## RETURN TO MATERIALISM

## (essay)

#### Introduction

As we reach halfway through the 1990s certain errors that characterized much of the left in the radicalization of the 1960s and 1970s are now somewhat clearer. In this article I want to focus on the sectarianism and dogmatism that dominated much of the left for a period. Specifically I want to try to make an evaluation of the strength and weakness of the movement that based itself on Leon Trotsky's interpretation of the rise of Stalinism (and therefore decline of Marxism.)

The reason I am returning to this topic is because I believe it is still an issue today in various organizations. Some, which are hopelessly sectarian, I do not wish to deal with concretely because there is no immediate hope to see them become part of the living struggles for social progress in the world.

In most cases those sectarian organizations are a negative factor in the development of an effective and viable movement. But, specifically, I see the Democratic Socialist Party of Australia as an organization with important potential but which is still holding on to many sectarian and leftist misconceptions from the past. It has one foot in Marxism and one foot in its own dogmatic past. The following discussion is presented with the hope that it will be considered over time by those who disagree with it.

Ideologically I believe the sectarian errors referred to above stem from the adoption of idealist rather than materialist views. Therefore I have titled this article "Return to materialism".

**Roots of our movement**

In the beginning there arose a mass social movement calling for working people to fight for their rights as capitalism developed in the 19th century. This movement had an ongoing debate over what its ultimate goals should be. Its immediate objectives were somewhat obvious. It fought for better pay, less hours of work, better working conditions and in many cases against various forms of ethnic, racial or social discrimination. But also, fundamental to the immediate struggles was the struggle for political rights for working people, the right to vote being one obvious and important issue.

The conception of a future society in which there would be no rich or poor, where society would be run democratically both politically and economically, where the economy would be rationally planned and production would be based on human needs not profits for individuals, gradually became accepted by millions throughout the world. That future society was generally referred to as socialism.

#### Karl Marx

Marx tried to put the ideological footing of this movement on a scientific basis. He sought a materialist explanation for the existing class conflicts and tried to make an analysis of the nature of the existing society which he labeled capitalism. He also raised the concept that to change the nature of capitalism to a society responsive to the needs of the majority — the working people — a change of who rules would be needed, something that the present ruling circles would resist by any and all means.

Thus Marx made a differentiation between struggles for reforms within a capitalist society and a struggle to fundamentally change society, that is to revolutionize society.

**Before 1917**

Up until 1917 there had only been one clear case where working people favoring such a social order had actually been in power, the Paris Commune. The social explosion that brought socialists to power in 1917 completely changed the course of the history of the world's workers movement and its political corollary, known as the socialist movement.

Prior to 1917 there no question in anyone's mind that the socialist movement fought for an extension of democracy. The idea that a government calling itself socialist could shoot workers for trying to organize a union or imprison workers for attempting to organize politically wasn't debatable. It was simply considered impossible.

When the socialists lost control in the USSR and the Stalinist mafia came to power in the mid-1920s it did so in the name of socialism and with the support of most people in the world who considered themselves socialists.

#### Rise of Stalinism

It is my opinion that the distortion that the rise of Stalinism brought about for the world's socialist movement is not yet, and will not be, fully appreciated for years. For the world ruling capitalist class it brought about a temporary respite, a golden opportunity to fight what had been a movement that seemed to grow and spread at an ever-increasing rate.

With the rise of Stalinism the bourgeoisie could posture before the world as more democratic and more supportive of civil liberties than what was being passed off as "socialist". The bourgeois press gave its full support to the equation of socialism and Stalinism.

Opportunists within the labor movement in capitalist countries who wanted nothing better then to sell out the interests of working people for personal benefits found this situation extremely favorable, since they could confuse the revolutionary movements with Stalinism. These right opportunists, who also called themselves "socialist", now found it easier to openly support capitalism, including imperialist wars against Third World people, by arguing against "communism".

#### Cold War

The politics of the world became rapidly completely dominated by the East-West conflict, as it was called. People calling themselves socialist could openly support the mass genocide against the Vietnamese people by the United States carpet bombing because they opposed "communism", while in the USSR unspeakable crimes were being committed in the name of "socialism", reinforcing the state of utter confusion in the world.

The truth regarding socialism and Marxism on a world scale went into freefall. Any kind of serious historical honesty was eliminated. Bourgeois education on the issues of the 19th century, the rise of the workers movement and socialism was reduced to crude propaganda made plausible by Stalinism. For the followers of Stalin, the majority of the movement claiming to advocate socialism, the scientific philosophy of Marx was turned into a religion in which anything, regardless of how obviously it contradicted everything Marx had written, was passed off as Marxism.

#### Terminological confusion

From the 1930s up to today, in the mid-1990s, the confusion in the minds of working people on a world scale is immense regarding the word "socialism". For most it is an economic project that inevitably will end up in a totalitarian government and/or economic paralysis. For some it may mean "Sweden" or simply lots of safety nets, but there is doubt this really "works".

Prior to 1917 the terms used by the socialist movement were generally understood by people. They knew that terms like social progress meant progress for the poor, for the majority of working people including small farmers. They knew that socialism meant reorganizing the government and economy so workers would have the decisive say and society would be run for the benefit of the majority. It meant more rational planning and equality. It meant more democracy not only politically but socially. That translated into the concepts of free education for all, free medical care, full employment, unemployment insurance, retirement insurance, etc.

Only right-wing demagogues could argue that socialism would lead to less democratic rights, inequality and fascist-like repressive regimes. Pre-1917 most workers would have dismissed such accusation as ridiculous and exaggerated propaganda. Not so today. The examples of Russia, China, North Korea and many others is clearly in the consciousness of people.

#### Leon Trotsky

Leon Trotsky's efforts to argue that the Russian revolution of 1917 was betrayed and that one should not associate Stalinism with socialism was supported by only a small number of those considering themselves socialist.

Among those calling themselves socialist, some who agreed with Trotsky that something terrible was happening in Russia came to the conclusion that what happened in 1917, the very revolution Trotsky and Lenin had led, was in the end responsible for the rise of Stalinism. While such a position had some principled advocates, social democratic currents, which were busy selling out the working people they influenced, also could not stand Trotsky precisely because he remained loyal to the original ideas of the socialist movement.

Millions influenced by Stalinism lived in denial, believing the USSR was a democratic workers paradise. They hated Trotsky and cheered when he was assassinated, just as they cheered when the whole leadership of the revolution of 1917 was murdered. Looking back it seems so bizarre that people in every country of the world could on one hand claim to be for socialism and at the same time be so easily fooled.

The fact that millions believing in a more just society and in democracy could be fooled into supporting the opposite of their beliefs is something that we should give a lot of consideration to. We should give this some thought for a couple of reasons. An important one is that these people were generally materialist in their philosophical views, that is, they were not superstitious but favored science. Yet they could believe in things for which there was little, if any, factual evidence.

