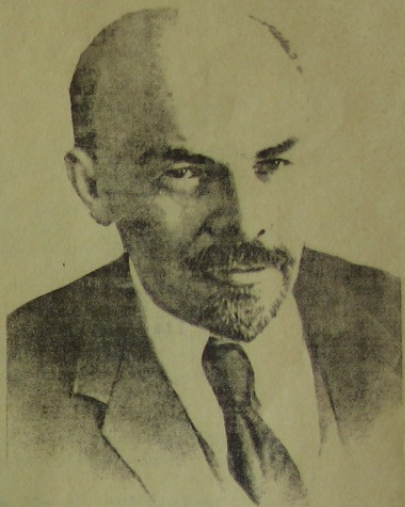


LENIN AND THE  
BOLSHEVIK PARTY



# FRONT LINE

no 4

journal of the international socialists

40¢



ITALIANS IN AUSTRALIA:  
A HISTORY OF STRUGGLE

CONTENTS

OCTOBER, 1976

Survey	Page Two
Lenin	Page Five
Italians in Australia	Page Seventeen

*FRONT LINE is published by Tom O'Lincoln  
for the International Socialists.  
Address: 5/11 Bogan St, Summer Hill, NSW 2130*

*SEND ALL CORRESPONDENCE TO:*

*PO Box M8  
Newtown South, NSW 2042*

International Socialists Branch List

Melbourne branches: contact Box 1473N  
GPO Melbourne 3001, tel. 654 2414

Sydney: PO Box M8, Newtown Sth 2042  
tel. 797 0348

South Coast: PO Box 1874, Wollongong

Canberra: c/o 2 Peake Place, Curtin  
tel. 81 5705

Adelaide: 3/219 Young St, Unley

HELLO AGAIN...

Front Line has not appeared for about two years. We had to discontinue publication during that time to establish our newspaper, The Battler. Now we are going to publish the journal once again.

It will look somewhat different. One of the aims of the old Front Line was to establish some basic theoretical documents, a task that has been more or less completed in the mean time. The journal will have less of a theoretical format in future.

It will try to be a popular educational journal, open to a working class audience as well as intellectuals.

Another aim of the old Front Line was to produce some analysis of the major unions, migrant groups, and other aspects of the struggles of today. This aim was never achieved, and we hope to return to it now.

Front Line will appear irregularly, as resources permit. For that reason we are not taking subscriptions, but if you would like to be assured of getting each issue, drop us a line to PO Box M8, Newtown South, NSW 2042.

Front Line is being published in Sydney. For that reason it cannot be produced under the direct supervision of the IS National Executive. Consequently, particular formulations are not necessarily official policy of the IS, but of the authors. Unsigned articles are the responsibility of the IS Education Department. The general direction of the journal will, of course, reflect the viewpoint of the International Socialists.

Because the main article in this issue is a review article, we have included no other book reviews. But we hope in future that the last section of the journal will consist of reviews (books, films, records, etc), of about 500 words in length. We will also consider publishing some pages of debate and critical comment from our readers.

# Survey

## IN THE WAKE OF MEDIBANK

The Lynch budget, the most horrendous in recent history, met virtually no response from the trade unions. While a number of them endorsed the People's Budget -- amounting to a warmed-over version of Jim Cairns' policies -- not one took any action.

The obvious reason is that the most important cuts had already been announced by Lynch in May. The strikes over Medibank were the fight over the budget.

Beginning with militant delegates' meetings, the unions in Wollongong and Melbourne took the initiative in a wave of strikes that culminated in the nation's first general strike. The fact that trade union leaders in Melbourne, including those in the CPA, had to be dragged kicking and screaming into action, does not lessen the importance of the repeated strikes in that city.

But Melbourne and Wollongong remained isolated. There were no delegates' or mass meetings in any other State capital. Sensing that the majority of Labour Councils were capable of holding the lid on, Hawke used the one-day general strike to destroy the Medibank movement.

The very scale of the national stoppage -- when contrasted with the lack of rallies, and the absence of any follow-up -- served to demoralise workers after the event. The response to the actual budget, as a result, was nothing more than mumbling. While workers are quite clear

about what the budget means, they lack the militancy of a few months ago.

The Truxtun affair showed badly even the Melbourne unions are. After loud and repeated chest-pounding by Ted Bull about a strike as long as the ship was in port, the unions settled for a 24 hour token stoppage. The press hammered home the defeat by organising mass support for the ship, and Fraser added salt to the wounds by inviting the rest of the fleet to visit Melbourne.

## PROSPECTS FOR THE COMING MONTHS

Everyone understands that the recession will continue for the next year or so, and that this is a conscious policy of the government. For the employers the recovery is beginning, but it is weak. Large sections of the ruling class are still unhappy.

This is obvious in the fight over devaluation. One of the results of a recession is that some businesses go to the wall. Fraser's policies will kill off a few more. Consequently some of secondary industry is joining the mining interests in demanding devaluation, adding up to a major split in the ruling class which extends into the ranks of the Liberal parliamentary party.

