## HOW THE COMINTERN WAS STALINISED

## (essay)

It was in 1917 that I first became a socialist, largely under the impact of the mighty Russian Revolution. The revolution was to change the course of my life. They were great days, and I take pride in saying that I became a communist at the age of 17 and remain so to this day.

At the time of the Russian Revolution I of course had no idea that little more than 10 years later I would be selected by the Communist Party of Australia to be the first Australian student at the Lenin School in Moscow.

The Russian Revolution shook the world to its foundations. As the news broke through in London, where I had been born in 1900, I was in an excess of joy. I eagerly read everything on the revolution that I could get my hands on, particularly the socialist papers.

I got the clear indication at the time of the Russian Revolution that this was the beginning of the new world. It was a tremendous thrill to me. I didn't know anything about Marx, Engels or Lenin, but suddenly these loomed into importance.

After reading some of the early pamphlets of Lenin, it started to turn my mind completely into becoming a socialist. I used to walk from one end of London to the other every week in order to get a socialist paper — I just had to have that paper. They ran installments in each issue of Jack Reed's Ten Days that Shook the World, and that inspired and educated me.

After migrating to Australia I joined the Communist Party of Australia in the early 1920s. For several years I helped build the CPA in Townsville and northern Queensland. In the process I was a leading militant in the railways union in Queensland and a CPA candidate in the Queensland elections in 1929.

Shortly after the election I received a letter from Ted Wright, the central organiser of the CPA. I had been selected to be the CPA student at the Lenin School in Moscow for a period of three years.

I was overwhelmed with joy, for here was my much-wanted opportunity to study Marxism and socialist philosophy.

I was approached by a fellow CPA member organiser in Townsville for him to take on my tools of trade. "You won't need these any more," he said, "you're going to be a professional revolutionary."

When I arrived in Sydney I went to Wright. He told me that once I got to Britain the Communist Party there would arrange for me to get to Moscow. "But we haven't got the money," he said.

After the CPA had received the travel money from Moscow, it had been spent, presumably on day-to-day matters. When I went to tell Jack Kavanagh, the CPA general secretary at the time, he was furious. He told me to attend a political bureau meeting with him, and at that meeting he moved the suspension of standing orders to discuss the matter. "We can't run a party like this," he said.

Kavanagh gave Wright a week to produce the 65 pounds needed to make the trip. I was to find out later that the money had been siphoned off from the accounts of the NSW Trades and Labour Council.

It wasn't long before I was in Britain, but I was not to be impressed with the British Communist Party. They were quite poorly organised — and coming from the Australian CP that was saying something. One of the things that got to me was the complete lack of interest they had in Australia and the party there.

I saw Harry Pollitt, the British CP leader, and after a discussion with him he asked me to attend a meeting of the British CP's Colonial Committee. At the meeting I was intending to give a more thorough report on the Australian political situation and the role of the CPA.

I was the first at the meeting and was soon to meet a number of the Communist Party leaders, some of whom had come across on occasions when I had lived in London. But they virtually ignored me and weren't really interested in anything I had to say about the Australian CP. And they called themselves internationalists!

So, I decided that I would find my own way to the Soviet Union. In any case, Bert Moxon, who was later to become the general secretary of the CPA, had given me a number of contacts in Europe in case I needed them. He had only just arrived back from a short visit to the Soviet Union himself, and he was the last person I saw in Australia before I embarked for Moscow.

Moxon gave me an important address in Berlin where many CP leaders stayed on their way to Moscow. When I arrived I found that I was to stay with Arthur Horner, the famous British miners' leader. As it turned out, he was a good friend to me and we used to travel around Berlin together. One had to be very careful in Berlin at that time (the end of 1929) and you couldn't be seen around too often.

Finally, Horner's papers to get to the Soviet Union came through. "Before I go," he said, "I'll take you to the Communist Party headquarters to get your passport fixed." I went with him to the very large CP warehouse in Leninstrasse.

Within a few days I was on my way to Moscow via Finland. At the time it was dangerous to travel through Poland. I was able to get through to Moscow without any trouble at all. That was because before I left Australia Moxon had advised me to place Communist Party papers on the top of my luggage so that at the Soviet Union border I would be quickly processed. It worked very well, and I was asked at the border if I knew what to do when I got to Moscow. "I know only one word," I said, "and that's Comintern!" The officer replied that would get me there.