#### Democracy and materialism

What this fact does is reinforce the materialist conception that truth can only be ascertained through the conflict of ideas. Without differences, debate and a really open, democratic culture a movement can easily adopt positions disconnected from reality. In the end our movement is based on the truth, a correct understanding of the world and the spread of factual information. Capitalism rests on falsehoods. Its mass media is forever distorting facts and history, teaching racism, sexism, ageism and every possible prejudice to keep people divided.

That Stalinism could act like capitalism and yet be accepted as socialism by millions is now an historical fact. There are many factors which help explain this phenomena. For one the Stalinist betrayal was carried out without a clear, strong split within the movement and the Stalinists presented all their anti-working-class policies as being for socialism and for working people. When the Stalinists framed and murdered socialists this was done by calling people who defended socialist ideas traitors to socialism. The resulting confusion, and thus political support for the Stalinist rulers, was essential to their consolidation of power and ability to remain in power.

Stalinism was an unstable social order that could exist only because it appeared to be something it wasn't. Like a trade union bureaucracy that can only survive as a balancing act between getting removed by its rank and file or by the destruction of the union by the bosses, Stalinism can only have a limited lifespan in any country. It can only appear after major struggles and victories of working people. It is a parasite that feeds off such victories until it kills the host.

The regimes in China and North Korea are of this nature. They will inevitable go back to capitalism (most likely variant at this point) or be removed by a new rise in the socialist movement. As the capitalist world has come to understand Stalinism more clearly, it has become far more friendly to these remaining stalinist regimes. Today China is not seen as a challenge to capitalism but an opportunity.

In the USSR the enormous support the "communist" regime had from its "Lenin" days gradually eroded under the Stalinist regimes. Eventually the parasitic social order collapsed, unable to maintain support among its own people and unable to compete with capitalism.

These developments are not understood by people in general. The political culture of our day still has a totally distorted view of the events around the history of the USSR. Over time this will begin to change. It has begun to change a little inside the USSR as the mass of people begin to experience capitalism and a discussion of what was wrong before and what may have been right in the revolution of 1917 slowly begins to be considered.

#### A profound confusion on the left

Nevertheless the confusion within the left is still there. After events like the Moscow trials in the mid-1930s one would think that anyone with half a brain could see through those frame-ups. But millions didn't. And it is not just years ago. Even today, after the utter collapse and exposure of the true nature of Stalinist regimes, some people who consider themselves pro-socialist still admire Stalin, or claiming to now be against Stalinism, base their politics on Stalinist platforms.

One example is the concept of popular frontism, which was aimed to subordinate the workers movement to any wing of the ruling class that would make deals with the USSR's regime. This strategy of betrayal was projected by Stalin precisely at the moment, 1935, he was organizing to have every member of Lenin's original central committee executed.

The Popular Front line eventually made the Stalinist organizations able to support anyone by its logic. The final extreme culmination was the Norwegian "Communist" Party welcoming Hitler's invading troops, the Communist Party of Cuba joining Batista's cabinet, and so on.

#### Leninism

In the ideological struggle around the rise of Stalinism two opposite currents began to reinforce a sectarian conception of what Lenin had advocated and done.

First the Stalinists turned Lenin into a cult/idol. Lenin was always right on everything. They took his body and put him on display. They called their philosophy Marxism-Leninism, a term that never had any scientific meaning. Marxism is the term given to dialectical materialism or historical materialism. Leninism is, at best, contributions made on organizational questions, the nature of imperialism, and so on. That is: analysis of social issues or strategic questions within the class struggle but philosophically within the confines of Marxism. Of course, terms gradually develop their own meanings over time and we have no choice but to recognize that. In most cases Marxism-Leninism came to be another name for Stalinism.

All so-called "Communist Parties" became ideological promoters of idealist philosophies, of course, in the name of Marxism and materialism. They ritualized their new anti-materialist, anti-scientific philosophy precisely to obscure truth and reality in order to justify and maintain popular support for their organizations in spite of their vicious abuse of power, and oppression of the people they ruled over. Stalin became their cult leader worldwide. But in each Communist Party there was a local cult leader that received standing ovations until removed, sometimes by a telephone call from Stalin, at which time another "leader" was picked and received the standing ovations.

The litany of utterly false ideas attributed to Lenin grew through the years. These included such concepts as only one party can represent the interests of working people, (meaning, of course, your local Stalinist organization) or, for instance, socialism can be achieved in one country, a concept obviously in contradiction with everything Marx and Engels wrote. These Stalinist conceptions became quite popularized. Bourgeois educational systems and the mass media turned these Stalinist concepts into the very meaning of the words in popular usage. To this day much of the left uses these terms not with their original content or meaning but with the Stalinist distortion.

#### Democratic centralism

For instance, the term democratic-centralism now means to most people a bureaucratic, undemocratic, if not utterly dictatorial, organizational structure because that is what most organizations calling themselves democratic centralist were like.

When a local city council in any United States town passes a law to put up a stop sign everyone has to stop there. The decision is made democratically, or at least by elected officials. But it is carried out by centralism. Even people who disagreed with the decision have to follow it. Loosely speaking, that is democratic centralism. The fact is that all societies, certainly capitalist societies, advocate democratic centralist conceptions as a basic framework for the existence of society.

The idea that a voluntary organization could apply democratic centralism as a premise of how it functions is totally benign. Most organizations, to one extent or other, do that. Some do not apply it. For instance, the Democratic and Republican Parties in the United States vote platforms and then the candidate is free to violate that platform all they want.

Obviously these two parties are not democratic centralist. People advocating fascism are members and run as Democrats in the United States, as do others who call themselves socialist. But most organizations, in general, have policies and rules which if you do not accept you are expelled.

Lenin's concept of democratic centralism was developed because Lenin was concerned over the effectiveness of an organization fighting for power. His idea starts with the right of majority rule. To be effective Lenin argued that a serious socialist organization should function under the premise that once decisions are made everyone should help implement the policy. One can argue about Lenin's organizational concept, when it is appropriate or how it should be applied.

But try to use the words democratic centralism today in broad circles. Many people who actually favor democratic centralism in one form or other respond in negative shock when the term is mentioned.

I noticed at the founding conference in Berkeley, California of the Committees of Correspondence how one keynote speaker made fun of the term "democratic centralism", to immense applause. I wondered just what people thought it meant that they should feel it was such a terrible thing. It is clear that the words now mean a Stalinist-like bureaucratic, top-down structure. The term's popular meaning has nothing in common with Lenin's views.

While this distortion of socialist, and Lenin's, ideas was developing in Stalinist organizations an interesting parallel development took place in the Trotskyist movement, which opposed and denounced the Stalinists for what they were.