For the working class, the recession is going to worsen. Unemployment will probably rise over the next few months. There are some signs of rank and file response to unemployment, mainly in New South Wales. Ship-building and building workers have held demonstrations, and a number of self-help groups

have emerged in Sydney.

The ship-builders' demonstrations have been impressive in their militancy. On the other hand the BWIU's cavalcade to Canberra produced scarcely 100 demonstrators, half of them officials, and was limited to tame visits to tame MP's.

The Parramatta Unemployed People's Movement is quite militant and political, but the other groups are limited to band-aid operations.

So the response is still weak, but at least it is there, which is a step forward over a year ago.

Outside New South Wales, the issue is not so much actual sackings as the problems of youth in finding a job. Hopefully there will be more activity around this issue in 1977.

Meanwhile, with the defeat of the political strikes, the wages issue will move to the forefront. As unemployment finally stabilises, unions will regain some of their confidence. Union leaderships, who have used the political issues as an excuse to dodge the wages question, will be put on the spot.

The employers see wages as a key issue too. They are putting in claims themselves in wage hearings. The militancy of one company, Repco, became obvious when the workers found out that the company has deliberately reduced production targets to be able to weather strikes. The result has already been a number

of lengthy, but unsuccessful strikes at Repco shops.

With militancy building up on both sides, the "phoney war" should end soon on the wages front.

## SOUTH AFRICA

Most observers have been astonished at the staying power of the black movement, and its ability to escalate the struggle month by month.

That even includes some of us on the Left, who always understood theoretically that feeling was so high among the blacks that, once the lid blew off, there would be no going back.

It has been widely pointed out that the South African explosion is a logical flow-on from the defeats suffered by imperialism in Angola and Mozambique, and the black successes in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia).

In another sense, however, it all began with the miners in Durban a couple of years ago. Their strikes were the first clear indication that South Africa's black workers were feeling their power as a class.

The devastating impact of their political strikes during recent months shows how effectively they have learned to use that power.

One other impressive aspect of the most recent struggles is the degree to which the coloureds (mixed-race) have aligned themselves with the blacks. It is a sign not only of a high political consciousness, but also of the confidence which the black movement inspires.

Finally, we note that the whites

are no longer able, as they were at the start, to find groups of more backward blacks to serve as a "black backlash".

Vorster has begun to make concessions. He has just removed the colour bar in sport, hoping to defuse one area where there has been consistent and effective international protest. Socialists should be careful to emphasize that the issue was not just discrimination in sport, but the whole system of apartheid in South Africa. The protests should continue.

Now Available!

FROM I.S. BOOKS

Eli Zaretski, Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life	\$2.50 (60¢)
Boggs, Gramsci's Marxism	\$3.75 (60¢)
Callinicos, Althusser's Marxism	\$3.75 (60¢)
Cliff, State Capitalism in Russia	\$3.75 (60¢)
Hallas, The Meaning of Marxism	\$.75 (20¢)
O'Lincoln, The Fight for Workers' Power	\$.20 (20¢)
Korsch, Three Essays on Marxism	\$2.50 (30¢)

Write to IS Books, PO Box 1473N,  
G.P.O., Melbourne

Additional charge for post in  
brackets.

# LENIN

Volume Two of Tony Cliff's work, reviewed by Tom O'Lincoln

In 1917, the Russian working class seized power. To make this giant step possible, it took a group of trained and experienced revolutionaries. This group formed the core of a mass party which organised the most militant sections of the working class, and enabled them to lead their class to power.

Much of the first volume, and part of the second, of Tony Cliff's work on Lenin is about the building of the hard core, the cadre. Most of the second volume is about the mass party that made the revolution. To understand the second, you have to understand the first.

THEORETICAL BATTLES

Lenin spent much of his time before 1917 in factional battles. The following exchange between the Menshevik Axelrod and another socialist tells us a lot about him:

Socialist: *Do you mean to say that all these splits and quarrels and scandals are the work of one man? But how can one man be so effective and dangerous?*

Axelrod: *Because there is not another man who for twenty-four hours of the day is taken up with the revolution, who has no other thoughts but thoughts of revolution, and who, even in his sleep, dreams of nothing but revolution. Just try and handle such a fellow.*

Cliff's book tells us about the man behind the politics. Consequently the politics of those old debates come alive as we watch Lenin fight them. It was Lenin's desire for revolution that animated him, not sectarianism. In 1903 he fought his first two great battles for revolutionary politics.