Upon arriving in Moscow I went straight to the Anglo-American secretariat of the Comintern. After presenting my credentials I was told that I was expected to give a report on Australia to a meeting in two days time of the executive committee of the Communist International.

I was somewhat nervous about doing this, and I said so. I thought I was only going to be a student in Moscow. Although I had been in the CPA for several years at that time, nearly all of it had been spent in northern Australia, in and around Townsville.

But they wouldn't have it — I was still to give the report. Outside the office a person was waiting for me. He said that he had heard the conversation and offered to help me. It turned out that he was a leader of the Profintern — the Red International of Labour Unions — and he had a broad knowledge of the Australian labour movement.

In the report to the Comintern leadership there were two points that I wished to emphasise. The first concerned the Queensland Resolution on running candidates against the Labor Party, which was soon to be applied in NSW by standing CPA candidates against those from the ALP.

I knew that Kavanagh was strongly opposed to this, and because of that his point of view should at least be brought to the attention of the Comintern leadership. Moxon supported the Queensland Resolution, however, and this is where he and Kavanagh parted company.

Secondly, it was my opinion that it would greatly assist the Australian party if they were to send a Comintern official or representative to Australia.

There was a large crowd in the room when I went to give my report. As soon as I began to speak, everyone in the room in all directions was talking. I thought I had done my dash, and after only a few sentences I stopped. The chairman told me to keep going, that they were only interpreting what I was saying. They had little technical equipment for translating in those days.

It was only a few weeks after the report that I was told that an organiser from the Comintern was being sent to Australia. He was an American by the name of Harry Wicks, who used the party name Herbert Moore.

The American students were anxious to find out who was being sent, and when I told them it was to be Wicks, a fellow leader of the Communist Party of the United States, they burst out laughing. "What," they said, "He's the greatest no-hoper there is. We have just dumped him from our leadership." It made me wonder how seriously the Comintern was taking the CPA. But when I later returned to Australia I was to see how effective Wicks/Moore had been in helping to Stalinise the CPA.

The Lenin School was situated in what was once a nobleman's building. The building had been converted into rooms holding three or four students. Additional sections contained classrooms, a library and office staff. They had a tremendous library, which was open day and night.

The Anglo-American sector of the Lenin School consisted of students from Australia, Canada, Britain, New Zealand and Australia — in all about 15 to 20 students, with a big group from Britain. The curriculum consisted of Marxian economics, the materialist conception of history, philosophy, party structure, strategy and tactics. The method of teaching was exceptionally good because it made the student his own instructor.

At the first meeting each student was given a list which contained some 10 questions on the subject matter to be discussed.

Underneath were placed the literature and sections of each book in which you could obtain help for your answer. When everyone was satisfied with what had to be done, the class was dismissed for research on the answers. The notice board would then inform you of when you conference was to be held, and these would last for days, until the subject had been exhausted.

Some to the students who had gone to the Lenin School were pure opportunists and careerists. They went out of their way to impress in order to gain a good report and a good job in the party in Britain or America.

For myself and the New Zealander, who did not have to compete, it was far more satisfactory. I was indeed happy to see that this point was not lost on all of the tutors. Their opportunity to disclose this was at the conclusion of the course, when the reports that were to be sent to the respective countries of the students were read to the class. A few of them contained the words: "Have wasted their time in the Soviet Union."

My report was to say: "has studied well in the Soviet Union".

At that time I just went to the school and took in all the knowledge I could. I only knew the bare outlines of the theory of surplus value, but when you begin to study it, in the ay that it should be studied, you soon realise the enormity and tremendous value of it as a study.

So I got stuck into it. They would give you a week or two when you could go away and do whatever you liked in studying for a class. But that was your task, to do that research. And then you were told that, for example, the political economy group was to meet in a conference.

Our tutor was a Red Army officer who was a very fine Marxian economist. The tutor would read the questions and ask who wanted the floor. Well, the British students were very eager to get up and take the floor, but what they said was a different matter. You could very well tell that they had done very little study. The Americans tried to do the same.

It was in this way that I began to see the limitations of these educational conferences at the school, but I still managed to gain enormously from it all and quietly assimilated the science of Marxism.