The factual information on the crimes of Stalinism and truth about the internal regime in the USSR put out by the Trotskyist movement in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s is now accepted by almost everyone. In fact, all research has confirmed that the factual description of the internal reality of Stalinist society by Leon Trotsky was completely accurate. In judging Leon Trotsky historically this is quite important. Trotsky defended telling the truth to the world. He fought his whole life for what he saw as in the interest of working people worldwide, regardless of the consequences to him personally.

#### Trotskyist movement

In the struggle against Stalinism the Trotskyist movement (by Trotskyist I mean supporters of Trotsky's views) focused its arguments on the difference between what Lenin had said and done and what the Stalinist were doing. Not to be confused with social democrats who denounced Stalinism but also Lenin, the Trotskyists emphasized heavily their support of Lenin. The Trotskyist of the late 1920s and 1930s could be characterized first of all by their heroic resistance with few resources to tell the full truth about Soviet "socialism" while still defending the original socialist ideal. Their other characteristic was their essential isolation from mass movements, and often little relevance in their countries' political life outside of issues involving the factional struggle stemming from the USSR's history.

#### Myth of the "correct program"

Slowly a myth developed within the Trotskyist movement that to this day still has some support. That myth is that what Lenin did was gather a cadre around a "correct" program, build a hard, centralized organization and when the masses radicalized they were won over. Having won the masses Lenin's party was then able to take "power". A whole series of corollaries followed from this erroneous concept and, over time, became part of the Trotskyist dogma. One example of these corollaries was the belief that without a party like Lenin's working people could not take power. Of course, a party "like Lenin's" meant a party with a "correct program" well centralized, with internally disciplined cadre. The Trotskyists argued that only the Fourth International (Trotskyist movement) had a correct program. Therefore in their eyes success for the workers' movement, long-term, was directly dependent on the growth of the Fourth International. Any other possible development was essentially ruled out. During the 1940s, for example, almost every article written in the International Socialist Review, a monthly magazine of the North American followers of Trotsky, ended with the words "Only the Fourth International etc, etc."

Parties associated with the Fourth International, (in time there were a few Fourth Internationals) all referred to themselves as Leninist and each affiliated organization a Leninist Party. The conception which gradually became accepted within the Trotskyist movement of Lenin's party had very little to do with what Lenin had actually advocated in Russia and nothing whatsoever to do with what actually happened in pre-1917 Russia. It is crucial to review the ideological error that appeared within the Trotskyist movement around this issue and which consolidated the isolated (sectarian) existence and politics of these organizations into a culture and dogmatic set of political principles.

#### Lenin and the mass working-class movement

To fully discuss these concepts it is best to go back and outline what Lenin advocated and did. Lenin was a member of the broad workers' movement in Europe, called at the time the Second, or Socialist, international. That mass movement found some expression in Russia and eventually was quite influential among working people and the intelligentsia since it advocated an end to the Czarist dictatorship and the establishment of democracy, the end of feudal relations on the land, a land reform and an eight-hour day.

In Lenin's day all organizations associated with socialism were rife with debate. All kinds of views permeated the movement and various newspapers advocated one or other point of view. One wing of the movement was concerned that the power of the movement had made it possible for leaders to benefit personally. For instance trade union leaders or elected members of parliament, by working out deals or compromises with representatives of capital, could betray the interests of workers in return for privileges for themselves.

Such people were referred to as "reformist", meaning they sought only to gain some reforms within the framework of capitalism, rather than fight for a new, socialist society. Lenin began arguing that in order to fight against such a disorientation of the socialist movement and in order to challenge capital it was necessary to have a more solid movement, both organizationally and ideologically. He noted that natural leaders arise in the day-to-day struggles of working people and that the role of the socialist party was to organize these leaders into an organization to act as a pole of attraction, a class-struggle alternative.

The goal was to help mobilize the whole working class, to unite the class in action. The starting point of Lenin's conception was the existing mass movement. That was just taken for granted in his days. Everyone was talking about what a movement or organization clearly competing for the support of the masses of workers should do.

Lenin's concept of a "party" has no meaning without a mass base. Certainly small groups could appear in a country to begin work to establish the ideas of socialism among their working people but such groups to Lenin were simply propaganda groups such as had existed in Russia in the 19th century.

Lenin's attitude towards such groups, how they should be structured, how they should organize, always depended on their specific circumstances. In the world Lenin functioned in, that was prehistory. He was arguing about what to do once the working class as a whole had its own independent movement both economically (unions) and politically (party).

The concept of a "correct program" abstracted from the actual process of a living mass struggles is the opposite of Lenin's method, which saw the program as something that evolves, itself a process, defined by not only a mass movement but, in Lenin's situation, a mass movement involved in revolutionary struggles. Lenin and all those around him generally had a materialist view of ideas and recognized that they reflected material events.

In the period of revolutionary upsurge in Russia from 1903 to 1918, in which Lenin's ideas of organization and party building were formed, there was no such thing as an abstract "correct program". The party's program clearly evolved. It was a process. It was repeatedly changed and modified. Looking back to that period you can see how fast positions taken by Lenin's party changed, how the organization was in continuous debate. Differences were the norm, not the exception. Major mistakes could be overcome because the power of the developing mass movement helped Lenin's organization readjust.

#### Lenin opposes soviets

One example was Lenin's opposition to the soviets, (workers' councils). With hindsight we can see that Lenin was sectarian in counterposing building a party to the councils. This position had serious negative effects in the struggles of the 1905 revolutionary explosion and its aftermath. Leaders in Lenin's party opposed him, positions were taken and carried out against his positions, ideas were publicly debated about these differences when legally possible.

Lenin's error was compounded when the revolutionary upswing of 1905 went into decline and he insisted the movement was not yet in decline. Quickly, as reality indicated otherwise, Lenin reversed his positions, including on the Soviets, which after 1906 he claimed should be supported.

Lenin's party, having tens of thousands of followers deeply rooted in the mass movement, rose and declined in active membership rather sharply depending on events. For instance, in 1912, after the defeat of the 1905 revolution, not a single unit of Lenin's party was still in existence or at least holding meetings in Moscow, the largest city of Russia.

Of course, that did not mean that thousands did not continue to agree with Lenin's party, but the repression made it difficult for its supporters to meet. The party that Lenin, the individual, participated in, which became known in history as the Bolshevik Party (meaning the Majority Party in Russian) had little, if any, similarity to what is often today called a Leninist party.

The idea that a group of a few hundred people who are not in the leadership of any mass movement, much less integrally involved in leading the working class as a social force, can be referred to as a Leninist party and having a "correct program" would never have crossed Lenin's mind. In 1918 Lenin would refer to such an idea as clowning.

#### Idealist error

By the 1940s, however, within the Trotskyist movement a conception had taken root that no matter how small or disconnected from the workers movement a group might be, if it had the "correct" program and a cadre, it was a Leninist Party and would eventually "win".

This was the "proven" Leninist way. What the Trotskyist movement did as a whole was drop the direct involvement with the living mass movement as a prerequisite for the development of a party. Thus "program" was separated from its social roots. In effect, program was separated from practice. Ideas were separated from their material basis.