The first was against the "economists" who wanted to limit the workers to economic struggles, while the intellectuals worked for political reform. Lenin insisted that the class struggle had to be made political at every opportunity. Revolutionaries had to take up political issues, and all kinds of oppression, among the workers. If they did so:

*The most backward worker will understand, or will feel that the students and religious sects, the peasants and the authors are being abused and outraged by those same dark forces that are oppressing and crushing him at every step of his life. Feeling that, he himself will be filled with an irresistible desire to act...*

The second battle was fought against the Mensheviks. They were an opposition faction of socialists. Lenin fought a bitter battle, leading to a split, against them. The battle was partly over control of the party's newspaper, partly over party rule. But the real issue was what kind of party was needed. Lenin wanted a tightly disciplined party of professional revolutionaries, because of the difficulties of working underground in Tsarist Russia. The Mensheviks called him an authoritarian. Many genuine revolutionaries, including Leon Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg, shared this view of Lenin at the time. As we will see, the events of 1917 showed that Lenin was anything but an authoritarian. At the same time, they showed how his serious attitude to party organisation made the Bolsheviks able to organise and lead the workers to power, while the Mensheviks became a sell-out organisation tied to the middle class.

#### THE RIGHTS OF OPPRESSED NATIONS

In the following years Lenin carried out a long debate with Rosa Luxemburg. Luxemburg was working Poland, which was ruled by Russia. In that country there were nationalist parties which used nationalism to tie the workers to the capitalist class.

We face a similar problem in Australia. In fact, the IS has more than once made heavy attacks on nationalism. But Luxemburg took it further. She denounced the whole idea of supporting national independence -- no matter what the situation.

Lenin was working in Russia, an imperialist power. He too had to fight against nationalist sentiments among the Russian workers, but it led him to stress the other side of the argument. He believed that the Russian workers could only win the confidence of the workers in Poland, the Ukraine or Finland, by supporting their right to independence if they wanted it. When Luxemburg complained that he was undercutting her fight against nationalism, he replied:

*Why should we Great Russian, who have been oppressing more nations than any other people, deny the right to secession for Poland, Ukraine or Finland?...people don't want to understand that to strengthen internationalism you do not have to repeat the same words. What you have to do is stress, in Russia, the freedom of secession for oppressed nations, and, in Poland, their freedom to unite. Freedom to unite implies freedom to secede. We Russians must emphasize freedom to secede, while the Poles must emphasize freedom to unite.*

Here, as always, Lenin was practical. "Truth is concrete," he liked to say.

#### WAR: THE ACID TEST

As late as July, 1917, all the socialist parties declared their opposition to war. The German Social Democrats declared:

*No drop of blood of a German soldier may be sacrificed to the profit lust of the Austrian ruling group (or) to the imperialist profit interests...The socialist proletariat refuses all responsibility for the events which are being conjured by a ruling class blinded to the point of madness.*

Yet only four days later, the same German Social Democrats voted for the military budget. Lenin, having read all the fine words, assumed when he heard this news that it was a forgery published by the German general staff! But similar betrayals followed all over Europe.

Lenin did not hesitate to oppose this trend. "The present war is imperialist in character," he wrote. "The imperialist war is ushering in the era of the social revolution...In all the advanced countries the war has placed on the order of the day the slogan of socialist revolution... The conversation of the present war into a civil war is the only correct proletarian slogan.

He went even further. He stated that the defeat of his own country, Russia, was the lesser evil. Socialists in other countries should likewise desire the defeat of their own country. After all, a revolution at home meant weakening the war effort! Many revolutionaries at the time found this position contradictory and incomprehensible, and formally perhaps it is. But Lenin was never interested in being formally correct. He wanted to smoke out the waverers and the renegades, and to separate away from them the serious revolutionaries who would fight against war.

To this end he exaggerated. Lenin often over-corrected in this way. He "bent the twig" to straighten it, and he didn't mind who was shocked.

*A French philosopher has said: "Dead ideas are those that appear in elegant garments, with no asperity or daring. They are dead because they are put into general circulation and become part of the ordinary baggage of the great army of philistines. Strong ideas are those that shock and scandalize, evoke indignation, anger, and animosity in some, and enthusiasm in others."*

The debate over the war would separate out the enthusiastic ones:

*The experience of the war, like the experience of any crisis in history...stuns and breaks some people, but enlightens and tempers others.*

For Lenin, political arguments and political positions were not an end in themselves. They were a means to building the party and making the revolution. Because Cliff shows us the debates against the background of these attitudes, they are a hundred times clearer than in many other books.

## BUILDING A CADRE

In his first volume, Cliff writes:

*Once while walking, Leo Tolstoy spotted in the distance the figure of a man squatting and gesturing strangely; a madman, he thought -- but on drawing nearer he was satisfied that the men was attending to necessary work -- sharpening a knife on a stone. Lenin was fond of citing this example.*

Some of the debates seemed as senseless to people then as some of today's left debates seem now. But each split and each debate schooled the Bolshevik membership. It sharpened their sense for the difference between principled politics and opportunism. It clarified their ideas.

By and large, in the present period the IS does not devote much time to factional battles. But this was not always so, and will not always be the case in future. As recently as last year, we carried out discussions and debates with other groups seeking a regroupment on the Left.

