

The Communist Party of Australia and Proletarian Internationalism,
1928-1945

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Abstract

The theory and practice of ‘proletarian internationalism’ was a vital dimension of the *modus operandi* of communist parties worldwide. It was a broadly encompassing concept that profoundly influenced the actions of international communism’s globally scattered adherents. Nevertheless, the historiography of the Communist Party of Australia has neglected to address sufficiently the effect exerted by proletarian internationalism on the party’s praxis. Instead, scholars have dwelt on the party’s links to the Soviet Union and have, moreover, overlooked the nuances and complexity of the Communist Party’s relationship with Moscow. It is the purpose of this thesis to redress these shortfalls. Using an extensive collection of primary and secondary sources, this thesis will consider the impact of a Marxist-Leninist conception of proletarian internationalism on the policies, tactics and strategies of the Communist Party of Australia from 1928-1945. The thesis will demonstrate that proletarian internationalism was far more than mere adherence to Moscow, obediently receiving and implementing instructions. Instead, through the lens of this concept, we can see that the Communist Party’s relationship with Moscow was flexible and nuanced and one that, in reality, often put the party at odds with the official Soviet position. In addition, we will see the extent of the influence exerted by other aspects of proletarian internationalism, such as international solidarity, the so-called national and colonial questions and the communist attitude towards war, on the Communist Party’s praxis.

I, Robert Bozinovski, declare that the PhD thesis entitled 'The Communist Party of Australia and Proletarian Internationalism, 1928-1945' is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature _____

Date _____

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Abbreviations

AAS	Anglo-American Secretariat
ACTU	Australasian Council of Trade Unions
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ARU	Australian Railways Union
AWU	Australian Workers Union
CI	Communist International
Cominform	Communist Information Bureau
Comintern	Communist International
CC	Central Committee
CCP	Communist Party of China
CEC	Central Executive Committee
CP	Communist Party
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
CPNZ	Communist Party of New Zealand
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CPUSA	Communist Party of the United States of America
EAM	Greek National Liberation Front
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
ELAS	National People's Liberation Army

FOSU	Friends of the Soviet Union
ICWPA	International Class War Prisoner's Aid
ILD	International Labor Defence
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IRA	International Red Aid
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
KMT	Kuomintang
KPD	Communist Party of Germany
LAI	League Against Imperialism
LLL Week	Lenin-Liebknecht-Luxemburg Week
MAWAF	Movement Against War and Fascism
MMM	Militant Minority Movement
PCF	Communist Party of France
PCI	Communist Party of Italy
PPTUS	Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat
Profintern	Red International of Labour Unions (see also RILU)
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RILU	Red International of Labour Unions (see also Profintern)
SFIO	French Socialist Party
SPD	German Social Democratic Party
SRC	Spanish Relief Committee
THC	Trades Hall Council
TUC	Trade Union Congress

UAP	United Australia Party
UCP	United Country Party
UFAF	United Front Against Fascism
UWM	Unemployed Workers Movement
WDC	Workers' Defence Corps
WWF	Waterside Workers' Federation
YCL	Young Communist League

Chapter One: Introduction and Literature Review

Proletarian internationalism was a central tenet underpinning communist thought. It was a broad concept which influenced the Communist Party of Australia's (CPA) policies, strategies, propaganda and actions. For communists, it represented the unshakable unity of the proletarians of all lands against the common foe of all workers: capitalism. It epitomised solidarity in the international class war; global proletarians against global capitalists; and a mortal struggle that a Marxist reading of history predicted would result in victory for the underdog. Against an expansionistic capitalism with outposts in all countries, victory could only be conclusive if it were global. Only then could the eradication of the scourge of capitalism, the *raison d'être* of revolutionary socialists, become a reality. For the attainment of this goal, proletarian internationalism was indispensable.

Proletarian internationalism also presented a unique and radically different perspective of the world from that offered by the mainstream national centric political doctrines. It was the diametric opposite to bourgeois 'nationalism.' Whereas nationalism emphasised loyalty to one's own countrymen/women, regardless of class, proletarian internationalism underscored loyalty to class, across borders, irrespective of colour or religion. In the Australian context, this set apart the CPA from the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the United Australia Party (UAP). The two major parties of Australian politics did not possess anything vaguely reminiscent of an internationalist worldview; this was understandable as neither had as its *raison d'être* the militant prosecution of the class war or the annihilation of capitalism on a global basis.

With the triumph of the Bolsheviks in 1917, revolutionary socialists witnessed the emergence of a living embodiment of their ideals. Proletarians could now point to a supposedly worker run state, building a worker's paradise. The primary aim of all class conscious proletarians was emulation of the Bolshevik example. Particularly encouraging was the seeming willingness of the new workers' government to render assistance via the Communist International (Comintern) to those who shared its quixotic ideals. In return, it became the duty of all revolutionaries loyal to the cause to defend the USSR. It was the sole workers' state; its destruction would be a tremendous setback to all revolutionary socialists. Refuting anti-Soviet propaganda and resisting anti-Soviet war was a central duty that fell on the shoulders of the faithful scattered around the globe.

These various threads all lead to the following question: what was proletarian internationalism? It must be stated from the outset that a detailed working definition of proletarian internationalism will be provided in chapter two and will serve as a constant reference point for this thesis. But generally speaking, proletarian internationalism meant a range of things to different people at different times. To communists it meant solidarity with fellow proletarians, wherever in the world their struggle was waged. It also meant defence of the land of socialism where the workers supposedly held state power. It meant affiliation to the Comintern, the global Communist Party, which in turn meant behaving in unison with the Comintern; ‘exceptionalism’ was anathema. It also meant waging struggles at home on behalf of fellow workers abroad and demanding an end to colonisation and imperialist expansion. Proletarian internationalism also entailed (in the CPA’s case) fighting for the acceptance of Australia’s neighbours and rejecting racism, bigotry, national chauvinism and the ‘White Australia’ policy. In a word, it meant fighting for class interests and socialism on a global scale, rejecting jingoism and racism along the way. The values inherent in proletarian internationalism attracted many to the CPA’s ranks; yet it was also a liability, often placing the party at uncomfortable loggerheads with mainstream opinion.

To others, proletarian internationalism held different connotations. Historians, and other commentators both hostile and sympathetic, have continually either misunderstood or underestimated the breadth of proletarian internationalism and its effect on communist parties. Where notions of proletarian internationalism are considered, they focus by and large on the CPA’s relationship to the Comintern and the USSR. Under this approach, proletarian internationalism is limited, becoming a byword for obedience to Moscow. Such approaches were expected from hostile commentators, many of whom merely echoed Cold War anti-communists. An egregious example is Günther Nollau, who writes that “‘proletarian internationalism’” is the name the Bolsheviks give to the principles governing the political relationships between Bolsheviks or similarly constituted parties and states,’ which, in other words, meant loyal observance of a Soviet line.¹ Heinz Timmermann, another relic of the Cold War, also writes: ‘The label *proletarian internationalism* has been used in the communist movement as a code word for the right

¹ For quotation see Günther Nollau, *International Communism and World Revolution: History and Methods* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1961), p. xv, and for more of Nollau’s opinions on proletarian internationalism see pp. 1-8.

of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to exercise a leading role in it.’² These understandings are flawed. As this thesis will demonstrate, the CPA and its members understood and practiced proletarian internationalism in a way that can be summed up as being ‘more than Moscow,’ although there is not denying the importance of the Comintern and the Soviet Union. Generally, the historiography has overlooked the importance communists’ placed in, for example, solidarity between working class people of all lands. This important article of communist faith actuated the CPA to adopt anti-racist, anti-militarist and anti-imperialist policies that significantly differentiated it from other actors on the Australian political scene. The CPA viewed war, racism and national bigotry as distractions assiduously cultivated by the bourgeoisie to divide the workers of the world. However, most scholars and commentators have not acknowledged the vital importance of proletarian internationalism in influencing the party’s approach.

Indicative of the complexity of proletarian internationalism was that its global focus did not preclude attachment to one’s ‘own’ country. In fact, as chapter two’s review of Lenin’s ideas will show, proletarian internationalism was impossible without communists’ exhibiting a genuine desire to safeguard the welfare of their ‘own’ countrymen and women. Lenin was not merely speaking of material wellbeing; he also called for revolutionaries to embrace the militant heritage of their ‘own’ working class, which the CPA proudly did in its embrace of the Australian radical and rebel traditions. As will be discussed in chapter five, urgings for greater pride in one’s ‘own’ country were reinforced by the Comintern. Its leader from 1934 until its dissolution, Georgi Dimitrov, stated at the 7th Comintern congress in 1935 that proletarian internationalism ‘must acclimatise itself in each country, sinking deep roots in its own native land.’³ In practice, this resulted in Australian comrades concluding that there was a lack of understanding of Australian history. In turn, this led to a careful study of Australian history and the discovery of an Australian radical heritage steeped in the struggles against convictism, the Eureka Stockade and the anti-conscription campaigns of the First World War. Communists, perhaps more than any other contemporary group, were infatuated with Australian history when the mainstream was still reciting the reign of English monarchs from centuries before. Therefore, proletarian internationalism, far from representing mere obedience to Moscow, also meant pride in one’s own national heritage,

² Heinz Timmermann, ‘The Fundamentals of Proletarian Internationalism,’ in Lawrence L. Whetten (ed), *The Present State of Communist Internationalism* (Toronto: Lexington Books, 1983), p. 3. Emphasis in original.

³ Quoted in Ralph Gibson, *The People Stand Up* (Ascot Vale: Red Rooster Press, 1983), p. 164.

while respecting that of people from other lands. Yet commentators have largely overlooked this facet of proletarian internationalism.

Thus, the purpose of this thesis is to redress the problems associated with current understandings of proletarian internationalism and its influence over the CPA during the years 1928-1945. It offers a new perspective on the party's history, distinct from previous scholarship suggesting that it was torn between loyalties to Russian and Australian socialist traditions.⁴ Instead, I suggest that the party's history can be better understood through a deeper understanding of its adherence to the principles of proletarian internationalism. Therefore, through the course of this thesis, I will demonstrate that it was proletarian internationalism that guided the party's hand and helped fashion the CPA's policy, tactics, strategy and other dimensions of its work. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that proletarian internationalism was 'more than Moscow' and that, on the contrary, it meant a vast variety of things. For its part, the party evolved into a fuller realisation of proletarian internationalism from 1928 to 1945. Additionally, it fluctuated expediently between the different elements of proletarian internationalism, emphasising one while downplaying another depending on the needs of the moment. I also intend to capture some of proletarian internationalism's complexity, especially in the CPA-Comintern relationship in order to illuminate the point that it was not a simple case of 'Moscow say, CPA do.' While Lenin argued, as will be explained in chapter two, that the national sections of the Comintern were bound to carefully implement the decisions of the International, the reality was more complicated. On numerous occasions, the CPA either ignored the Comintern 'line', or applied it when domestic circumstances necessitated it, or tailored it to better suit the Australian political landscape. Through the course of this thesis, it will become evident that the CPA-Comintern relationship was more than just a one way stream of instructions, dutifully implemented by an obedient Australian party.

It must be stated from the outset that it is not intended to 'prove' that the CPA was internationalist; this is axiomatic to all serious scholars of the CPA. Additionally, limitations of space prevent an exploration of the party's fulsome (and naïve) adulation of Stalin's Russia and other dimensions of the party's internationalist work. To reiterate, the thesis will instead focus on the significance of proletarian internationalism, as articulated in the model offered in chapter two, on the formulation of the CPA's policy, tactics,

⁴ These were advanced by Alastair Davidson and Peter J. Morrison and are discussed in the literature review below.

strategy and reactions to significant international events during the years between 1928-1945. This will be the first time such an endeavour has been attempted, and will include such features of proletarian internationalism as the CPA's relationship to the Comintern and other internationally based associations of communist inspiration; international solidarity, including the CPA's relationship with its fraternal communist parties; the effect of Lenin's so-called national and colonial questions ideas on the CPA's approach to Aborigines, migrants and the colonial world; and consider the CPA's policies and reactions to wars of various causes. In taking this approach, the thesis will separate proletarian internationalism from the archaic assumption held by some that the internationalism of communists was controlled or limited to the Comintern.

Each of the above themes will be explored. Chapter two will provide a detailed working definition of proletarian internationalism that will light the path ahead in subsequent chapters. Chapter three will pick up the story during 1928 to 1929, when the CPA resisted the Comintern's so-called 'Third Period' before elements in the party, after much internal disruption, succeeded in aligning it with the International. Chapter four covers the years between 1930 until mid-1935 and will trace the impact of Third Period proletarian internationalism on the party's policies and will then examine its belated (by international standards) departure from the Third Period. Chapter five incorporates the remained of 1935 up until mid-1941 and includes popular front era communism, the CPA's reactions to a spate of conflicts, before concluding with its response to the outbreak of the Second World War. Finally, chapter six will detail the CPA and proletarian internationalism during the 'people's war' from mid-1941 until 1945. But first, an examination of the literature is necessary to illustrate how historians and others have traditionally dealt with the CPA and proletarian internationalism.

Historiography of the Communist Party of Australia

There is an extensive literature covering the history of the Communist Party of Australia. Limitations of space prevent an exhaustive review of the literature here. However, it is apt to state that most of the literature is concerned with specific aspects of the CPA's history. There are three seminal works on the CPA's general history. Stuart Macintyre's *The Reds* is the most recent and by far the most significant.⁵ Macintyre uses a number of sources only available since the collapse of the Soviet Union, including previously

⁵ Stuart Macintyre, *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia from Origins to Illegality* (St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1998).

unavailable Comintern and CPA documents. However, *The Reds* is an incomplete history as it ends in the middle of 1941. Further, Macintyre interprets the CPA's history within the general context of its influences from the Comintern and Stalinism specifically and not on 'proletarian internationalism' and the CPA as such, although his work by no means confines internationalism to the Comintern. Nevertheless, *The Reds* is an indispensable source for any historian of Australian communism.

Two other, less recent, works are also of significance. Alastair Davidson's *The Communist Party of Australia: A Short History* and Robin Gollan's *Revolutionaries and Reformists* are classic projects of CPA history.⁶ These books are between almost forty and thirty years old and therefore lack the insights provided in newer sources, both primary and secondary, made available in the intervening period. Both these books employ the traditional understanding of proletarian internationalism as euphemism for CPA servitude to the USSR. However, neither of these works could in any way be considered hostile to the CPA.

Davidson's contention is that the CPA was removed from the Australian socialist tradition between 1928 and 1950, after which it began 'a stumbling, groping, limping move back to Australian traditions.'⁷ Accordingly, his book traces the inner party tension between exponents of the Australian socialist tradition and adherents of Russian methods. Davidson believes that between 1928 and 1950, the CPA moved into an 'alien tradition,' characterised by the introduction of inapplicable 'Russian traditions in policy and organisation,' thus accounting for the party's declining fortunes by the 1950s.⁸ In this sense, Davidson was one of the first notable historians of the CPA to use understandings of proletarian internationalism interchangeably with 'foreign,' 'Russian' or 'Stalinist.' Proletarian internationalism, as postulated by Davidson, is restricted to observing the Soviet line, making it far removed from the complex nuances and emotions associated with proletarian internationalism, as will be demonstrated in this thesis.

Likewise, Gollan's study is not focused on proletarian internationalism and the CPA. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that the CPA embraced a global outlook, though restricts his conception of proletarian internationalism to observing a Soviet line. In the book's

⁶ Alastair Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia: A Short History* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1969); Robin Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists: Communism and the Australian Labour Movement, 1920-1955* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1975).

⁷ Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia*, p. xi.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

introduction, Gollan claims that he would succeed if he gave ‘a general impression of what Communists thought.’⁹ In not extending his conception of proletarian internationalism, which was a crucial component of communist thought, he falls short in attaining his objective. Gollan initially cast his nets wider than other historians, but reined them in too soon. Nevertheless, this shortfall does not detract from the quality of Gollan’s project.

Frank Farrell’s *International Socialism and Australian Labour* is the most focused Australian study on labour internationalism.¹⁰ His work encompasses the broader Australian labour movement, including organisations such as the CPA, ALP and certain unions, owing allegiances to transnational socialist organisations. But, the emphasis of Farrell’s work is internationalism by organisation and affiliation, and not a wider internationalism. Where efforts are made to delve into the world of internationalist perspectives, they relate to the ALP and select unions, detailing their struggle against internal elements that advocated a broader internationalist viewpoint than the ALP or union was willing to concede. By contrast, the extent of the CPA’s internationalism is largely omitted. Where internationalism and the CPA is discussed, it is cast in a negative light, supposedly representing nothing more than subservience to Soviet dictates.

A recent study by David McKnight titled *Espionage and the Roots of the Cold War: The Conspiratorial Heritage* considers the CPA’s international affiliations within the context of a study on espionage.¹¹ However, a drawback of McKnight’s work, from the perspective of this thesis though unavoidable considering his topic, is that his focus is restricted to internationalism by organisational affiliation. McKnight then utilises those affiliations to mount an argument that the communist *modus operandi*, steeped in the Russian conspiratorial heritage, was highly conducive to espionage. McKnight’s project has little to do with exploring proletarian internationalism as conceptualised here; it is more an examination of murky conspiratorial matters orchestrated by, and for the benefit of, Moscow.

⁹ Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists*, p. v.

¹⁰ Frank Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour: The Left in Australia 1919-1939* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1981).

¹¹ David McKnight, *Espionage and the Roots of the Cold War: The Conspiratorial Heritage* (London: Frank Cass, 2002).

Other works refer tangentially to the reactions of the CPA to international events. One such book is E.M. Andrews' *Isolationism and Appeasement in Australia*.¹² Andrews outlines the reactions of select groups (including the Communist Party) in Australia to the various international crises between 1935 and the outbreak of the Second World War. According to Andrews, ever since the Italo-Abyssinian conflict of 1935, the CPA was one of two groups to respond vigorously to the international crises of the day. Even the somewhat hostile Andrews has to concede that the CPA maintained a consistent anti-appeasement line, whereas the other group with a great interest in international affairs, the Catholics, assumed the opposite position.

Journal articles and book chapters provide more focused studies on internationalism and the Communist Party. Julia Martinez's chapter on camaraderie, even a sense of 'brotherhood,' between Australian and Asian seamen is refreshing and informative.¹³ It deals with efforts by communist seamen, in a spirit of internationalism, to bring down racial barriers separating white seamen from their Asian counterparts. Internationalism in Martinez's study is, due to the subject of her work, restricted to anti-racism. James Bennett's chapter on the New Zealand labour movement and the labour arm of international communism, the Red International of Labour Unions (Profintern), also provides an immensely valuable post-structuralist understanding of internationalism.¹⁴ Although the chapter focuses principally on the New Zealand labour movement, it frequently refers to the CPA and Australian labour. Of particular interest is its description of the intermediary role played by the CPA between the Profintern and the Communist Party of New Zealand (CPNZ). Alexander Trapeznik's chapter, 'Grandfather, Parents and Little Brother,' provides greater focus on the conduit role played by the CPA between the Comintern and the CPNZ.¹⁵ Unlike Bennett's aforementioned chapter, which covers relations between the New Zealand labour movement and communist linked world labour, Trapeznik's interest is with the relationship between the communist parties.