In doing this, an idealist error, philosophically, was introduced. The first point of any program that has any meaning, and certainly one in which the word "correct" could in anyway be used, is one that has shown that a leadership link has been made with the working masses. Otherwise correct program begins to simply mean comments about the world, past history, predictions of events for the future, and so on.

The actual mass link is itself part of the premise of a program. For instance, recognizing in one's head what really happened in the history of the USSR is a good and useful thing. But it is not a program. Stating general outlines of the realities of capitalist society is useful, but it is not a program. A program is a living, complex process relating to the ongoing struggle that permeates our class-divided society — a struggle that is occurring now at this moment in a million different forms and at a whole spectrum of levels.

**The rise of splits**

But in this framework what then happens when two leaders disagree? Once you are functioning in this sectarian framework there is no way to resolve differences, and given that the very existence of the organization and its future success is believed to be tied to this ever-important "correct program", differences become very threatening.

Within the Trotskyist organizations a culture developed which formally claimed to allow differences to exist but in reality crushed any dissent. While the roots were very different, the forms in which dissent was crushed in Trotskyist groups had many similarities to how Stalinist groups crushed dissent. Of course, in Trotskyist groups dissidents were expelled, not shot.

Differences in sectarian groups inevitably led to splits. After a split, two organizations, each with its own "correct program", often confronted each other. The logic of this process was the proliferation of sects and cults. That process exploded within the Trotskyist movement.

The evolution of some of the groups became quite bizarre. Splits occurred in ever-growing numbers as groups became less and less involved in the living movements of their own countries. In fact, all social movements and mass struggles were more and more seen simply as recruiting arenas for the cult/sect with the correct program.

Cadres became the defenders of the Holy Grail, and usually there was in each group just one "Lenin of today" who could interpret and adjust the "program". If the "correct program" was maintained the masses would some day come. A sort of religious "our day will come" corollary developed to the correct program.

#### Posadas, Moreno, Healy, Barnes

One such cult was that of Juan Posadas. I had the opportunity to meet Posadas in 1960 in Havana, Cuba. This, man was clearly certifiable. He believed he could communicate with his dog. When the dog died the Posadista Central Committee sang the internationals at his grave. Posadas also believed he could communicate the situation in Vietnam to his six-month-old grandchild. In later years, when the child was five, he was added to Posadas political bureau for his enlightening views.

Posadas advocated nuclear war and other utterly insane views. His origin was in the Trotskyist movement and he had hundreds of followers, primarily in Latin America. I understand there are still a few Posadistas in the world although Posadas passed away some time ago.

Moreno in Argentina was another quite colorful, but slightly more rational cultist with thousands of supporters. In England you had Healy, a man clearly deranged, who believed anyone who disagreed with him had to be an FBI agent. Yet he also had thousands of devoted followers, including the movie actress Vanessa Redgrave.

While the three mentioned above may have been somewhat extreme expressions of this phenomenon, in general all groups calling themselves Trotskyist had elements of sectarian and cult-like existence by the 1960s.

Also, amazing as it might seem, while these organizations produced endless written materials on all kinds of political phenomena, almost nothing can be found seeking to explain this astounding phenomena of the cultification of Trotskyist organizations. If you look closely you will see some of the same processes at work, although in a less extreme form in other sect/cults like that of the Lambertist in France or the ISO out of England.

The one group that I had an opportunity to experience personally was the development of the Barnes cult in the United States SWP. The SWP today is completely disconnected from reality. Its cult leader holds a series of bizarre political positions evolving in a manner quite similar to Moreno or Posadas.

The question is, why did groups, whose origins are in the struggle against Stalinism, evolve in this direction? This includes every group in the world influenced by James Cannon, with the exception of the DSP in Australia. What are the material roots of this phenomenon?

Since the DSP was originally formed in association with the North American SWP, it is of value for the DSP to look clearly At the origins of the sectification of the North American SWP.

The SWP did not become a sect because of Barnes the individual. Barnes himself is a product of what was wrong in the SWP. In my opinion the problem goes back to the isolation of the SWP from roots in the mass movement and involvement in living struggles. The idealist error I have mentioned above become codified in the outlook of the SWP beginning in the 1930s. Its sect-like nature was already evident in the late 1930s and early 1940s, but became more pronounced as time went on.

#### Crises of the US SWP

With the recruitment of a new generation in the 1960s the SWP faced a crisis. Its participation in the antiwar movement around Vietnam brought it somewhat closer to involvement in a living struggle, an important encounter with reality and the political tempo of the nation, something it had not really experienced since the labor struggles of the 1930s, in which the SWP did have some important participation.

The impact and conflict of its sectarian idealism and its materialist involvement in a struggle created an interesting reaction in the culture of the SWP. Its older leadership, especially that of Farrell Dobbs, but also others such as Tom Kerry, felt threatened. Others, such as Joe Hansen and George Breitman, had mixed feelings. I believe some were starting to understand the sectarian nature of the SWP, especially Joseph Hansen.

Barnes was the youth "leader" hand-picked to fight against the introduction of reality and potential de-dogmatization of the SWP's sect-like existence. In the 1970s Barnes began a conscious campaign to rid the SWP of its infection by people not molded into sect-like thinking. In private discussion Barnes spoke openly of the need to drive out over 50 per cent of the membership of the SWP.

The political cover for this campaign was an ultraleft, workerist campaign consciously designed to drive out those not willing to accept a cult-like existence. This campaign was, of course, believed in the minds of people like Barnes and Dobbs to be defending the "correct program" protecting the "proletarian" SWP from the petty-bourgeois infection resulting from the rapid recruitment of members from university campuses.

This campaign had an ultraleft side, politically, since it had to promise the remaining members that all this was necessary to get ready for huge new opportunities, of which the petty-bourgeois members of student origin would only be in the way. The fact was, of course, that the remaining members had the same background as those driven out.

But by 1978 the SWP was passing resolutions talking about the coming "battles for power" and other projections totally disconnected from reality. The growth of ultraleft positions spread to international issues like the rather famous article that the SWP printed accusing the FSLN of being the main block to success in the struggle against Somoza in Nicaragua.

The SWP even held public forums titled "Why the FSLN failed" just months before Somoza was overthrown by the FSLN. After the FSLN victory the SWP shifted its position towards the FSLN.

In the end all of this had nothing to do with real events in the United States politically, or within the working class. It was a clash of reality with a sectarian methodology deeply entrenched in the SWP.

While this process was going on, one exceptional leader within the sphere of influence of the US SWP, who had his origins in the mass struggle against the war in Vietnam, stood up to Barnes. That was Jim Percy, of Australia. He sensed something was deeply wrong. The SWP veered for a short period of time away from its sectarian existence in the late 1960s and early 1970s, only to come back in spades to consolidate its sect idealist political framework.

