

# 'Seek truth from facts'- the heart of material dialectics

"Seek truth from facts" is a well known and correct saying. It is of no value simply to repeat it endlessly. Its only value lies in carrying it out. Seek truth from facts is a cardinal principle of science. It lies at the heart of materialist dialectics. Departure from this principle by Communists leads to great difficulty. Where there has been departure from it there have been serious errors. Recognition of facts as facts is itself often a difficult undertaking. This is particularly so in social and political events.

The substitution of texts or quotations from Marxist classics for the actual facts in one's own country was a characteristic of some Communist work in the thirties and forties. It proceeded from the text rather than the facts. The facts were distorted or denied so that they would fit into the quotation rather than seen as the facts they were. This prevented the inner laws which governed those facts from being deduced. Thus because Marx and Engels said that the socialist revolution would first occur in the advanced capitalist countries of Europe, this method of thought held as an inviolable truth that socialist revolution would first occur in the advanced capitalist countries of Europe. In truth the facts of social development determined otherwise. In this respect Marx and Engels were wrong. But it did not alter the correctness of their general analysis; it showed that the integration of those general truths with actual conditions was a complicated matter. Not enough facts had accumulated for Marx and Engels to make an accurate prediction. Again Marx and Engels rather thought that socialist revolution would be a simultaneous world-wide event. This was the appearance of their time. The facts refused to obey this view. Lenin, however, basing himself

on the far greater factual material that had accumulated after the deaths of Marx and Engels proved that socialist revolution could be successful in a single country and would occur in single countries. Further facts proved him correct. During his life, Lenin constantly corrected his own previous opinions not wholly correct or proved incorrect. Indeed this is so of Marx, Engels, Stalin and Mao Zedong. In his classic, *The State and Revolution*, Lenin pointed out that Marx's conception of the new proletarian state was quite abstract in 1847; it was only after the experience of the Paris Commune that Marx's ideas became more precise. Lenin said of Marx's 1847 views: "Marx did not drop into utopia; he expected the *experience* of the mass movement to provide the reply to the question of the exact forms the organisation of the proletariat as the ruling class will assume and the exact manner in which this organisation will be combined with the most complete, most consistent 'winning of the battle of democracy'." Thus Marx had general and vague ideas of the solution of this problem. He awaited the accumulation of further facts to enrich and clarify and make those ideas more exact.

A great service done for the Chinese revolution was Mao Zedong's seeking the truth of the facts of China. This was precisely in the period when certain powerful figures in the Communist movement conceived of revolution in terms of the *texts* of Marxist-Leninist classics. If it wasn't dealt with in those classics then nothing could be done about it. Communist writings at that time abounded with quotations, particularly from Stalin. These quotations were supposed to solve the problems in the given countries. The facts

were distorted to "obey" the quotation. At the same time a style of work developed that "solved" problems in given countries from a world centre. There is nothing wrong with reading and studying Marxist classics and quoting from them — indeed it is very necessary, even critical. But there is everything wrong with allowing them to supersede, distort or deny facts. Mao Zedong broke from this wrong method and thereby made an immense contribution to Marxism itself. He put Marxism in its correct place — a guide to action. The actual situation in China was subjected to close analysis. That analysis was guided by Marxism but it was not made to conform to or "obey" some Marxist statement. The facts of China were examined free from preconceived ideas, just as they were. Those facts enriched the general truths of Marxism. The analysis was made in accordance with the general laws revealed by Marxism. The analysis showed that China (and anywhere else) had a particularity. Marxism showed that that particularity, the facts, had to be taken into account fully. Marx himself often repudiated the idea that he was a Marxist — a protest against turning his writings into dogma.

When we talk of studying Marxism it is to get the essence, the method, the general principle so that the facts of Australia can be studied in the light of that essence, method, general principle.

