
SOME QUESTIONS

'Perplexed'

Reading through most of the articles prepared for the first issue of this journal brought two feelings. First, a warm glow that here at last was a journal I could broadly agree with, would not feel embarrassed to distribute, and might even get enthused enough about to write for. Second, a serious doubt that this would really become a 'journal for discussion of revolutionary ideas' rather than just another propaganda magazine, perhaps with more acceptable propaganda. There is something too pat or cut and dried about the 'line' running through the articles I've seen so far to really encourage 'discussion' (although I basically agree with them). Yet 'discussion' or development of revolutionary theory, is what is desperately needed, not propaganda.

To some extent that is inevitable with a first issue. An initial position has to be set out before it can be discussed and developed further. However I believe the position set out for discussion should itself emphasize the inadequacy of our theory and focus on the need to develop, not just propagate, some ideas before a genuine 'red' movement can emerge. Unfortunately the articles I have read do not emphasize this. There seems little point commenting on the large areas left untouched – a better approach would be to contribute something on some of those areas for the next issue. But I hope the following comments and questions will help stimulate debate in the next issue.

'What We Need Is a Revolution!'

I'm glad to see the traditional 'red' position restated – it's refreshing compared with the pap put out from the pseudo-left. But there is a limit to how refreshed one can feel as a result of reaffirming very ancient truisms. Why does that position have so little support and why have movements based on it collapsed and turned into their opposites? Surely that question must spring to mind when writing sentences like this: 'Despite the eventual defeat of the Chinese revolution after his death in 1976, Mao left us with a better understanding of the problem of capitalist restoration and how to fight it'.

Under the concluding heading 'Where to from here' there is an implicit admission that the author, like the rest of us, hasn't got the foggiest clue about what can actually be done using the wonderful insights provided by a 'red' position:

As economic and social conditions continue to deteriorate we are sure to see a resurgence of rebellion against capitalism. For the moment conditions are quiet and the immediate task ahead for revolutionaries is to introduce radical ideas into the public arena. This will provide the basis upon which to create a revolutionary movement and eventually a revolutionary party that will contend for power with the capitalists. Victory will depend on winning popular support and defeating conservative resistance.

Most people in what passes for the 'left' these days would agree with that – precisely because it is so obviously wrong. The problem is that we don't have much in the way of radical ideas to introduce into the public arena. That suggests an immediate task of developing some, not just pressing on with general truths from decades or centuries ago and expecting to win popular support on that basis. So far the result of deteriorating economic and social conditions has not been revolutionary rebellion against capitalism but conservatism and reactionary opposition to capitalism (often presented as 'left', merely because it opposes capitalism). Pinning one's hopes for a resurgence of rebellion on depressing conditions is depressing. Depressions are depressing.

The article refers to a change in 'human nature' stemming from both a 'new empowering role in production plus a fundamental change in all other areas of life which will see people becoming full participants in the political, intellectual and cultural life of society'. Fine, but doesn't that also imply a more 'empowering' process than is expressed by 'winning popular support'?

Also, conditions aren't really all that 'quiet'. In fact we are in a period of relatively rapid social change – but 'reds' are 'quiet' because we don't have much to contribute. For example internationally the collapse of the East European police states and the Soviet Empire has profound implications for the rest of the world as well. Advances in science and technology are more interesting to radically minded people than relatively stagnant politics. Closer to home in the State of Victoria, Australia, there is quite a lot of 'noise' about the cuts imposed by the State Government as a result of its budgetary crisis – strikes, demonstrations, occupations etc.

Consider the local Victorian struggle over education cuts. If 'reds' are serious about transforming society so that workers will 'come to control production rather than be controlled by it', surely we ought to be able to help develop some ideas useful to the people now occupying schools that have been closed by the Government, and resisting attacks on conditions at other schools.

Militant struggle isn't much use if there is no way it can win in the present economic climate. But surely there must be some ways that parents, teachers and students can unite with others to actually achieve real benefits rather than just protest and lose. For example the Government wants schools to raise more of their own funds. That means worse conditions all round, especially in areas where parents are less well off and therefore also less well organized. How about responding 'positively' by using school facilities (including work done by students supervised by teachers) to establish economic enterprises that raise money as well as improving education by relating it more closely to real life and helping to organize parents and develop links with other sections of the community?

An interesting possibility might be to establish community newspapers and other media based at occupied schools and involving other schools, parents, unemployed teachers and other workers etc. Why couldn't they compete successfully with the bourgeois mass media as well as being immensely educational and a direct weapon for organizing against the Government? With funding slashed for special programs for migrants, are there ways that such community media (in all languages) could help involve English speaking parents and students and others in taking some of the load off teachers and help non-English speakers get organized at the same time as teaching them English?