**Leftist politics**

The appearance of the "correct program", "we are a Leninist Party" ideology has tended to always require a "leftist" view of reality and prognostications that cataclysmic events will soon catapult the sect into importance. This phenomenon is also to be found in all cults.

Posadas was more clear and extreme, since he projected two events that would make his cult the center of all world events. He projected nuclear world war or the landing of extraterrestrials as the catalyst for his group's ascendency.

The "leftist" side is necessary because the sect members have to be more radical than any living movement. The attraction of association with a living process has to be broken to maintain the sect. This requires forever knocking any positive development in social movements. Analyses have to be made continuously showing the failings of all movements and their inevitable collapse and failure.

This is done by looking at mass social movements primarily in a formalistic, programmatic framework. Since all mass movement by definition have only a partly formulated program it is easy enough to show their "failure to understand".

The history of the SWP is full of such examples. I will list a few here to help show concretely how, in effect, the policies of the SWP have always been politically leftist or dogmatic and sectarian. This is true not just for the period that the fully developed Barnes cult appeared, but almost from its origins in the struggle against Stalinism in the early 1930s.

One could argue that this was inevitable because of objective conditions. Whenever a group like the SWP attempted to engage in mass work it ran into the complete dominance of the left by the Stalinist Communist party. That fact is helpful in understanding what happened, but it does not change the fact of the SWP's dogmatic positions.

In the mid-1930s the SWP opposed the formation of a Labor Party in the United States. Nothing could have be more incorrect, since the rise of the CIO unions in the 1930s created the potential and a great deal of interest in launching a political party of labor. The failure, objectively, in United States history of such a party forming is one of the limiting factors on the labor movement today.

The blame for this failure falls primarily on the Communist Party and its Popular Front line, which was projected by Stalin to back the Democrats and on the Social Democrats, who also backed the Democrats. The SWP justified its anti-labor-party policy by counterposing a mass revolutionary socialist party to a labor party.

This confuses program with mass struggle in an idealist manner. The error is sectarian and similar to Lenin's error of opposing the Soviets. (Or of the DSP saying it does not advocate an Alliance like that of New Zealand but instead a more "politically correct" formation.)

Once the potential for the rise of a Labor Party passed, the SWP shifted to a position of advocating a Labor Party. In the early 1930s the SWP called Nicaraguan revolutionary leader Cesar Sandino a "traitor" to his people. This was explained with ultraleft arguments regarding Sandino's lack of a correct program, and so on. By the 1940s the SWP was opposing the proposal to vote an equal rights amendment (ERA) for women's rights to the US constitution. This was opposed as a petty-bourgeois proposal that working women were not interested in.

In the late 1940s, when the African-American nationalist movement began to grow, seeking to develop pride in its own community and culture, the SWP opposed it as a reactionary movement. In the late 1940s, when Farrell Dobbs had the first opportunity to speak on national radio to a large audience of the North American populace he brought them "greetings" from the Fourth International. In case anyone has any doubts, let me assure them nothing could be a more utterly sectarian approach to politics then to give a talk in such a manner, which had nothing to do with the realities of the North American people.

What this shows is how deeply imbedded sectarianism was in the culture of the SWP. In more recent times I could give a whole long list of positions, which most DSPers would quickly recognize as leftist or sectarian errors, since I lived the experience.

For instance when the civil rights movement exploded in the south of the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the SWP opposed its young members joining that living struggle. The explanation was made that we had the "correct program" and we needed to concentrate recruitment to our program rather than involvement in a struggle where we had no branches.

When the Vietnam War was coming to an end, the Vietnamese asked for world support in its effort to force the United States to the negotiating table. The SWP opposed the demonstrations that then ensued demanding the United States accept a negotiated peace settlement. When radicals in California launched an effort to establish a radical electoral formation called the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP), the SWP opposed it, denouncing the PFP as a liberal-bourgeois party.

The utter absurdity of that position was, of course, explained by looking at its platform rather than seeing the meaning and direction of the effort to launch candidates that would oppose the war in Vietnam and fight for social justice at home.

All of the above points occurred while James P. Cannon was alive. Cannon will go down in history as a giant for standing up to Stalinism and trying to keep alive the ideals of the early socialist movement, but Cannonism is not what the SWP literature claims: the Americanization of Leninism.

The SWP is not, nor has ever been, a Leninist party. It is absurd to think so, because it was always isolated from the working people as a social layer and as a movement. At best, it was a propaganda group that advocated the formation of a Leninist party, but existence was sect-like existence, and its political positions were ultraleftist or sectarian.

#### Differences

The culture that develops inside organizations with the we-have-the-correct-program view, as mentioned, never really allows differences although in the formal statutes it always claims to accept the right to minority views.

The SWP never had a culture permitting differences. Every group that ever raised any questions regarding any of its policies was eventually driven out.

In this sense it had no resemblance to the party Lenin led, which was continuously alive with debate and differences. Lenin's party had various newspapers that would debate each other publicly. In fact, in the 1908 period when Lenin was arguing against one grouping in his organization he accused them of hiding their minority views and not publishing them in their public organ.

I do not think most DSP members would think it Leninist for a minority to start up its own public organ and publish its differences with the majority. Well, that was the reality of Lenin's party. In that specific case Lenin even argued that the minority should not use the excuse that the party was not in a pre-convention discussion period to not publicly publish their minority views.

Lenin wrote letters to friends all the time expressing his personal views. He thought it quite normal for there to be private discussions and correspondence between members of his organization. He saw that as a right. In fact, in one letter he began by saying that if anyone read this letter when it wasn't addressed to them, that person was violating his right to private correspondence.

Cannon tried to set up norms of functioning. Some are undoubtedly of great value, while others are completely opposed to the reality of Lenin's Party, but they were always presented as "Leninism".

Cannon introduced the idea that members of a Leninist party are violating norms if they express their differences within the organization to anyone outside the organization or engage in private correspondence, even within the organization.

At the time I joined the SWP in the late 1950s there was a lose grouping in the SWP that the Dobbs leadership referred to as "petty bourgeois" and that was eventually driven out, called the Weissites (named after Murry Wiess a leader of the SWP). One of their horrendous crimes was that they had circulated letters to each other about the internal situation in the SWP.

In saying all of this my point is not to say that responsible people should not think out how they act and the consequences of their actions in terms of how best to carry on a discussion within an organization. Nor do I mean that we should not have rules and norms and try to function in an organized manner.

I am trying to get people to think through these issues and to realize that the norms the US SWP taught the Australian DSP were a misrepresentation of what Lenin's movement had been like, and not necessarily at all a "proven" organizational method. My point is the norms Cannon developed had little to do with the reality of Lenin's party.

The underlying difference has its roots in the fact that Lenin's party was directly leading the masses in a powerful radicalization and the SWP was an isolated ideological propaganda grouping. Even if the SWP had really reflected Lenin's organizational forms they might very well not be at all applicable to its specific circumstances. The idea of a generalized organizational method is about as correct as the idea of an abstract "correct political program".

