

CHAPTER 7

Victory Over The Hill Group

It was May, 1963. Ted Hill was sitting at the table in his law office. John Sendy and I came to see him following a report we had received that he had held a factional meeting of his own followers. John and I had just been elected State President and Secretary of the Communist Party in Victoria. We had polled ten times the vote that Hill had polled in a secret ballot of delegates at a State Conference, held a few days before.

I had arranged the interview with difficulty. Hill had been reluctant to see us at all and when the interview came he said he would not discuss any matter with us. He also said he held an "entirely different political position."

Hill had been secretary of the Victorian State Committee for 13 years. He had been for many years a member of the Central Committee secretariat. It was hard to credit that he would not even talk with the Party leadership. But such was the fact.

What was the "entirely different political position" he spoke about? Looking back, one realises that such a "position" could not have sprung up suddenly. It had its roots in attitudes and lines of thinking that Hill had been displaying in some degree over many years (a certain leaning forwards "left" adventurism, a certain impatience of work for unity, a certain intolerance of good comrades with different views, etc). What crystallised these tendencies, however, was the new system of views and policies advanced at this stage by the Communist Party of China.

At the heart of these views and policies was a non-communist approach to the question of war and peace.

In previous chapters I have given the Communist Party's peace policy as I have understood it over the years and as it appears in the Party Program. It is a policy of seeing the struggle for peace as the **central**

struggle of the moment and of setting out confidently to **win** that struggle.

In our view the new balance of forces in the world,—the rise of the socialist countries, the newly free nations and the peoples' peace movement—has made it possible to **impose** peace on the imperialists.

CAN WE IMPOSE PEACE?

The Chinese leaders, on the other hand, believe in fact that imperialism will make war, sooner or later, as long as it remains anywhere in the world, no matter what the balance of forces may be. Our Chinese friends would frequently quote in 1960 the example of the feudal rulers of Tibet—weak, backward, isolated, helpless, yet prepared to rise in revolt against the whole Chinese People's Republic rather than peacefully accept an inevitable social change. Did this not prove that the reactionaries would wage armed struggle in any situation, however hopeless? Lance Sharkey, returning from China early in 1962, paraphrased the Chinese leader's attitude as being in fact "we fight for peace but world war will break out."

We have taken our stand on the Statement of the 81 Communist Parties which said:—"The aggressive nature of imperialism has not changed. But real forces have appeared that are capable of foiling its plans of aggression. War is not fatally inevitable. Had the imperialists been able to do what they wanted they would already have plunged mankind into the abyss of the calamities and horrors of a new world war. But the time is past when the imperialists could decide at will whether there should or should not be war."

That statement has been proved correct on each of those recent occasions when the imperialists almost started a world war,—over Berlin (1949), Korea (1950), Indo-China (1954), Suez (1956), Cuba (1962). Whether the forces of peace will prove strong enough to end the present serious and prolonged American invasion of Vietnam, only the future will tell; but there is no doubt about the weight and power of the forces (including those within the USA) striving for the withdrawal of forces and restoration of peace

in that area. The imperialists' will to wage war must always be measured against the people's power to impose peace.

The Chinese leaders say, and the Hill group repeats, that we want colonial peoples to sit down peacefully beside their oppressors. That is nonsense. We have supported every effort of oppressed peoples to throw off any colonial or semi-colonial yoke within their own country. The Communist Party has a record of unwavering support for the national liberation movements in China, India, Indonesia, Malaya, Vietnam and elsewhere.

SHOULD WE HIDE NUCLEAR HORRORS?

One thing that struck me powerfully in China was the absence of any propaganda on the horror of nuclear weapons. Millions of people in this and other countries have come into action for peace through coming to understand the horrors of nuclear war. But in China, to speak of these horrors is viewed as harmful. It is viewed as frightening people and so helping American imperialism dominate the world by nuclear blackmail.

The Chinese leaders gloss over the consequences of nuclear war. In their widely-distributed article of 1960, headed "Long Live Leninism!" they said that, should the imperialists launch a nuclear war, then "on the debris of imperialism the victorious people would create **very swiftly** a civilisation **thousands of times higher than** the capitalist system and a **truly beautiful future** for themselves." How does this square with any scientific estimate of what the world would be like after a nuclear holocaust?

The question of peace or nuclear war is the greatest immediate question facing mankind. Hundreds of millions of lives depend on it. The Communist Party of Australia takes the stand that we must go ahead working for peace and disarmament confidently, wholeheartedly, realising the full immensity of the consequences and believing in the great power of the socialist countries and of the masses of the people to **impose peace**.

