

a) the Georgians were mostly peasants with a nobility dreaming of the glories of the Georgian past while being integrated with the Russian tsarist state administration;

b) the dispersed Armenians made up the bulk of the relatively new bourgeoisie and controlled commerce and the oil fields of Baku;

c) and the Azerbaijani (and immigrant Persian) Muslims formed the lowly paid workers in the oil fields.

These realities meant that the Georgians promoted a "feudal-monarchist" nationalism connected with their Eastern Orthodox faith, while the dispersed Armenians sought identity through their Armenian church and promoted a "bourgeois" non-territorial nationalism in competition with the fledgling Russian bourgeoisie. By contrast, the younger and radical Georgian intelligentsia (including Stalin) developed a mass political movement that brought together Georgian peasants and both Georgian and Azerbaijani workers. Their opponents were the tsarist autocracy (and therefore Georgian nobles) and the largely Armenian bourgeoisie. We can see how primary identification of a class would be expressed in

cultural terms, especially in terms of language and religion. The Caucasian Social Democrats also struggled over this question, with the Mensheviks promoting a cultural-national autonomy position for a future socialist state, thereby obscuring the question of class.

2. Developments in the Bolshevik Position

In this section we turn to developments in the Bolshevik position. To begin with the key insight, which differed from the preceding proposals: in terms of nationalities, the resolute focus should be on the unifying category of class, which would lead in turn to the recognition and fostering of greater diversity.

2.1. Lenin

In response to the tsarist policy of subordinating all of the linguistic and national variety of the Russian empire to an enforced "Great-Russian nationalism," Lenin tirelessly reiterated that "whoever does not recognise and champion the equality of nations and languages, and does not fight against all national oppression or inequality is not a Marxist" (Lenin 1913, 28). The specific issue may have varied – from language in schools to bills in the Duma – but the responses repeated the same point: national autonomy, self-determination, linguistic freedom, and no imposition by one nation on another. "All nations in the state are absolutely equal, and all privileges enjoyed by any one nation or any one language are held to be inadmissible and anti-constitutional" (Lenin 1914, 281).

The reason for this position is that class is the bond for all workers, and that nationalities are secondary to class. Workers of all languages, cultures, and nationalities need to work together in a united front, for class is always primary (Lenin 1903). Any insistence on the primacy of the identity of nationalities and the urging of a federation would split the working class into rival groups.

2.2. Stalin

Over three decades or so, Stalin would come to reflect many times on the national question (Stalin 1904; 1918; 1919; 1920; 1921b; 1921a; 1925a; 1925b; 1929) and it would become a standard topic in his many reports to Party congresses and conferences. However, his "Marxism and the National Question" (1913) is perhaps the most well-known and influential piece, so let us consider this essay in a little detail. The article in the midst of immense debate.

All sides were seeking a Marxist solution to the same problem: how to incorporate and protect the many minority nationalities living in the same state. Their disagreements turned on two issues.

1. The first was the contrast between class and nationality: is class to be the basis of the national question, or is to be "national culture"? As we have seen, the Austrian Marxists, the Bund, and the Caucasians Mensheviks advocated the latter and developed a culturist federalism with a federated state that would account for multiple nationalities. Stalin criticised this position and instead stressed that the core category is class, and that only through class can we deal more comprehensively with the question of nationalities.

2. The second issue concerned diversity and unity: if we begin with "cultural-national" diversity, then we struggle to find unity within a federated state; but if we begin with class, then unity follows.

Now we come to the key point: this emphasis on unity through class produces a dialectical outcome. Unity through class does not result not in assimilation under a uniform culture (as one finds in capitalist states), but in a higher level of diversity that fosters the distinct characteristics of nationalities. This principle would lead to the Soviet Union's unprecedented recognition of the territorial claims of nationalities and strong protections for minorities without territory.

In light of a long and complex argument, Stalin at one point summarises with a famous and much-quoted definition: "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture" (Stalin 1913, 307).

Note that Stalin stresses that ethnicity, race, or tribal identity do not constitute a nation. Further, the positions of Austrian Marxists such as Otto Bauer, the nationalist wing of the Bund, and the Mensheviks in the Caucasus may all be seen as limited to the "psychological make-up," or the "specific spiritual complexion [*osobennosti dukhovnogo oblika*]" of a common culture and its historical formation.

However, there is a contradiction in Stalin's study. In the definition quoted, Stalin mentions

histories of centuries and millennia (in relation to the Italian, French and other nations). However, in other parts of the study he emphasises that nations arose only after the emergence of capitalism: “The process of elimination of feudalism and development of capitalism is at the same time a process of the constitution of people into nations” (Stalin 1913, 313). This contradiction or tension between longer and shorter histories, between nations with millennia of developments and nations produced by capitalism, runs throughout the essay. If we are not aware of the tension, the risk is that we can misread this 1913 essay.

So we are left with the question: which historical approach has come to be assumed as the basis for later resolutions, policies, and initiatives? The longer historical account. We will return to Stalin’s later contributions below.

3. Party Resolutions and State Constitutions

After the success of the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks were faced with the daunting task of building anew a country that was in many respects a broken and “failed” state. Among many aspects of the construction of the world’s first socialist country were the resolutions of the Party (before gaining revolutionary power) and constitutions of what became the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

3.1. Party Resolutions

To begin with the Party resolutions. At the first congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (1898), we find the following article 8 in the program: “The party recognises the right of every nationality to self-determination.” By the second congress of 1903, article 8 had been expanded: “The right of the population to receive education in their native tongue, to be realised by the provision, at the expense of the state and the organs of self-government, of the necessary schools; the right of every citizen to use his native tongue at assemblies; the introduction of native languages on a par with the official language in all local social and state institutions.” Further, article 9 stipulated: “The right to self-determination for all the nations that constitute the state.”

3.2. Constitutions

In light of these developments, it should be no surprise that all nationalities were included in the structures of governance of the USSR.

To begin with the constitutions of 1924 and 1936. As background to the 1924 constitution, the “Declaration of the Formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” which was ratified on 30 December, 1922, clearly states that the dictatorship of the proletariat serves to “eradicate national oppression, to create an atmosphere of mutual confidence, and to lay the foundation for the fraternal co-operation of peoples.” This declaration would come to form the preamble to the 1924 constitution, and would be elaborated in the constitution of 1936.

In the 1936 constitution – famous for including the world’s first constitutional articles on the rights of women, the rights to work, social insurance, rest and leisure, holidays, medical care, and education, as well as for the proactive nature of these rights – we also find stipulations concerning minority nationalities. These include governing structures in the autonomous republics, as well as autonomous regions, areas, districts, cities and rural localities (articles 89 to 101).

Further, article 123 states: “Equality of rights of citizens of the U.S.S.R., irrespective of their nationality or race, in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life, is an indefeasible law. Any direct or indirect restriction of the rights of, or, conversely, any establishment of direct or indirect privileges for, citizens on account of their race or nationality, as well as any advocacy of racial or national exclusiveness or hatred and contempt, is punishable by law.”