#### Talking tough

It is for the above reasons that in my opinion the DSP is not, and should not refer to itself as, a Leninist party. The new preamble of the DSP's program, in my opinion, is an attempt to codify some of these incorrect concepts of organization.

Its language is that of an organization that is not dealing with the reality of mass struggles. When an organization is isolated it can talk in tough terms about "overthrow" and "revolutionary action" and so on. Organizations that actually lead the masses, like the FPL in El Salvador or the Alliance in New Zealand, would pay an immense negative price for that kind of needless and easily misunderstood language.

What that language does is give those wanting to block our movement a weapon to attack us and help isolate us. It is posturing that serves no purpose and miseducates the membership on how to handle themselves. Deep down it reflects a method that lacks seriousness. It is ultraleft in that sense.

Such language is completely unnecessary to maintain our principles. It is revealing when people believe that they have to use language easily misunderstood in order to maintain their principles. It shows a great fear of selling out.

It is true the DSP lives today in a world that has seen so much betrayal of our ideals for a democratic and just world that it fears the same shift away from socialist ideals could affect it. While this is definitely part of our reality, the use of such terms and acting tough and passing tough-sounding phrases is no real protection.

On the contrary it reveals a developing leftist error. The preamble also makes a prediction of total demise unless the kind of structure referred to as Leninist (incorrectly) is adopted and followed. The preamble says the DSP would degenerate and no longer be a coherent organization.

We should give this some careful thought. Causa R in Venezuela does not follow any of this. They act precisely in the manner criticized by the DSP. Yet Causa R has not degenerated or collapsed. Instead they have gone from 20 members to tens of thousands directly in the leadership of major industrial unions, have the support of millions, precisely among the poorest Venezuelans and its industrial working class.

Does that mean Causa R, and what it advocates is right for Australia, or even Venezuela? That is not necessarily the case. Will they be able to go beyond their present gains with the organizational methods they have used up to now? That's a difficult questions to answer, but my point is we should drop this arrogance about the "proven Leninist principles of organization", meaning the structure that Cannon developed in the United States.

We need to maintain an open mind, to learn from not only the Russian experience but from that of others who have succeeded in winning the masses to break with bourgeois politics and for the independence of the class.

The Causa R example is an extreme one, but nevertheless useful. The original group of 20 members led by Alfredo Maniero decided on this course some 23 years ago. Maniero was driven by the need to root the organisaiton once again among the masses. To now look at Causa R and not recognize its success and potential would be blindness.

#### Never say never

It is wrong to make statements like: "Any attempt to start with a politically heterogeneous, loosely organized group, to try and win a mass base, and then try to turn it into a tight Bolshevik-type party, would end in disaster. It wouldn't have revolutionary politics." Or, "But there's never been a case of a loose organization without trained cadres ever being able to lead a socialist revolution."

First of all, Lenin's party did begin with a politically heterogeneous, loosely organized group, which did win the masses, the Second International. And then Lenin did succeed in building within such an organization a more cohesive formation.

Yet John Percy's report, quoted above, refers to exactly what Lenin did as something that would end "in disaster", something that's impossible. The point John Percy is defending is the concept that one starts with a small but hardened cadre formation with a fully developed "revolutionary socialist" program and then you win the masses and become a big cadre formation.

Any other vision is dead wrong. History says John is wrong. What we have never seen yet, but we probably will see some day is what John advocates. Everything is possible over time and in rapidly changing circumstances.

Secondly, the FSLN is a perfect example of an organization that was completely heterogeneous politically, and deliberately so. Yet it did succeed in winning the masses and carrying out armed struggle to bring down the Somoza dictatorship.

So was the July 26 Movement in Cuba. Statements about the "only" way that things will happen or could "never" happen are generally wrong. Causa R continuing to evolve in its class struggle orientation cannot be ruled out in the manner that John Percy does in his report to the DSP. In the recent military uprisings against the government in Venezuela the masses poured into the streets to support the soldiers trying to end the Mafia-like, corrupt rule of the bourgeois political parties.

The media immediately started a campaign against Causa R, accusing it of intrigue with the rebel military officers and of hiding arms, etc. In the recent elections the military threatened a coup if Causa R won. What will happen in the next period is unclear. This is a living struggle.

There is no question Causa R is standing up for the working class and promoting its interests. It does not fit the schema of the DSP, so undoubtedly the DSP will expect it to "end in disaster", focusing its attention on the limitations of Causa R's stated platform.

If the DSP leadership believes views like those put forward by Steve Robson at the 19?? DSP national conference will mean disaster, one can only imagine what they think of Causa R. After all, what Causa R advocates and practices would make Steve Robson look like a raving centralist.

Causa R, like the Greens, tries not to vote at meetings. Anyone can join or leave, they are publicly against democratic centralism and so on. They didn't fall apart, they did not lose their effectiveness, if by that we mean leading the class struggle, fighting for the rights of workers, winning masses to a class break with the parties of the bourgeoisie, etc.

In criticizing Robson the DSP leadership used a method that has been characteristic of all sectarian Trotskyist groups. Once anyone challenges the leadership you make a class characterization of that person. Barnes did that to Jim Percy. Jim was great as long as he agreed. Once he differed it was discovered he had been a "petty bourgeois" type all along. He was a student hippy type with a beard who owned a house. Ipso facto petty bourgeois, wrong politically.

Percy would inevitably lead to the liquidation of the party, since he was adapting to the petty bourgeoisie milieu. The method goes like this: someone raises a criticism but insists they agree with socialism, and the overall program, Leninism, Marxism, etc, the leadership then claims there is a "logic of the line". The logic of the line is always to capitulate to pressures. Pressures from whom? Why, naturally, the petty bourgeoisie, usually the radical petty bourgeoisie. In DSP language the "left-liberal" milieu. What this method does is end the discussion.

It is a way of refusing to consider criticisms. It is a culture that crushes democracy and debate. The message that such a method sends out to the rank and file is "differ, and you will be driven out".

Here is an exact quote used by a DSP leader against Robson: "While Comrade Robson has not consistently thought through where the line and orientation he has begun to develop will lead (hence his denials that he is not for building a Leninist cadre party), nevertheless, it represents an adaptation to the pressures of this left-liberal milieu. The logic of the line he has begun to develop is to dissolve the party into this milieu ... It is a liquidationist line ..."

In one form or another I have read that quote 100 times. Its role is to end debate and to silence others.

#### The New Zealand Alliance

In general, in recent DSP documents there is a tendency to rigidity. And in the analysis of other currents the main focus is on program. When looking at the marvelous mass break in New Zealand from the two parties of the rich, the DSP documents refers to the Alliance as left-liberal.