¹² E.M. Andrews, *Isolationism and Appeasement in Australia: Reactions to the European Crisis, 1935-1939* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1970).

¹³ Julia Martinez, "'Coolies' to Comrades: Internationalism between Australian and Asian Seamen,' in Raymond Markey (ed.), *Labour and Community: Historical Essays* (Wollongong: University of Wollongong Press, 2001), pp. 295-312.

¹⁴ James Bennett, 'The New Zealand Labour Movement and International Communism, 1921 to c. 1938,' in Alexander Trapeznik and Aaron Fox (eds.), *Lenin's Legacy Down Under: New Zealand's Cold War* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2004), pp. 73-91.

¹⁵ Alexander Trapeznik, "'Grandfather, Parents and Little Brother": A Study of Centre-Periphery Relations,' in Trapeznik and Fox (eds.), *Lenin's Legacy Down Under*, pp. 57-72.

Trapeznik's conceptualisation of proletarian internationalism is encamped in Cold War orthodoxy, which revolves around the view that it went no further than the Comintern and, more generally, the Soviet Union. This is where Trapeznik's article conflicts with this thesis: although the Comintern was of tremendous significance to communist parties, it was not the limit of proletarian internationalism, nor was it the sole source of communist policy, strategic or tactical initiative.

The CPA-Comintern relationship is also the subject of numerous journal articles. Barbara Curthoys, who was among the first Australian historians to use the new Comintern material in her work, is the author of three on this subject. Her three useful articles concern the role of the Comintern in determining and consolidating the leadership of the CPA during the late 1920s and early 1930s and the impact on the CPA of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact signed on the eve of World War II.¹⁶ The strength of Curthoys's work lies in its use of previously unavailable sources, shedding considerable light on murky episodes in the party's history. However, Curthoys's work is narrow in scope, focusing on CPA-Comintern relations. A similar work is found in Beris Penrose's 'Herbert Moxon, A Victim of the "Bolshevisation" of the Communist Party,' in which she outlines the role played by Harry Wicks, an American Comintern emissary, sent to Australia in 1930 to enforce the Third Period and orchestrate the ousting of party general secretary Herbert Moxon.¹⁷ The purpose of neither author was to embark on a broader study of the CPA and proletarian internationalism, thus their discussions on that concept are narrow. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the usefulness of both Curthoys's and Penrose's work to this thesis.

Former communists have also recorded in article form their experiences with the Comintern. Richard Dixon's 'The CPA in the Thirties' provides some unique insights into the CPA's internal struggles following the 6th Comintern Congress in 1928.¹⁸ This article is largely (though not entirely) free of the partiality that pervades other works by communists. Jack Blake has also written two articles about the CPA and its relationship with the Comintern in the early 1930s. In both articles Blake cautions against

¹⁶ Barbara Curthoys, 'The Communist Party and the Communist International (1927-1929),' *Labour History*, no. 64 (May 1993), pp. 54-69; Barbara Curthoys, 'The Comintern, the CPA, and the Impact of Harry Wicks,' *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 39, no. 1 (1993), pp. 23-36; Barbara Curthoys, 'The Comintern, the CPA and the Non-Aggression Pact: Revelations as a Result of Glasnost,' *People's Cause: Journal of the Association for Communist Unity*, vol. 1, no. 3 (May 1992), pp. 4-13.

¹⁷ Beris Penrose, 'Herbert Moxon, A Victim of the "Bolshevisation" of the Communist Party,' *Labour History*, no. 70 (May 1996), pp. 92-114.

¹⁸ Richard Dixon, 'The CPA in the Thirties,' *Australian Left Review*, no. 49 (1976), pp. 25-29.

oversimplification and the use of hindsight to denigrate the party as an association of Stalinist dupes. In 'The Early Thirties,' Blake exhorts commentators to carefully consider the conditions of the early 1930s before dismissing the CPA as a gullible Stalinist stooge.¹⁹ Blake then describes the circumstances that seemed, at the time, to vindicate the Comintern's postulates that correctly predicted the trials and tribulations that confronted the working class in the capitalist world. He also stresses that the prestige of the Soviet party and state, which had demonstrated that a socialist revolution was possible, held tremendous sway. Its experience and advice could not be easily dismissed. In 'The Australian Communist Party and the Comintern in the Early 1930s,' Blake again sets his sights on the perceived oversimplification of the Comintern role in party affairs.²⁰ The specific case Blake refers to is the change of party leadership in 1929. In discussing this, Blake cautions historians not to automatically assume that all developments in the party were a result of Comintern instruction. In addition, Blake points out that the so called 'left sectarian' position of the CPA cannot be ascribed entirely to the Comintern, as sectarianism had its Australian proponents well before the Comintern swung left in the late 1920s. Both of Blake's articles lucidly outline the great complexities involved in the CPA's interactions with the Comintern.

University dissertations are also a valuable source for CPA historiography. Most have a narrow focus, addressing the CPA and specific events or the party's industrial work.²¹ None has yet attempted to examine the influence of proletarian internationalism on Australian communism. However, Peter J. Morrison's PhD thesis titled 'The Communist Party of Australia and the Australian Radical-Socialist Tradition, 1920-1939,' which challenges Davidson's contention that the CPA veered away from Australian traditions before 1950 by suggesting that it in fact shared many characteristics with previous Australian socialist organisations, has perhaps the greatest bearing on this thesis.²² The relevance of Morrison's study was that, although a radical socialist tradition seemed the antipathy of proletarian internationalism, the CPA, as will be seen in chapter five, did not believe the Australian radical socialist tradition to be incompatible with proletarian

¹⁹ Jack Blake, 'The Early Thirties,' *Arena*, no. 25 (1971), pp. 43-52.

²⁰ Jack Blake, 'The Australian Communist Party and the Comintern in the Early 1930s,' *Labour History*, no. 23 (November 1972), pp. 38-47.

²¹ See, for example Beris Penrose, *The Communist Party and Trade Union Work in Queensland in the Third Period: 1928-35*, PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 1993; B. E. Symons, *All-Out for the People's War: 'Red Diggers' in the Armed Forces and the Communist Party of Australia's Policies in the Second World War*, BA (Hons), University of Wollongong, 1993.

²² Peter J. Morrison, *The Communist Party of Australia and the Australian Radical-Socialist Tradition, 1920-1939*, PhD thesis, The University of Adelaide, 1975.

internationalism, and instead warmly embraced it. Indeed, as mentioned above, Lenin, too, argued that there was no contradiction between proletarian internationalism and embracing the socialist heritage of one's 'own' country. Morrison points to the Industrial Workers of the World and the Victorian Socialist Party as the CPA's antecedents. The Communist Party's policies and *modus operandi*, contends Morrison, were merely a continuation of the activities of these and other comparable organisations; from the CPA's hostility to the ALP to the strict regimen its leaders imposed on the membership, all had precedent in Australian radical socialism. In relation to proletarian internationalism, Morrison restricts himself to the Comintern and is at times vague and confusing. He maintains that the Comintern played little role in the affairs of the CPA, that many of the shifts in the party's policy ascribed to the Comintern, such as the onset of the 'Third Period', can be just as easily attributed to domestic dynamics. Yet Morrison also points out that the Comintern was the final arbitrator of disputes within the party, meaning that it could not be easily dismissed. The sort of international affiliation enjoyed by the CPA was a departure from the Australian socialist tradition and perhaps explains Morrison's confused treatment of it.

Biographies, Autobiographies and Politically Partisan Works

There are numerous biographies and autobiographies that also shed light on the CPA's history. Similarly, there are numerous works, both by former communists or anti-communists, which recount party history from a partisan perspective. All these works see internationalism differently in comparison to the authors discussed above. They express it, so to speak, in their own words, without the analysis or interpretations of others. Particularly useful are the perspectives of communists, whose accounts are valuable in fashioning a more comprehensive definition of proletarian internationalism. Autobiographical, biographical and party history works by (or about) communists or former communists, such as Eric Aarons, Audrey Blake, Len Fox, Ralph Gibson, Stan Moran, John Sedy and Bernie Taft, among many others, collectively impart a more rounded meaning of proletarian internationalism, going beyond and sometimes overlooking the Comintern.²³ Biographers, particularly Peter Cook (who has studied Ted

²³ Eric Aarons, *What's Left?: Memoirs of an Australian Communist* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1993); Audrey Blake, *A Proletarian Life* (Malmesbury: Kibble Books, 1984); Len Fox, *Broad Left, Narrow Left* (Chippendale: Published by the author, 1982); Len Fox, *Australians on the Left* (Potts Point: Published by the author, 1996); Ralph Gibson, *My Years in the Communist Party* (Melbourne: International Bookshop, 1966); Stan Moran, *Reminiscences of a Rebel* (Chippendale: Alternative Publishing Co-op, 1979); John Sedy, *Comrades Come Rally! Recollections of an Australian Communist* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1978);

Laurie) and Ross Fitzgerald (who has written a biography on Fred Paterson), have also attempted to convey a sense of internationalism that stretches beyond the Comintern.²⁴ For instance, Cook provides a glimpse at the internationalist orientation that was so appealing to Laurie and many of the Communist Party's other new recruits in the 1930s:

Ted Laurie joined the Communist Party for much the same reasons as Gollan, Lockwood and the many others who, in the late 1930s, were profoundly affected by the disordered state of their country and the larger world, who feared the rise of fascism, who supported the Spanish republicans, and who saw in the Soviet Union a shining antithesis to their own feeble, greedy, directionless society.²⁵

Indeed, the global causes of the 1930s swelled the CPA's ranks with idealists, dismayed at the turn of events, particularly in Europe and Asia. John Sendy's biography of Ralph Gibson demonstrates the potency of internationalism in Gibson's thinking.²⁶ For Gibson, the colonial situation in India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), in addition to his staunch opposition to European fascism and war, affected him 'intensely and continued to do so throughout his life.'²⁷ Many of the 1930s generation of recruits were attracted to the CPA because of its seemingly principled stance on international issues, a stand greatly influenced by the various dimensions of proletarian internationalism.

Most of the abovementioned authors of biographies and autobiographies eschew apologetics. However the credibility of others is significantly diminished owing to their partisanship, which in turn forces any historian to tread with extra caution, constantly cross-referencing and corroborating facts and statements. What follows is a brief survey of some of the most egregiously partisan offerings.

Bernie Taft, *Crossing the Party Line: Memoirs of Bernie Taft* (Newham, Australia: Scribe Publications, 1994). See also Simon Bracegirdle, 'Several Decades as a Communist Activist,' in Carole Ferrier and Rebecca Pelan (eds.), *The Point of Change: Marxism/Australia/History/Theory* (St. Lucia: Australian Studies Centre, Department of English, University of Queensland, 1998), pp. 48-55; Ralph Gibson, *One Woman's Life: A Memoir of Dorothy Gibson* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1980); Itzhak Gust, *Such was Life: A Jumping Narrative from Radom to Melbourne* (Caulfield South: Makor Jewish Community Library, 2004); Keith McEwan, *Once A Jolly Comrade* (Brisbane: The Jacaranda Press, 1966); Edgar Ross, *Of Storm and Struggle: Pages from Labour History* (Sydney: Alternative Publishing Co-operative, 1982); Jeff Sparrow, *Communism: A Love Story* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2007).

²⁴ Peter S. Cook, *Red Barrister: A Biography of Ted Laurie* (Bundoora: La Trobe University Press, 1994); Ross Fitzgerald, *The People's Champion, Fred Paterson: Australia's Only Communist Party Member of Parliament* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1997).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁶ John Sendy, *Ralph Gibson: An Extraordinary Communist* (Melbourne: Ralph Gibson Biography Committee, 1988).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

Marxists of various shades have attempted to write the CPA's history. Unfortunately, they often succumb to the temptation to engage in crude polemics, raising questions about their motives in embarking on the project in the first place and often leaving their credibility in tatters. One of the most dreadful cases of historical partisanship is W. J. Brown's *The Communist Movement and Australia*.²⁸ It is a highly jaundiced account that utilises a doctrinaire Marxist conceptual framework and selectively ignores certain facts that throw doubt on the author's muddled contentions. Proletarian internationalism does feature in the book, although Brown understates the Comintern's influence on the Australian party. Long serving CPA Chairman L. L. Sharkey's *An Outline History of the Australian Communist Party* predictably shares Brown's partisanship.²⁹ He traces the CPA's history from its inception until the early 1940s, offering an orthodox Stalinist analysis of all the controversial incidents in the party's history. Indeed, much of Sharkey's writings relate to contemporary events, making it as much a primary, as it is a secondary, source. Although largely preoccupied with the domestic and internal activities of the CPA, it has limited success in conveying a meaning of proletarian internationalism that goes beyond the Comintern. E. W. Campbell's *History of the Australian Labour Movement: A Marxist Interpretation* sets the CPA alongside Australia's radical socialist antecedents, covering a period stretching from the 1850s to the 1940s.³⁰ It is not focused exclusively on the CPA, though the party features prominently. Campbell's Marxist analytical framework is overwhelmed by heavy political bias, understandable in light of the fact that he was commissioned by the CPA to write a book extolling the party's place in Australian labour history. Campbell traces the evolution of the Australian labour movement and places the party as its historical end product. Although providing useful interpretations of Australian events from the communist perspective, proletarian internationalism is not one of Campbell's subject matters. Less partisan, though still reluctant to concede some glaring mistakes of the past is Ralph Gibson's *The People Stand Up*.³¹ Gibson provides the reader with a comprehensive look at the twelve years before the outbreak of World War II through the eyes of a communist. Proletarian internationalism features prominently; however, just like other works by communists,

²⁸ W. J. Brown, *The Communist Movement and Australia: An Historical Outline, 1890s to 1980s* (Haymarket: Australian Labor Movement History Publications, 1986).

²⁹ L. L. Sharkey, *An Outline History of the Australian Communist Party* (Sydney: Australian Communist Party, 1944).

³⁰ E. W. Campbell, *History of the Australian Labour Movement: A Marxist Interpretation* (Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1945).

³¹ Gibson, *The People Stand Up*.

Gibson downplays the role of the Comintern and suffers from selective amnesia on certain embarrassing events from the history of international communism.

While most of these authors (with the exception of Brown after the 1960s) take a sympathetic position on party history, there are other more hostile accounts from the party's political enemies, both left and right wing. There are two notable offerings from Trotskyite historians: Tom O'Lincoln's *Into the Mainstream*, and *Betrayal: A History of the Communist Party of Australia* by the 'Workers News Editorial Board.'³² Their primary preoccupation is to attack the CPA, attempting to cast it as having betrayed socialism. These authors seek to transplant the Stalin-Trotsky rivalry onto the Australian political scene, as the CPA sided with Stalin and trenchantly rejected Trotsky. These polemicists depict the party as having abandoned true internationalism, supplanting it instead with loyalty to Stalin. Thus, the focus of works of this character is on the CPA slavishly following Soviet diktat. A consideration of the influence of proletarian internationalism, as conceptualised in this thesis, is missing entirely.

The other polemicists, right-wing anti-communists, have also tried their hand at the history of the Communist Party. M. H. Ellis's offering, *The Garden Path*, and Tony McGillick's autobiography, *Comrade No More*, seek not only to record the history of 'treachery' and 'disloyalty' of the CPA, but, notwithstanding inconvenient facts, also attempt to smear the ALP by association.³³ These books amount to little more than lengthy anti-communist/Labor rants, emblematic of the ignorance and bigotry of Cold War red baiting. It is, however, worthy of an ironic note that Ellis and McGillick (a former, disgruntled communist himself), along with others on the right, pay great attention to the influence of proletarian internationalism on the CPA, which they present as 'proof' irrefutable of the Communist Party's disloyalty. Proletarian internationalism is unashamedly cast here as little more than obeying 'orders' from Moscow. Ellis in particular goes to great lengths to 'prove' that the CPA was attempting to conceal its international affiliation, although knowledge of the CPA's open relationship with the USSR, and its plainly internationalist outlook, were well known to all ever since it was

³² Tom O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream: The Decline of Australian Communism* (Sydney: Stained Wattle Press, 1985); Workers News Editorial Board, *Betrayal: A History of the Communist Party of Australia* (Marrickville: Allen Books, 1981).

³³ M. H. Ellis, *The Garden Path: The Story of the Saturation of the Australian Labour Movement by Communism* (Sydney: The Land Newspaper Ltd., 1949); Tony McGillick, *Comrade No More* (West Perth: T.C. McGillick, 1980). Of slightly less anti-communist vitriol is the autobiography of notorious communist 'defector' Cecil Sharpley. See Cecil H. Sharpley, *The Great Delusion: The Autobiography of an ex-Communist Leader* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1952).

founded. The CPA itself never made any effort to hide its closeness to Moscow. On the contrary, during the timeframe under review in this thesis, 1928-1945, the CPA proudly identified itself with the Soviet experiment, believing it to be more a strength than a weakness.

Comintern Historiography and Studies of Other Communist Parties

The historiography of the Comintern is abundant and growing. New research is emerging rapidly, as historians make use of the relatively recent availability of archival material in Moscow to fill in historiographical blank-spots. Much of the recent scholarship that incorporates these new sources does so by relating the material to individual communist parties. For example, an edited book by Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe takes a world tour of communist parties covering most continents, though not, unfortunately, Australia.³⁴ Nevertheless, the breadth of parties considered is extensive, and its use of new sources makes it an important consideration for historians of communism. Another edited tome, this time assembled by Matthew Worley, covers communist parties during the Third Period.³⁵ All contributions make use of new sources and employ more nuanced approaches and succeed in showing that Third Period communism was not a uniform experience around the world. Australia is a port of call, with Stuart Macintyre providing an engaging overview of the Third Period in Australia. Finnish historians Tauno Saarela and Kimmo Rentola continue the edited offerings with their *Communism: National and International*.³⁶ This work's contributions focus on European communist parties, providing worthwhile insights into the effect of internationalism and nationalism on those parties. Strangely, however, in light of the nature of the project, a comprehensive analysis of proletarian internationalism is missing.