In his reflections on the 1936 constitution – which went through many rounds of feedback and revision – Stalin observes (1936, 167–68):

> The draft of the new Constitution of the U.S.S.R. is … profoundly internationalistic. It proceeds from the proposition that all nations and races have equal rights. It proceeds from the fact that neither difference in colour or language, cultural level, or level of political development, nor any other difference between nations and races, can serve as grounds for justifying national inequality of rights. It proceeds from the proposition that all nations and races, irrespective of their past and present position, irrespective of their strength or weakness, should enjoy equal rights in all spheres of the economic, social, political and cultural life of society.

4. Structures of Governance

Constitutions do not emerge out of thin air; they respond to and shape the structures of governance. In the Soviet Union, two organs of governance emerged through trial and error. In the 1924 constitution, the first organ was called the Federal Soviet and the second the Soviet of

Nationalities. By 1936, the two chambers were known as the Soviet of the Union and the Soviet of Nationalities. Together they formed the Supreme Soviet, which was the highest legislative body. For any proposal – even from the Central Committee of the Communist Party – to become law, it had to be approved by both chambers of the Supreme Soviet.

4.1. Soviet of Nationalities

What was the composition of the Soviet of Nationalities? In the 1924 constitution, article 15 stipulated that it is composed of "representatives of the member Republics and associated autonomous Republics," with five representatives from the former and one from the latter. By the 1936 constitution, article 35 stipulates elections "according to Union and Autonomous Republics, Autonomous Regions and national areas on the basis of twenty-five deputies from each Union Republic, eleven deputies from each Autonomous Republic, five deputies from each Autonomous Region and one deputy from each national area." Further, the Soviet of Nationalities had legislative power from the very beginning, not only in terms of approving bills, but also for the sake of initiating legislation. And all legislation had to be published in all the languages spoken in the Union.

Clearly, the structures of governance in the Soviet Union explicitly included the many nationalities that were part of the union.

4.2. Stalin on the Soviet of Nationalities

Among the many debates concerning the 1936 constitution, not a little concerned the two chambers of governance. In relation to a proposed amendment relating to the Soviet of Nationalities, Stalin had this to say (1936, 189–90):

> The fifth amendment concerns Article 33. The creation of two chambers is regarded as inexpedient, and it is proposed that the Soviet of Nationalities be abolished. I think that this amendment is also wrong. A single-chamber system would be better than a dual-chamber system if the U.S.S.R. were a single-nation state. But the U.S.S.R. is not a single-nation state. The U.S.S.R., as we know, is a multi-national state. We have a supreme body in which are represented the common interests of all the working people of the U.S.S.R. irrespective of nationality. This is the Soviet of the Union. But in addition to common interests, the nationalities of the U.S.S.R. have their particular, specific interests, connected with their specific national characteristics. Can these specific interests be ignored? No, they cannot. Do we need a special supreme body to reflect precisely these specific interests? Unquestionably, we do. There can be no doubt that without such a body it would be impossible to administer a multi-national state like the U.S.S.R. Such a body is the second chamber, the Soviet of Nationalities of the U.S.S.R.

4.3. Other Socialist Countries

Despite some differences, the structures of governance in socialist countries would by and large follow a similar model. There would be two chambers of governance, with one of them specifically designated for representation by minority nationalities, along with other groups.

For example, in China there are two organs of governance. However, all legislative power lies with the People's National Congress, which is similar to the Soviet of the Union. The other chamber became – due to the specific nature of China's revolutionary history – the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Comprised of all minority nationalities, other political parties, religious groups, and so on, the CPPCC has wide-ranging consultative powers, but not legislative power.

5. Preferential Policies for Minority Nationalities

Along with the structures of governance, the Soviet Union implemented the world's first preferential policies for minorities. These policies arose – in part – from the view that rights had to be pro-active and not "negative" rights (as in bourgeois constitutions and states). As Stalin observed (1921b, 20; see also 1923, 269–70): "The victory of the Soviets and the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship are a fundamental condition for abolishing national oppression, establishing national equality and guaranteeing the rights of national minorities."

This approach was very consistent, since an early form was already expressed in the 1903 platform of the Russian Social Democrats: "The right of the population to receive instruction in their native tongue, to be realised by the provision, at the expense of the state and the organs of self-government, of the necessary schools; the right of every citizen to use his native language at assemblies; the introduction of native languages on a par with the official language in all local social and state institutions." At this early stage, the platform was consciously developed in response to tsarist repression, which was targeted at all minorities.

5.1. Implementation

The reconstruction of Russia into the Soviet Union entailed the establishment of autonomous territories and regions where there were identifiable nationalities. What about dispersed minorities without clear territories? They were provided with a strong framework of protections, including stiff penalties for any form of racial denigration and abuse. These dispersed minorities should also be able to use their own languages, operate their own schools, law-courts, and soviets, and have freedom of conscience in matters relating to religion.

Across the Soviet Union, these preferential programs cost millions and billions of roubles, producing solutions as well as creating new problems. Since this was the world's first program of preferential policies for minority nationalities, new and unanticipated problems were bound to arise. But these were good problems to have, for they were part and parcel of socialist construction and required innovative thinking in order to solve them – and to provide lessons for later socialist practices.

Within the vast expanses of what would become by 1924 the Soviet Union, the task of identifying and supporting nationalities created a large number of autonomous republics and regions (*oblast* or *okrug*), national districts of 25,000 to 10,000 people, and even village Soviets with as few as 500 people. At the same time, there was continual debate as to who belonged to which group, to what the various levels and groups were entitled, and constant alterations and refinements. Further, the whole program may always not have lived up to some of its lofty aims, since the way forward faced immense hurdles and setbacks. Yet its achievements were significant.

5.2. Raising Minorities to Socialism

A further aspect of the preferential policies for minority nationalities was to "raise" them to socialism within a relatively short period of time. In other words, the task was to raise the cultural, social, and economic level of the minority nationalities, especially those who were in the border regions of the Soviet Union. As was pointed out in the early 1920s, some regions and their nationalities still had a pastoral economy and patriarchal-tribal ways of life, while others had semi-patriarchal and semi-feudal structures. To raise them to the new and still developing level of socialism actually meant taking them directly from much earlier modes of production (tribal society and feudalism) to socialism.

This task could be achieved only by taking into account their specific economic situations, class structures, cultures, and manners of life. So we find stipulations that the minority nationalities in question should develop and strengthen their Soviet statehood in light of their particular conditions; establish courts, administration, economic organisations, and organs of governance; foster presses, schools, theatres, recreation clubs, and cultural and educational institutions – all of the above operating with the local language and staffed with local people who understand the specificities of local habits and customs.

5.3. Coining New Terms

Communist scholars and policy-makers developed some new terms to describe and analyse the process underway. These terms may be worth reconsidering as the CPA develops its First Nations policies.