For a long time the Communist movement in Australia was seriously hindered by the worship of the text, the very thing from which the Chinese Communists under Mao Zedong's leadership broke. Thus in Australia, the investigation of the actual situation was for many years held back. Two particular features of this were an abnormal attitude (reverence) for Stalin and an abnormal adherence to what was conceived to be the Soviet Party line and the policy of the Soviet Union. This, too, was an international phenomenon. It was correct greatly to respect Stalin and the Soviet Union and to learn from them, but it was entirely incorrect to see them as solving Australia's problems. The best that could be said was that their implementation and development of general principles of Marxism most certainly could be learned from but could not be a substitute for seeking the truth of Australia from the facts in Australia. To stretch or distort those facts of Australia into quotations, statements or policies of Stalin and the Soviet Union was quite wrong. To have preconceived ideas of those facts was certain to cause trouble. To have solidarity with Stalin and the Soviet Communist Party on the basis that each Party independently had the job of seeking truth

from the facts in each country was obligatory. A part of the error was a worship of Stalin as the last word on Marxism. If Stalin said it, it was correct. If he said something was incorrect, it was incorrect. There was an idealised picture of Stalin's perfection and perfection in the Soviet Union. This, too, is a departure from seeking the truth from facts. It was quite correct to pay close attention to Stalin and the Soviet Union. An initial approach that they were probably correct is fair enough, but the assumption that they were holy writ was not. Moreover, it is a denial of the materialist conception of history to reason in this way. Leaders arise from classes; they serve the class by acting within a collective which never loses contact with the class and through a process of a million ties, collectively expresses the concentrated wisdom of that class. Stalin's words were arbitrarily applied to situations to which they had little or no application. They became a ritual which hindered the investigation of the reality of Australia. Likewise the approach to other Marxist classics. There were elements of "book worship" in its most virulent form. After the death of Stalin there was no living God of the international Communist movement. Khrushchov in an entirely unprincipled and wrong way "destroyed" the God that was Stalin. Really he attacked the whole of Marxism. Confusion reigned. One factor in this confusion was undoubtedly the past excessive reliance upon the idealised picture of Stalin as all wise. Khrushchov and his heirs exploited this very confusion in order to pursue their own social-imperialist aims and to turn Communist Parties into their own weapons, but now with a complete departure from Marxism (to which Stalin, on the contrary, had basically adhered).

The method of thought in the Australian Communist movement during Stalin's period persisted. The "exposures" about Stalin at least made Communists think. Even then the "thinking" largely took the form of citing and counter-citing the Marxist classics. There were those who wholly denounced Stalin and those who "rationalised" the criticism away. Stalin became the centre of debate, whereas the real question was the Marxist method. Involved was the need to evaluate Stalin from the standpoint of Marxism. This the Chinese Communists did. But in Australia, the question of Stalin tended to be debated as a thing in itself.

One of the difficulties in the present situation about Chairman Mao arises from this type of approach. Chairman Mao *must* be assessed in accordance with materialist dialectics and historical

materialism. There is nothing abnormal or extraordinary about that. He is not a thing in himself. The very same approach must be made to Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, and anyone else who occupied or occupies a leading position in the revolutionary (or other) movement. Undoubtedly a difficulty is that an arbitrary idealised picture was built up about Chairman Mao so that he was seen as almost a mystic figure; his writings as holy writ which was extolled in countless quotations. In Australia the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party was influenced by this. But it is just not correct with Chairman Mao nor with Marx or anyone else. Chairman Mao's great contribution to Marxism is a fact. If only for the lesson of integrating Marxism with China's reality he would have made a gigantic contribution to Marxism. And it must be noted that if his method is adopted, then the facts show that China's reality is different from that of Australia (or anywhere else) and accordingly integration of general truths with China's reality is different from that integration in other countries. His approach can, indeed must, be learned from as a *method*. To do otherwise lets scoundrels like Lin Biao and the gang of four impose quotations and words on facts, paralyses the thought of others, imposes arbitrarily statements from one situation to another. The little Red Book is useful in giving general guidance and as a sort of index to Chairman Mao's writings. But when imposed on people just to repeat or recite as the solutions to all problems, it is very dangerous. In a similar way we can take socialism in the Soviet Union when it was socialist and we can take China. The type of subjective idealised thinking of which we have been speaking would have that the then socialist Soviet Union and the now socialist China had and have no flaws. Everything is perfect. Every socialist Soviet citizen was a paragon of Marxist virtue and every Chinese today likewise. It never was true and probably never will be true. The facts revealed that serious mistakes were made in the Soviet Union. Lenin, Stalin and others analysed them. In China serious mistakes were made. Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping and others, analysed them. Some regarded first the Soviet Party and then the Chinese Party as "perfect". In each case they were great Parties but they made mistakes and clearly there were great disagreements among the leaders. All this is reality. But because some had arbitrary preconceived notions about these countries and Parties, they found great difficulty in adjusting to the facts. Moreover, they conceived these Parties in an abstract way so that

they could not see the primacy in this case of Communist work in Australia itself, even irrespective of what happened elsewhere. "Experts" arose on the Soviet Union, on Stalin, on China, on Mao Zedong. These experts sometimes expressed views on questions on which they could have very little knowledge. When others disagreed with their views, they got very excited. The prime job however remains in Australia.