The new sources from the archives have also been applied in studies that focus exclusively on the Comintern. Alexander Dallin and Fridrikh Firsov are among the growing list of scholars that assemble various archival documents, revealing a behind the scenes glimpse into Comintern operations.³⁷ Ivo Banac has recently produced an edited

³⁴ Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe (eds.), *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919-1943* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999).

³⁵ Matthew Worley, (ed.) *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

³⁶ Tauno Saarela and Kimmo Rentola (eds.), *Communism: National and International* (Helsinki: Finnish Historical Society, 1998).

³⁷ Alexander Dallin and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov (eds.), *Dimitrov and Stalin, 1934-1943: Letters from the Soviet Archives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

version of the diary of former Comintern leader Dimitrov.³⁸ This book is essential for understanding Comintern policy and the true intentions behind it. An indispensable history on the Comintern by Jeremy Agnew and Kevin McDermott also brings together various new sources from the Soviet archives and an extensive array of newer and older secondary sources, painting a picture of international communism valuable in tracing communist party history.³⁹

Less recent works are also valuable sources of knowledge for Comintern history. The historian of greatest renown, and whose work is the most influential, is E. H. Carr. Carr was a pioneer whose scholarship laid the foundation for an alternative to his contemporaries' obsession with the crude equation, Communist Party = Comintern = Stalin. He is responsible for a plethora of books on Soviet and global communism. However, for our purposes, two books are especially germane. *The Twilight of the Comintern* is a typical example of Carr's meticulous research, in which he lucidly outlines the international role of the Comintern.⁴⁰ It is one of the classic works on the Comintern. The other of Carr's relevant publications, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*, traces the role of the Comintern and the Soviet Union during the Spanish Civil War.⁴¹ However, Carr, like most historians of international communism, does not relate anything in any of his work to the CPA; nor does his work utilise the concept of proletarian internationalism when discussing events as shall be done in this thesis. Other works are less comprehensive. The study of both the Comintern and Cominform by Fernando Claudin is useful, though adversely effected by Trotskyist bias and is outdated.⁴² Like Claudin, Duncan Hellas's *The Comintern* also suffers from excessive Trotskyite partisanship.⁴³ The writings of Franz Borkenau and Julius Braunthal are worthwhile, though verbose and suffer, at times, from undue cynicism.⁴⁴ Edited books by Robert V. Daniels, Jane Degras and Helmut Gruber that assemble Comintern

³⁸ Ivo Banac (ed.), *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933-1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

³⁹ Jeremy Agnew and Kevin McDermott, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1996).

⁴⁰ E.H. Carr, *The Twilight of the Comintern 1930-1935* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

⁴¹ E.H. Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

⁴² Fernando Claudin, *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform, 2 vols.* (London: Penguin Books, 1970).

⁴³ Duncan Hellas, *The Comintern* (London: Bookmarks, 1985).

⁴⁴ Franz Borkenau, *World Communism: A History of the Communist International* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962); Julius Braunthal, *History of the International, 1914-1943*, trans. John Clark, vol. 2 (Bristol: Nelson, 1967).

announcements and documents are valuable tools for researchers.⁴⁵ Two edited offerings from Milorad M. Drachkovitch and Branko Lazitch, *The Comintern: Historical Highlights, Essays, Recollections, Document* and *The Revolutionary Internationals, 1864-1943* (the latter was compiled by Drachkovitch alone) feature a collection of contributions dealing with specific events in the history of the Comintern.⁴⁶

Before concluding, it is worth reviewing some of the scholarship on other communist parties, as this thesis will on occasion refer to events in fraternal parties. The historiography of other communist parties is more abundant than that of the CPA. For example, studies into the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) and Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), the senior Anglophone parties with whom the Australian party maintained closest relations, are plentiful and increasingly use new archival sources. These studies enable comparisons between positions adopted by different communist parties, helping to identify any policy synchronisation that would suggest a globally consistent communist line.

John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr are renowned historians of the CPUSA, and, more broadly, the Comintern.⁴⁷ Their work, although excessively influenced by a strident anticommunist approach, which with messianic zeal seeks to prove the subversive character of the American party, makes extensive use of sources available only since the end of the Cold War. In *The Secret World of American Communism* and *The Soviet World of American Communism*, Haynes and Klehr, with the assistance of others, reprint, at considerable length, correspondence between the Comintern and the CPUSA.⁴⁸ These

⁴⁵ Robert V. Daniels (ed.), *A Documentary History of Communism*, vol. 2 (New York: Vintage Books, 1960); Jane Degras (ed.), *The Communist International, 1919-1943: Documents, Vol.1-3* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); Helmut Gruber (ed.), *Soviet Russia Masters the Comintern: International Communism in the Era of Stalin's Ascendancy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1974).

⁴⁶ Milorad M. Drachkovitch and Branko Lazitch (eds.), *The Comintern: Historical Highlights, Essays, Recollections, Documents* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966); Milorad M. Drachkovitch (ed.), *The Revolutionary Internationals, 1864-1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966).

⁴⁷ Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992); Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, *In Denial: Historians, Communism and Espionage* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2003).

⁴⁸ Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Fridrikh Igorevich Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Kyrill M. Anderson, *The Soviet World Of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). A similar undertaking, without the strident anti-communism, traces the Comintern – Communist Party of South Africa relationship. For this, see Apollon Davidson, Irina Filatova, Valentin Gorodnov and Sheridan Johns (eds.), *South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History, Volume I, Socialist Pilgrims to Bolshevik Footsoldiers, 1919-1930*, vol. 1 (London: Frank Cass, 2003) and *South Africa and*

documents are then used to substantiate the authors' contention that the CPUSA was, at all times, under the effective control of the Comintern and its Soviet masters. These documents are also useful for the study of CPA-Comintern relations, as they expose certain trends in world communism that have remained untreated in the Australian literature. However, the near obsessive focus on Moscow's influence on the American party tends to result in an undue neglect of other influences, such as domestic political circumstances or the prevailing mood of American communists.⁴⁹ Moreover, the simplistic assumptions of these two authors severely restricts their conception of proletarian internationalism; they are classic proponents of the orthodox 'communist party controlled by Moscow' school, assiduously following the footsteps of cold warriors such as Theodore Draper.⁵⁰ This thesis, in its account of the Australian party, will challenge these archaic perspectives.

Other historians of the CPUSA take a more measured approach in comparison to Haynes and Klehr. Without being as strident as Haynes and Klehr, Maurice Isserman's *Which Side Were You On?* recognises that the Comintern played a central role in shaping the CPUSA's position in relation to the Second World War.⁵¹ Fraser Ottanelli takes a similar approach as Isserman.⁵² Ottanelli indicates that the Comintern was vital in changing the CPUSA's position from support of the Roosevelt administration to vehement opposition during the early days of the war, a position the CPA also held at the time towards both Labor and the UAP. However, in neither of these books is the broader conception of proletarian internationalism, as applied in this thesis, considered.

The historiography of the CPGB also comprises valuable works for comparison with the CPA. Noreen Branson's two books are comprehensive, spanning a large timeframe, and

the Communist International: A Documentary History, Volume II, Bolshevik Footsoldiers to Victims of Bolshevisation, 1931-1939, vol. 2 (London: Frank Cass, 2003).

⁴⁹ For an antidote with a focus on the domestic political and cultural influences on the CPUSA, see Michael E. Brown, Randy Martin, Frank Rosengarten and George Snedeker (eds.) *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S. Communism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993).

⁵⁰ For some of Draper's work, see Theodore Draper, (ed.) *A Present of Things Past: Selected Essays* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990); Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia: The Formative Period* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986).

⁵¹ Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?: The American Communist Party During the Second World War* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1982).

⁵² Fraser Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

stretch from the late 1920s to the early 1950s.⁵³ *Opening the Books*, an edited collaboration from Geoff Andrews, Nina Fishman, and Kevin Morgan provides a balanced account of numerous spheres of activity in which the British party was engaged.⁵⁴ Matthew Worley's recent publication on the CPGB in the Third Period captures some of the nuance and complexity of those years.⁵⁵ Andrew Thorpe's *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920-1943*, through the use of new sources, sheds much new light on the Comintern-CPGB relationship.⁵⁶ Two books recording the proceedings of a CPGB historical conference on the party's change of line in the opening months of the Second World War are important for determining the significance of the Comintern in forcing this shift, as well as conveying the internationalist feeling underpinning relations with the Comintern.⁵⁷ An article by Monty Johnstone on the Comintern's impact on the CPGB during World War II, also has bearing on the Australian experience.⁵⁸ The applicability of these works resides in the fact that the CPGB and the CPA shared similar wartime experiences, particularly in switching their positions from support of the war, to opposition, during the war's early stages.

Other books about the CPGB are also useful. Francis Beckett's *Enemy Within* is an engaging work, but suffers from the significant drawback of lacking footnotes or corroborating evidence. As a result, some of Beckett's observations have to be treated cautiously.⁵⁹ Willie Thompson's *The Good Old Cause* is a handy reference, but short both on detail and on proletarian internationalism.⁶⁰ Kevin Morgan's focused study on the CPGB between the years 1935-1941 sheds light on how the party dealt with the many

⁵³ Noreen Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1927-1941* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985); Noreen Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1941-1951* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1997).

⁵⁴ Geoff Andrews, Nina Fishman, and Kevin Morgan (eds.), *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of British Communism* (London: Pluto Press, 1995).

⁵⁵ Matthew Worley, *Class Against Class: The Communist Party in Britain Between the Wars* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001).

⁵⁶ Andrew Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow, 1920-1943* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

⁵⁷ John Attfield and Stephen Williams (eds.), *1939: The Communist Party of Great Britain and the War* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990); Francis King and George Matthews (eds.), *About Turn: The British Communist Party and the Second World War* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990).

⁵⁸ Monty Johnstone, 'The CPGB, the Comintern and the War, 1939-1941: Filling in the Blank Spots,' *Science and Society*, vol. 61, no. 1 (Spring 1997), pp. 27-45.

⁵⁹ Francis Beckett, *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party* (London: John Murray, 1995).

⁶⁰ Willie Thompson, *The Good Old Cause: British Communism 1920-1991* (London: Pluto Press, 1992).

crises of those turbulent years.⁶¹ Morgan and John Callaghan have also penned seminal biographies on, respectively, CPGB secretary Harry Pollitt and influential theoretician R. Palme Dutt.⁶² Both Pollitt and Dutt, far removed in style and personality, were significant figures in the communist world. Their influence extended beyond Britain, stretching as far afield as India and Australia. Both, though especially Dutt, were avid internationalists. The authors recognise this and aptly convey both individuals' internationalism, particularly Pollitt's exertions for Republican Spain in the 1930s and Dutt's efforts for colonial India. These biographies are important contributions to the historiography of international communism and will be drawn upon in this thesis. But next, we shift our focus to a comprehensive definition of proletarian internationalism.

⁶¹ Kevin Morgan, *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics, 1935-1941* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989).

⁶² Kevin Morgan, *Harry Pollitt* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); John Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993).

Chapter Two: The Ideological Foundations of Proletarian Internationalism

Internationalism has been a fundamental part of communism since the days of Marx and Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*, the document largely responsible for codifying communism and setting out its inviolable canons, heavily emphasised the imperative of internationalism in the cause of the proletariat. With the *Manifesto*'s famous concluding catchcry that the 'Workers of the world, unite!' Marx and Engels sought to mobilise the massive forces of the world working class against their oppressors, the bourgeoisie. Marx and Engels recognised the importance of the proletariat conduct its struggle on a global basis and were adamant that defeat of one's 'own' oppressor was insufficient. This chapter will explore these issues as well as examine the Leninist conception of proletarian internationalism, which formed the backbone of the CPA's understanding of proletarian internationalism.

The international dimensions of capitalism made the unity, and common action, of the workers of the world the only means by which capitalism could be defeated. According to *The Communist Manifesto*, the bourgeoisie gave production and consumption a cosmopolitan character in every country.¹ This resulted from the need to import wares peculiar to certain parts of the world in order to meet the insatiable demands of domestic markets. As Marx and Engels explained,

In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations.²

The bourgeoisie was globalising its influence and subjugating the toiling masses of other nations, consigning erstwhile 'barbarians' to a position analogous to that of the proletariat in the metropolitan countries – all, according to Marx and Engels, for the exclusive class interest of the bourgeoisie.

¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*, Third Australian ed. (Melbourne: The Workers' Educational Bureau, 1932), p. 28.

² *Ibid.*

With the global proliferation of capitalism, Marxist theory held that the bourgeoisie was also automatically exporting its form of class rule. The idea that the class in control of the means of production was also the hegemonic influence in society (through its arrangement of class relations and the state in a way congenial to its interests) was a tenet fundamental to Marxism. Hence, as long as the bourgeoisie maintained state power, ‘the working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got.’³ The state was an instrument of class rule; therefore, its leaders, interests and defence served bourgeois interests, which were of little value to the working class. The workers’ interests were instead best served through cooperation with other proletarians, irrespective of race or creed, and not with one’s ‘own’ bourgeoisie. Furthermore, according to Marx and Engels, the global expansion of the bourgeois mode of production transferred the class exploitation experienced by the metropolitan proletariat onto the colonised people. On this, Marx and Engels stated that the bourgeoisie ‘compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves...it creates a world after its own image.’⁴ The logical corollary was the diminution of various freedoms and a reign of oppression, which Marxists believed could only be resisted by the proletariat. Inevitably, as the bourgeoisie sought to sate its appetite for cheap resources and markets through global expansion, the class structures and antagonisms observed by Marx and Engels in Western nations would appear in colonial countries. These tensions would be exasperated by the added dimension of foreign subjugation. Hence, the proletariat’s problems and solutions in the West were identical, or would in time become identical (so long as capitalism existed), for the colonial world.

Despite Marx and Engels’ belief in the global uniformity of the proletariat’s interests, the national struggle was to take immediate priority. ‘The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie.’⁵ Yet this too had a nexus with the global struggle. Marx and Engels implored communists, in the context of the national struggle against the bourgeoisie, to also ‘point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality.’⁶ In proclaiming this, Marx and Engels indicated that while it was a matter of course that the proletariat must first settle matters with its ‘own’ bourgeoisie, only the defeat of the bourgeoisie on the global level could secure final victory in the class war. Communists could not concentrate

³ Ibid., p. 46.

⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

⁶ Ibid., p. 39.

on the national struggle to the detriment of the global contest, but had to wipe capitalism off the face of the world. Lenin too, as we shall see below in the section on international proletarian solidarity, shared this belief.

Socialist internationalism therefore stemmed from the Marxist analysis of capitalism. International cooperation between the working class was an unavoidable precondition for overthrowing capitalism. Since the bourgeoisie was perennially in search of new markets, sources of raw materials and cheap labour, capitalism was a global problem. No corner of the globe was spared its tyrannical exploitation. Thus, the class struggle was unavoidably global. For the proletariat to win that struggle, international cooperation between the proletariat of different countries was imperative. Victory over one's 'own' bourgeoisie was inadequate; the historic world struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat would draw in like a vortex any victorious proletarians attempting to remain aloof from the conflict raging in the rest of the world. International proletarian action, cooperation and solidarity would constitute the main arsenal of the class struggle; this formed the early basis of proletarian internationalism. Although proletarian internationalism would be elaborated by others in due course, Marx and Engels laid the foundation for its conceptualisation. But without a transnational organisation committed to socialist internationalism and the revolutionary values expressed in the *Manifesto*, internationalism would remain nothing but a utopian dream, binding socialists only in spirit, not in action.

The situation changed in 1864. In that year, proletarian internationalism first found transnational organisational expression in the form of the First International. Co-founded by Marx, it lasted until 1872 when various ideological schisms and the defeat of the Paris Commune signalled its death knell. The creation of 'an agency to coordinate the proletariat in its historic world wide struggle against capitalism' was the ostensible rationale underpinning the establishment of the First International.⁷ Although it existed for only eight years, the First International was revered by subsequent generations of socialists, including Lenin and his followers. It was the first step in the global unification of the class struggle and represented a strengthening of internationalism.⁸

The need for a new international body following the demise of the First International led to the creation of the Second International in 1889. The Second International was a

⁷ McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, p. xviii.

⁸ *Ibid.*

broader organisation than the First International, and presided over the rapid growth of the working class movement. However, the Second International was more decentralised than the First International, imparting the outward appearance of little more than a loose federation of autonomous parties.⁹ Lenin later perceived this to be among its greatest weaknesses. Nevertheless, the breadth of representation at the Second International meant that the exchange of experience and ideas, between member parties and leading luminaries of the International, became greater in frequency than was previously the case. The Second International therefore resulted in increased relations among global socialist parties.

The strengthening of fraternal links was not the limit of the development of proletarian internationalism during the existence of the Second International. Colonialism and the growing menace of imperialist war also received extensive attention. Yet the stance of the International on the so-called ‘colonial question’ was riddled with ambiguity and contradiction. The leaders of international socialism, especially those from countries with extensive colonial possessions, displayed a marked reluctance to call for the unconditional end of colonialism.¹⁰ Lenin later poured scorn over the hypocritical posturing of the leaders of the International, which at one moment would call for the granting of national self-determination, then in the next breath exempt the colonies of their ‘own’ country from enjoying those same rights.¹¹

However, the hypocrisy of the leaders of the International on the divisive issue of the First World War incurred Lenin’s harshest ire. The war wrought cataclysmic repercussions on international socialism. The International itself underwent an irreparable split. The menacing clouds of war had concerned socialists years in advance of the outbreak of war in 1914. Macabre prophecies of doom were forecast. Any war, it was believed, would be an imperialist misadventure, resulting in the needless slaughter of millions of workers. War profiteering was a near certainty, ensuring the war was in the interests of greedy capitalists. Workers, on the other hand, stood to gain absolutely nothing. Resolutions to this effect were passed at the Stuttgart congress of the Second International in August 1907, and were reaffirmed in later congresses at Copenhagen and

⁹ Ibid., p. xix.

¹⁰ On the Second International and the colonial question see Julius Braunthal, *History of the International, 1864-1914*, trans. Henry Collins and Kenneth Mitchell, English ed., vol. I (London: Thomas Nelson, 1966), pp. 305-319.

¹¹ V.I Lenin, *Lenin on the National and Colonial Questions: Three Articles* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1970) p. 18. See also the polemic in Lenin, *Lenin on the National and Colonial Questions*, pp. 1-19.

Basle.¹² Proletarian internationalism, so long as the leaders of international socialism remained faithful to their resolutions, was believed capable of preventing a senseless bloodbath.