1. Policy – *politika*. This term was interchangeable with:

2. Construction – *stroitel'stvo*. For example, language policy (*iazykovaia politika*) and language construction (*iazykovoe stroitel'stvo*) were interchangeable terms. Why? In some cases languages had to be recreated, written forms developed for those with only an oral language, leading to the development of new types of literature, education, and culture.

3. Indigenisation – *korenizatsiia*. This new term derived not from the stem *koren-* ("root" – with the meaning "rooting") but from its adjectival form *korennoi* as used in the phrase *korennoi narod* (indigenous people).

Why mention these terms?

The whole process was was seen as the deliberate process of ethnologists and socialists in producing and developing a new society and structures of governance, within which nationalities were central. Most of the material concerning Soviet preferential policies involves policies, research teams, concrete programs, government departments (central and local) and the many significant achievements and mistakes made in the process.

5.4. Creating a New Society

As Stalin observed in his report to he Communist Party's fifteenth congress of 1931, the preferential policies involved "the creation of new nationalities" out of groups that had been so thoroughly assimilated that they had "earlier never dreamed of national existence." He also observed:

> We stand for the preferential policies [*pokrovitel'stvennaia politika*] in relation to the development of the national cultures of the backward nationalities. I emphasize this so that it will be understood that we are not indifferent, but actively supporting [*pokrovitel'stvuiushchie*] the development of national culture (quoted in Martin 2001, 17).

6. Anti-Colonial Struggles for National Liberation

Finally, we come to what may well be the most important insight in relation to minority nationalities: the implication for anti-colonial struggles for national liberation. Deriving from Marx and Engels, as well as Lenin, this was Stalin's distinct contribution to the basic principles of Marxism and had an immense effect on the history of the 20th century until today. This was an insight into the global dimension of class struggle and a new approach to world-wide revolution.

The insight may be stated as follows: the October Revolution and the preferential policies of the Soviet Union provided a microcosm of the global anti-colonial struggle against capitalist imperialism. This insight follows directly from Marx and Engels's resolute emphasis on anti-colonial struggles for national liberation as inescapably connected with class struggle.

The logic is as follows: a) the focus on class provides a dialectical approach to the national question; b) this led to the world's first preferential policies for minority nationalities and an important structural feature of socialist governance; c) the next step was to apply this logic to anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles.

6.1. Development of the New Basic Principle

In 1921, Stalin observed that it was "the Communists who first revealed the connection between the national question and the question of the colonies, who proved it theoretically and made it the basis of their practical revolutionary activities" (Stalin 1921a, 53). This theoretical and practical breakthrough took some time to emerge, so let us follow how the Bolsheviks came to this insight.

In 1918, Stalin published "The October Revolution and the National Question." In this article, Stalin notes the uprisings – inspired by the Russian Revolution – in Austria-Hungary and Germany and saw them as the beginning of much wider revolutionary activity in the common struggle against imperialism. Was Stalin simply concerned with a European revolution? He points out that a focus on Western Europe would mean missing the real revolutionary upsurge, which was happening in "the East." Does he mean the eastern parts of Russia, part of the "border regions"? No, since he moves beyond the orbit of Russian influence: "the East" is a term for all peoples oppressed by colonialist imperialism, including "China, India, Persia, Egypt and Morocco" (Stalin 1918, 175).[3]

In the same article, Stalin points out: "Thus, from the particular question of combating national oppression, the national question is evolving into the general question of emancipating the nations, colonies and semi-colonies from imperialism" (p. 168). This is the crucial breakthrough, and Stalin repeats the point in the conclusion to this speech, where he observes that the October Revolution had widened the scope of the national question, converting it from "combating national oppression in Europe into the general question of emancipating the oppressed peoples, colonies and semi-colonies from imperialism" (p. 170).

Let us now turn to the 1921 article, "Concerning the Presentation of the National Question." Here Stalin criticises socialists, especially of the Second International, for restricting their concerns over the national question to "civilised" nations, such as the Irish, Czechs, Poles, Finns, Serbs, Armenians, and Jews, thereby neglecting the millions upon millions of oppressed peoples in Asia and Africa. These global "second-class citizens" were not even on the radar of such socialists, except perhaps as an assumed colonial prop for the sake of maintaining "civilisation." By contrast, it was precisely revolutionary communists who had first revealed the inescapable link between national question internal to a country such as the Soviet Union and the colonies. Even more, this theoretical proof

3 Mao Zedong (1948) was very appreciative of this important article by Stalin, summarising its main points and developing them further.

became “the basis of their practical revolutionary activities” (Stalin 1921a, 53).

Finally, in “The Foundations of Leninism” of 1924 Stalin repeats many of the points already noted, and observes that the “national question was thereby transformed from a particular and internal state problem into a general and international problem, into a world problem of the liberation of the oppressed peoples in the dependent countries and colonies from the yoke of imperialism” (Stalin 1924, 144).

6.2. Attacking the Capitalist “Rear” and the October Revolution as a Form of National Liberation

Stalin frequently used a military metaphor: attacking the “rear” of the colonies for the “war” waged at the “front” against capitalism. Since capitalist imperialist countries were mostly short of crucial raw materials, they relied on the colonies for food and fuel, raw material for industry, markets to sell the items produced, and labour-power. It followed that the communist movement should tackle both “front” and “rear,” uniting the proletarian movement and anti-colonial national liberation movements into a common front. The colonies cannot be completely liberated without the overthrow of capitalism; so also, national liberation movements in the colonies challenge the rule of capital. Without such activity, the victory of any proletarian revolution is never entirely secure.

Further, in the 1927 piece, “The International Character of the October Revolution,” Stalin took the argument a huge step further. He begins by arguing that that revolutionary anti-colonial struggles for national liberation also happened in Russia. He has in mind the minority nationalities, who were liberated from internal tsarist colonialism as a result of the October Revolution. Without landlords and capitalists to oppress these nationalities, they too were freed in a way similar to the proletariat and the peasantry. While the core position of the leadership and example of the proletarian revolution is maintained, the new note here is that the vast territories of the Russian Empire also entailed significant colonisation in the process of expansion across the Eurasian landmass.

6.3. A New Form of Global Revolution

It has been a staple of some Marxist analysis that global revolution would take place first in “advanced” or “developed” capitalist countries. Those who promote such a position usually refer to selected and decontextualised quotations from Marx and Engels. What they miss is the interest in and emphasis on anti-colonial struggles in places such as Ireland, India, and China. Indeed, specific collections of the works of Marx and Engels on these parts of world have been published (Marx and Engels 1971; 2006; Marx 1951).