However, I wasn't the only one who could see the misuse of the Lenin School, because old Comrade Trotsky was well aware of it too. At one of the earlier Comintern plenums, Trotsky quoted Stalin as saying that "our weakest link is the trade unions". Trotsky replied: "And where's your stongest link — the Hotel Deluxe, and the other places in Moscow where your students are."

How right Trotsky was with that observation. That summed up, to my mind at least, what most other students made of their stay at the Lenin School.

In my room at the school were an American and two Canadians. The American was to go on to become a central leader of the CPUSA. And there they were lying in bed with volumes of Capital stuck on their chests while they were sound asleep. If they weren't in the Hotel Deluxe, they were to be found in bed.

These were the new leaders of the Communist parties. Their performance at the Lenin School not only reflected their lack of interest in Marxist theory, but also the calibre of leadership being cultivated by the Stalinist leadership of the Third International.

While in Moscow I was able to attend many important meetings of the Comintern, including meetings of the executive committee of the Communist International. One that I recall in detail was the debate about the production of a daily paper by the British CP. Harry Pollitt was in Moscow for the meeting and presented a critical report on the proposal. He pointed out that they only had a few thousand members and would be unable to financially support a daily paper.

The Russian Comintern leader who had been pushing the project simply moved that such a paper be printed. "I cannot believe," he said, "that in the heart of the British empire we do not have a Bolshevik daily." Pollitt said, all right, so be it. The British CP couldn't afford it, didn't feel they could properly use it, and simply didn't want it at that time. But the Comintern won out.

A few months before I finished the course, the school called all the students together in our large auditorium. We were addressed by the woman comrade who ran the Lenin School. She announced in a loud and accusing manner:

We have just discovered that a faction has been formed of Zinoviev and Bukharin. We don't know how far it has gone, but it is permeating the ranks of the party. We are determined that it is going to be wiped out.

I have received instructions that all students at the school have to be examined to see if they have any germs of this faction in them. It is what we call a party chistca, a party cleansing, which has been ordered throughout the Soviet Union.

This consisted of a presidium being placed in charge while students were put into a witness box then asked factual questions about their activity in the Communist Party. It was then left to members of the respective party to challenge or refute the statements of the "accused".

For the New Zealander and myself, there was no one else from our respective countries. The opportunism of the British and American students astounded me. You wouldn't credit how they could go at each other as they did. The Russians just laughed at all of this as they saw who were the most subservient. They were, however, more interested in the students from Poland, Lithuania, Finland and other countries bordering the Soviet Union. They were often in the stand for hours on end.

We were eventually told that there were gaps in the stories of the students from some of these countries, and they were liquidated in some way or another.

Later it was learned that Zinoviev and Bukharin had "confessed" their mistakes and all could breathe freely again.

This "party cleansing" gave me an idea of what the Left Oppositionists and supporters of Trotsky must have gone through, for they were "dealt with" far more brutally.

By the time I reached the Lenin School, Trotsky had already been expelled from the Communist Party and exiled from the Soviet Union. No one at the school — students or tutors — would dare mention Trotsky. I was the only one who had the audacity to do that. In one of the books in the Lenin School library there still remained a praiseworthy passage on Trotsky. I made a reference from this passage to a tutor. He said that he would have a look into it, but I never heard any more of it.

As far as all the students were concerned, they were anti-Trotskyists, otherwise they would never have been sent there. I was perhaps the only exception, and that was because they had never asked me.

I had always had the keenest regard for Trotsky. The anti-Trotsky campaign had reached Australia not long before I left for the Soviet Union, and I had not taken it too seriously.

During the course at the Lenin School — which was to have lasted three years but was cut short to less than two years — we did not study and of Trotsky's works. The falsification of the history of the Russian Revolution had already taken place. Trotsky, who along with Lenin had been the central organiser and leader of the revolution, was not mentioned throughout our course.

We were being trained as party leaders to be sent back to our respective countries. And so I returned to Australia to become a central leader of the Communist Party of Australia only to find myself in conflict with the Comintern representative and the Stalinist leadership he had nurtured.

They didn't realise that in sending me to the Lenin School I had taken my assignment seriously and had systematically educated myself in the theories of Marxism. This understanding of Marxism was to lead me through the fight with the Stalinists in the CPA and take me into the newly formed Trotskyist movement.