Yet despite the solemn pledge of socialists to vigorously oppose the participation of 'their' government in any imperialist war, the outbreak of war in August 1914 resulted in an about face which split the international socialist movement. Second International affiliates in all major belligerent nations with representative government voted for war credits, and were duly swept up in the eruption of mass national chauvinism which greeted war. The affiliates of the Second International had severely compromised proletarian internationalism. Following this chain of events, Lenin announced his battle cry: 'The Second International is dead...long live the Third International.'¹³

The central issue underpinning the split in the Second International was working class internationalism in a time of war. The parties that had voted for war credits and provided their governments with unconditional support had not only ignored the resolutions of the International, but had also neglected their responsibility to the working class, both national and international. Meanwhile, a separate grouping remained somewhat aloof from the flood of jingoism that greeted the outbreak of war. This group eventually formed the nucleus of socialist opposition to the war. It was this anti-war tendency that split away from the Second International following the conference of anti-war parties that met at the Swiss town of Zimmerwald in 1915, and led to the emergence of a 'left' opposition to the war, known as the Zimmerwald Left. Lenin was associated with the Zimmerwald Left.¹⁴

Up until the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917, Lenin was not a notable figure in the international socialist movement. His party, rent with internal division and suffering under the fiercest oppression at the hands of the Tsarist secret police for most of its existence, could claim only a tiny, albeit dedicated, following, yet largely unknown beyond socialist circles in Russia. Indeed, the Russian labour movement itself was hardly a significant factor in international socialism. When war broke, it appeared the least

¹² See Braunthal, *History of the International, 1864-1914*, pp. 320-356 for the International and its attitude to war, and pp. 361-363 for the text of the Stuttgart resolution on militarism and the international conflicts.

¹³ Quoted in McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, p. xix.

¹⁴ See David Kirby, 'Zimmerwald and the Origins of the Third International,' in Rees and Thorpe (eds.), *International Communism and the Communist International*, pp. 15-30, for an account of the origins of the Zimmerwald Left and Lenin's complex relationship with it.

capable of striking the first blow against capitalism. Yet it was Lenin and his colleagues that struck the first blow against capitalism and contributed most to subsequent thinking on proletarian internationalism.

Before embarking on a detailed discussion on Lenin's formulation of proletarian internationalism, a note on sources is necessary. The chief source drawn upon in the following discussion is a compilation published in 1967 containing extracts from Lenin's works concerning different aspects of proletarian internationalism dating between 1894 and 1922.¹⁵ Many of the extracts were drawn from articles or books written by Lenin, though some of his speeches and letters relevant to proletarian internationalism were also included and are used in the following discussion. Many of these were published during Lenin's lifetime, or soon after his death. Nearly all were in the public domain prior to 1928, which is the first year with which this thesis is concerned. Most of the materials contained in the book, and used here, were known to the leaderships of communist parties, particularly those leaders who had studied at Comintern schools. Moreover, these sources were often featured in the communist press or were available at communist bookshops.

We now turn to establishing an understanding of Lenin's conception of proletarian internationalism. There were four discernable elements, all of which required action to reinforce word. These were: the imperative of international organisation; genuine international proletarian solidarity; a consistent approach to the national and colonial questions; and the correct class analysis to inform the socialist position on war.

Proletarian Internationalism and the Imperative of International Organisation¹⁶

From early in his career as a revolutionary, Lenin demonstrated an acute understanding of internationalism and its significance to the victory of socialism. He also attached immense importance to the need for an international organisation to lead the world proletarian revolution to a victorious conclusion. Capitalism was international; therefore, the proletariat's emancipation could only be international. Hence the imperative for revolutionaries to organise on an international basis. In one of his first published articles, written in 1894, Lenin defended internationalism against 'subjective philosophers' who claimed that the First International had failed to 'prevent the French and German workers

¹⁵ V.I. Lenin (ed.), *On Proletarian Internationalism* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1967).

¹⁶ Henceforth, when reference is made to this aspect of proletarian internationalism and for the sake of simplicity, I will use the phrase 'organisational element of proletarian internationalism' or a variation thereof.

from cutting each other's throats and despoiling each other' during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871, and that internationalism was, *ipso facto*, unattainable and utopian. The 'subjective philosophers' claimed that the International's chief failure was its inability to settle accounts with 'national vanity and national hatred.'¹⁷ In his defence of internationalism, and conveying his solid belief in the necessity to organise the working class internationally, Lenin wrote:

... there is no other way of combating national hatred than by organising and uniting the oppressed class for a struggle against the oppressor class in each separate country, than by uniting such national working class organisations into a single international working class army to fight international capital.¹⁸

The importance of international organisation of the workers remained a mainstay of Lenin's thinking and actions beyond the triumph of the October revolution. The need for an international body to coordinate the 'international working class army' formed a major pillar of the Leninist conception of proletarian internationalism, one which the CPA, through its affiliation to the Comintern, also acknowledged as an integral part of proletarian internationalism.

Lenin stressed the importance of global cohesiveness in the conduct of socialist parties. As all workers were engaged in the fight against the bourgeoisie, Lenin argued that

Working class organisation and solidarity is not confined to one country or one nationality; the workers' parties of different countries proclaim aloud *the complete identity (solidarity) of interests and aims* of the workers of the whole world. They come together at joint congresses, *put forward common demands to the capitalist class of all countries*, have established an international holiday of the entire organised proletariat striving for emancipation (May Day), thus welding the working class of all nationalities and of all countries into one great workers' army. The unity of the workers of all countries is a necessity arising out of the fact that the capitalist class, which rules over the workers, does not limit its rule to one country.¹⁹

It is notable that this passage appears to highlight at an early stage what would become synonymous with Lenin's conception of an organised international working class body,

¹⁷ Lenin, *On Proletarian Internationalism*, p. 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11. Emphasis added.

that is, as a disciplined monolith. Obviously the intended ends – namely, the abolition of capitalism and the inauguration of socialism – were identical worldwide. But Lenin's stipulate that workers 'put forward common demands to the capitalist class of all countries,' suggested that revolutionaries maintain identical policies to achieve the socialist objective. These would presumably be set with the assistance of the International's central leadership. Hence, the Leninist International, which was typically reflected in the Comintern of the early 1920s, was to be united and disciplined, espousing identical policies like any other cohesive political party. 'Exceptionalism,' the practice of excepting one's own country from international decisions, was to be avoided. The imperative for both discipline and the frowning on 'exceptionalism' were maintained in Stalin's Comintern. However, as will be seen for instance in chapter three with respect to the inception of the Third Period, its belated adoption by the Australian party caused it to deviate from the international cohesion and discipline sought from the Comintern. That incident in particular symbolises the complexity of Comintern-communist party relations, one that has been understated in past scholarship.

Lenin's thinking on the requirements for an effective International evolved further with the outbreak of the Great War. The hypocritical position adopted by the majority of the Second International's affiliates shattered Lenin's faith in its usefulness. However, he remained steadfast on the necessity of an International to conduct the fight for socialism. As indicated above, he had declared the Second International dead and demanded the establishment of a new International. Whenever it was formed, Lenin envisaged that it would be 'purged not only of "turncoats"...but of opportunism as well.'²⁰ Thus, Lenin's new International, imaginary until 1919, was to be entirely free of elements not wholeheartedly committed to revolution, a necessary measure if it was to avoid its predecessor's mistakes and successfully carry forward its revolutionary objectives. It would be a Bolshevik party on a global scale; a world party, not a loose association of fellow travellers. The war had wrought a great schism in the ranks of international socialism, never to be healed, between a revolutionary and reformist tendency. National chauvinism, largely responsible for precipitating the split, among other heretical deviations, was to be excised from the new International.²¹

Lenin's dream became reality in 1919. The Third International, through its exacting twenty-one conditions of affiliation that spelled out strategy, tactics and organisation,

²⁰ Ibid., p. 103.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 141-142.

reflected his ardent belief in keeping the organisation limited only to devoted revolutionaries and loyal followers of the principles outlined in this chapter. The world communist party was firmly committed (at least in its early history) to proletarian internationalism, constantly vigilant against right and left deviations, against 'exceptionalist' and 'reformist' elements within the ranks. It set out general policy frameworks that individual detachments (or 'sections' to use Comintern parlance) of the Comintern were bound to implement; if the communist parties erred, more direct intervention was possible, as evidenced in the Australian mission of American Comintern emissary Harry Wicks, which will be discussed in chapter four. In a word, Lenin's Comintern was the general staff of the world revolution; it issued commands that had to be obeyed. According to Lenin's conception, any that refused to submit to the twenty-one conditions or quibbled with the Comintern's decisions would be excluded or expelled. In the Third International, a repeat of the indiscipline of the great betrayal of 1914 was impermissible. Only rigid centralisation could forestall a reoccurrence. This was the rationale underpinning Lenin's regulation of the organisational dimension of proletarian internationalism. The CPA, too, would become well versed in the practice of periodic purges conducted to rid the party of alleged deviators, as will be discussed in chapter four, in the name of fidelity to the international line. Other chapters will also relate the complexity of this aspect of proletarian internationalism, which permitted the CPA to avoid timely implementation of some of the Comintern's edicts and escape censure. In practice, Lenin's strict discipline was looser than his theories would permit.

An international organisation committed to revolution would inevitably fail in its task without genuine international solidarity of the working class. As referred to earlier, Marx recognised the centrality of this point for revolutionary breakthroughs. Lenin also attached profound significance to it.

Proletarian Internationalism and International Proletarian Solidarity

The fundamental premise underpinning Lenin's belief in the necessity of international proletarian solidarity was little different from that of Marx. As Lenin wrote:

Capitalist domination is international. This is why the worker's struggle in all countries for their emancipation is only successful if the workers fight jointly against international capital. That is why the Russian worker's comrade in the fight against the capitalist class is the German worker, the Polish worker, and the French worker,

just as his enemy is the Russian, the Polish, and the French capitalists.²²

The supposition of a common plight of the proletarians of all nations underpinned Lenin's statement. Solidarity was necessary in the fight for class emancipation as all proletarians shared a stake in the success of their comrades in other lands. Although this passage predates the Great War, there was little change in Lenin's commitment to it throughout his life. It was his firm belief that revolutionaries must never depart from the values of international proletarian solidarity; proletarians engaged in the same struggle around the world required genuine solidarity linking their struggles, backed with meaningful action. As will be shown in later chapters, the CPA's practice evolved into a fuller attainment of this point.

The catastrophic consequences of the Great War underscored the importance of international proletarian solidarity. Lenin believed that if socialists remained faithful to international proletarian solidarity, then the horrors of the Great War could have been avoided. The distinguished German social democratic theoretician, Karl Kautsky, incurred Lenin's harshest wrath for failing to remain loyal to international proletarian solidarity during the war. Lenin later outlined the duty of internationalists, which the 'renegade' Kautsky had failed to fulfill, in the following passage:

Internationalism means breaking with one's own social-chauvinists (i.e., defence advocates) and with one's own imperialist government; it means waging a revolutionary struggle against that government and overthrowing it, and being ready to make the greatest national sacrifices (even down to a Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty), if it should benefit the development of the world workers' revolution.²³

We know that the majority of socialists renounced international solidarity and rallied to the defence of 'their' country. Lenin, along with a handful of others, remained committed to the values of international proletarian solidarity. Proletarians could not fight the wars of the bourgeoisie, killing downtrodden compatriots from opposing armies, while also claiming to adhere to international proletarian solidarity. According to Lenin, the proletariat had to turn its guns on the bourgeoisie. This was not the view of the 'social-chauvinists,' and marked a permanent schism between revolutionaries and reformists on the outbreak of war in 1914.

²² Ibid., p. 12.

²³ Ibid., p. 223.

Lenin's idea of solidarity demanded self-sacrificial action. Internationalism in deed, not merely phrasemongering, was the measure of true commitment.²⁴ As he once wrote, while excoriating 'petit-bourgeois nationalists' who provided mere lip-service to the equality of nations,

[P]roletarian internationalism demands, first, that the interests of the proletarian struggle in any one country should be subordinated to the interests of that struggle on a world wide scale, and, second, that a nation which is achieving victory over the bourgeoisie should be able and willing to make the greatest national sacrifices for the overthrow of international capital.²⁵

This encapsulates the solidarity and self-sacrificing spirit fostered by proletarian internationalism. The focus was international, not national, to the point where one's 'own' domestic struggle was subordinate to the greater global good; that even a nation that was winning against its 'own' bourgeoisie was expected to make even greater sacrifices for the advance of the global cause. And action always spoke louder than words. The Internationals had been, since Marx's day, entrusted with translating internationalist campaigns from word into deed. The failure of the Second International to fulfill its duty has already been mentioned. Yet even without the assistance of an international body, Lenin still expected individual proletarians to fulfill their international obligations. Thus he warned West European reactionaries against interference in the 1905 revolution, as Lenin believed the proletariat of Europe would not tolerate, and would in fact resist, any attempt at intervention.²⁶ International proletarian solidarity, therefore, transcended other loyalties; nationalism was not insuperable. One's 'own' government could not be permitted to interfere in the advance of a foreign proletariat without inviting a backlash from its own proletariat. By way of illustration, the CPA, an ardent practitioner of this stipulate, warned 'its' government on countless occasions that the Australian proletariat would not tolerate interference in the affairs of proletarians of other lands, and would buttress this warning with action.

The primacy of class identity over national identity was continually underscored by Lenin. Efforts by domestic chauvinists to divide the international solidarity of the working class through the encouragement of national hatred were vigorously countered. One such

²⁴ Ibid., p. 177.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 299.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 38.

incident occurred in 1899 during an uprising in China, which elicited this sharp attack from Lenin against the Russian press, which was calling for Russian intervention:

...the duty of all class-conscious workers is to rise with all their might against those who are stirring up national hatred and diverting the attention of the working people from their real enemies [i.e. the bourgeoisie].²⁷

Its significance rests in the warning that the Russian proletariat would not remain aloof while Russian reactionaries intervened against the forces of progress in China. Identity with the plight of the Chinese toilers was more significant than the shared national bonds with the Russian bourgeoisie. On a separate occasion, Lenin wrote

Those who seek to serve the proletariat must unite the workers of all nations, and unswervingly fight bourgeois nationalism, *domestic* and foreign.²⁸

According to Lenin, socialists were given no choice other than to unite the world proletariat in a common fight against bourgeois nationalism wherever it manifested itself. Any attempt to divide the proletariat, from any source, was contrary to Lenin's understanding of solidarity. For Lenin, the racial, ethnic and national origin of the proletariat was immaterial. National hatreds, as with national interests, were engineered by bourgeois chauvinists, intent on dividing the working class, both nationally and internationally. Therefore workers would have no option other than to resist nationalistic impulses for the sake of maintaining a united working class. The accusation hurled at the CPA throughout its history, that it was 'disloyal,' stemmed from its devotion to, and active agitation for, this very point.

Increased efforts were required on behalf of proletarians in colonial and semi-colonial nations, as well as national minorities, subjugated by one's own country. We are not concerned at present with the related conception of anti-colonial policy. That will be considered later. For now, our focus is confined to the obligations of the proletariat in metropolitan countries, in the spirit of international proletarian solidarity, to colonial nations. Lenin envisaged that under a socialist system, the class solidarity between erstwhile colonial slaves, or oppressed national minorities, and the metropolitan

²⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 80. Emphasis in original.

proletariat would deliver ‘[t]he unity of the workers of all nationalities coupled with the fullest equality for the nationalities and the most consistently democratic state system.’²⁹ Equality among different nations, and in particular solidarity between the proletariat of the oppressor and oppressed countries, was essential for the triumph of world revolution. Lenin elaborated further:

Recognition of the equality of nations and languages is important to Marxists, not only because they are the most consistent democrats. The interests of proletarian solidarity and comradely unity in the workers’ class struggle call for the fullest equality of nations with a view to removing every trace of national distrust, estrangement, suspicion and enmity. And full equality implies the repudiation of all privileges for any one language and the recognition of the right of self-determination for all nations.³⁰

In other words, only genuine action (beyond mere words) from the metropolitan proletariat could win the trust of the colonial proletariat and the proletariat of the national minorities and thereby strengthen the unity and solidarity of the international proletariat. Only after the metropolitan proletariat had won the trust of the oppressed proletariat could a triumphant socialist revolution, which would deliver the above promises of national equality, be achieved. With the objective of winning the trust and cooperation of colonial and migrant proletarians for the prospective revolution, the CPA became a pioneer in combating racism and xenophobia, championing the cause of Aborigines and migrants, while also demanding better treatment for the toilers under Australian and British colonial rule. In this scenario, international solidarity was winning the trust of foreign comrades and laying the foundations for future joint revolutionary actions.

Lenin was provided the opportunity to test and further elaborate his ideas on solidarity after the October revolution. Following the Bolshevik revolution, class conscious proletarians now had a workers’ state committed to socialism, towards which they could lend their wholehearted solidarity. While the nascent Bolshevik state, struggling for survival, desperately required the solidarity of the world proletariat, its leaders hinted that the new state would manifest solidarity with tangible assistance after the Civil War turned in their favour. Indeed, while the Civil War was ongoing, the Bolsheviks established the Comintern for the ostensible purpose of spreading the revolution westward, upon which the survival of the Bolshevik regime was, at the time, believed to

²⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 87.

depend. The Civil War presented an opportunity to test the extent to which the proletariat and the Bolsheviks were prepared to put into practice their solidarity. During the dire circumstances confronting the Bolsheviks in mid 1918, Lenin, expecting some relief from the world proletariat, said:

Aware of the isolation of its revolution, the Russian proletariat clearly realises that an essential condition and prime requisite for its victory is the united action of the workers of the whole world, or of several capitalistically advanced countries.³¹

Defence of, and solidarity with, the Bolshevik state was an expectation of Lenin's.³² Class conscious workers could not rebuff the appeals of the Bolsheviks during their hour of peril. And when support for the Bolsheviks during the Civil War from 'proletarian fighters' in the interventionist and imperialist armies was forthcoming, Lenin's faith in international proletarian solidarity seemed vindicated. He praised the role of the European proletariat, concluding that without the support of some of the interventionist soldiers and sailors, the Red Army's successes in the Civil War would perhaps never have materialised.³³ When the Soviet Union was confronted with a similar situation over twenty years later during the Second World War, the CPA exhibited indefatigable solidarity with Soviet Russia. It agitated to increase Australian aid to the Soviet Union, by way of communists joining the fighting forces, radically boosting production or contributing in some way to the various 'Aid Russia' committees. Such activity was precisely the sort of assistance Lenin expected.

Proletarian Internationalism and the National and Colonial Questions

Another dimension of proletarian internationalism inseparable from international solidarity was the so-called national and colonial questions. It was responsible for determining communist approaches on colonial policy (called the colonial question) and domestic ethnic minorities (called the national question). The Leninist conception of the national and colonial questions was perhaps the most documented of all the elements of proletarian internationalism. His writings opposing imperialism became holy writ for communists, including Australian communists, for decades to come.

³¹ Ibid., p. 214.