The Soviet Union has done a tremendous service

to the world for 45 years by demonstrating that the cause of socialism is the cause of peace. Despite difficult situations in which it has to take strong and sometimes unpopular actions, it has kept in tune with the strong peace sentiments of the mass of the human race. This is an example that all socialist countries should emulate.

MENZIES' LIE

If the Chinese leaders believe that the imperialists are bound to make war, that does not make them aggressors. The charge of "Chinese aggression" is false.

We have pointed out widely:- (1) In the Korea war it was not till the Americans had bombed their way right up to the Chinese frontier and over it that the first Chinese soldier moved into Korea. (2) In Vietnam there are more than 200,000 Americans thousands of miles from their own shores bombing within a few miles of the Chinese frontier line—and at the moment of writing not a Chinese soldier has moved over that line. (3) At the end of 1962, units of the Chinese army moved over the Indian border in an action which certainly did lasting harm to India-China friendship and to the cause of peace, but the fact remains that, although completely victorious, the Chinese forces withdrew in a few days to their own side of the frontier—not the action of would-be conquerors. (4) China's actions in Tibet have been taken in a territory which has been part of China for centuries.

We must make these facts widely known in doing battle against Australian and American ruling circles which are dragging us into war with Asian peoples precisely on the basis of lying propaganda depicting China as an aggressive country.

"SUNRISE IN THE WEST?"

The big changes in the world have made it more possible for the working class and its allies **under certain conditions** to take power within a country by peaceful means, introducing revolutionary changes in the machinery of state and in the social system and putting down the resistance of the dispossessed million-

aires without civil war. In this matter, too, the Chinese leaders adopt a dogmatic stand instead of a realistic one. When we were in China Liu Ning-I, a leading member of the Chinese Party's Central Committee, insisted that the prospects of a peaceful transition to socialism **anywhere** were the same as the prospects of "the sun rising in the west."

MARXISM FORGOTTEN

I have already outlined the Communist Party's views on the decisive importance of the **economic competition** between the two social systems. I have held and advocated these views since I joined the Communist Party in 1932—and before. I well remember reading the report of the Soviet leader Manuilsky to the Executive Committee of the Communist International in 1931. It impressed me greatly at the time. What was pictured in that report was the coming triumph of world socialism through the contrast between the social absurdities of capitalism and the successes of planned socialist economy. We have always had that picture in front of us. Certainly the people in capitalist countries have to wage their own struggle inside each country; but they can be enormously strengthened and inspired by the example of the superiority of socialism in practice. To belittle this factor, as the Chinese do, seems to me un-Marxist because Marxism sees the development of the forces of production as the key to all history.

It is also un-Marxist to depict the national liberation movements of oppressed peoples as being decisive for the whole world struggle. These movements, despite their immense sweep and great historic importance, are not in the main led by the working class and they gain their strength largely from alliance with the world working class headed by the socialist countries. Any view that would isolate the oppressed peoples from the socialist countries, or see them as **replacing** the world leadership of the working class, can only do harm to the whole movement.

A WORLD OF FANCY

In their attacks on the Soviet Union the Chinese leaders fly into a world of fancy. Pointing to examples

the struggle is to expose the policy of the Labor Party leaders. Certainly we criticise their views and actions where necessary **as they affect the struggle**. We point to their shortcomings, concretely and constructively, on the basis of the workers' own experience. We criticise their basic theories also but in ways that will build the common struggle, not weaken it. We do not make over-simplified or false statements such as those of the Hill group that "the nominal, declared policy of the ALP is more than ever to the right," or that Arthur Calwell is "as violent an anti-communist as any single European Social Democrat or any collection of them," or that the ALP and DLP both serve the capitalist class and therefore "logically they should merge."

We have fought against Hill's view that the Labor Party is simply a party of capitalism and against his flat denial that it can assert a working class policy on any issue. The Labor Party **has** asserted a working class policy on many issues under the people's pressure. Many examples have appeared in these pages.

We see today a growth of working class and socialist ideas within the Labor Party and a growth of quite a strong Labor Party left wing extending even into some leading circles; and we believe that further important changes in the Labor movement are possible as the struggle develops. It is possible that large sections of Labor Party members, even of leading members, may join with communists and others in a united effort to break the power of the monopolies, to put an end to the present mad foreign policy and to work for peace. It is **only** through such united effort that the Australian working people can prepare the ground for the winning of socialism.

CRUSADING FOR UNITY

When I returned from China and the Soviet Union early in 1961, after the statement of the 81 Parties, I came as a crusader for unity between and within the Communist Parties. I found that the year 1960 had been a year of serious disagreement within the State Committee, Hill's views and the opposition to them having already reached an advanced stage.