As for the Bolsheviks, the concrete support and theoretical insight concerning anti-colonial struggles may be understood as a new development in the global revolution. The Bolsheviks had hoped that once the “weakest link” in the capitalist chain was broken, other links would would follow. They initially looked westward, to Europe, where the social and economic cost of war was high, social unrest widespread, and genuine possibilities for the revolutionary seizure of power existed in countries such as Germany and Austria-Hungary. It was not be. Instead, Stalin and his circle urged communists to look “east,” to anti-colonial struggles for liberation. Here lay real potential for the global revolution, which was to be realised in East Asia. Thus, the Soviet Union, along with other socialist movements, should “support – resolutely and actively support – the national liberation movement of the oppressed and dependent peoples” (Stalin 1924, 147).

Alongside concrete and practical support in terms of investment in infrastructure, educational opportunities, organisation, logistics, and arms for anti-colonial movements, the Soviet Union also influenced the United Nations to adopt the 1960 “Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.” Initially proposed by the Soviet Union in the 1950s, the declaration was taken up by a coalition of Asian and African states in the growing non-aligned movement. Only after a number of newly liberated countries were admitted to the UN was the critical voting majority achieved and the declaration was adopted on 14 December, 1960. Let us see how this brief but pointed document speaks of a new type of anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic sovereignty.

To begin with, this new type of sovereignty is a right; it is equated again and again with the “inalienable right” to freedom. It follows that “subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights.” Further, sovereignty provides the required conditions for human rights,

since these rights can be enacted only in the context of the "self-determination of all peoples." Colonialism is therefore an "impediment" to freedom, to "the social, cultural and economic development of dependent peoples." Finally, territorial integrity is a crucial feature of what becomes a redefinition of sovereignty: "any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations."

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, three points need to be emphasised.

First, the "national question" was a work in progress, all the way from initial parts of the Party's platform, through policy implementation in the Soviet Union, to the insight into implications for anti-colonial struggles for national liberation. As a work in progress, the approach to minority nationalities policy and anti-imperialist struggle needs constant reform and updating to suit the times. It can be said that by the 1970s the Soviet Union had neglected this important task. For example, the revised constitution of 1977 contained no revisions of the nationalities policy and retained what was by then an outdated "right to secession." While the main cause of the breakup of the Soviet Union was loss of direction, union, and theoretical knowledge of the Communist Party, the failure to update the nationalities policy was a contributing factor that led to republics declaring independence.

Second, the "national question" should always be addressed in light of concrete realities and the specific historical, economic, social, and cultural conditions of a country or region. While this is an obvious point, it needs to be emphasised when considering the Australian context. It will not do to impose a model developed in different conditions.

Third, the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle for national liberation is a form of class struggle, an international form of class struggle (Losurdo 2016). This point originally derives from Marx and Engels, but it was the distinct insight from the Soviet Union that turned this point into a basic principle of Marxism. To quote another great communist revolutionary leader: "National struggle, in the final analysis, is a question of class struggle" (Mao 1963, 379).

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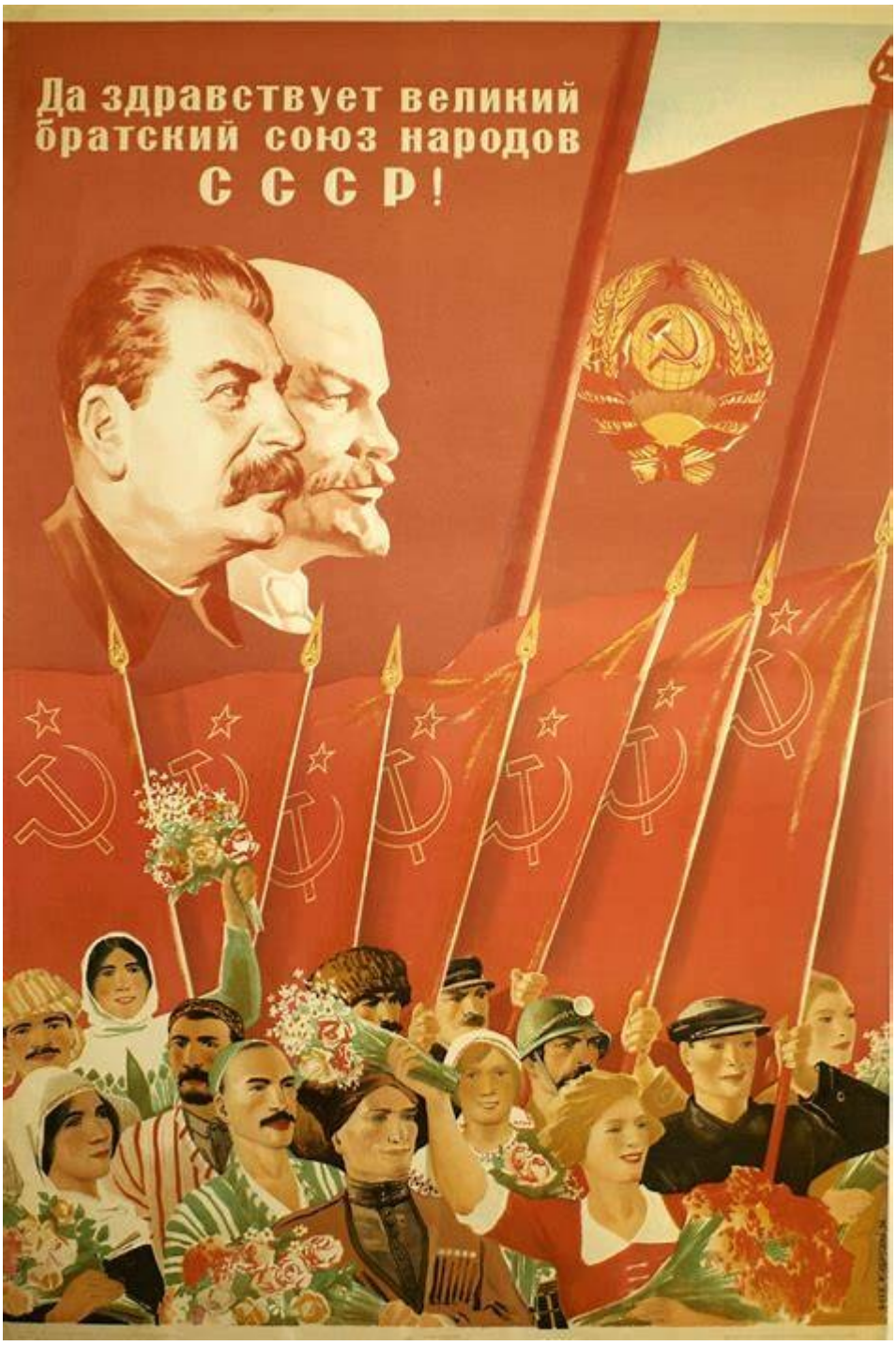
Да здравствует великий
братский союз народов
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AMR Interview with Comrade Sally Mitchell

Part 2: First woman fitter and turner in Adelaide and trade unionist career

(For Part 1, see *AMR* 76, pp. 21–29)

AMR: What did you get your apprenticeship in?