³² Ibid., p. 206.

³³ Ibid., pp. 271-274.

Lenin's estimation of nationalism and colonialism was that both were the creation of capitalism. The national and colonial questions were indivisible from the class struggle. Consequentially, understanding and resolving these questions could only come through an analysis revolving around the class struggle. Lenin's views, however, were more complex than a simple blanket opposition to colonialism and nationalism. For example, Lenin wrote in 1903:

The Social-Democrats will always combat every attempt to influence national self-determination from without by violence or by any injustice. However, *our unreserved recognition of the struggle for freedom of self-determination does not in any way commit us to supporting every demand for national self-determination.*³⁴

This appears a contradiction of solidarity through its suggestion that not all struggles for self-determination were worthy of the support of Lenin's party. The key, however, to understanding this rests in Lenin's class analysis. As Lenin explained, not all self-determination³⁵ movements were led by the proletariat. Thus the success of such movements did not guarantee the liberation of the proletariat from the clutches of the bourgeoisie:

...the Social-Democratic Party *considers it to be its positive and principal task to further the self-determination of the proletariat in each nationality rather than that of peoples or nations* [as a whole]. We must always and unreservedly work for the *very closest* [sic] unity of the proletariat of all nationalities, and it is *only in isolated and exceptional cases* that we can advance and actively support demands conducive to the establishment of a new class state or to the substitution of a looser federal unity....³⁶

This extract refers to movements of oppressed national minorities struggling for national self-determination and not colonial liberation movements. In this context, Lenin clearly admonished socialist support for most bourgeois led national self-determination movements, while even proletarian led movements were only marginally more acceptable. Lenin believed the interests of the disparate national groups in any given state were better served by united, rather than nationally divided, proletarian organisations. As a result,

³⁴ Ibid., p. 17. Emphasis added.

³⁵ Within the context of this discussion, national self-determination is understood to represent the desire of a national minority to achieve greater control over its own affairs from a larger and more oppressive national grouping, as distinct from colonial subjugation.

³⁶ Lenin, *On Proletarian Internationalism*, p. 17. Emphasis added.

national minorities should pin their hopes on the success of socialists within the boundaries of their home state. Moreover, national exclusiveness, chauvinism and the division and estrangement of nations, were ‘incompatible with proletarian internationalism, which advocates, not only closer relations between nations, *but the amalgamation of the workers of all nationalities in a given state in united proletarian organisations.*’³⁷ In the Australian context, this would see the CPA endeavour to bring migrants and Aborigines into the pre-existing organisations of the proletariat (such as trade unions) while also devising policies aimed at combating racism and xenophobia. It secured the CPA’s fervent advocacy of Aboriginal self-determination. In addition, ‘bourgeois’ (namely non-communist) migrant groups were objects of derision at different stages during the party’s history.

Lenin’s position on national self-determination must be differentiated from that on colonial liberation. In colonial liberation struggles, even bourgeois liberation movements were to receive the endorsement of the proletariat of the imperialist countries and the colonies. At the same time, the proletariat had to maintain its independence and not join too closely with the bourgeoisie.³⁸ Lenin was emphatic in his demand that ‘real’ socialists and internationalists from the oppressor nations had to agitate for the independence of the colonies. Word backed by action was necessary; only it could demolish mistrust between oppressor and oppressed, strengthening international proletarian solidarity. Failure to fulfill this would reveal the offending socialists as chauvinists and imperialists.³⁹ This point held obvious poignancy for the CPA, which devoted extensive attention to colonial liberation.

Even in the absence of colonial liberation movements, Lenin demanded the proletariat of the oppressor nations agitate for the freedom of the colonies. Work was to be carried out in a number of spheres. In the colonies themselves, Lenin urged socialists to conduct ‘revolutionary work’ among the occupation forces.⁴⁰ Domestically, Lenin insisted that socialists pursue the following: ‘In the internationalist education of the workers of the oppressor countries, emphasis must necessarily be laid on their advocating freedom for the oppressed countries to secede and *their fighting for it*. Without this there can be no internationalism.’ This again emphasised constant action from the proletariat of the oppressor countries for the independence of the colonies. Moreover, it placed the interests

³⁷ Ibid., p. 87. Emphasis added.

³⁸ On this point, see Neil Harding, *Leninism* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 132-133.

³⁹ Lenin, *On Proletarian Internationalism*, pp. 131-132.

⁴⁰ Lenin, *Lenin on the National and Colonial Questions*, p. 36.

of the entire proletariat ahead of ‘one’s own’ nation and, indeed, the subordination of ‘the particular to the general interest.’ In order to achieve this, revolutionaries were expected to fight against small nation narrow-mindedness, seclusion and isolation. This would be most pertinent to the Communist Party of Australia in the context of its agitation for the independence of New Guinea, India and other colonial countries.⁴¹

In light of the above, it could be assumed that socialists were bereft of national pride or that national pride was deprecated as another bourgeois device used to stymie the global cohesiveness of the proletariat. Indeed, Lenin had written that ‘bourgeois nationalism and proletarian internationalism – these are the two irreconcilably hostile slogans that correspond to the two great class camps throughout the capitalist world...’⁴² However, Lenin rejected tendencies to dismiss national pride: ‘Is a sense of national pride alien to us, Great-Russian class-conscious proletarians? Certainly not!’⁴³ How, precisely, could this be congruent with proletarian internationalism?

Lenin’s justification of national pride was simple. Socialists were to consider themselves patriots by virtue of what they sought to create for ‘their own’ proletariat, which in turn would contribute to the advancement of the interests of the global proletariat.

We love our language and our country, and we are doing our very utmost to raise her toiling masses (i.e. nine-tenths of her population) to the level of a democratic and socialist consciousness.⁴⁴

The oppression of the Russian proletariat by the Tsar, nobility and the bourgeoisie appalled Lenin. His national pride and consequent patriotism stemmed from identification with Russia’s oppressed peoples and those in the nation’s past that identified with their plight. If one had the interests of the oppressed at heart, and when they comprised the majority of the nation (in the Russian context nine-tenths of the nation), effectively becoming the nation, then national pride and patriotism for the people, as opposed to the state, was acceptable. So too was pride in the radical traditions of the past that sought to advance the cause of liberation for the downtrodden; socialists would merely be following in the footsteps of these predecessors. Socialists, by taking an interest in the wellbeing of the oppressed, were to lead them to emancipation and a better

⁴¹ All quotations from Lenin, *On Proletarian Internationalism*, p. 160. Emphasis added.

⁴² Ibid., p. 81.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 108.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

existence. Thus revolutionary socialists were the most patriotic of all classes. This was deemed universally true for all socialists in the capitalist countries and, indeed, the CPA during its periods of moderation (discussed in chapter five) would likewise seek to establish its patriotic credentials.

Nevertheless, internationalism remained the fulcrum of revolutionary activity. While asserting that national pride was not alien to class-conscious proletarians, Lenin also upheld the slogan that ‘the working man has no country,’ so long, of course, as the proletariat did not enjoy state power. He identified four points that validated this slogan. First, the workers’ economic position was not national but international. Second, the class enemy was international. Third, the conditions of the proletariat’s emancipation were international. Fourth, the international unity of the workers was more important than the national.⁴⁵ Further, ‘a distinction must necessarily be made between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation, the nationalism of a big nation and that of a small nation.’⁴⁶ In outlining the preceding points, Lenin intended that proletarians never lose sight of internationalism, while also ensuring that class conscious proletarians of the oppressor nations did not confuse national pride with nationalism, which could consolidate colonialism. Nationalism of small nations was liberationist and progressive, while that of the larger nations was expansionistic and therefore imperialist. Lenin never wearied of reminding socialists that no nation could be free so long as it held other nations under subjugation. The CPA, too, seldom lost sight of this point.

Proletarian Internationalism and War

The final pillar of proletarian internationalism concerned the socialist attitude towards war. Fundamental in determining whether a war was justified was the identity of the class whose interests were best served by the conflict. Wars fought by bourgeois governments were imperialist and did not merit endorsement. Hence, the 1905 Russo-Japanese war was the first major conflict involving Russia during Lenin’s life as a revolutionary. Lenin opposed the war on the grounds that it was an imperialist war of plunder. Neither Russia nor Japan could claim any right to a presence in the contested region, which was populated with Chinese and supposed to be under Chinese sovereignty.⁴⁷ Moreover, both

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 166-167.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 331-332.

⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, pp. 33-36.

governments were instruments of bourgeois class rule; workers, therefore, could have no interest in a bourgeois war.

Lenin's opposition to imperialist war was maintained during the outbreak of World War I. The hypocritical postures adopted by the Second International and its member parties have already been referred to. Lenin, however, remained consistent with his own oppositionist ideas on imperialist war. He certainly was not one to be swept along by the outbreak of mass chauvinism that greeted war in 1914, nor was he to become an opportunist and support the war simply because it was popular. He opposed the war as a bourgeois inspired imperialist war, where the proletariat had been 'hoodwinked' into fighting. The war's aims were nothing more than the seizure of colonies and the ruin of rival nations.⁴⁸

Lenin believed imperialist war should be resolved by the proletariat. He retained immense faith in the revolutionary potential of class conscious workers, even though he became bitterly disillusioned with the leaders of European Social Democracy.⁴⁹ His proposed solution to the imperialist war was domestic; the 'chief enemy is at home' he proclaimed.⁵⁰ Thus, he raised the slogan 'turn the imperialist war into civil war,' which would result in the defeat of capitalism and the bourgeoisie and lead to 'the formation of a republican United States of Europe...'⁵¹ The answer to imperialist war was revolutionary defeatism. Yet the CPA, for reasons of expediency that shall be explored in chapter five, failed to adopt similar strategies for the termination of the Second World War during its initial 'imperialist' phase.

However, wars were not to be opposed *per se*. Communists were no pacifists. The class character of a war was the essential condition in determining a socialist's attitude. As Lenin wrote:

Every war is violence against nations, but that does not prevent socialists from being in favour of a revolutionary war. The class character of war – that is the fundamental question which confronts a socialist.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 91.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 92-93.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 180.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 95-97.

⁵² Ibid., p. 229.

Lenin argued that the character of a war did not depend on who the attacker was, or in which country the enemy was stationed. Instead 'it depends on what class is waging the war, and on what politics this war is a continuation of.'⁵³ If the war were between two world groups of bourgeois imperialists, both were (so the reasoning went) interested in nothing more than plunder, thereby making it the duty of internationalists to prepare for the 'world proletarian revolution as the only escape from the horrors of a world slaughter.' Only wars that facilitated the hastening of the proletarian revolution; wars waged by the proletariat itself; wars of small countries and colonies fighting for independence (such as Abyssinia and China in the 1930); and war fought by progressive elements against reactionary adversaries (as was the situation in the Spanish Civil War) were to receive the support of socialists. Certainly wars for the defence of the worker's fatherland were condoned, and the proletariat was expected to rally alongside the Soviet Union. That, according to Lenin, was the meaning of internationalism during war and was the duty of 'the internationalist, the revolutionary worker, the genuine socialist.'⁵⁴ The points made in this section will be elaborated in chapter five when the CPA was confronted with civil and world wars.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the Leninist conception of proletarian internationalism that will be the conceptual framework of this thesis. An understanding of this theory is essential as Lenin was considered infallible and, therefore, his word carried tremendous authority amongst members of communist parties the world over. It comprised four key elements that can be briefly identified as: the organisational element of proletarian internationalism; international proletarian solidarity; the national and colonial questions; and the correct attitude to war under proletarian internationalism. Clearly it was far broader than traditional historiographical representations suggest; proletarian internationalism was not just a code word for obedience to Russia. In time, proletarian internationalism would see new additions, elaborations and outright violations of its composite principals. In subsequent chapters, I will consider how the Communist Party of Australia applied these ideas; assess how closely it both adhered to and was influenced by these ideas; and whether it took some leeway in determining its own application of proletarian internationalism.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 230.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Chapter Three: Resisting the Third Period

This chapter will examine the period between 1928 and 1929. It traces the shift in policy within the Comintern from the united front to the Third Period's 'class against class,' the CPA's resistance to this policy change and the causes behind the removal of the Australian leaders responsible for resisting the Comintern line. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section will provide a detailed overview of the period before the 6th Comintern Congress, with subsections tracing the changing international line, new international organisations and domestic activity embarked upon by the CPA. The second part of the chapter will discuss the proceedings of the 6th Comintern Congress. The chapter's third section will explore the CPA's response to the 6th Comintern Congress, internationalist activity conducted by the CPA and events leading to the inception of the new Central Committee led by Herbert Moxon and L. L. Sharkey at the end of 1929.

The chapter will demonstrate that during this period, the CPA had an equivocal approach towards proletarian internationalism. This largely resulted either from domestic realities facing the party (e.g. the political inexpediency of opposing White Australia) or to outright objection to policies inaugurated internationally. The latter found clearest expression in the CPA's resistance to Comintern policy, specifically the relevance of the Third Period to Australia and the party's consequent reluctance to accept the 'class against class' tactic. In doing this the party both contradicted the organisational aspect of proletarian internationalism, and demonstrated the complexity of CPA-Comintern relations. Equivocation was also evident in the CPA's approach to anti-war work, which was central to proletarian internationalism. While the CPA abounded in anti-war propaganda, it was accompanied with little action. Similarly, the CPA's solidarity and anti-colonial work was rhetorically in keeping with those aspects of proletarian internationalism described in chapter two, though again lacked supporting action.

Before the 6th Comintern Congress: The Comintern Moves Left

The Changing International Line

In the eighteen months leading up to the 6th Congress in mid-1928, a fundamental shift to the left in the Comintern line was almost furtively executed. The old strategy of collaboration with social democracy became anathema. The 'new line's' emergence was protracted, yet far reaching. Two events were its immediate cause. First, as Stalin emerged triumphant over the 'left opposition' in the Communist Party of the Soviet

Union (CPSU) by late 1927, a new conflict was brewing with Bukharin. This partially accounts for the leftward swing in the CPSU and the Comintern; Stalin now required left-wing support for the struggle against Bukharin's right-wing and his ambitious new domestic policies intended to build socialism in one country. The second cause of the leftward swing was the unravelling of the united front following the opening of hostilities in China between Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) and the Communist Party of China (CCP). These events were the most significant in instigating the change in policy; but, as will be shown below, they were not the sole cause of the shift to the left.

The new policies were elaborated at three important meetings. These were the 15th CPSU Congress in December 1927 and two Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) Plena held in May 1927 and February 1928. Numerous features first visible here remained hallmarks of the new line: the so called 'war danger' against the USSR and the Chinese revolution; the internal 'right danger'; and capitalist rationalisation and its communist response which signalled the outbreak of hostility between communists and social democrats. For its part, the CPA was blissfully impervious to these changes; it did not draw the correct conclusions from the new line and only belatedly adopted its terms in late 1929.

The first meeting was the 8th ECCI Plenum in May 1927. It met during a tense period for the Soviet Union. The country was enveloped in a 'war scare,' with seemingly sound reasons. Russo-British relations had cooled and plummeted further following a raid on the Soviet trade delegation in London, the so-called Arcos raid. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were then severed. Events in China, as already mentioned, were taking a turn for the worse. Consequently, with the Soviets facing a less than amicable Britain and potential threat from China, the 'war danger' was the main topic for Plenum's consideration.¹

The 8th ECCI dissected the contributing factors to the 'war danger,' and predetermined the communist response to imperialist war. It predicted that a future war was likely to take the form of an aggression against the Soviet Union and/or the colonial liberation

¹ 8th ECCI Agenda contained in the Comintern periodical *International Press Correspondence* [hereafter *Inprecorr*], vol. 7, no. 31, 26 May 1927, p. 638. For the Arcos raid see H. Flory, 'The Arcos Raid and the Rupture of Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1927,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 12, no. 1, (1977).

movements. In the interim, communists were urged to concentrate on sloganeering and incessant propaganda against imperialist war.²

Budding hostility towards social democracy, linked to the war scare, was already notable. It was exacerbated by two events following the Plenum. Most significant was the September decision of the British Trade Union Congress (TUC) to dissolve the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee. Second was the refusal of the Austrian social democrats to call a general strike following a workers' uprising in Vienna. These events directly contributed to the discrediting and unravelling of the previous tactic of the united front 'from above.' By the 6th Comintern Congress a year later, it had been abandoned entirely. But at this Plenum, issues related to defence and colonial policy were the cause of vituperation against social democrats. The Plenum claimed that 'reformists' were aiding war preparations, directed particularly against China and the USSR.³ Further, the ECCI criticised the British 'reformists' for approving the dispatch of soldiers to quell rebellions in India and China. It encouraged a more confrontationalist stance by applauding the CPGB's energetic fight 'against the imperialist policy of the Labour Party.'⁴ The CPGB was instructed to continue its struggle against 'imperialist tendencies' in the labour movement and to continually explain to British workers 'that the colonial peoples are fighting the same capitalist enemy [as ourselves].'⁵ Similar activities were expected from all communist parties. Although this was a sign that the sectarianism of the Third Period was gathering pace, these tasks were also consistent with Leninist proletarian internationalism.

The emergent sectarianism of the 8th ECCI was intensified during the 15th CPSU Congress, which opened on 2 December 1927. It was the first since the expulsion of Trotsky on 14 November 1927.⁶ Trotsky's demise also signified the triumph of the Stalinist conception of proletarian internationalism. In August 1927, Stalin described an internationalist as one who 'unreservedly, unhesitatingly and without conditions is prepared to defend the USSR because it is the base of the world revolutionary movement.'⁷ Hence, the struggle against war in general and anti-Soviet war in particular,

² *Inprecorr*, vol. 7, no. 40, 14 July 1927, p. 896.

³ *Inprecorr*, vol. 7, no. 35, 16 June 1927, p. 737.

⁴ *Inprecorr*, vol. 7, no. 36, 23 June 1927, p. 765.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 768.

⁶ Leonard Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1970), p. 310.

⁷ Quoted in Geoffrey Stern, *The Rise and Decline of International Communism* (Aldershot: Edwin Elgar Publishing Limited, 1990), p. 71.

was nominated by Stalin as the touchstone of proletarian internationalism. While Lenin certainly attached importance to the defence of the USSR, he did not consider it to be the primary factor in deciding internationalism.