Our debates caused some unnecessary polarisation and bitterness. Cliff is careful to point out that Lenin had similar experiences. After the fight in 1903, he wrote:

*I go over all the events and impressions of the Congress. I realize that I often behaved and acted in a state of frightful irritation, "frenziably"; I am quite willing to admit this fault of mine to anyone, if that can be called a fault which was the natural product of the atmosphere, the interjections, the struggle, etc.*

Unfortunately these personal hostilities are a common by-product of the debate. We can't allow them to deter us. As Lenin put it:

*Such arguments simply put the whole question on the plane of pity and injured feelings, and were a direct admission of bankruptcy as regards real arguments of principle...*

For all the personal unpleasantness, the discussion over regroupment gave us a clearer understanding of our politics -- including some of the weaknesses. This is an essential part of building the organisation.

Political battles helped provide the Bolsheviks with a hard core of professional revolutionaries. This is what is called a cadre, and it is the backbone of an organisation.

The Bolsheviks had a powerful cadre in February, 1917. Unfortunately, the years of experience, though they gave them understanding and courage, also led much of this cadre to routinism, and slowness to adapt to new conditions. It was up to Lenin to shake them out of it, as we shall see.

PAGE EIGHT

## PART TWO: ALL POWER TO THE SOVIETS

In February, 1917 the Tsarist regime collapsed under the pressure of workers' strikes and demonstrations -- and in the face of a dissolving army. Two new governments arose simultaneously to fill the gap.

One was the official government, which claimed the right to rule. But this government had very little real authority. It represented only the capitalists. The working class refused to accept its instructions unless they were also approved by the second government -- the soviets.

The Russian word "soviet" means "council". The councils of workers' and soldiers' deputies which sprang up spontaneously after February represented a new kind of state -- a workers' state. They were quite capable of running the country.

### ALL THE PARTIES HOLD BACK

Yet the leadership of the soviets was in the hands of parties like the Mensheviks, who wanted to hand over all power to the capitalist official government.

Their argument was that Russia wasn't ready for socialism. After all, it was a poor and backward country. On paper, the Mensheviks were right. In fact even the Bolsheviks agreed with them -- until Lenin got back from exile.

Lenin agreed that socialism was impossible in Russia alone. But the war had created the conditions for international revolution, he argued. If the workers took power in Russia, it could be the spark for uprisings all across Europe.

The theoretical arguments of the Mensheviks reflected their ties to the timid middle classes. But the Bolsheviks were based on the most militant workers. These workers were instinctively moving toward the idea of socialist revolution. Why were the Bolsheviks willing to accept the Menshevik arguments?

Many of the Bolshevik leaders had just come back from exile. They needed time to find their feet. But others had developed a conservative routinism. In times past the Bolsheviks had spoken only of a democratic revolution in Russia, to sweep away Tsarism. There was no talk of socialism in that revolution. This old theory had been developed by Lenin himself and the Bolsheviks clung to it.

Now, looking at the world situation, Lenin revised his theory at a stroke. If the workers took power throughout Europe, they could help Russia build socialism. The workers in Russia should transfer all power to the soviets, and create a workers' republic, as the first step to the international revolution.

PAGE NINE

## THE STRUGGLE IN THE PARTY

When Lenin announced these ideas, they called him an anarchist. Some called him a Trotskyist, with justification since his new ideas brought him close to Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution. When he first raised them in the Petersburg Committee, he was out-voted by 13 to 2.

However, at the First Petrograd City Conference, a few days later, he won by a vote of 33 to 6. And at the Seventh All-Russian Conference a few days after that, he won with no votes against, and seven abstentions.

Had Lenin fully convinced the leadership in those few days? Not yet. But as mentioned above, the working class rank and file of the party was already moving in the direction of Lenin's ideas. He appealed to this rank and file, and they responded enthusiastically, dragging their leadership behind them.

## WHAT KIND OF PARTY WERE THE BOLSHEVIKS IN 1917?

For the opponents of the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks were a tightly-knit, conspiratorial group of professional revolutionaries. They back this view with references to Lenin's arguments of 1903, ignoring the fact that these views related to illegal work under the Tsar. They also suggest that the Bolsheviks were a group of middle class intellectuals, using the working class for their own purposes.

Then there are Stalin and his heirs, who portray the party as monolithic and Lenin as infallible. Neither view holds up to a careful study of the real Bolshevik Party of 1917.

The Bolsheviks began 1917 with a hard core of professional revolutionaries, but the overwhelming majority of the party was recruited during the course of 8 months of revolution.

In Petrograd, the party grew from 2,000 members to 16,000 between February and April, and to 36,000 by August. In Moscow the party had 600 members at the beginning of March, and 15,000 members in August.

Obviously these new recruits possessed little Marxist theory. They undoubtedly had all kinds of confused and wrong ideas. On the other hand, they learned many concrete political lessons in the course of the revolution itself.

What united the Bolshevik mass membership was not complex theories, but the basic of the class struggle: All power to the soviets; peace, bread and land.

## THE PARTY IS THE PRODUCT OF THE CLASS

The most advanced workers joined the party. But there was great unevenness from place to place. What was advanced in the bush was

considered moderate in Petrograd, and downright backward in militant centres like Kronstadt.