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## Notes on Ted Tripp

Ted Tripp was born in 1900 in London and died in Melbourne in 1992.

In a 1978 interview with Dave Deutschmann, published in *Direct Action*, the newspaper of the Australian Socialist Workers Party, Tripp describes joining the Communist Party of Australia as a young British immigrant working as a fitter and turner in the railway workshops in Townsville, north Queensland.

"Walking down the main street of Townsville," he said, "I saw to my amazement an old man holding high the *Workers Weekly*.

"After walking past him a few times, I summoned enough courage to speak to him. That was Harry Wilkes. He as a commercial traveller around various districts in north Queensland and took with him a suitcase of communist literature. I went to his room and became enraptured with his literature."

Tripp was recruited to the CPA by Herbert Moxon, at that time the Brisbane organiser of the CPA, and later to become CPA general secretary. Tripp and Moxon worked closely together for the next three years.

Tripp organised the first CPA group in Townsville and represented the branch at the 1927 CPA conference.

During a state-wide rail strike in 1926, Tripp played a key organising role, which included producing a daily strike newspaper, which was distributed throughout the state. It was one of the first such daily strike newspapers in Australia.

One of the debates at the 1927 CPA conference was over what became known as the Queensland Resolution — whether the CPA should stand candidates against the Labor Party.

The conference decided the CPA should run its own candidates in the next Queensland elections.

As one of the three CPA candidates in the elections, Tripp received a large vote, which led the electoral officer to ask whether he wanted a recount. Tripp told the electoral officer that the result was already a victory for the CPA and a recount was not necessary. Peter Beilhartz, in notes from a 1976 interview with Tripp, says Tripp won about 1500 votes to the ALP candidate's 4000.

This was at a time when CPA support was strong among the working-class of north Queensland's ports, railways and meatworks.

Two months later, Tripp became the first Australian selected to attend the Lenin School.

On returning to Australia, Tripp immediately came into conflict with Harry Wicks, the Comintern representative from the CPUSA, who used the party name Herbert Moore.

Wicks said he thought Tripp had mixed in bad company in Moscow and he would have to check with the Soviet authorities about him.

Tripp began a national speaking tour describing what he had seen in the Soviet Union and became a leading propagandist and educator for the CPA, taking classes for CPA and Young Communist League members in the major cities, addressing meetings and speaking in support of CPA candidates.

Meanwhile, Wicks was moving to exclude Tripp from the CPA leadership, and even tried to have him suspended from membership, but the charge was withdrawn when Tripp confronted Wicks at a political bureau meeting.

Wicks had already excluded former CPA general secretary Jack Kavanagh and was about to expel Bert Moxon, the then general secretary.

Tripp survived the 1931 CPA congress, at which he became the first central leader to criticise Comintern policy in Germany, although he had not at that time read Trotsky's writings on Germany, which didn't begin to reach Australia until a few weeks later.

In 1932 Tripp was assigned to the Friends of the Soviet Union and became its national secretary. Under his leadership the FOSU grew to about 7500 members and had a widely circulated magazine, *Soviets Today*. He continued travelling the country, addressing meetings on the Soviet Union and socialism.

Tripp was removed from his position in the FOSU in 1933 and expelled from the CPA in 1934. Before his expulsion he had been in contact with the Trotskyist organisation, formed two years earlier.

After joining the Trotskyists in the Workers Party, Tripp became one of its leaders, mainly involved in education and propaganda, and around 1937-38, publisher of the Workers Party newspaper, *The Militant*.

He became a regular Trotskyist speaker at Sydney's Domain, and spent much time trying to win over members of the CPA.

A few years later he left the Workers Party, and subsequently began to publish another Trotskyist magazine, *Proletarian Review*, based among Trotskyists at Sydney University.

During World War II he moved to Melbourne, became inactive in the Trotskyist movement, but was a militant shop steward in the Federated Ironworkers Association.

From 1945 Tripp was associated with the Victorian Labor College and was its secretary from about 1958 to 1978. The Labor College was founded in 1917 by Guido Baracchi, a founder of the CPA and later an editor of the Comintern's English-language *Inprecor*. For a time, Baracchi was sympathetic to the Trotskyist movement.

In 1978, at the age of 78, Ted Tripp joined the Socialist Workers Party.