N. I. Bukharin, the then Comintern president, delivered the main Congress report that took a further step towards the Third Period. It is necessary to state here that it was Bukharin, not Stalin, who formulated the ideas underpinning the Third Period. Indeed, Stalin's line until late 1927 was, as McDermott and Agnew observe, essentially 'Bukharinist.'⁸ Stalin did, however, subsequently plagiarise and distort Bukharin's ideas. In his report, Bukharin characterised this new period in post-war capitalism as an epoch of wars and revolution, yet one in which a partial, relative and temporary⁹ stabilisation of capitalism had been attained. This was qualified with the observation of 'internal contradictions' of capitalist stabilisation largely absent in previous years. These were manifested in growing cases of economic decline; overproduction due to rationalisation/mechanisation; fiercer class struggles in the form of a 'capitalist offensive' against the wages and conditions of the workers (ostensibly to provide capitalists a competitive edge over rivals, though with the deleterious effect of shrinking the purchasing power of the domestic market); strikes to resist the 'capitalist offensive'; increased unemployment; and, of particular relevance to Australia, the removal of British unemployed to Australia.¹⁰ The resultant overproduction and contraction of domestic markets, in addition to the insatiable capitalist appetite for cheaper labour and resources, contributed to the increase in the so-called 'external contradictions' of capitalism. This was manifested most acutely in the threat of war as a solution to the simmering economic crisis, as capitalists aggressively turned to international markets to dispose of surplus goods. War was predicted between the imperialist states as they jostled for supremacy in the colonies or even turned their guns on the Soviet Union¹¹ In all this, social democracy was seen as a willing accomplice, thus positioning itself against the working class and the Soviet Union. However, this was a forecast. According to Bukharin, capitalism had not yet reached the abovementioned crisis.

⁸ See argument pursued by McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, p. 75.

⁹ According to communists, capitalism could only temporarily stabilise itself. This interpretation was influenced by basic Marxist tenets: that crisis was inherent under capitalism, that cyclical ups and downs were inevitable and that these factors would lead to the downfall of capitalism, a historically assured outcome.

¹⁰ *Inprecorr*, vol. 7, no. 73, 29 December 1927, p. 1671.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1672.

Bukharin had previously labelled this new period of post-war capitalism as the Third Period in 1926.¹² The first period from the end of the First World War to the mid-1920s was characterised by revolutionary struggle and communist advance. The second period from the mid-1920s was the era of capitalist stabilisation and the united front. The main feature of this Third Period was the return and intensification of the class struggle and capitalist crisis as a consequence of the abovementioned internal and external contradictions of capitalist stabilisation.

The intensification of the class struggle necessitated the adoption of policies in conformity with the Manichean slogan ‘class against class.’ This promoted the distinct identity of communist parties ‘as the sole working class party’ and therefore pitted communists against all other forces in society, though primarily against rivals for the leadership of the proletariat, the social democrats. In practice, this meant that communists were bound to challenge social democrats in all spheres – especially industrial and political. In the course of this struggle, prophesied Bukharin, communists would be victorious. Evidence for this was found in increased communist electoral victories, mass demonstrations, strikes and trade union influence won by communists in Europe.¹³ The prognosis was that the influence of communism would grow and that of social democracy would wane.

Bukharin’s assessment revealed ominous fault lines between himself and Stalin. Contradicting Bukharin’s assertion of a temporary capitalist stabilisation, Stalin argued that capitalist stabilisation was in the process of decay and that it was approaching (if not already in) a grave crisis, signalling that capitalism had unmistakably entered a period of destabilisation.¹⁴ Bukharin was subsequently forced to concede ground on this point. Additionally, he was forced to recognise the presence of a right-wing deviation from party policy (termed the ‘right-danger’), which, nevertheless, did not spare him criticism from certain Stalinists. Although seemingly minor, this division of opinion was a harbinger of conflict.

¹² For the origins and development of the Third Period see McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, pp. 68-80 and Matthew Worley, ‘Courting Disaster? The Communist International in the Third Period,’ in Worley (ed.), *In Search of Revolution*, pp. 1-17. See also Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe, ‘Introduction,’ in Rees and Thorpe (eds.), *International Communism and the Communist International*, p. 4.

¹³ *Inprecorr*, vol. 7, no. 73, 29 December 1927, pp. 1674-1675. ‘Sole working class party’ quote cited in McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, p. 73.

¹⁴ Campbell, *History of the Australian Labour Movement*, pp. 124-125.

Nevertheless, both were in strong agreement on the fiendish character of social democracy. On account of their centrality to Third Period communism, the deliberations on social democracy merit greater consideration. Bukharin argued that the leftward swing of the European proletariat was met with a turn to the right from the heads of social democracy in a desperate bid to retain influence. This idea was inseparable from the Third Period and provides an explanation for communist loathing of their reformist counterparts. Through their advocacy of conciliatory economic and industrial policies, the social democrats had shown their ‘complete capitulation to bourgeois ideology’ despite ‘left’ manoeuvres and posturing.¹⁵ He reasoned that social democratic policy, from its acceptance of the League of Nations to the idea of working within the bourgeois democratic state, shared little common ground with communist policy.¹⁶ Moreover, Bukharin’s powers of prophecy predicted that social democrats would rally to the defence of their own government in the event of war with the Soviet Union. ‘That is as clear as daylight’ said Bukharin. ‘Seen from this standpoint, all talk of sympathy for the Soviet Union is an open and malicious deception of the broad masses.’¹⁷ The ‘Resolution on the Report of the Delegation of the CPSU in the ECCI’ was even more scathing of social democracy. Part of the resolution read

In spite of the most varied hypocritical manoeuvres there is revealed precisely in this question the true nature of Social Democracy, which in reality is assisting the imperialists in organising the war against the Soviet Union.¹⁸

This assertion placed social democrats squarely in the camp of Russia’s and the Comintern’s enemies.

This prompted a further unravelling of the erstwhile tactic of the united front. A more belligerent approach towards the leaders of social democracy, complemented with the building of the united front ‘from below’ (that is with rank and file social democrats) around the fight against war and for the defence of the USSR, was the order of the day.¹⁹ Communist parties were advised to adopt class against class and go on the offensive by contesting elections in opposition to the social democrats, ostensibly to highlight their

¹⁵ *Inprecorr*, vol. 7, no. 73, 29 December 1927, p. 1675.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1676.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 2, 12 January 1928, p. 71.

¹⁹ *Inprecorr*, vol. 7, no. 73, 29 December 1927, p. 1676.

‘treachery’ and to assert the working class bona fides of the communist parties.²⁰ By the 1929 Australian federal elections, the CPA had still not grasped this change of tactics. The above changes in policy commonly, though incorrectly, ascribed to the 6th Comintern Congress, laid the foundation for hostility towards social democracy, the main feature of Third Period communism.

By the 9th ECCI Plenum, held in February 1928, international communism had unofficially entered the Third Period. ‘Class against class’ became the new orthodoxy. The perceived mass turn to the left and accompanying swing to the right from social democracy, asserted by Bukharin at the 15th CPSU Congress, was for communists becoming increasingly evident. It was also at this Plenum that the Stalinists begun to construct a dangerous ‘right deviation,’ intended, ultimately, to manoeuvre Bukharin out of the Comintern.²¹

The 9th ECCI dramatically escalated communist hostility toward social democracy. The British Labour Party was subjected to a severe diatribe, accused of betraying the working class and the Chinese and Indian revolutions, as well as preparing to ‘go over’ to the side of the bourgeoisie. As *Pravda* stated, the Comintern now had to ‘direct its whole front towards the most possible strengthening of the struggle against international social democracy, which constitutes the chief hindrance to the winning of the broad masses of the working class for communism.’²² Communist parties had to carve out an independent identity as the ‘only true party of the working class.’ Competition against social democrats in all spheres, using the united front from below, was encouraged for the purpose of winning the allegiance of the working class and the ‘complete exposure and annihilation of social democracy.’²³ This was the meaning of class against class.

With the universal validity of class against class assured, the Plenum set about formalising changes to the tactics of the CPGB and the Communist Party of France (PCF) initiated months earlier. While the CPGB and PCF came in for the greatest scrutiny, it is important to note that all other communist parties, including the CPA, were expected to draw lessons from the Plenum’s instructions and apply similar tactics, where relevant, to

²⁰ Ibid., p. 1677.

²¹ McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, p. 75.

²² *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 8, 16 February 1928, pp. 168-9.

²³ Ibid. p. 169.

their own situation.²⁴ This was common practice in the organisational dimension of proletarian internationalism.

The CPGB and PCF were directed to spurn electoral alliances with social democrats and contest elections. Through doing this, they would be asserting an independent identity and, therefore, fighting for the support of the working class. Any collaboration with the leaders of social democracy was forbidden.²⁵ Communists were instructed to work with rank and file social democrats against the reformist leadership. A leading British communist, R. Palme Dutt, aptly described the new line: the CPGB was to field the maximum number of candidates and ‘go forward as an independent party to direct and open conflict with the official reformist leadership of the Labour Party.’²⁶ The PCF, even prior to the Plenum, had undertaken to contest elections on a ‘class against class’ basis in opposition to the French Socialist Party (SFIO).²⁷ If before the Plenum there was any doubt as to the Comintern’s direction on social democracy, there was none after its conclusion.

This was the line of international communism leading into the 6th Comintern Congress. The sharp turn to the left, to the belligerent tactic of class against class and from the previous policy of the united front, had already been set in train by the Comintern. The 6th Congress need only approve what was a *fait accompli*.

New International Organisations

As described in chapter 2, Lenin believed a significant aspect of proletarian internationalism was the international organisation of revolutionaries. In this regard, there were a number of new international organisations that exerted a direct bearing on the CPA. Of these, three will be discussed: the League Against Imperialism (LAI), the Friends of the Soviet Union (FOSU) and The Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat (PPTUS).

²⁴ Indeed, the CPA published the Comintern resolution on the ‘English Question,’ which set out the CPGB tactic, in *The Communist: Theoretical Organ of the Communist Party of Australia*, no. 9, June 1928, pp. 17- 21.

²⁵ *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 12, 1 March 1928, pp. 253-4.

²⁶ *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 11, 1 March 1928, p. 233.

²⁷ See *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 8, 16 February 1928, p. 173-4. This was not without resistance and trepidation from both parties. The PCF leadership ‘saw little logic in a policy that could only result in greater victories for the right.’ The CPGB leadership shared similar sentiments. McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, p. 73.

In Brussels on the 10th of February 1927, a meeting of representatives of ‘oppressed peoples’ founded the World League Against Imperialism and for National Independence. Described as a broad gathering (communists supposedly only made up ten percent of the delegates²⁸) it was in fact the brainchild of German communist Willi Münzenberg and was a communist front from the outset.²⁹ Essentially, its aim was to create a broadly representative organisation with national chapters, whose task it would be to frustrate the war aims of ‘imperialist’ governments while simultaneously generating sympathy for colonial liberation movements. But the LAI was more than an international organisation of revolutionaries; its work, especially its bid to boost international solidarity and assist colonial liberation, clearly incorporated numerous dimensions of proletarian internationalism. Moreover, the LAI’s work was to be action driven, conducted in a true spirit of proletarian internationalism. As much of the meeting dealt with the sanguinary intentions of imperialist states, particularly in relation to China and India, speakers expressed the opinion that the only effective means of frustrating imperialism was through concerted action on the basis of international solidarity.³⁰ To stimulate solidarity, the likeness of the struggle in the metropolitan countries and the colonies was repeatedly expressed.³¹ International solidarity in the Leninist sense, as described in chapter 2, where word was reinforced with action, was the expressed intention of the LAI. However, it was not until 1930 that an Australian chapter of the LAI was formed.

Similarly, the FOSU was an attempt to organise the workers internationally on the basis of international proletarian solidarity, this time with the Soviet Union. During the celebrations of the 10th anniversary of the October revolution in 1927, a congress of ‘Friends of the Soviet Union’ met in Moscow. Its purpose was to ‘decide upon practical measures to defend the Revolution against the inevitable attacks of world capitalism.’³² The Congress, supposedly instigated by British workers, resulted in the formation of the FOSU. It pledged to ‘make impossible war on the Soviet Union,’ the Chinese revolution and ‘any country struggling for its freedom.’³³ The importance of its decisions impelled the *Workers’ Weekly*, the CPA’s official newspaper, to bemoan the absence of Australian

²⁸ *Inprecorr*, vol. 7, no. 16, 25 February 1927, p. 323.

²⁹ For Willi Münzenberg and his efforts organising communist fronts, see Stephen Koch, *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg and the Seduction of the Intellectuals* (London: Harper Collins, 1995).

³⁰ For a summary of the discussion, see *Inprecorr*, vol. 7, no. 16, 25 February 1927, pp. 328-331.

³¹ *Ibid.* See also John Callaghan, ‘The Communists and the Colonies: Anti-Imperialism Between the Wars,’ in Andrews, Fishman and Morgan (eds.), *Opening the Books*, pp. 4-22, for a discussion on the LAI tracing its formation and subsequent activities.

³² *Workers’ Weekly*, 20 January 1928, p. 4.

³³ *Ibid.* See also *Workers’ Weekly*, 27 January 1928, p. 3.

representation.³⁴ The *Weekly* demanded greater Australian representation in future, suggesting a delegation be sent to Russia to ‘learn the truth.’³⁵ Stalin was very willing to host foreign delegations; as McDermott and Agnew argue, delegations would return home to captive proletarian audiences with glowing accounts of life under socialism, thereby making it difficult for governments to recruit the working class of various countries for anti-Soviet war.³⁶ But like the LAI, it was not until 1930 that an Australian chapter of the FOSU was founded.

The Profintern³⁷ inspired Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat was of more immediate consequence to Australian comrades. It was formed after a conference of militants in Hankow from countries bordering the Pacific in May 1927. With Profintern general secretary Alexander Lozovsky keeping a watchful eye on proceedings, American communist Earl Browder became the inaugural PPTUS general secretary.³⁸ Representatives drawn largely from the militant fringes of the labour movements of various nations, including the USA, China, Britain, Japan, and France, were present at its founding conference.³⁹ The presence of an Australian delegation was foiled by the Bruce-Page government.⁴⁰ The stated intention of the PPTUS was to bolster ties between militants from the West and the East in order to, among other things, strengthen the fight against imperialism and war in the Pacific; defend the Soviet Union; support the Chinese revolution and other national liberation movements in the region; boost living standards in the Pacific; and overcome racial and national prejudices.⁴¹ In the Australian context, a fight against the White Australia policy was the most immediate task arising from these aims. The Profintern was largely responsible for the creation and staffing of the PPTUS, which in the opinion of Frank Farrell, aimed to ‘organise the unions of the Far East and

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *Workers' Weekly*, 20 January 1928, p. 5.

³⁶ McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, p. 52.

³⁷ The Profintern, or Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), was international communism's industrial wing. For a history of the Profintern, see Reiner Tosstorff, ‘Moscow Versus Amsterdam: Reflections on the History of the Profintern,’ *Labour History Review*, vol. 68, no. 1 (April 2003), pp. 79-97.

³⁸ See McKnight, *Espionage and the Roots of the Cold War*, for a description of the inaugural meeting.

³⁹ Frank Farrell, ‘The Pan-Pacific Trade Union Movement and Australian Labour, 1921-1932,’ *Historical Studies*, vol. 17, no. 69 (October 1977), p. 447, notes they were either communists or RILU affiliates.

⁴⁰ The Australian government would not grant visas to the Australian delegation. [Sydor Stoler] *What is the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat?* (Sydney: Labor Research and Information Bureau, 1928), pp. 32-33.

⁴¹ See *The Pan-Pacific Worker: Official Organ of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2 April 1928, p. 3 [all Australian editions unless stated otherwise]. See *ibid.* for the aims, objectives and reasons behind the convocation of the Hankow conference and the establishment of the PPTUS.

Pacific into a regional anti-imperialist bloc.⁴² Indeed, it is plausible that the intention behind the PPTUS was to create a union based anti-war body in the Pacific: the trans-national nature of the PPTUS made it an ideal coordinator of anti-war activity. Further, as will be evident in this chapter, the issue of war constantly appeared as a topic at PPTUS meetings.

The Australasian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) affiliated to the PPTUS shortly after its formation. Unsurprisingly, militants warmly welcomed the ACTU affiliation.⁴³ Militant Australian trade unionists were, after all, credited with having first devised the idea of a pan-pacific trade union organisation and of completing the preparatory work necessary for the formation of the PPTUS.⁴⁴ Less enthusiasm was forthcoming from conservative unions, such as the Australian Workers Union (AWU), which severely criticised the affiliation on the grounds that it undermined the White Australia policy.⁴⁵ However, it is not necessary to recount here the involvement of the ACTU in the PPTUS, as this has been done elsewhere.⁴⁶

Instead, focus will be limited to the policy of the Australian edition of the PPTUS journal, *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, which commenced publication in April 1928. The journal was under the nominal editorship of former communist and secretary of the NSW Labour Council, John ('Jock') S. Garden, but most of the editorial work was performed by communist Jack Ryan.⁴⁷ Equally significant was Sydor Stoler, nephew of Profintern general secretary Lozovsky. Arriving in Sydney in early 1928 and leaving in 1929, Stoler

⁴² Frank Farrell, 'Australian Labour and the Profintern,' *International Review of Social History*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1979), p. 43. See also Farrell, 'The Pan-Pacific Trade Union Movement and Australian Labour, 1921-1932,' pp. 444-447.

⁴³ *Inprecorr*, vol. 7, no. 66, 24 November 1927, pp. 1487-1488.

⁴⁴ *Inprecorr*, vol. 7, no. 36, 23 June 1927, p. 763; *What is the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat?*, pp. 29-32.

⁴⁵ Farrell, 'The Pan-Pacific Trade Union Movement and Australian Labour, 1921-1932,' pp. 450-451.

⁴⁶ See Farrell, 'The Pan-Pacific Trade Union Movement and Australian Labour, 1921-1932'; Farrell 'Australian Labour and the Profintern'; Farrell *International Socialism and Australian Labour*; Jim Hagan, *The History of the ACTU* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1981); James Bennett, 'Rats and Revolutionaries': *The Labour Movement in Australia and New Zealand, 1890-1940* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2004), pp. 88-92. Bennett also traces the interaction between the PPTUS, Australia and New Zealand, as well as relations between the communist parties of Australia and New Zealand. For this, see Bennett, 'The New Zealand Labour Movement and International Communism.'

⁴⁷ J. N. Rawling (unpublished manuscript) 'Communism Comes to Australia,' chapter 13, p. 4, Guido Baracchi papers (National Library of Australia [hereafter NLA] MS 5241, series 2). Ryan later admitted that he took over the editorship of the *Pan-Pacific Worker* upon the behest of the party although against his will. 'Ninth Annual Conference of the Communist Party of Australia, December 1929,' p. 48, CPA records (Mitchell Library [hereafter ML] MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 1).

helped establish the journal, which the Profintern helped finance.⁴⁸ He worked closely with Garden at the NSW Labour Council and the CPA and wrote numerous articles and pamphlets under various *noms de plume*.⁴⁹

The Pan-Pacific Worker's editorial policy aimed at spreading internationalist sentiment among Australian workers, thus breaking down the traditional national and racial barriers embodied in the White Australia policy.⁵⁰ Articles on the development of the Chinese and Indian revolutions, the ubiquitous menace of war, working conditions in the Soviet Union as well as industrial struggles in other parts of the Pacific, were regular features. Domestic politics also received considerable attention.