In some country centres, Bolsheviks and Mensheviks didn't even split until as late as September. On the other hand the Bolsheviks of the Vyborg District were calling as early as March for the soviets to take power. This was a month before Lenin returned to Russia to win over the whole party to that demand.

The sailors at Kronstadt were so radical that Lenin had to repeatedly restrain them. There was a continual tendency during 1917 for militant areas like Kronstadt to push for immediate action, and get themselves isolated as a result.

The most famous case was the July Days. Militant sections demanded demonstrations, and were moving toward insurrection. The Bolshevik leadership believed an insurrection might succeed in Petrograd, but that Petrograd would be isolated and the insurrection quickly crushed. They opposed the demonstrations.

Many Bolshevik workers were angry and frustrated. Some tore up their party cards in disgust. Other went right ahead and organised demonstrations in defiance of the leadership. The unevenness of the class found its expression right through the party. The party was not some infallible, sealed vessel suspended above the working class itself.

## THE WEAKNESS OF THE BOLSHEVIK CENTRE

The unevenness of the membership and the masses of new recruits put huge strains on the organisational centre of the party.

It might be some consolation to our members, confronted with great financial problems, to know that at the time of the February revolution the Bolsheviks had a treasury of 100 rubles -- about \$200 in terms of today's buying power. In September, the secretariat complained that out of 333 local committees, only 24 of them had sent in dues! Most of the funds were raised not from dues, but by special collections and fund appeals.

The provincial committees complained constantly about the centre. It was common to hear that the Central Committee was only a "Petrograd Committee" on account of its apparent concern for the remainder of Russia. A delegate from Central Siberia said; "It seems to us that the CC acts as a subsidiary department of the Petrograd Organisation," and another stated that Pravda was not a national paper but only a Petrograd paper.

In discussion before and during our own July National Committee meeting, comrades from Sydney and Wollongong said some similar things about our own national centre. The Bolsheviks had two excuses, which

apply much less to us:

\*Petrograd was where the action was.

\*If the CC was a "subsidiary" of the Petrograd organisation, it was probably partly justified by the role played by the advanced Petrograd workers in the party.

IS members should find it sadly amusing that the Bolshevik Central Committee was as disorganised as our own leadership bodies. The CC again and again made decisions which they immediately forgot all about.

On October 10 the CC voted to set up a Political Bureau whose task was to guide the insurrection. It did not meet once -- everyone forgot all about it!

Again on 16 October the minutes say a Military Revolutionary Centre was to be set up. It never met either.

Attendance at CC meetings was appalling. Out of 21 members, attendance ranged between 6 and 16. At the session which decided on the insurrection, only 11 members were present.

On the other hand, those 11 were bold enough to make the decision. There was none of the lack of confidence some of our committees have sometimes shown in the face of poor attendance.

The informality of organisation also contained great strengths. Cliff sums it up this way:

*"An overformal party structure inevitably clashes with two basic features of the revolutionary movement, (1) the unevenness in consciousness, militancy and dedication of different parts of the revolutionary organisation; and (2) the fact that members who play a positive vanguard role at a certain stage of the struggle fall behind at another."*

#### THE INTELLECTUALS ARE UNRELIABLE

Contrary to those who think he wanted an elite party of intellectuals, Lenin was very dubious about middle class intellectuals. This attitude was the product of bitter experience.

The war and the revolution were both acid tests. At the start of the World War, a wave of patriotic enthusiasm swept Russia. It did not leave the Bolsheviks untouched. But Trotsky points out:

*As a general rule, the confusion was most pervasive and lasted longest among the party's higher-ups, who came in direct contact with bourgeois opinion.*

PAG: TWELVE

It was the working class that broke quickest from patriotism. At the beginning of the war, strikes were few. But by the second half of 1915 there began to be bitter strikes, including clashes with the police. The Bolshevik groups began to grow. But their greatest problems were lack of funds and -- lack of intellectuals.

One old Bolshevik worker tried to get a leaflet written against the war, and turned to intellectuals who had been members of the party. But many of them were pro-war, and the rest were frightened. He tried to write it himself, but his Russian was inadequate (apparently he was Latvian). Fearing it would be taken for a German publication because the Russian was poor, he again sought intellectuals to edit it. None would help, and the leaflet had to be published mistakes and all.

#### LENIN RELIES ON THE WORKERS

Many worker Bolsheviks arrived at Lenin's anti-war position on their own. For instance, a group of Latvians reached the conclusion that the imperialist war should be turned into civil war, without seeing Lenin's theses and without having any theoreticians among them.

No figures are available for changes in the composition of the party during the course of the revolution but there is no doubt that the bulk of the new recruits were workers and soldiers. Figures for individual regions show they were almost entirely proletarian in composition. In Reval in August there were 3,182 members: 2,926 were workers, 209 military, and 47 intellectuals.

Here are some other reports. Kronstadt: "local students and teachers do not undertake local work"; Finland: "Intellectuals (besides officers) -- none." Moscow: "New forces of intelligentsia -- practically absent." And so on, and so on.