This is utterly wrong. It misses the entire point of the process that is occurring and the potential made possible by the appearance of the Alliance. The Alliance is a definitive break by working people from the two parties of the bourgeoisie. It is the starting point in the framework of New Zealand to develop a mass movement for social change and democracy.

It can lead to a struggle in the unions for democracy and a class-struggle orientation, and may lead to the development of massively increased class consciousness and a culture of struggle. To look at the Alliance from a programmatic framework, and not see that the mass break is its most important underlying programmatic statement, is an idealist approach to politics.

The DSP reports see the Alliance as "a break with Laborism" or as a break to the "left". But stating it this way can miss the whole point. It is a break with class-collaborationist politics, it is a class break, and like all mass developments it has only a partial platform with a lot of areas left unstated.

To say that in Australia this is not a "model that we'd want to copy politically" because, "They will have activists but not revolutionary cadres, with revolutionary socialist politics" is utter leftist confusion.

What has happened in New Zealand, politically speaking, is the number-one goal that we need in every industrialized nation. It is the beginning of a mass, conscious break with class-collaborationist politics. The key to politics in New Zealand today is to have this break survive, grow and expand. The key to the evolution of the Alliance in New Zealand is rooted in international events.

The main victory of the New Zealand development for the working class is its example internationally, and likewise the present international relationship of forces limits the immediate possibilities in New Zealand. The leadership of the Alliance is proving itself remarkably.

Firstly, to have succeeded in forming the Alliance, an extremely difficult achievement, and thus begin to break the monopoly grip of capital over politics in New Zealand and secondly, to begin building up a membership organization that begins to consolidate without losing its mass influence.

After the next elections it might become more possible for the Alliance to begin consolidating support in the union movement and building support among students and other youth. That is to go a bit more beyond the electoral framework under which it began. But we must keep in mind that New Zealand at this moment is not under the impact of a deep radicalization with mass actions and political fervor among its youth.

The New Zealand Alliance has received next to no support from all the "correct program" sectarians. On the contrary all they can think about is raiding the Alliance in order to add another member to their sect. All they focus on is the formal stated platform of the Alliance.

The key to the Alliance's program is its break. Its leadership is completely independent of the ruling class in New Zealand and internationally and it is totally committed to defending the working people, the poor, to fight for defence of the environment and promote solidarity with other working people internationally.

This is an historic first in the post-Cold-War period. The Alliance, in part because it is close to Australia, becomes an excellent opportunity to promote class-struggle politics by calling for a break in Australia, like in New Zealand. The DSP focuses not on the living class struggle and the leadership being formed in that process, but on whether "cadres" with an ideologically "correct program" are being formed.

Since, after four years, it doesn't see something happening that fits its preconceived forms, the DSP now feels uncomfortable with the Alliance. The DSP's international report states: "And in this framework we also note the problems with there not having developed an organized revolutionary socialist current. Such a current, which can provide a principled position of how to advance forward, is even more urgently required in the period ahead."

The fixation on program blinds the DSP to understanding a form of development different from their own experience. To make the above statement is factually wrong. A process is now under way in New Zealand which is developing a leadership, but it is happening in a manner much more like what happened in Nicaragua.

It is very different from how groups like the DSP have been formed. In the same manner the DSP document on the environment looks at Green groups not as part of a process in motion with which we not only must ally ourselves but of which we are a part.

Instead, the resolution focuses on programmatic issues. Statements like: "Greens, like everyone else, must choose where they stand on all social issues," is a ridiculous formal logic oxymoron. By Greens we mean exactly those people who are in motion around one aspect of problems being created by the world capitalist system.

By definition, "Greens" is an expression of motion, of rebellion, on a specific issue not "all social issues". By this logic of they "must chose", all struggles and all real movements that appear can be criticized since they always appear with incomplete platforms, otherwise they would not have their mass character. That is in the real world.

The opposite of what the DSP resolution argues for is the direction we should pursue. We want there to be a Green movement that does not take up "all social issues" in order to bring about the largest possible unity in exposing and opposing the destruction of the environment. How that movement then inter-links, inter-relates and develops with other social movements is a complex process.

Thus what Greenpeace is doing with its dramatic actions to expose the corporate polluters should be cheered by us, not denounced. To refer to these actions as "stunts" is insulting and arrogant to the committed activist who often, risking their lives, have sought to force the world media to reveal what is happening to the environment.

Such an attitude blocks the ability of the DSP to work with others. It is sectarian posturing. The idea that lobbying is some how reformist or incorrect is also promoted in this resolution. It is referred to as the politics of "liberal reformism."

Lobbying is just one kind of activity. Its nature is determined by its interrelationship with other events and movements. It has no specific characteristic in itself, it is like a tactic such as demonstrations, strikes, elections, etc.

Once again the resolution is not written with an eye on our objectives, our relation to living movements and struggles, but a sect-like declaration of our ideological superiority. Finally, I should mention a comment that was quoted in one contribution from the National Committee report on "DSP Interventions in Australian Politics". This is referred to as being "based on the Leninist strategy of building a revolutionary Marxist vanguard party".

Before doing so we should note the use of terms like "a revolutionary Marxist vanguard party" sounds really radical. It's not just a Marxist party, but a "revolutionary" one, meaning obviously that there are Marxist parties that aren't revolutionary, and its not just a revolutionary Marxist party but a "vanguard" at that.

This kind of language reveals an underlying ultraleft posturing. That is something we need to consciously rid ourselves of, because it comes out of the culture and tradition that has led to the self-isolation and destruction of organizations like the SWP in the United States.

In the quote that follows there is a reference to a category of people referred to as the "revolutionary vanguard" as against the "social vanguard". An explanation of how class consciousness is developed follows with these words: "Through the intervention of the revolutionary vanguard in the broader social vanguard (the "natural leaders" of the class) and winning them to a revolutionary Marxist perspective and commitment to socialism. The tactical essence of the method is to turn the more conscious elements of the vanguard against the less conscious and to try to draw the vanguard as a whole towards a socialist perspective through ever higher forms of organization and unity in struggle. The highest form of unity is, of course, that of the revolutionary party itself."

This paragraph is confusing on several levels, but I want to focus on just one aspect. The idea that unity is achieved by setting the more conscious workers against the less conscious workers seems rather odd.

While there might be some explanation for this formulation, the way it is presented seems rather ultraleft. Our goal is try to unify the class in action. The more conscious workers try to draw in the less-conscious workers in concrete actions of a class struggle character.

In John Percy's report, while accepting that the DSP may have made mistakes he states: "But at each major struggle, at each step, we did the right thing." Of course, that is exactly what all vanguardist organizations believe and it is exactly the kind of statement that organizations leading the masses, like the FPL, the FSLN, etc, never make.

#### Summation

In the last analysis if we are correct and capitalism will be surpassed by a more rational social order in which class divisions as we have known them will end, this has to have very deep objective roots. If our concept of the origins of ideas is the material world, the ideas of class struggle and of a socialist vision are being generated continuously.