Feature articles on international issues sought to promote international solidarity and cooperation by raising the international awareness of Australian readers. Much attention was paid to the exploitation of Pacific labour, which, it was argued, was used to reduce wages in Australia.⁵¹ Some exhortations appealed to self-interest in the hope that it would foster greater international solidarity.⁵² For the PPTUS, international proletarian solidarity was 'more than a mere pious phrase.'⁵³ It was a large part of the organisation's *raison d'être* and integral to its efficacy, particularly in relation to the campaign against war.

The menace of war, predicted to bring the United States and Britain to blows (though Soviet involvement was also envisaged) was a constant theme in the pages of the *Pan-Pacific Worker*. Stopping war was integral to proletarian internationalism; and the *Pan-Pacific Worker* was willing to play its part. The Pacific was likely to be the main theatre in any future conflagration. Hence, Australian participation was inevitable.⁵⁴ The most effective means thought available to overcome the war danger was to increase international cooperation. In particular, the workers of Australia were enjoined to

establish the closest contact with the workers of all the other Pacific countries, in order to enable the workers of these countries to act in

⁴⁸ McKnight, *Espionage and the Roots of the Cold War*, p. 106.

⁴⁹ Among these were 'Carpenter' and 'S.S.' Correspondence Esmonde Higgins to J.D.B. Miller, undated, Guido Baracchi papers (ML MS 5765, box 1).

⁵⁰ *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2 April 1928, p. 2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25. The CPA also used this argument and praised the PPTUS in seeking to ameliorate the problem. *Workers' Weekly*, 29 June 1928, p. 2.

⁵² See, for example *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2 April 1928, p. 22.

⁵³ *What is the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat?*, p. 5.

⁵⁴ *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2 April 1928, pp. 23-25.

unison ...to carry on the struggle against the threatening imperialist war on the Pacific.⁵⁵

By stressing the similarities shared with Pacific workers, the PPTUS hoped to persuade proletarians that they were far too alike, despite the cries of White Australia advocates, to fight one another.

These issues were brought to the attention of the first secretariat meeting of the PPTUS held in Shanghai during 3-6 February 1928. Due to the ruthless 'white terror' then underway in China, the meeting was conducted under strict secrecy. Jack Ryan was sent as the Australian representative and chaired the meeting.⁵⁶ The Shanghai Conference, much like contemporaneous Comintern meetings, focused on the danger of war and strategies for its prevention.⁵⁷ Though unlike the Comintern, its policies are best described as a strange concoction of sectarianism with offers of unity to reformists. Confusion was soon eliminated; in months, the PPTUS would find itself traversing the same sectarian path as the Comintern.

The Conference acknowledged the threat of war and the liberation of oppressed peoples as the 'largest problems of the Pacific trade union movement.'⁵⁸ But next to articles in the *Pan-Pacific Worker*, adherents were unable to meet the lofty objectives of this task with corresponding action of their own. Inaction was symptomatic of more fundamental shortfalls. Browder pin-pointed the problem when he identified a lack of internationalism as a weakness among the PPTUS 'sections.' The danger of 'the tendency to provincialism,' along with its obvious incompatibility with international solidarity, was that it could obstruct action in defence of China or Russia. This presented a serious obstacle to the PPTUS sections from discharging their set tasks. Browder discerned the particular acuteness of the problem in the more industrially developed nations, such as Australia and Japan, and called for its 'breaking down.'⁵⁹ Essentially, overcoming provincialism underpinned the ultimately fruitless propaganda activities of the *Pan-*

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁶ This was after the recognised delegate, Duggan, and the two alternates, Garden and Howard, were unable to attend. Ibid., pp. 10.

⁵⁷ *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1 May 1928, p. 3. For detailed information on the deliberations of the Conference, see the reports by Earl Browder in Comintern records (Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of Contemporary Historical Documents [hereafter RC] Fond 534, Opus 4, Delo 216 [hereafter 534/4/216]).

⁵⁸ Earl Browder, 'The Pan-Pacific Secretariat Meeting,' p. 5 (RC 534/4/216).

⁵⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 4-5 and Earl Browder, 'Report on the Activities of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, Since the February Plenum,' p. 6 (RC 534/4/216).

Pacific Worker. Clearly, there was some distance yet before the PPTUS succeeded in instilling a sufficient level of international solidarity in its adherents.

Next to issues of war and solidarity, the Conference set out the ‘tasks’ it expected affiliates to perform. These assumed the form of directives, which Browder welcomed as it made the PPTUS ‘a real directing organ whose decisions will play an intimate part in the life of the workers and their trade unions.’⁶⁰ Moreover, this *modus operandi* was congruent with the organisational imperatives of proletarian internationalism as outlined in chapter two. Yet directives issued from afar to a largely isolationist labour movement succeeded in stimulating the ACTU’s contempt, aiding the forces opposed to affiliation with the PPTUS.⁶¹ One of the tasks related to the sensitive issue, for Australian unionists, of immigration and racial solidarity. The edict read as follows:

Discriminatory immigration laws in some countries, chiefly in Australasia [sic] and America, must be combated; while opposing all forms of mass immigration promoted by steamship companies, governmental agencies, and exploiters generally, we draw attention to the way the imperialists develop racial prejudices among the masses, utilising them to divide the workers into antagonistic groups fighting one another instead of the real enemy, which is international capitalism.⁶²

The Conference also made the decision, upon Ryan’s suggestion, to hold its next Congress in Australia during March 1929.⁶³ The Australian proponents of the PPTUS greeted this with unbridled delight. *The Pan-Pacific Worker* swiftly took up the duty of publicising it and setting out the tasks for its organisation, hastening to remind readers that one year was not a long time to make preparations.⁶⁴ The ACTU pledged to meet the requirements of the government in order to secure the admission into Australia of foreign delegates.⁶⁵ The CPA called it a ‘necessary congress’ due to the urgent need to coordinate

⁶⁰ Browder, ‘Report on the Activities of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, Since the February Plenum,’ p. 1 (RC 534/4/216).

⁶¹ This culminated in the ACTU’s disaffiliation in 1930. Farrell ‘Australian Labour and the Profintern,’ p. 49. The tasks set down by the PPTUS smacked against the reformist and legalist *modus operandi* of the ACTU. See *The Pan-Pacific Worker* vol. 1, no. 4, 15 May 1928, p. 11. Browder was also aware of the precariousness of the Australian affiliation. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶² *What is the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat?*, p. 43.

⁶³ Browder, ‘The Pan-Pacific Secretariat Meeting,’ p. 3 (RC 534/4/216).

⁶⁴ *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 1, no. 2, 15 April 1928, pp. 2-3.

⁶⁵ *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 1, no. 4, 15 May 1928, p. 5.

action against a Pacific war.⁶⁶ Optimism abounded; but as is shown later in this chapter, the federal government burst this communist bubble.

Generally, the policy of the PPTUS conformed to the Leninist conception of proletarian internationalism. It fulfilled Lenin's organisational expectations by accepting largely militants and revolutionaries into its ranks. The PPTUS also expected its 'sections' to perform tasks set out by it, providing the appearance of a centralised and disciplined international body for the coordination of revolutionaries.

The solidarity aspect of proletarian internationalism was greatly fulfilled by the PPTUS. *The Pan-Pacific Worker* regularly contained articles aimed at generating class and cross racial solidarity. The PPTUS also issued appeals to action for its sections on behalf of the working class in other countries.⁶⁷ The similarity of the struggle all over the Pacific was constantly highlighted, despite the substantial differences of the situation in Australia. Through constant efforts to stimulate international proletarian solidarity, the PPTUS also aided colonial liberation movements and the forces opposed to war, meeting the other aspects of proletarian internationalism.

CPA Domestic Activity and Proletarian Internationalism

The CPA entered 1928 having just completed its 7th Conference. 1927 was a busy year for the CPA and proletarian internationalism. In addition to the gradual change in the Comintern line and the establishment of the PPTUS, the CPA was preoccupied with various campaigns conducted on the basis of international solidarity. Limitations of space preclude a detailed consideration of this work. It suffices to note that the party took up the cudgels for various causes; one was on behalf of two American anarchists, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti; another was the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution in November, when the party proudly held aloft the banner of international solidarity; and, though limited in opportunities, it revelled in agitation and propaganda (agit-prop) work espousing the Chinese cause, particularly after the bloody suppression of the 'Canton Commune' in December 1927.

⁶⁶ *Workers' Weekly*, 1 June 1928, p. 2. But Browder was conscious of the likelihood that the Congress might not proceed on Australian soil and suggested that preparations be made to hold it either in Vladivostok or Harbarovsk. Browder, 'Report on the Activities of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, Since the February Plenum,' p. 10 (RC 534/4/216).

⁶⁷ For example, see the appeal on behalf of arrested Japanese communists published in *Workers' Weekly*, 11 May 1928, p. 4.

In time, the Commune became a *cause celebre*. But at the party's 7th Conference in Christmas 1927, it was barely recent history. Emotions were still raw. The reverberations of the Commune's suppression were felt in Moscow, where it added momentum to the Comintern's leftward turn. In Australia, solemn expressions of international solidarity were all the party could offer: 'We are faced with the same problem – the emancipation of the workers from imperialism and all forms of capitalist oppression.'⁶⁸ Contrasting the party's practical internationalism of the late 1930s, the weak CPA was unable to reinforce these feelings with action. Thus in this instance, international solidarity as set out in chapter two was beyond the party's reach.

Another sign of proletarian internationalism at the 7th Conference was the presence of British Comintern emissary, R.W. Robson. In his hasty report, he stressed that Australia's mounting geopolitical importance meant that the 'Communist International places very great importance on affairs in Australia,' a spurious assurance given the Comintern's general disinterest in antipodean affairs, which is enlarged upon below. He justified the expulsion of the left opposition in Russia and described the successes recorded in industrial activity and mass work by various European communist parties, suggesting that the CPA similarly work within trade unions and the Labor Party. Robson also argued that the increased likelihood of another seamen's strike was a compelling reason to develop closer contacts between the CPA and CPGB; yet as is shown later in this chapter, the British party had unilaterally relinquished responsibility for directing the tiny Australian party.⁶⁹ But Robson himself was not as well attuned to the nuances of the changing line: as Macintyre notes, he exhibited sympathy for the supporters of the united front, glossing over the concerns of those frustrated with it.⁷⁰ Robson's instruction to work within the Labor Party crumbled shortly after the 9th ECCI. And the Profintern affiliated Militant Minority Movement (MMM) soon provided the CPA with an industrial foothold, becoming a key fraternal during the Third Period.⁷¹ The shift in focus from the political

⁶⁸ *Workers' Weekly*, 13 January 1928, p. 3.

⁶⁹ For Robson's report see *Workers' Weekly*, 9 March 1928, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Stuart Macintyre, 'The New Line in the Antipodes: Australian Communists and Class Against Class,' in Worley (ed), *In Search of Revolution*, p. 251.

⁷¹ The MMM was created out of the Trade Union Educational League in 1927. Greg Mallory, *Uncharted Waters: Social Responsibility in Australian Trade Unions* (Brisbane: Greg Mallory, 2005), p. 30. See *Workers' Weekly*, 30 March 1928, p. 1, for the MMM's preamble and objectives. For the MMM affiliation to the Profintern, see Gibson, *The People Stand Up*, p. 41; Charlie Fox, *Fighting Back: The Politics of the Unemployed in Victoria in the Great Depression* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 2000), p. 49; Richard Dixon, 'Industrial Policy in the 30s,' *Australian Left Review*, no. 27 (October-November 1970), p. 24.

to the industrial was a significant long-term tactical change that became a feature of Third Period communism, reaping the party sizable dividends.

Robson, however, was unimpressed with the CPA. His report to the Comintern was scathing. The party was impotent. Factionalism was rife, preventing the party from performing any effective work. The absence of coordinated industrial activity, which was supposed to be the responsibility of the party Central Executive Committee (CEC), came in for particular criticism. Robson also expressed frustration at the trivial preoccupations that thwarted any effective leadership from the CEC on the significant issues facing the party. This exacerbated difficulties connected with the membership's already low level of 'theoretical understanding.' Robson was particularly disturbed at the freedom with which Conference delegates were permitted to determine the party position towards the Labor Party 'despite the fact the CI had something to say about it.'⁷² This is another example of the complexities inherent in the CPA-Comintern relationship that this study aims to illuminate. To redress the problem, Robson asked that the Comintern devote greater attention to the CPA; this immature and isolated outpost of international communism stood 'in need of frequent advice and assistance.'⁷³ All this suggests that the organisational bond of proletarian internationalism was yet to crystallise.

Robson's urgent plea for help failed to raise a stir in the Comintern's corridors of power. The Comintern had already attended to Australian issues and appeared unwilling to trouble itself any further.⁷⁴ As recently as August 1927, the Comintern's Anglo-American Secretariat (AAS) had considered the problems of the Australians, the upshot of which was the recommendation that the CPA take the offensive and initiate a 'big mass campaign, distinct from the ALP, and even in opposition to it.'⁷⁵ Despite this, it appears, as has been plausibly argued elsewhere, that Moscow attached greater value to its relationship with Jock Garden and his Profintern affiliated NSW Labour Council, the

⁷² Macintyre, 'The New Line in the Antipodes,' p. 251.

⁷³ For Robson's report to the Comintern see 'Report on the situation in the Australian Communist Party,' 19 April 1928, (RC 495/94/41) and R. W. Robson report to Polit-Secretariat, 20 April 1928, pp. 3-4 (RC 495/3/63).

⁷⁴ In 1926, the Comintern claimed the CPA would never be a communist party in the Leninist sense, until it learned to 'combine the fight for the everyday demands of the workers with the combating of the craft spirit of the Labour aristocracy of the ideology of the 'White Australia,' and of British imperialism.' 'Resolution on the Australian Question,' (RC 495/2/57). See also Macintyre, *The Reds*, chapter 6, for the Comintern's efforts to put the CPA on the correct path.

⁷⁵ Macintyre, 'The New Line in the Antipodes,' p. 251.

‘Trades Hall Reds,’ than it did with its Australian section.⁷⁶ This relationship, as well as the Comintern’s general neglect of its Australian affiliate, was a cause of profound tension in CPA-Comintern relations, demonstrating that that relationship was more than a case of ‘Moscow say, CPA do.’ The CPA angrily demanded answers for the neglect. It bemoaned the absence of Australian places at the International Lenin School, despite the party requiring better trained functionaries. Adding insult to injury, the CPA only discovered of the Lenin School’s services after it had mistakenly received correspondence intended for the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA). The CPA also queried whether the Comintern was still in contact with Garden (following Garden’s assertion that he was still communicating with the Comintern and was recognised as its Australian representative), whom the party pointed out had been expelled from its ranks years before. The absence of regular correspondence and assistance from Moscow was another sore point. ‘Do you consider our Party to be a part of the [Communist] International?...are our efforts never to meet with anything but complete indifference?...Can we be expected to show results worthy of a Communist Party?’ lamented CPA general secretary Tom Wright with some justification.⁷⁷ The Comintern mollified the party’s anger, assuring it of places at the Lenin School and denying any connections with Garden, a disingenuous claim in light of Garden’s appointment to the Profintern executive in March 1928.⁷⁸ But relations remained strained until 1930, when the onset of the Third Period swept a new leadership into office.

This state of affairs was a departure from the tenets of proletarian internationalism. Without doubt the internecine warfare in the Comintern itself was a major factor in its neglect of the CPA. Nevertheless, an international centre supposedly committed to the cause of world revolution could ill afford to neglect a relationship with one of its sections. In neglecting this duty, it was inevitable that a national section where the ‘theoretical level’ was low would deviate from the established line. As we will see below, deviation worsened and culminated in the dramatic events of the 1929 national conference. Therefore, in this instance, the Comintern, although riven with factional strife, was at variance with Lenin’s stipulates on international organisation, while the CPA was seeking to strengthen its international bonds.

⁷⁶ Frank Farrell, ‘Explaining Communist History,’ *Labour History*, no. 32 (May 1977), pp. 1-10. Garden’s Labour Council was the Profintern’s Australian ‘section’ since 1921. For the Labour Council’s affiliation, see Farrell ‘Australian Labour and the Profintern,’ p. 42.

⁷⁷ All of the above is from CPA CEC to Secretary ECCI, undated (RC 495/94/43).

⁷⁸ General Secretary CPA to Anglo-American Secretariat ECCI, 23 March 1928 (RC 495/94/43).

The CPA's difficult relationship with the Comintern extended into 1928. Problems revolved around the party's position towards the ALP, which was at variance with Comintern policy. As discussed above, the Comintern had effectively entered the Third Period between late 1927 and early 1928. Yet the CPA was still advocating a united front with the ALP against the Bruce-Page government, particularly its industrial relations legislation.⁷⁹ Even after the virulently antagonistic 9th ECCI, whose decisions the CPA was acquainted with by April, the party was still only capable of directing the mildest criticism to the ALP.⁸⁰ This was in spite of the publication in its own press of a direct appeal from the Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Kalinin, that the party end its 'opportunist policy' and fully embrace the class struggle.⁸¹

However, in mid-1928, the CPA took the first step in aligning itself with the Comintern inspired breach with Labor. The catalyst for change was the approach of the 1929 Queensland election. At first, the party – albeit the leaders not associated with the doyen of Australian left-wing communism Herbert Moxon – recognised that Queensland workers, although disillusioned with Labor, were not yet ready to break with it.⁸² A majority of the leadership accepted this and instead urged Queensland workers to pursue the muddled approach of breaking with Premier William McCormack and what communists called 'McCormackism,' but not reformism. Additionally, the CPA would not contest any electorates. This raised the question: if the CPA did not stand candidates, and workers were enjoined to break with this 'McCormackism,' for which party were workers to vote?

The CPA's position was entirely untenable and fell well short of the International's policy. The line established at the 9th ECCI was known to the party leadership. Nevertheless, instead of toeing the Comintern line and announcing outright its intention to contest the election, the party threw open the pages of the *Workers' Weekly*. The leaders, having already decided their position, sought to ascertain the readership's

⁷⁹ *Workers' Weekly*, 27 January 1928, p. 4. This was doubly in breach of the Comintern line. The Comintern had been demanding a fight against industrial arbitration, yet the CPA wished to work with the ALP for its defence.