It is not surprising that Lenin had immense faith in the working class. He wrote a pamphlet a month before the revolution, aimed at exposing the old prejudice that the workers were too ignorant to wield political power, that the state apparatus was too complicated for simple mortals to handle. It was called Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?

*Since the 1905 revolution, Russia has been governed by 130,000 landowners, who have perpetrated endless violence against 150,000,000 people, heaped unconstrained abuse upon them, and condemned the vast majority to inhuman toil and semi-starvation. Yet we are told that the 240,000 members of the Bolshevik Party will not be able to govern Russia...*

*...We have a "magic way" to enlarge our state apparatus tenfold at once, at one stroke, a way which no capitalist state ever possessed, or could possess. This magic way is to draw the working people, to draw the poor, into the daily work of administration.*

PAGE THIRTEEN



Lenin was no utopian. He knew it would not be easy:

*It goes without saying that this new apparatus is bound to make mistakes in taking its first steps...Is there any way other than practice by which the people can learn to govern themselves and to avoid mistakes?*

But he laughed at the arguments of the capitalists, who said the situation of war and chaos made the transition to workers' rule too difficult:

*(Another) plea is that the Bolsheviks will not be able to retain power because "the situation is exceptionally complicated"...O wise men! They, perhaps, would be willing to reconcile themselves to revolution if only the "situation" were not "exceptionally complicated."*

#### LENIN CALLS FOR INSURRECTION

Just as Lenin had to fight to win the party to the demand for All Power to the Soviets, so he also had to win the party to insurrection. As the workers got close to power, the party leaders became cautious. Some of them were weak, but others were voicing legitimate worries. After all, an insurrection is now game! As Lenin himself pointed out, there is no going back once it is begun:

*Never play with insurrection, but when beginning it realize firmly that you must go all the way.*

Lenin was in hiding and could argue only with letters. In his letters he demanded action. "The success of both the Russian and the world revolution depends on two or three days fighting," he thundered. The Central Committee, however, had cold feet, as Bukharin described:

*The letter was written with extraordinary force and threatened us with all sorts of punishments. We all gasped. Nobody had yet posed the question so abruptly...At first all were bewildered...Perhaps that was the sole case in the history of our party when the Central Committee unanimously decided to burn a letter from Lenin...Although we believed unconditionally that in Petersburg and Moscow we should succeed in seizing power, we assumed that in the provinces we could not yet hold out...*

When the rank and file found out about this situation, they were appalled. One district worker related:

*Not long ago we got a letter from Ilyich for delivery to the Central Committee...We read the letter and gasped. It seems that Lenin had long ago put before the Central Committee the question of insurrection. We raised a row. We began to bring pressure on them.*

When the Central Committee had finally agreed to the insurrection on paper, vacillation continued in practice. Some interpreted the decision for insurrection as only a matter of general orientation, rather than a directive for action. It is interesting that the more reluctant comrades included many of the former henchmen of the July Days.

The CC was not just cowardly. It was reacting to reports from the districts, where the mood was mixed: some workers were keen, others not. Meanwhile, Kamenev and Zinoviev, two top party leaders, dropped a bombshell. They denounced the plans for insurrection in a non-party newspaper. This amounted to tipping off the ruling class. Lenin was furious and demanded their expulsion.

However the CC refused to expel them. Lenin was so worried that on the very day the insurrection began, he was still writing letters to prod them: "History will not forgive revolutionaries for procrastinating when they could be victorious...To delay action is fatal."

#### WHY DID THE PARTY NEED TO BE PUSHED AND PROBDED?

Why did Lenin have to fight over and over to push the party forward? Probably the most brilliant part of Cliff's book is the concluding pages, where he takes up this question.

Firstly, every party needs routine for stability. The Bolsheviks, like the IS, built up work patterns, structures, styles of work -- and sometimes ceased to question whether they were getting outmoded. Party officials got into a rut.

Secondly, even the most revolutionary party is subject to pressure from alien social forces. The party leadership is in daily contact with establishment public opinion. So are all its intellectuals. This is why the middle-class make up of the IS is a source of constant worry to us. But even the Bolsheviks, with a working class membership, could not be immune. The ruling class had legions of skilled propagandists and an efficient press. It was impossible not to be effected.

Thirdly, for almost the entire life of a party, the working class is weaker than the ruling class. To avoid disaster, the party gets used to taking this into account. Yet when the time is ripe for revolution -- and can seize power -- the habit of considering the ruling class as stronger becomes the main obstacle to victory.

#### THE MOOD OF THE MASSES

There is a final trap. The masses may appear unready. Of course they may really be unready -- but you can also be fooled. In the early months of revolution, there is a time of explosive spontaneous struggle.

The July Days were such a time. When the workers see the limitations of spontaneous outbursts, they become more careful and decide to wait for the opportunity for well-led and co-ordinated action.

This watchful mood, after the previous exuberance, can look like apathy. That was the situation in October, 1917. But the "apathy" melted away like magic when the Bolsheviks gave the sign for insurrection.