SM: You know, it was that dilemma, I was think "what am I going to do when I leave school? I have no idea what I am going to do." Somebody said that the local water department at the state government was looking for apprentices, and particularly they were wanting to try and engage some girls into the roles. And that somebody said: "Have you ever thought about doing that"? I went, "Hah, that would be a guaranteed job for four years wouldn't it?" So I made an application and I had done half a year of technical studies – woodwork at school, and the next half I would have done metalwork, and so I went into this interview for a "fitting and turning" apprenticeship with no metal background whatsoever. The night before I had gone and asked a brother-in-law what exactly a fitter and turner was just in case they asked me the question where I needed to explain what that trade might be. So that was the level of knowledge I had, it was not a lifelong ambition but rather, "that seems to be a pretty good opportunity, why don't I do that," and I got it.

AMR: What was it like to become an apprentice fitter and turner? I have also heard from some of the other (CPA) members that you were one of the first women in the country to become a fitter and turner. Is this correct?

SM: I was the first one in Adelaide. This was in 1978 when I commenced my apprenticeship. I was in a training centre, and I think there was one other young girl doing electrical. She didn't last long though. I was one girl amongst approximately 80 to 90 young men. The only difference between me and them was that I was maybe a year older than them, so maybe I had a bit more life experience and maturity than them, but yeah I was it. I was it. And that was it for maybe the next seven years of my working life.

AMR: Was that challenging being the only women in that situation very early on in that trade?

SM: Interestingly enough, I think I did pretty damn well. I never thought about it I think is the question, see I never thought that we couldn't do it, I thought that there was nothing that we could not do. That idea that you couldn't do this was never an issue in my head. It was "I don't know what that tool is, I don't know what the name of it is." The first day was daunting 'cause I am at a work bench, and I open up the drawer and I go "I know that's a file but what's that?!" (laughs) having never touched them before outside of hammering something in the shed. Fortunately, the trainers were really, really good people and I don't know if they did this for me or if it was just the way that they did it but they went and took me from the bottom right through, and they were so helpful and assisting and supportive without being patronising about it.

AMR: That's great, I think a lot of the readers of the AMR may have not have experienced being a fitter and turner. Would you be able to describe that trade and what a standard workday would be like for us?

SM: Fitting and turning, I think that they call it mechanical engineering now, but it was at a time where you could do things with your hands at a work bench, so basically I could take a piece of steel and with a chisel I could reshape it, and with other tools I could make it square or flat, you know, depending on what you needed to do. For example, in that role I made things like clamps, I made a toolbox as part of that process. In the learning of the first year in the learning centre we touched on all of the professions, so we did a little bit of welding, and I knew how to weld, and I learnt how to do a bit of sheet metalworking hence the toolbox, all of it associated with metal. With the turning side of things, you are using equipment like metal lathes and milling machines. At that stage we were not talking computerised equipment, that was only just starting to come into the industry, I'm talking 1978–1979 at this point in time. It was learning how to operate a machine to take a piece of metal and turn it into a bolt for example. That was really interesting

One of the things that I remember from that exercise was that there are three-jaw and four-jaw chucks in a lathe. Now a three-jaw chuck, you just turn the appliance and it will tighten up on the metal and all the bits that hold the metal will come together at the same time, it's not a problem. The

four-jaw is that you have to adjust each piece that holds the metal individually so that it runs properly, which is a whole different exercise. Now if you don't tighten these things right, the machine will go up at very high speeds and if you're not careful your piece of metal will fly out of it past your head, and you aren't wearing hard hats or anything. I was struggling with the strength to tighten it up, you know I didn't have a lot of body strength at that stage, and again its one of the things that the trainers and the guys in the tool room – instead of making a joke about it, instead of making fun of me about that – quietly called me over and gave me this metal bar, hollowed out with a nice little grip on the end of it with my name on it – it was to help me tighten it up.

AMR: That is a beautiful example of solidarity of workers.

SM: It was! I had that experience through my apprenticeship, whereas trust me I know bullying, I have experienced bullying, so I understand that. I can certainly understand better now then what I think I did at the time of how difficult it can be for any person to be an individual in a larger group of people. Whether it be me as a woman, whether it be the other apprentice who was an Aboriginal young man and the issues for him ... got him into the union as a result of some of the problems that he was experiencing. I never had those same issues. But I do know that other young woman have ended up not doing their trades as a result of, you know, the behaviour of others around them. I was really, really fortunate in so many ways, and I had a number of times where the older men around me had come, recognised a problem, and spoken to me quietly and gone and dealt with it. I didn't have to raise those issues, that was good for me.

AMR: Yeah that is good. Did you join your union as an apprentice? I feel like that is a silly question to ask a communist.

SM: No it's not! At that point in time, I thought that everybody who went to work joined a union. As far as I knew, everyone that I knew was in a union. I never even contemplated that people didn't join unions. I just thought that is what you did (laughs). It had been so much part of our lives. So I go to work, and I have joined the union cause I'm a metalworker, I join the union. I didn't know that it was unusual for apprentices to join and that they weren't recruited either by the union. Apprentices, they are on low wages and what not; they tend not to agitate amongst the apprentices.

AMR: Why do you think that is the case?

SM: I don't know, I don't understand it. I had a friend's son went into a metalwork apprentice in an organised job. When I was talking to him, he said that he hadn't been approached. So I saw the secretary of the union, gave him his details and said: "He's going to join the union but you've got to approach him. You've got to go and be seen." I don't know why that was the case but I was flabbergasted. After that first year of my apprenticeship, and I was in the union, I went into the workshop. You get put out into the workshops where the real work is done and where the adult people are, the big people, and right then there was a union meeting and the shop steward had resigned, and no one would become the shop steward. Oh My God! What do you mean nobody will become the shop steward?! I spoke to the organiser who was a Party member and I said "they have no shop steward!" It was a bit of an eye-opener, I thought, "Gee wiz, they don't realise that you have got to have a shop steward, hey." I did not become a shop steward, but I was in the union and I was active in the union. I started to attend some meetings.

Being the only girl at the time in the young workforce there, at the department, they didn't know how to say no to me. But of course, you take time off the job, that gets added onto the end of your apprenticeship, by the way, it's not like it gets wiped off, so if you take any time away from the job for any reasonable amount of time you have to make that time up down the track. The union one day approached me and said: "There's an international conference happening in Thailand, youth and women symposium, and we would like you to be part of the delegation." I went "shit yeah!" (laughter). And I did! So in my second year apprentice I participated in an international conference on behalf of the union. Pretty chuffed.

AMR: Which union was it that you were a member of at that time?

SM: The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, the metalworkers!

AMR: Were you a member of the Party at that time as well?

SM: I think I was. Like I said, I have gone back a number of years. It's hard to think of when I was a member of the Party and when I was just with the Party. You know that sort of thing. I know that within the metalworkers I discovered, you know you have the politics of the union, and then you

have the “real politics” of the union. So when I learnt that and when I understood the role of the Party within the union and how that worked in a true sense, I was a part of that process.