A factor in the whole process is a tendency for people, including Communists, to look to some leader to solve *all* problems. No doubt the day to day environment of capitalism helps to produce this, for example, within the factories decisions are made for the workers: they are not asked, except within the narrowest bounds, to think for themselves. Preceding social epochs contain even greater influences towards the all-powerful leader. The feudal lord decided all things. It is part of bourgeois historiography that "great men" make history; materialism on the contrary holds that the people make history. The Communists were and are influenced by this aspect of the all-pervading bourgeois ideology. They looked to the great men to solve *their* problems. Again it is correct to study the great man and learn from him. It must be remembered that he is great because he was one of a group who crystallised, represented, expressed, the real interests of the mass of toiling people. To regard him as God or God-like is a distortion of the great man — a bourgeois feudal concept. Mao Zedong himself constantly urged people to think for themselves, to use their brains — the organ of thought.

If people like Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong were understood in this way, then difficulties would not arise when negative features in their lives and work appeared. Of course, when the negative is exaggerated and added to a pack of lies as with Khrushchov against Stalin, then the question is entirely different. It is an attack on Marxism itself. The very greatness of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Zedong is that they did crystallise the wisdom of the people. That can be seen in the facts of the development of the history and the society of which they were part. In Mao Zedong's case it can be seen in the development of Chinese liberation and socialism but to attribute it to him as opposed to or standing above the Chinese people, is a denial of Marxism. It is an obvious denial of the facts. Certainly Chairman Mao and his colleagues correctly understood the facts of China, the laws of China's revolution and hence they

# How do we think ?

## an extremely important question

### How do we think?

This is an all important question for revolutionaries who are striving to integrate Marxism-Leninism—Mao Zedong Thought with people's struggle in Australia.

How do we think? — basically means how we view the world, because if we lived in a vacuum with to nothing see, feel or hear, then we could not think because there would be no material world to think about.

As people striving to understand the world in order to change it, we at the same time strive to use the methods of dialectical materialism in studying reality. The laws of dialectical materialism come from matter, for all matter develops or dies away, according to these laws.

In other words, everything is in movement, everything is in the process of coming into being and dying away. As Engels said in his work *Dialectics of Nature* — "*Dialectics, so-called objective*

*dialectics, prevail throughout nature, and so-called subjective dialectics, dialectical thought, is only the reflection of the motion through opposites which asserts itself everywhere in nature and which by the continual conflict of opposites and their final passage into one another, or into higher forms, determines the life of nature. Attraction and repulsion.*"

One of the difficulties in understanding dialectical materialism is the grasping of its universality. There is a tendency to consider dialectical materialism as "some theory" relating only to politics. One of the reasons for this is explained by Engels. In counterposing dialectics "as the science of inter-connections" to metaphysics which views things as static and in isolation from one another, Engels points out: "*It is therefore, from the history of nature and human society that the laws of dialectics are abstracted. For they are nothing but the most*

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greatly influenced the Chinese people but it was the Chinese people who made the revolution.

It is a dangerous business to adopt a style of work that develops unqualified "heroes". It is correct to respect and learn from a capable leader. But the development of hero-worship is no good for the hero or the hero-worshipper. It is trite to say there are no perfect people. There must be a balanced analytical view of everyone — the positive and the negative. It will proceed from the essentially noble qualities of mankind. The movement is studded with fallen "heroes". Equally people do not conform to a given image. Every-one tends to see himself as perfect and judge others

according to that "perfection", to mould them according to it. Apart from its incorrectness it would turn the world into a pretty dull place if everyone conformed to the one pattern. A proper balanced estimate all round is required.

Lest it be thought that passages in the above disparage study of Marxist classics, let it be said emphatically that there is no real hope for correct seeking of truth from facts or for independent thought unless Communists are imbued with the principles of Marxism. That can only be attained through study. Some say it is difficult to study, therefore we don't study. That is just a bourgeois approach that simply must be overcome.