Such proposals would run straight into trade union opposition concerning 'volunteerism' and raise complex problems about taking the heat off the Government and assisting it to cut funding further. But if we are serious about workers overthrowing the Government and re-organizing society themselves, surely we have to come up with some kind of action program that isn't based on demanding that the existing bourgeois regime organize things better for us. When we do, and we find the Government is preventing us from using the facilities we need to get on with implementing our program (not only empty schools but also

other means of production) that's when it makes sense to speak of revolution, to get them out of the way so the people can get on with it.

I have no idea what is possible in Victorian schools at the moment – but I'm sure there are some teachers and others around who could contribute interesting articles on the subject. Such articles developing revolutionary theory on 'changing the nature of work' in that area would shed a lot of light on what some of the classical 'red' propositions actually mean and why we really do need a revolution to achieve them (and what kind of revolution and how).

'Red and Green Don't Mix'

Again, I basically agree with the article. But I'm angrier about having to agree with 'smug conservatives' against the greeny pseudo left 'who think they are being terribly radical' but in fact are being 'even more conservative than the conservatives'.

Actually, only the more moderate 'conservationists' can be legitimately described as 'conservative' (which they admit to, even choosing the name 'conservationist', which is no more different from 'conservative' in content than it is in spelling). The 'radical' greenies and especially the brownies are more accurately classified as 'reactionaries'. The greeny reactionary opposition to modern industrial society criticised in the article is indeed a 'polar opposite' of 'red' attitudes.

Unfortunately it is necessary to restate the obvious: we want to progress from capitalism, not react against it. But having said that we need to understand why this appalling reactionary gibberish has managed to displace 'red' ideas and how to fight back. I would like to see some articles analysing the appeal of green (and other) reactionary politics and the defeat of red politics. Why are so many of our friends attracted by overtly reactionary and consciously irrational rubbish? Has it peaked? Is an alliance with progressive capitalists against reactionary 'socialists' appropriate? (Cf Lenin's alliance with the 'legal marxists' against Narodism).

I think the bankruptcy of, and consequent disillusionment with 'red' politics is a major factor explaining (perhaps a bit tautologously) the appeal of reactionary politics. It seems easier to

talk about that informally among friends than write about it. It's been a while now since anybody has been traumatized by their experiences with 'red' politics. Can we write about what went wrong and why we lost interest and what kind of politics would be worth fighting for?

'Refuting "Anti-Imperialist" Myths', 'The Kerr Coup – Another Myth' and 'The Left and the Gulf War'

These articles raise similar issues to 'Red and Green Don't Mix'. The pseudo-left views being criticized are such incredible drivel one has to wonder how they became dominant. Alternatively one has to wonder whether the circles in which they became dominant are worth polemicizing with – after all most people are not even mildly interested in the reactionary mythology of the pseudo-left.

How many people rallied around the pseudo-left efforts to defend Iraq's occupation of Kuwait when they were deluding themselves that their mobilization in support of fascist aggression would be the beginning of a new anti-war movement similar to Vietnam in the sixties? The whole mobilization collapsed completely within days and those responsible for it have said nothing much about it since, because there is nothing that they could say without admitting that they misunderstood the situation completely. How many people actually share the pseudo-left's fundamentalist conception of the USA as the 'Great Satan'? (This remark should be taken literally – one cannot argue about the Gulf War with a pseudo-leftist for more than a couple of minutes without running into the problem that those who believe in the 'Great Satan' are not amenable to rational argument.)

Likewise, how many Australians, even die hard ALP supporters, really believe that compelling the Whitlam ALP Government to face a general election when it could not obtain supply from the Senate was a 'semi-fascist coup' plotted by the CIA etc?

Again, how many actually believe the 'development theorists' allegedly 'anti-imperialist' suggestion that the people of the Third World have been getting progressively worse off during the modern era?

Unfortunately, many good people are influenced by green politics and other reactionary drivel from the pseudo-left, who were once

progressive, or still are on some issues, and who could be progressive and even revolutionary eventually. Propaganda refuting specific reactionary views may be useful in helping such people. But the fundamental problem is the vacuum in 'red' politics that has allowed reactionary ideas to spread unchallenged for so long. Despite that vacuum the reactionary pseudo-left remains totally isolated and insignificant. Refuting their ideas will not be very difficult, but neither will it be decisive, since they have so little influence anyway. A genuine 'red' left can avoid isolation and insignificance but we can't start building one without developing a better understanding of what it's all about.

What is it all about?

This journal does not need a large number of readers to succeed. It needs a small number of regular contributors willing to actually respond to each other with comments, questions and fresh ideas.