AMR: At your workplace were there other communists or was it just you?

SM: At my workplace to my knowledge it was just me. There were other good people and we worked closely together in the union side of things. We have some funny stories to tell around some of the things that we did. I wasn’t aware of any other Party members at the department that I worked at, but within the union there definitely was.

AMR: How did your branch approach the question of Party work in the workplace and what were the expectations on Party members in their workplaces, whether it be this job or other jobs?

SM: I think I was not fully a member at the time when I had this discussion occur, but I had a late comrade from the Party approach me one day and tell me that I wasn’t doing enough or doing it right. I thought “I’m doing everything I can right” – in my working life, the trade union movement post, the metalworkers. Well, I ended up the secretary of the Food Preservers Union in here and most of that and my working life I was working alone. I didn’t have other people around me, I was it. I was the secretary of the union and I put the rubbish out and mowed the lawn as well. That’s been a large part of my working life. I have worked with three unions. A member of the Metalworkers Union. I asked the metalworkers was there going to be any opportunity for me to be able to become an organiser. They didn’t think so, so I went external to the union and I applied for a job with the Miscellaneous Workers Union and became an organiser with them for a period of time, and learned the difference between elected and appointed officials. You can’t have palace coups with appointed officials; its why many unions use that method.

AMR: Could you talk to us about this difference that you learned.

SM: This is the learning curve, I was used to elected roles unions have, you become elected. At that time, if you can imagine I was on the job, I had done my apprenticeship, I had been actively involved in the union, coming out of his time the shop steward asked me if I was going to take his role, I said “I do not have the experience yet, I don’t know enough yet, you keep on I will be your deputy,” took that on. That was my theory, I did as much education in the union as I could, I went to as many classes as they would offer me, I went to residential schools in Clyde Cameron college, I went to conferences in Sydney, every second Friday with trades and labour council I would ring Mick and ask, “Do you need a proxy member for tonight?” I went to every meeting I possibly could, it was a really exciting time and great to be part of, I was in the union movement. And so, when I thought that I would never get a chance to be an organiser, as I would have sat on a job for as long as it took to do that, would have stayed on the job being a shop steward, I then applied and went external.

Where you are an appointed official, means that is you are employed, like a worker employed by a boss; that’s the relationship. Basically, that’s the summary of it, when you are an employee like that you have got the boss. Whereas where you are an elected official your boss is your membership.

AMR: Most union organisers are appointed officials today.

SM: It has changed a lot. It has changed a hell of a lot since amalgamation. My observation is attempts to change political leadership of organisations that employ their officials are rarely successful. Usually, they will have an elected senior executive group. But then everything below that is an employee. So, the ability of employees to become that elected official is really quite difficult. My observation here in South Australia, where that has been attempted in a couple of unions: you can't get over the hierarchy so to speak. They have the power of financing your employment and everything. For many, you’re not even eligible to be a member of that union. You're an employee, but you're not allowed to be a member that union you’re working for. Instead, for example, you might be a member of the Clerks Union because you are considered an administrative worker as an organiser and that keeps you out of being a member of your home union that you're actually working for, that keeps you out of challenging your leadership.

AMR: I’m certainly aware of attempts being made in this way from within with organisers and employees parts of unions; it's never gone well.

SM: Yeah. I've not come across a challenge where they have been successful to overturn a leadership situation from the employed basis of

union workers. You might have some great workers in that base and some terrific political people, but ultimately these organisers are an employee, and the leadership is their boss.

AMR: It seems to me that most of those attempts are done from those who are employed by the union rather than from the membership itself.

SM: That's right

AMR: That probably indicates something.

SM: It is that. Because you know, they're seeing the need for change and the members are not. If you advocate and you start talking against the union on the job you won't be around too long. That's the truth. I was an employee of the Miscellaneous Workers Union at the time when Martin Ferguson, of all people, was a secretary and that says a lot of the direction of that union at that moment in time. He went off to the bosses and became a right-wing reactionary; bastard, as far as I am concerned.

From there, though, with that union, I represented workers in the private sector, I was looking after workers in nursing homes and security guards and things like that. They worked around the clock. I would go. As you're a union official, you have got to see your members, not just on day shift, but you have got to see them on the other shifts as well. You go out of hours to do all these things. So I said, just trying to be upfront with everything, I said: "As I am going to be out on the job until 10 pm and then I'll need to go back on Saturday to see this group of workers. Is it OK if I come in late on Monday?" "No! You're supposed to be on time on Monday!"

That was where I began to realise the difficulties for single mums in that union as organisers. The meetings would be held too early, and you're trying to get your kid to school, you know. They were not forgiving at that stage, not forgiving or not recognising the issues there. I think that's changed a lot within organisations since then. But at that time, they weren't tolerant of it. They should have been. Don't know what to say about it. From there though I just went: I can't do this, I'm not going to put up with this, I can't work here. This is going to drive me insane. They're not going let me be political. They're not going to do anything that I really want to be doing. You just have to basically, recruit, recruit, recruit and that's it. You know, just get the members in. Don't worry about servicing or anything like that.

I came across the Food Preservers at that stage, the Food Preservers Union of Australia, a little union that looked after workers in food manufacturing. So, factory-based workers. Men and women in that membership group. They seemed to be political union and they didn't seem to be frightened with politics. They were on the left, and I thought, 'they're exciting, they're blue collar. I want to go and work with them." I actually went to Noel, the (union) secretary of the state here, literally had a part-time organiser with Noel, the secretary and office worker and a little office. I went around and said "I really want to work for you." I think their part-time organiser had just left. I said "I really want to work for you." And he said, "well, what are going to pay you?" I said, "the misso's pay me this." They said, "we can't afford that". I said "well, what can you afford?" We went down. I worked out that I was working for about 120 bucks a day, and they could afford to pay me three days a week, and they brought me the worst car I've ever had in my life. I couldn't have driven it outside the city limits. And I took the job and then went home to my then husband and said, "oh, by the way, I just changed my job to something that I really what I do, but I'm doing it!" and I did!

So, I started working with the Food Preservers [Union] and that was just like chalk and cheese. They were an exciting union, and they were energetic. They were had great rapport with their members, had fantastic members. They were workers, blue collar workers. The members had respect for us, we had respect for them. We serviced the membership and everything. The people I worked with like Noel here (in SA) and nationally Tom Ryan and the other secretaries in other states, they were good people. They were there for all those good reasons, you know. I could ring Tony any time of day or night and he would answer that call. I've never known anybody as principled.

AMR: What do you think were the underlying reasons between those stark differences between these two unions and the different experiences working for them?

SM: I don't know. I don't know. The foodies had been, I don't know when you could pinpoint the origins. They had a very fine reputation around the country, sort of. We had Bill Hartley associated with us in Victoria. We were we were part of the community radio station 3 CR, I think it operated out of the union office. We had Gail

Cotton, who stood up at ACTU congress against the [Prices and Incomes] Accord and was pilloried. You know, she was totally, totally slammed. She was a tough cookie. It was a union that had women in officer roles right through the structure without having to adopt any affirmative action approach. We had women organisers, and women across the state in committees, shops, stewards, you know, because they were there out there in our membership. They were a big part of our membership. Likewise, the fellows and they were just really good workers.