The experiences of people in this society, the exploitation, oppression and abuses always generate struggles, organizing and the development of social movements. Ideas about these movements and how to change society are always in flux.

To believe that a few decades ago a small list of individuals discovered the magic wand is not materialist. Our movement is still developing ideas on how to organize and how to change society. A lot of people around the world are thinking about these issues. Their experiences are helping them to find a way forward to end the way capitalism is destroying the planet and its human population.

Our movement has existed only a moment in history. The future will hold all kinds of surprises especially regarding forms. The DSP itself is a very unusual formation. In many ways it is the only one of its kind. It arose out of the student movement of the 1960s, survived exposure to the sectarianism of the US SWP and survived the 1980s when most left organizations, for whatever reason, were collapsing.

Its leadership has been very astute in having the courage to think for itself, try experiments, pull back from things that did not appear to work and continue to look for openings. It appears to me that in the recent period there has been a shift to the left and sectarianism.

It first hit me at the Green Left conference, when in a panel on what we should do next the DSP representative did not focus on what the Australian people or its working class needed, the challenges before Australia for justice, democracy and saving the environment but instead on the need for a Leninist Party.

Thus the issue of what the nation needs was reduced to a focus on the discussion on how best to organize the DSP. Overcoming this shift will be a new challenge to the DSP and its leadership, in my opinion. In general, I have come to the conclusion over the years, as many people do as they get older, that it's necessary to be more cautious in one's views, recognizing how often in the past one has believed in things that turned out to be wrong.

Thus I make these criticism of the DSP's present approach as a way of helping the DSP. I am not optimistic as to how it will be received by the DSP given its internal culture. Only time will tell its effect.

I remain supportive of the DSP as one of the healthiest expressions of the radicalization of the 1960s and an organization that certainly can continue to play, as it has up to now, an important role not only in Australia but in helping the international movement.

#### What should we do?

Recognizing past errors can help us to understand how best to proceed today. The fact that organizations like Solidarity in the United States and the DSP in Australia exist with committed members but without mass roots is simply a fact of life. It is also an accomplishment.

It is far better that such organizations exist than that they don't. The question is how to overcome isolation? The problem is not organizational, although it has an organizational side.

Meeting less often or lower levels of participation or commitment will not necessarily increase the size and influence of an organization like the DSP. Experiments in this direction in the mid-1980s resulted in the opposite. The level of activity inevitably is driven more by political developments outside of our control than any internal decisions.

Sensitivity to this issue within the framework of maintaining an activist organization is important, but we must avoid developing an internal culture that is alien and in conflict with the existing mass culture of our respective countries, and especially among working people.

The problem of reaching out is political. One step that came out of the thinking around this question in the DSP was the change of the newspaper from Direct Action, as a strictly party paper, to Green Left Weekly, with its more open political content. This step was a success.

What is needed to begin to over come the isolation is a political shift away from sectarian traditions, language, internal culture and methods of intervention in the direction of the kind of thinking behind establishing Green Left.

The question of language is not a tactical question. It reflects the real political content of our movement. If we are serious about becoming effective and actually changing society, we must stop playing "revolution". For us to succeed, especially in the "Third Wave" world we now live in, our movement must be more internationalist then ever and must be deeply rooted to succeed.

Rather than start from what happened in history it is better to start from what is needed in the world to create a peaceful, just, ecologically sound, prosperous society for all, and how that translates for one's own country, including the immediate steps that need to be taken, objectively.

The development of independent mass politics, independent of those in power, and posing the question of who should rule, are essential to make all the work around specific demands and reforms really meaningful. The failure of the rise of the trade unions in the 1930s developing into a mass political party in the United States was tragic for the entire development of social struggles since then.

The defeat in the USSR set the framework for the defeat in the United States, since the left dominated by the Communist Party was able to betray the workers' movement and keep it tied to the two-party system.

But because of the change in objective circumstances, these subjective factors are now changed. The possibility of a revival of our movement is now on the agenda over the next historic period.

The Alliance and the Workers Party of Brazil are signs of the change. Neither is a finished product, something that is impossible, just as a new-born baby cannot be instantly an adult. The existence of an organisation like the DSP, on a much lesser level, is also a start even if it is isolated because it carries certain elements of what a successful mass movement will need.

But the key is for the DSP or its equivalents in other countries to help develop the mass movement, to root itself in the masses, or it can end up as an impediment to progress, as almost all organisations calling themselves Leninist today are.

The future changes in society will only come about after our movement has literally become the culture of working people, precisely in the manner in which the Sandinistas became in Nicaragua or Causa R is now achieving in Venezuela, or the July 26 Movement did in the late 1950s in Cuba.

Those old enough to have lived during the height of the Vietnam antiwar movement will remember what it was like when large layers of the population, especially the youth, had a culture of struggle. For us to "win", this must occur on a more massive scale than ever, and it must be international more than ever.

For the few groups that have survived the last 30 years, and still maintain a commitment to socialism, but are isolated, it is imperative to make these changes.

The "turn to industry" of the United States SWP in the late 1970s was a farcical ultraleft expression of this underlying problem. After the massive explosion of the antiwar movement and the SWP's participation in it, its sectarian isolation stood out more clearly.

The organisation had to choose which way to go, and in the name of going to root itself in the working-class and end its isolation, the SWP codified its sectarian existence even more profoundly.

We need to do exactly the opposite. In this sense the fear of selling out, the fear of not sufficiently ideologically separating ourselves from other currents, of not continuously "exposing" the limitations of protest movements, has to be confronted.

Deep down, the fear of selling out is a lack of self-confidence, something any organisation that is isolated inevitably develops.

#### Objective versus subjective

In preparing this criticism it was, of course, necessary to focus, and thus to be one-sided, to bend the stick.

The process of internal education of the membership of any organisation committed to socialism is critical.

That is, the subjective factor is itself an important part of the equation. While this article is clearly focused against one-sided vanguardism or subjective errors, I want to make it clear that the question is not choosing between the two but the correct interrelationship between objective and subjective factors.

#### Cannon

While recognising there was a sectarian side to Cannonism, we should also recognise that many of Cannon's organisational ideas are simply good organising techniques.

Many of his ideas on how executive committees should function, the relationship between elected leaders, how to express ideas and how to organize discussions, are certainly of value.

Lenin was terribly wrong when he suggested that the international should not only set the line but determine tactics for each country. The need for leaderships to arise in each country, even within each area of struggle, is imperative for the kind of movement we need to build.

Leaderships make mistakes, by definition. That is normal. The movement internationally will include various currents; that is normal. In fact, we may discover over time that it is really essential, given the diversity of issues with the working people of the world.

Imitating others is a dead end, but one can learn from almost any experiences, especially successful ones. For a period, large numbers set out to imitate the Cubans in Latin America. This was a mistake. So were the attempts to imitate the Russians after 1917. People who can think for themselves have the best chance of success.