There is no infallible way of measuring the mood of the masses. Mistakes are inevitable at times. But Lenin possessed a kind of thermometer in the party. It had roots in all sections of the class, and reflected the level of heat in each. Fortunately he was able to read it accurately.

Our organisation plays the same role in a tiny way. During the Constitutional Crisis, our regular customers on paper sales rounds gave us a good indication of the mood in working class communities. In the Medibank struggle, our members and contacts in factories gave us a feeling for the temperature at the point of production -- where the heat is usually greatest.

When we felt the time was right, based on our reading of the mood, we called a meeting of shop stewards. The rest is history -- literally. We lived up a little bit to the heritage of Lenin. We dared to act. Lenin once summed up revolutionary politics in the words of

*Danton, the greatest master of revolutionary policy ever known: audacity, audacity, and more audacity.*

Audacity is something we are pretty good at. But Lenin's audacity was based on a deep understanding of the working class and of history. To get a little more of that, we need to read Cliff's book.

#### Tony Cliff, LENIN

Volume I: *Building the Party*  
Volume II: *All Power to the Soviets*

Available from IS Books,  
Top Floor, 28 Block Place, Melbourne, tel. 654 2414  
PO Box M8, Newtown Sth 2042, tel 797 0348 (Sydney)

*NOTE: In popular articles we are trying to dispense with footnotes. We're sure anyone interested in thorough study will want to buy the book itself, where all quotes are footnoted.*

# Italians in Australia

## A HISTORY OF STRUGGLE

*NOTE: This article first appeared in the Italian-language paper Lotta Operaia, published by the IS, which unfortunately met an untimely end after one issue. Of course it is very sketchy, but since so little material exists on the subject, we thought it deserved to be published in English.*

THERE HAVE BEEN Italians in Australia since 1770, when Captain Cook was accompanied by Giacomo Mario Matra and Antonio Ponto on his voyage of discovery. In a sense, an Italian revolutionary tradition could be traced to 1853, when Giuseppe Garibaldi paid a brief visit to these shores.

The following year, another Italian played a most important role in the rebellion at the Eureka stockade. Raffaello Carboni was about 35 years old, a man of small stature, with red hair and beard. He had participated in the insurrection against the Austrians in Italy in 1848-49, and had been drawn to Australia like thousands of others by the gold fever.

The miners at Ballarat found the life harder than they had expected. They were forced to pay a heavy fee for their mining license, regardless of whether they found any gold at all. In response, the miners built a stockade and armed themselves. Carboni, who spoke several

languages, was given the job of co-ordinating all the Europeans.

Not all accounts credit Carboni with a heroic role in the following battle. But just to be at his post was a courageous act of sorts, since most of the miners who had voted for insurrection the night before had disappeared by the time the first shots were fired.

The miners were arrested, and Carboni among others was tried on a charge of treason. But no jury could be found to declare them guilty, so Carboni was released, and proceeded to write a book about his experiences.

He then returned to Europe to take part in the Italian wars of independence in 1859-60.

### GUIDO BARACCHI

Another revolutionary figure was Guido Baracchi, who was active in the socialist movement at the turn of the century. He was the son of an Italian noble, and had studied at Melbourne University, but after a trip to Europe he became a socialist and joined the Labor movement. In 1920 he was among the founders of the Communist Party, and together with Percy Laidler he organised the Victorian branch.

It was Baracchi who, as editor of the magazine Proletarian Review, introduced Lenin's "State and Revolution" to Australian readers.

Baracchi participated in the Com-

unist movement for many years, mostly in Europe, but left it over the Stalin-Hitler pact, remaining active as a Trotskyist.

But it was only with the mass immigration of Italians that large numbers of them became involved in struggle in Australia.

In 1891 the Italian-born population in Australia was 4 percent of the whole population, a percentage larger than that of today. In 1901, the Federal government instituted the White Australia Policy, which most people imagine was directed only at blacks and Asians. But in fact it reduced to a trickle the immigrations and other Southern Europeans. In 1947 the population of Italians and the percentage had fallen to 0.4, a tenth of that of 1891.

#### ANTI-FASCISTS

Italians in Australia found themselves facing hostility because of the growth of fascism, and were often accused of fascist sympathies. In reality they were very active anti-fascist organisations among them.

For example, when an Italian warship, the Montecuccoli, visited Melbourne, they were given anti-fascist leaflets at a dance in Carlton, which led to a brawl. Two days later a thoroughly apolitical Italian named Taffy Orlando was taken hostage by the sailors, who thought he was an anti-fascist activist. To free him, 7000 people marched

in a demonstration down to the ship.

A professor at Melbourne University, Doctor Omero Schiassi, was one of the most active people in the anti-fascist movement. He had been a socialist member of the Bologna city council. Forced to emigrate by the fascist regime, he lived on money from the university which varied according to the amount of lessons he gave. The Italian consul organised a boycott of his lectures.

Rather than accommodate the consul, he preferred to live in poverty in a tiny flat. When he died in 1953, 150 people attended his funeral, including leading members of the Labor movement.