AMR: You said that you became the secretary of this union, is that right?

SM: Yeah, I was a part-time organiser, started with them in 1987 I think it was I when ended up there. And so, I'm working there as part time organiser with Noel for a period of time. One day he says to me “Listen, I'm going to have to go down to Tassie and become the secretary, you know, take over the branch down there. The reason is he's (the secretary) leaving, and we have not got the succession plan properly there, so I am going to take the family down to Tassie and go there.” And I thought, ‘Shit! What’s going to mean with South Australia?” Cause of our industrial officer, who’s been here longer than me and I thought if it's going to be him we are going have some problems. We're not going to be able to work well together. He looked at me and said, “Well, the branch committee want to know what you're doing and, you know, they want you to take it on.”

AMR: Wow.

SM: Yeah!

AMR: That would have been exciting.

SM: And it was, it was! It was thrilling. I get emotional. It was huge and daunting at the same time. Huge honour and I said “yes.” So, I then went off to Moscow for eight weeks.

Both: (laughter)

SM: I was in the ACU (Association for Communist Unity) actually at that point of time. This is the time of the ACU within the Party. That's dating it, because I end up in Moscow and that was organised by Clancy and co. And I led a delegation over there of union officials and we went to the school for eight weeks. So, I came back, and I became secretary of the union. I had no experience, that’s what I felt like. I thought I wouldn’t have become a secretary of a union to 100 years down the track; when you've been a shop steward for 1000 years, been an organiser for 1000 years and you get all this knowledge and experience. then you might become a secretary. And I've done it this quick road and thinking “Shit!” I was able to do it because I had a terrific branch committee, I had my colleagues like Noel who I replaced and the other officials around the country. I was never isolated from them at all, we worked really closely nationally and so whilst I didn't have much support in the state in the sense of someone working with you, I did have it nationally. We met regularly and all those sorts of things. Tom, he told me later he took great pleasure one day at a meeting: as I was overseas, somebody said “where’s that person who’s going be state secretary, Sally?” And he said “oh, we have sent her to Moscow for training.”

Both: (laughter)

SM: Our union had a reputation. We had a close association with Libya. And so there used to be guns for Gaddafi stuff. So Bill Hartley and others used to travel there.

AMR: To Libya? What was it like? Going to Libya?

SM: I didn't. I never went there but they did. Our union was seen to have those radical ties. I actually had somebody say to me once that we sent guns to Gaddafi. We didn't get them from Gaddafi, apparently we sent them to him. We had very close ties with the progressive forces within the Middle East; that was unusual in a union. And so our union really is fascinating. Bill Hartley as a whole, there's a whole thing there with Bill Hartley around that and so on. We were seen as these radical, outrageous people.

AMR: Could you tell me more about Bill Hartley, whom you've just mentioned?

SM: Bill is a whole different story again. Yeah. Bill had been expelled from the ALP at that stage. So he goes right back into Whitlam days I think. I can't tell you a lot, talk to Romina as she might know more. And because Romina and I worked with the same union, Romina came into the union through the amalgamation we had with the confectionery workers, she and her sister Vicki worked with Carlos as organisers with confectionery workers. We became food preservers, we came together and worked together for the next several years, and we were in the same organisation. She was in the Victorian

branch of the union, I was of the South Australian branch of the union, so we regularly would get together. So yeah, so that's a different story again.

AMR: Fascinating, that question was to try and understand the radicals you were working with and where they came from in their politics and everything.

SM: And actually, I don't know. Tom was ALP as was Bill, yes? But Victorian politics are different then the rest of the world. So I don't know how to explain that. But they were in the left of the left of the ALP is the way I see them. I don't know how they where they fitted with the Party over there. I really that I don't know.

AMR: Well, there was a radical left in the Victorian ALP, which Whitlam was in many ways part of destroying.

SM: Yeah. Yeah, and I know Hartley, he was expelled.

AMR: All right. In any case, I might just go backwards a little bit because you mentioned education within the union movement that you were participating in. And one of the things that has been pointed out to me is how devoid opportunities for education are within the trade union movement in large parts. Could you tell me about what you experienced and what opportunities were available at that time?

SM: Well, I was coming through from, you know, starting work and through that initial period of my working life. We had TUTA (Trade Union Training Authority) that received funding and so on. And so, they would conduct union training and it was something that was available and we did all the time, we did an amazing amount. I was working for them for a bit of time. I was still a metalworker, you know, on the job as a fitter and turner, they had a 12-month position become available, temporary back-fill, and the secretary of the union asked me to apply for it, and I went for it. I was actually that ... if you can imagine that period of time my working life, I was then teaching shop stewards how to be shop stewards when I felt I barely knew how to be one myself. But people don't know what you don't know. If you don't, if you miss something out and where you're talking, they don't know what your experience is unless you tell them. You can teach people without necessarily having the full experience yourself, you know. And that's what I did for the next 12 months, taught people how to do things that I was, in effect, learning alone, but learning a hell of a lot in doing. How to train people, how to speak to people and the goods and bads with that. But it was great, that was a terrific experience. So we had trade union training already, they had that in each of the states, and then they had a Central College that was in Albury- Wodonga and there was a purpose-built college which has since been closed down when they stopped TUTA. That provided, really, training across the union movement and was pretty intensive, pretty good stuff in my mind.

AMR: What kinds of training did TUTA provide?

SM: We did leadership training, we did women at work, so we did the basics about women in the workplace. We did health and safety rep training. We did delegate training at different levels. You know, more experience, more training. We do residential courses here and nationally. I recall that's where I first read the [Prices and Incomes] Accord as a participant in a training course – “What's that?” Or was that one of those schools we were discussing it right at the very beginning of it? That's how old I am. It was where you got your union education, but then the metalworkers equally ran their own education class as well that was focused on theirs. We had shops steward training within the metals as well. We had women's committee within metalworkers. So it was right, of course, whatever was available, I'd put my hand up and go and do it.

AMR: I understand that a lot of unions still do delegate training and HSR training, but I understand that that can be quite truncated to what used to exist.

SM: I think so. I realise I'm becoming distant from knowing what the current situation is versus then, but we had access to trade union training leave in our awards and things like that. We had ten days a year that we could go and do training. And that was separate to other forms of leave.

AMR: What were your impressions of the [Prices and Incomes] Accord as it was coming and how did it affect you as a very active participant in the union movement and then later a union leader?