Events were heading towards open clash but the Central Committee succeeded in restoring an uneasy unity within the Victorian organisation early in 1961. Hill was away in a Soviet sanatorium for the first part of that year undergoing urgently needed medical treatment. I had made serious errors in judging the situation immediately on my return, but after the Central Committee's intervention and call for unity I did genuinely exert myself to make that unity workable. I still believed that all Communist Parties would rally behind the 81 Parties' Statement, and aimed to do all possible to unite all Communists behind that Statement, which I saw (rightly) as providing a solid basis for all our work in Australia. I had not forgotten the phrase of my Nanking friend about the "combined wisdom of all the fraternal parties."

After Lance Sharkey's report back from the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in which he told of the serious departures by the Chinese leaders from the basic ideas of the Moscow Statement, I made a further critical re-examination of the Chinese views which had strongly influenced me at an earlier stage. Having taken my stand, I set out consciously to improve on my conduct in previous inner-Party crises in most of which I had tended to be irresolute and ineffective. I fought for the Party's policy throughout the Party and publicly with, I hope, the firmness and resolve that the situation called for.

INNER-PARTY DEBATE

Hill led a virtual revolt within the Party as from February, 1962. He had the support of one-third of the Victorian State Committee of 29. He had, and still has, no following of any consequence in any other State.

A debate ensued for 18 months—quite the most thorough inner-party debate in my experience. As the debate proceeded it more and more revealed an overwhelming support for the Party's policy. But a small minority continued to advance rejected policies to the point where this seriously disrupted the work of many branches and made the State Committee almost un-

workable. State Committee meetings became battlefields. The position on the State Committee was made worse by the fact that Frank Johnson, who had become State Secretary following Hill's resignation, while appearing to support the Party, was in league with Hill all the time. At one State Committee meeting he actually moved a resolution and then voted against it!

In September, 1962, the disruption had become such that a committee of national leaders came to Victoria to hold an inquiry. In November the Central Committee issued a serious warning to the disruptors. In that month, however, a brief respite came when the Hill group joined in carrying a unanimous resolution on the State Committee (the first and the last unanimous resolution in that year of battles, 1962) calling on all members to unite firmly around Central Committee policy, warning against the advocacy of "views which could lead to an anti-Soviet position" and calling on all Party members to assist in stopping disruption within the Party. This gave us a few quiet Xmas branch meetings and an all-in Xmas social which we hoped would build a new spirit for the future.

But the lull was short-lived—members of the Hill group staged quite a demonstration at a meeting addressed by Claude Jones, a Central Committee leader who had just returned from Europe. Then came the State Conference in April, 1963.

THE 1963 STATE CONFERENCE

Meetings were held throughout the Party to prepare for this event. Many branches held two full meetings to discuss the draft resolution that was to be submitted to the Conference. All members had complete liberty to speak and vote at these meetings. The branches elected delegates to section conferences which in turn elected delegates to the State Conference. The result for the Hill group was calamitous. Its leading members, including Hill himself, were defeated by a ten to one majority in the secret ballot for the new State Committee. This was after they had had ample opportunity to state their views fully both in the branches and at the conference. Hill himself addressed

the conference for half an hour, impressing no one but his own hardened supporters.

The Conference met with 160 delegates. It was the largest and most representative conference held in Victoria up to that time, and also the most enthusiastic. It was liberal with applause and finished with some standing ovations. It overwhelmingly adopted the draft resolution and overwhelmingly voted for a new State Committee pledged to support fully the policy of the Party as democratically decided. The Conference was attended by three Central Committee leaders, R. Dixon, Laurie Aarons, Claude Jones, and had an international visitor in the person of Tim Buck, Chairman of the Communist Party of Canada, who still says this was the best conference he ever attended!

It was the delegates themselves and not merely leading members who thrashed out the political questions at this conference. They did this in a good way, linking the questions in dispute with their own experiences of work among the people. They showed clearly the results of the policy of working class unity and what the alternative would mean. They showed that the Communists, on the basis of this policy, were a leading active force in the struggle over wages, in united action against the war in Vietnam, and so on.

Hill accused us of wanting to "stifle resistance." One was left wondering why a leading Central Committee member should be so concerned about the right to "resist" majority decisions! In a similar vein, Flo Russell said that Lenin had never been "a captive of the majority." This was devastatingly answered by Comrade Dixon who said that, if this attitude were taken in the trade unions, you would soon have scabs all over the country. Dixon made a big impression on the delegates and got tremendous applause.

THEY PUT THEMSELVES OUT

The only answer of the Hill group to this conference was to intensify their struggle against the Party, become more defiant and extend their disruption into new fields. I have referred already to Hill's flat refusal to discuss any matter with the newly-elected State