#### AFTER THE WAR

After the Second World War, the government attempted to maintain the White Australia Policy, aiming to populate Australia with Anglo-Saxons. They were stymied by a lack of ships to bring migrants from Britain, so they turned to Balts, but finally the government arrived at an agreement with the Italian government to allow Italian migration -- on the condition that they were willing to live in camps.

About 200,000 Italians arrived in Australia between 1950 and 1961, so that today the percentage of Italian-born residents has risen to 2.5 percent, and that of residents of Italian derivation to 5 percent.

Many were forced to live in barracks, of which one of the most notorious was at Bonegilla in northern Victoria. Thousands of immigrants, predominantly Italian, were kept there in appalling conditions until

work could be found for them.

In the 1961, the credit squeeze imposed by the Menzies government caused serious unemployment. Many who had come to Australia on the promise of a good job found themselves out of work, and forced to remain in the camps, where they were given two dollars a week to live on.

The workers began hold protest marches once a week. Eventually, when a policeman manhandled a demonstrator, one march became violent. Police were brought in from Melbourne with pistols and clubs.

The Italians were accused of fomenting the trouble, although workers of several nationalities were involved. One barracks, occupied almost entirely by Italians was cleared by force. Of course the Liberal government did little to alleviate the causes of the unrest.

When the Italians and other migrants did find jobs, they were hardly delighted with what they found. Pay and conditions in the car factories were particularly bad. Italians workers participated actively in two famous strikes.

#### SELL-OUTS AT FORD AND GM-H

The first strike was at GM-H at Fishermen's Bend, in Melbourne. In 1964, when this factory was built, it was considered a model factory -- a workers' Disneyland. The workers thought differently. In mid-May they won two small victories in sections of the plant. At the same time record profits were announced, and

this fact was widely discussed in the factory.

Mass meetings were held and the union demanded a pay rise of 6 dollars. On 18 September there were further meetings, which voted for another meeting to discuss a strike.

At the beginning of October a strike began which lasted for weeks, and mass meetings, each larger than the last, confirmed the determination of the workers to press on to victory. Car workers in South Australia struck in solidarity, and sent tens of thousands of dollars for the strike fund.

This militancy, from workers who had been thought docile and submissive, terrified the more conservative trade union leaders. Taking advantage of the votes of two bureaucrats who had not been present at any previous meetings, the unions' Disputes Committee voted 21-19 to end the strike more or less on the employers' terms.

The voting at the following mass meeting was a farce. Anyone could get a ballot paper. One person got twenty. An announcer on Melbourne's Channel 7 announced that he had voted! In protest, Greek, Italian and other migrant workers tried to disrupt the vote. Only 2000 of the 4500 ballot papers were recovered.

Forced back to work in this manner, the workers naturally felt betrayed. The VBU was forced to dissociate itself from the voting process. A Greek worker told the press: "The unions are bullshit. They sold us out just when we wanted to fight on."

turn to next page.

One union leader who made statements against this resolution of the dispute was the Communist Laurie Carmichael. For his trouble he was subjected to ferocious attacks in the Italian-language paper "Il Globo". It is ironic that it was this very Carmichael who got caught in the second explosion at a car factory in Melbourne.

This second strike took place at Ford in Broadmeadows. 75 percent of the workers were migrants. In May the workers struck against the will of the union leaders, who had recommended a series of strikes at GM-H. A mass meeting decided to strike at Ford, and simply refused to return to work. Their demands included a pay rise but the most important points were over working conditions.

The unions attempted to get them back to work on June 11. But on their return to work, more than a thousand workers staged a mass demonstration. They broke windows and tore down a brick wall. During a meeting they attacked Carmichael -- who tried to answer weakly that "we had a plan" -- and tore his coat.

#### ORGANISATION NEEDED

Since the election of Labor in 1972, and especially since the Ford strike, migrant workers have begun to organise. Spontaneous strikes and revolts are an excellent expression of anger, but they don't have the effectiveness of solid organisation. Two conferences of migrant workers have been held, and a conference on migrant education.

In the Italian community, the Federation of Italian Workers and Families, F.I.L.E.F., has offered some services and centre of political activity.

But there is no organisation on a mass scale. In a survey done by FILEF, the desire expressed by the largest number of Italians was for a strong Italian Rights Movement.

*Copies of the Italian language original: "Italiani in Australia: Una Storia di Lotta", can be obtained from IS Books, PO Box 1473N, GPO, Melbourne, or from the bookshop, top floor, 28 Block Place, Melbourne. Price: 10¢ each plus post.*

# The Battler

PAPER OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS

Lively and authoritative news and comment on events in industry and politics, in Australia and around the world.

The socialist newspaper that fights for workers' power. Only ten cents from our sellers, but to make sure you get your copy, why not subscribe?

*Get yours on time!*

# SUBSCRIBE

to The Battler

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

Introductory Subscription (6 issues).....\$1.00  
Yearly Subscription (25 issues).....\$7.00  
Supporting Subscription.....\$20.00

CLIP AND POST TO -  
The Battler, Box 1473N; GPO Melbourne 3001.

# The Market