SM: Initially. Yeah. I'm a delegate on the job. I'm a shop steward on the job. It looked like it was something that was going to deliver social wage across the board. It may, you know, seem to it's being advocated and promulgated in that way. I was not looking at it as being problematic. I can look at it in hindsight and see it broke down the

union movement and that Hawke did the job he was put in to do. In my personal opinion, that was to do what he did and that was break down the union movement. He's no hero of the working class as far as I'm concerned. I tend to put that out to everyone: "Hawke's the reason why people didn't take the streets around Whitlam, you know. He kept them in the workplace, he kept them off the streets." You don't become a Rhodes scholar without being picked to do it. And not everybody gets to be one. It's a bit like trade union training or going off to the party school in Moscow. You get handpicked to go and do these Jobs. He got handpicked to go and do that. He came back and he delivered all of his working life. That's my opinion.

AMR: It's an important viewpoint. How did the accord affect you? It seems that you started off open to some of the ideas and then your view changed as time went on.

SM: Yeah. Well, went with the Food Preservers Union. One of the very few unions at the time that advocated opposition to it. And as I said Gail Cotton, who was a Victorian official for us and a pretty tough cookie. She'd actually left the union when I started. She's just before me, she stood up at the ACTU Congress to oppose the accord and I think got front page pilloried for that stance. I mean the trade unions; you know the leadership of the trade union movement were trying to tear it [our union] apart. You know, they did not like the union, us standing up and being publicly opposed to it. I learned more about opposition and that stuff as I went along in the union movement, more so than at the time. At the time I thought it was the direction we were heading into. In terms of timing of all of that, you know you're starting to move into time when I probably wasn't in the Party and it's when the ACU starts to come about. It is around that time when dad was expelled from the Party as a result of activity in the ACU when I was working at TUTA. So that's around 1983.

AMR: I understand that a large part of what happened with the Association for Communist Unity, a large impetus to it was the question of the Accord and different opinions about it, instance, certain figures in our party like Jack McPhillips and Peter Symon are known for have been incredibly hostile to it, and then Pat Clancy is known to have had a very different view on it. What do you remember from that period of time?

SM: I'd have to say I wasn't aware of that level of division within the party. I just knew that you know the ACU was brought about and that was in my mind working and engaging the broader union movement, that's what we were working on. So, for me, it wasn't about the Accord, more so trying to work on a broader front was how I saw it. Trying to engage people that might have been left in the ALP and progressive forces in that area and trying to work out that commonality of where you could do work together on matters and that's the way we're approaching it here. The end result was dad got expelled. I now obviously wasn't a member because I wasn't expelled.

AMR: What do you what do you remember about your dad being expelled? And what was the situation that occurred with that?

SM: At the time I was pissed. I was really pissed about that because Dad, even at that period of time he was never not a Communist. So the idea that he'd be expelled after all those years to me was a major insult. I still maintain that, you know, I think that. You still have debate about was that a right or wrong decision. I felt that we had not changed our principles in what we were doing. It felt like it was a way of working still: you know and engage with people. It wasn't about not being a Communist. Never that it was about working and trying to work in a broader way with people, and that makes sense to me because there's all these other progressive forces around and we can't work in isolation. Yeah, we can all be keepers of our own ideology, but if we don't work out how to work together … How are we going to do this? And how do we change this system?

AMR: What was it like to be a member of the Association Communist Unity as opposed to SPA, which I presume you had been previously?

SM: It was exciting, 'cause, "Yeah, we're doing stuff." We were having meetings, really broad meetings. It's really interesting because I was having to chair some of them and that was, you know, people questioning and why and how would this work. And well, you know, the ALP's not going to like that sort of thing and how would they stand that, would they be expelled from that party? You know, every other party wanted to expel anybody who wanted to talk working together. That's really what it appeared to me, yeah. I haven't thought about this history for a long time. I just know that we we're bringing together quite large meetings of people to have discussions and look at doing things together and I know we are, we're not, you know, supporting some broader campaigns for

people we elected to local government. Things like that.

I actually think we made a mistake as a Party continuing to think that we must be in federal elections. I think we should be in grassroots elections. We should be standing in local government elections and traditionally that is where the Party has had much more success. You know, whichever form of the Party it has been at that time. I mean, Dad was elected when I was knee-high to a grasshopper. Before we had footpaths on the street sort of thing and in later time in this local area in Port Adelaide we had three members of the Party elected to be Council people. And one of them, you know, for many years was re-elected, others moved on to other roles. In my mind, I think we've always had much better success and impact at a local level than at a federal or ... you know, the cost of running campaigns at those higher levels of election. So yeah, here we end up having a supported candidate in our local council. I can't remember how she voted but it's a good campaign to be part of and it was a local campaign, was focused on local issues. It didn't need to be Party specific because it was about community stuff.

AMR: How long were you a member of the Association for Communist Unity and what do you remember about what ended up happening to it? Because I understand that It doesn't exist anymore.

SM: No, it doesn't. Well, I was part of the delegation, went to the Trade Union School in ‘88. So ACU was in my mind organising that stuff at that time. I realised the Party also had its own contacts in those areas too. I don't know when it disbanded so I'm trying to think; I've got some gaps in my memory on some of this and I try and place it in terms of time in my working life that triggers things. I'm not quite sure when it stopped, you know, to be honest.

AMR: I understand that Pat Clancy died in 1988 coming back from Mongolia.

SM: Yes, he did. Had a heart attack on the plane. Tragic.

AMR: And then Tom McDonald and some of the other leading members of the ACU left.

SM: When are you're saying that was?

AMR: It was in the ‘90s because he ended up supporting the New Left Party.

SM: Must be earlier than that, because I was with the Miscellaneous Workers [Union], so I was with them ‘til around ‘87 and I went over to his funeral. They wouldn't give me leave to do so, I had to take my my annual leave to go. So I did, yes, yeah. Anyway, another story the wake. Yeah, that was a huge funeral. Big thing to be part of. In my mind it was around 1987, 1988.

AMR: I understand that Tom McDonald ended up supporting the New Left Party and he spoke about that in his memoirs *Intimate Union*.

SM: Which I haven't read yet.

AMR: And that the Association for Communist Unity had taken a position of opposing being involved in that [New Left Party], and that produced a significant difficulty and a large number of its members ended up joining the Labor Party.

SM: Yeah. And I'm not quite sure really. I can't really talk a lot of with confidence around that area, to be honest. I think I was just involved with the union stuff and getting really into that. So I wasn't paying attention.

AMR: Being a union secretary you were probably too busy by that time.

SM: And nerve wracking! I became secretary in 1988. I was then so appointed, in the first instance went to election, I was elected the youngest female secretary of the union in South Australia and so that's another first.

And then I carried that union through two amalgamations. First off, with the Confectionaries, and secondly with the Metalworkers. So I went from working for a union that didn’t think they could give me a job, and came back not only as an official but as an assistant secretary of the union and secretary of one of the divisions. And then, yeah, it's like, “take that!” (Laughter)

(To be continued)

"The victory of the Soviets and the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship are a fundamental condition for abolishing national oppression, establishing national equality and guaranteeing the rights of national minorities."

- Stalin (1921)

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