⁸⁰ Contained in the CPA archive is a document summarising the decisions of the 9th ECCI Plenum and its implications for policy and tactics. 'The IX Plenum of the ECCI,' 12 April 1928, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 8).

⁸¹ *Workers' Weekly*, 10 February 1928, p. 3. It also published the CPGB's rejection of an approach for unity by the British Independent Labour Party (ILP), commending the CPGB document, which vehemently attacked reformism and its irreconcilability with communism. *Workers' Weekly*, 25 May 1928, p. 4.

⁸² 'The Australian Situation,' p. 5 (RC 495/94/43).

opinion: to contest or not? However, this debate did not last long. It was quietly abandoned after the leadership became aware of the Comintern's 'Queensland Resolution' (discussed below), which considerably strengthened the hand of leftists baying for reformist scalps. Regardless, the CPA's non-appreciation of the 9th ECCI decisions concerning elections renders inexact Macintyre's assertion that all communist parties 'responded to the same cues for the New Line, adopted the slogans of 'class against class' and entered into the frenzy of activity it prescribed.'⁸³ The Comintern had expressly given the cue to communists to contest elections from early 1928. The CPGB and PCF were complying – but not the Australian party. Debate on the issue in the national sections, from the Comintern's perspective, was superfluous.

During the short time this debate took place, clear lines of division emerged between prominent party leaders. The preference of the majority, including the party's peripatetic chairman Jack Kavanagh and secretary Tom Wright, was for the confusing tactic of the united front with Labor but not McCormack. Both Kavanagh and Wright were the heads of the majority faction that doggedly resisted the Third Period by clinging onto conciliatory policies towards reformism. On the other hand, Queensland comrades, exasperated with economic difficulties and the McCormack government, wished to adopt the 'British tactic,' i.e. class against class. The Queenslanders possessed a record of demanding a more confrontational stance towards Labor – at the 1923 CPA National Conference, the Queensland delegation unsuccessfully pressed to go on the offensive against Labor.⁸⁴ Herbert Moxon, from Queensland and a rival of the majority Kavanagh led faction, who ostensibly championed unswerving loyalty to Moscow, was the main internal proponent of anti-Laborism. Thus, as with most Comintern policies, a belligerent approach to Labor had some pre-existing grounding in the party. It cannot be dismissed as an alien imposition on a reluctant party. Indeed, most comrades defied the leadership and wrote in praise of the Comintern endorsed British tactic of contesting elections and called for the Australian party to follow suit. It is worth noting that the rank and file of other communist parties were also eager to break with the 'reformists,'⁸⁵ and that it was upon the support of such members that the 'right wing' leaderships of various parties, including the Australian, were removed.

⁸³ Macintyre, 'The New Line in the Antipodes,' p. 249.

⁸⁴ Fitzgerald, *The People's Champion*, p. 28.

⁸⁵ The CPGB was a case in point. See for example, Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt*, p. 120; Andrew Thorpe, 'The Communist International and the British Communist Party,' in Rees and Thorpe (eds.) *International Communism and the Communist International*, p. 74; Thompson, *The Good Old Cause*, p. 43.

Election strategy had long been a cause of simmering discontent. Months before the debate on electoral tactics was opened, the Comintern, upon the prompting of local disputants, was compelled to impose the 'correct line' for the election. In April, the ECCI, with Bukharin himself present, after hearing conflicting reports from Robson, Moxon (who accompanied Robson back to Moscow), Jack Ryan and Norman Jeffery (who were in Moscow for the 4th Profintern Congress held in March 1928), endorsed a resolution, the so-called 'Queensland Resolution.' This established the CPA's tactics for the Queensland election. After criticising Robson's report, Moxon called for an open breach with Labor, saying continued support for it was 'next to criminal.' In return, the conciliators Ryan and Jeffery accused Moxon of proliferating 'a series of misstatements and distortions actuated by personal antagonism.'⁸⁶ These divisions were a microcosm of the wider factional strife in the CPA.⁸⁷ The battlelines were drawn.

The ECCI sided with Moxon. Macintyre's opinion that the Queensland resolution was a compromise that 'originated in response to rival claims of local disputants' within the CPA tends to understate the importance of the Comintern's post 9th ECCI line.⁸⁸ Although the new line was not applied in its entirety, almost certainly due to the CPA's shortage of resources, the Comintern policy would still have required the CPA to contest the Queensland elections even if Moxon had not been present to press his case. The resultant resolution specifically stated that the party independently contest 'three or four carefully selected constituencies,' where leading members of the incumbent Labor government were seeking re-election, or where communists had a realistic chance of winning. In electorates with no communist candidates, the CPA and 'left-wing committees,' were instructed to support left-wing candidates. In electorates where there were neither communist nor left-wing candidates, the party was to advise workers to withdraw their support for Labor candidates that refused to repudiate the past record of the government. The use of the informal vote was recommended if Labor candidates failed to comply.⁸⁹ By July, the Queensland Resolution had been accepted by the CPA

⁸⁶ For these debates see Macintyre, *The Reds*, p. 145; Macintyre, 'The New Line in the Antipodes,' p. 252; Curthoys, 'The Communist Party and the Communist International (1927-1929),' pp. 57-59.

⁸⁷ The best accounts of the factional strife that beset the CPA during this period can be found in Macintyre, *The Reds*, ch. 6 and Curthoys, 'The Communist Party and the Communist International (1927-1929),' pp. 54-69.

⁸⁸ Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 146-147. Likewise, Curthoys 'The Communist Party and the Communist International (1927-1929),' p. 58, argues that the Queensland Resolution was a compromise.

⁸⁹ 'The Queensland Labour Party,' 8 May 1928, p. 2 (RC 495/3/64). The political secretariat of the ECCI endorsed the Queensland Resolution on 27 April 1928.

and published in its press.⁹⁰ Later in this chapter, we will consider the party's application of this Queensland Resolution, whose implementation was an essential condition for the fulfilment of the organisational element of proletarian internationalism.

The assistance in the shape of the Queensland resolution did not repair the CPA's uneasy relationship with the Comintern. By mid-1928, the CPA was still dissatisfied; the Comintern had to do more. Doubtless, a contributing factor for the Comintern's disinterest was the paralysis induced through the struggle for power between Stalin and Bukharin. This, however, was compounded by the inadequacy of the Colonial Department of the CPGB, which was supposed to fill the gap in connections between the CPA and the Comintern. In fact, its ambit did not extend to Australia, though as Macintyre points out, the Australians preferred to do without the patronising guidance of the British party.⁹¹ The Australians may have had good reason to be dissatisfied; the CPSA, which was also reliant upon the British, was similarly unhappy with the assistance it received from the Colonial Department, suggesting the Department itself was afflicted with serious shortcomings.⁹² The upshot saw the CPA propose that it be permitted to dispatch its own representatives to Moscow, ensuring a strengthening of contact with the ECCI. Further, it asked that it be transferred out of the AAS and placed in the ECCI Eastern Secretariat. Australia's proximity to the Pacific and the party's insistence that Australia cannot be considered 'simply as a British "Colonial" section' appeared to justify a restructuring.⁹³ However, the Comintern did not share its opinion and rebuffed the suggestion. Consequently, the CPA was stuck with its haphazard relationship with Moscow. And the organisational bonds of proletarian internationalism were still inadequate, although through no fault of the Australian party.

The party exerted greater control over other aspects of proletarian internationalism. For example, a multitude of special days during every year presented it the opportunity to engage in internationalist activity. These days ostensibly served to commemorate

⁹⁰ 'To the Political Secretariat ECCI,' 20 September 1928 (RC 495/94/41); *Worker's Weekly*, 20 July 1928, p. 1.

⁹¹ Macintyre, *The Reds*, p. 147.

⁹² For the South African concerns, see Davidson, Filatova, Gorodnov and Johns (eds.) *South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History, Volume I, Socialist Pilgrims to Bolshevik Footsoldiers, 1919-1930*, p. 229.

⁹³ Central Committee CPA to ECCI Secretariat, 21 May 1928 (RC 495/94/43). Macintyre, *The Reds*, p. 147-148.

historical events and were commonly orchestrated by the Comintern.⁹⁴ Below, I will deal with three: Lenin-Liebkecht-Luxemburg week, Paris Commune Day and May Day.

January provided international Lenin-Liebkecht-Luxemburg week (also known as LLL week). Its purpose was to celebrate the lives of the three revolutionaries and to bolster anti-war and anti-colonial propaganda.⁹⁵ In 1928, a specially expanded *Workers' Weekly* marked the occasion by running articles on their lives. Articles quoting Lenin explained the class character of imperialist war and the communist role therein. This implied that communists follow the example of Lenin, Liebkecht and Luxemburg and fight against the social democrats and war.⁹⁶ Organising and imbuing youth with anti-militarism was integral to the fight against war. On colonialism, articles quoting Lenin stated unequivocally that only when the workers of the imperialist countries fought for the independence of the colonies could they consider themselves internationalist. 'Without this, "internationalism" does not exist.' In case the relevance was lost on some readers, the editor added that 'Australia has become an imperialist country, with its hold on New Guinea.'⁹⁷

Paris Commune Day, on 18 March, was another occasion during which the communist movement could exhibit its internationalism and militant heritage. The party cast itself as the heir to the Communards, reflecting an aspect of proletarian internationalism which allowed the militant traditions of one country to belong to the world proletariat and not just the country in which the tradition was born. The party used the day as a reminder of the reactionary character of capitalism, which sought to crush the revolutionary movement as the reactionaries had done to the Paris Commune. It is also worthy of note that 18 March 1928 was the 5th anniversary of the International Red Aid (IRA), called the International Labor Defence (ILD) in Australia. In keeping with the spirit of Paris Commune Day, the role of the IRA/ILD was to free capitalism's political prisoners and

⁹⁴ For a brief discussion of some of the days celebrated by international communism, as well as communism's stance towards certain national public holidays, seen from a Finnish perspective, see Tauno Saarela, 'International and National in the Communist Movement,' in Saarela and Rentola (eds.), *Communism: National and International*, pp. 34-37.

⁹⁵ It should be noted that the ECCI did not include Luxemburg when celebrating this week because of her 'serious mistakes in emphasising the spontaneity of the working class.' Ibid., p. 37.

⁹⁶ *Workers' Weekly*, 20 January 1928, pp. 2-3.

⁹⁷ For quotations see *ibid.*, p. 2. This was despite Tom Wright arguing at the Comintern in October 1927 that Australia was not an imperialist country. Tom Wright closing speech, 10 October 1927 (RC 495/3/39).

provide aid to militants and their families about to face ‘capitalist justice.’⁹⁸ For most of 1928, the ILD, confined largely to NSW and directed by the CPA to conduct propaganda for China, Samoa and the Solomon Islands, was unable to even convoke a meeting.⁹⁹ The party, frustrated at its inability to get the ILD off the ground, allowed it to wind down in June 1928.¹⁰⁰ However, the news in August of a Brisbane organisation claiming to be the Australian section of the IRA provoked the party into reviving the Sydney ILD and expanding it nationally.¹⁰¹ From then on it rendered legal aid to militants, until it was finally dissolved in the mid-1930s.

May Day was the day of international proletarian solidarity. Its importance was concisely set forth in the following terms:

MAY DAY is the special occasion, decided upon by the international working-class movement, when class-conscious workers in all countries endeavour to focus the attention of their class brothers on the INTERNATIONAL character of the working-class struggle.¹⁰²

May Day was described as a gesture of proletarian defiance against capitalism, a day when the working class, weak when divided nationally, welded itself ‘together with the bonds of international solidarity.’¹⁰³ Its purpose, like the aforementioned days, was not only to underscore the international togetherness of the working-class, but to bring to light common problems. In 1928, international tensions, particularly (communists believed) between Britain and America, signified the presence of the ‘war danger.’¹⁰⁴ The CPA also pointed out the increased resemblance of the struggle in Australia to that of the ‘Old World,’ highlighting the capitalist imposed challenges facing the Australian working-class. Among these were bans on ‘working-class’ (i.e. communist) literature, immigration, increased unemployment and capitalist rationalisation.¹⁰⁵ May Day was, indeed, the day of the Australian worker’s counter offensive. The party exhorted workers

⁹⁸ The above is taken from *Workers’ Weekly*, 16 March 1928, pp. 1 and 3; *Workers’ Weekly*, 6 April 1928, p. 4. See also *Inprecorr* vol. 8, no. 13, 7 March 1928, for a special edition celebrating the IRA’s 5th anniversary.

⁹⁹ Minutes of organisation department, 15 April and 20 May 1928, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 3).

¹⁰⁰ Minutes of organisation department, 24 June 1928, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 3).

¹⁰¹ Minutes of organisation department, 26 August 1928, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 3).

¹⁰² *May Day* (Sydney: Communist Party of Australia, 1928), pp. 1-2. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁰⁵ *Workers’ Weekly*, 4 May 1928, pp. 1-2.

of all lands to unite in a common fight to topple capitalism, thereby obviating the problems arising out of it.¹⁰⁶

During this period, the urgency of the struggle against war, a major part of proletarian internationalism, was continually underscored by the CPA. The imperialist and warmongering intentions of the major capitalist states were persistent themes for party campaigns and propaganda. It denounced the deceit of the major capitalist states by, on the one hand, discussing disarmament, while on the other, arming ‘to the teeth.’¹⁰⁷ The persistent rejection of the Soviet Union’s disarmament proposals was taken as irrefutable proof of the belligerent character of capitalism and its governments.¹⁰⁸

Perceived domestic war preparations aroused the CPA’s suspicions. It saw macabre meanings behind various pieces of legislation enacted by the Bruce government. Indeed, in a report intended for the 6th Comintern Congress, the CPA stated the policy of the Bruce government was to ‘prepare Australia for service on Britain’s behalf in the coming war in the Pacific.’¹⁰⁹ The CPA found ample – yet specious – evidence to buttress this assertion. For example, Bruce’s industrial relations legislation was believed to carry the objective of blunting the working-class’ ability to resist war.¹¹⁰ Another example was the potential introduction of conscription, which appeared to confirm war’s imminence.¹¹¹ Visits of British government emissaries were interpreted to comprise a part of the British plan to improve Australia’s war capability.¹¹² Again, agit-prop was employed to counter the ‘war danger.’ Melbourne comrades distributed leaflets among Anzac Day marchers in 1928, asking them to take an oath to the effect that they will never again fight in another war beneficial to capitalism.¹¹³ However, the party admitted that shortcomings were adversely effecting its anti-war work; it demanded members offer greater attention to this sort of activity in future.¹¹⁴ Indeed, greater efforts were required for it to fully realise its proletarian internationalist duties.

¹⁰⁶ *May Day*, p. 6 and 16.

¹⁰⁷ *Workers’ Weekly*, 13 January 1928, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Workers’ Weekly*, 10 February 1928, p. 3; 2 March 1928, p. 1; 20 April 1928, p. 4. See also the reprint of a speech on disarmament by Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov in *Workers’ Weekly*, 18 May 1928, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ ‘The Australian Situation,’ p. 2 (RC 495/94/43).

¹¹⁰ *Workers’ Weekly*, 24 February 1928, p. 1 is a typical example. See also ‘The Australian Situation,’ p. 3 (RC 495/94/43).

¹¹¹ *Workers’ Weekly*, 17 February 1928, p. 1.

¹¹² For example see *The Communist*, no. 6, March 1928, pp. 6-9 and *Workers’ Weekly*, 27 April 1928, p. 4.

¹¹³ *Workers’ Weekly*, 4 May 1928, p. 4. Some of the individuals responsible for the distribution of the leaflets were arrested for ‘distributing pamphlets offensive to the spirit of Anzac Day.’

¹¹⁴ *The Communist*, no. 6, March 1928, p. 9.

The CPA fared better in other fields of proletarian internationalism, particularly international solidarity. The most sustained example of international solidarity during this period was on behalf of striking coal miners in Colorado. The strike was one of a number of other contemporaneous American coal strikes. It was led by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and commenced on 13 October 1927. The men went on strike for, among other things, improved wages and working conditions. The strike concluded early in 1928, with the men winning a wage increase. But the dispute was more eventful than this. According to the *Workers' Weekly*, peaceful picketing was broken on the morning of 21 November 1927, when employer backed armed thugs opened fire, killing six and wounding many others. This incident, which became known as the 'Columbine Massacre,' shocked the CPA, which solemnly proclaimed that the 'Columbine victims sacrificed their lives in November. Their comrades are still continuing the struggle. Our plain duty is to accord them the greatest amount of practical support.'¹¹⁵

The conflict was represented as a classic case of the capitalist state using its coercive might against the proletariat. The governor of Colorado lent his open support to the mine owners and strike breakers. The fiercest repression by means of arrest and the use of armed thugs was said to have been unleashed against the men. Claims abounded that tanks, machine guns and bombers were deployed against the strikers, with many, including women and children, killed. Assistance to the strikers and their families was in desperate need. Australian comrades were asked to provide cash, either individually or via their union, to the ILD organised Colorado Miners' Appeal.¹¹⁶ The Profintern released an appeal, echoed by the CPA, exhorting workers to increase the intensity of protests against the bloody events in Colorado, which purportedly put American capitalism 'on the same level as European Fascism and Chinese counter-revolution.'¹¹⁷

The CPA believed that there were lessons to be learned for Australian coal miners from the Colorado strike. In particular it drew attention to the American method of dealing

¹¹⁵ The above is taken from *Workers' Weekly*, 30 March 1928, p. 3 (the quote is also from this issue) and 20 April 1928, p. 4.

¹¹⁶ There was some dissent against the dispatch of £10 by the Sydney branch of the Carpenter's Union. The CPA countered by explaining that a defeat for the Colorado miners would be used to force the wages of Australian miners down. *Workers' Weekly*, 17 February 1928, p. 3. The Militant Women's Group of Sydney also ran a fundraiser for the Colorado miner's appeal. For this see *Workers' Weekly*, 30 March 1928, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ For the Profintern appeal, see *Workers' Weekly*, 27 January 1928, p. 3; The rest is taken from *Workers' Weekly*, 10 February 1928 – 9 March 1928.

with industrial disputes, exemplified in the employers' response to the Colorado strike. The party believed this American method would soon be repeated in Australia through the Bruce-Page government's draconian industrial relations legislation. Here was an instance where international experience could light the way for the party's future challenges and activity. Further, it argued that if the Colorado miners suffered defeat and were forced to accept lower wages, then Australian workers would also have to accept lower wages. Therefore, in the spirit of international solidarity, the Colorado strike was represented almost as if it directly involved Australian workers. The sentiment was encapsulated in the shibboleth that '[a]n injury to one is the concern of all.'¹¹⁸ These were fine internationalist sentiments; though there was little scope for more practical internationalism to reinforce sentiment, thus leaving the party short of a more complete realisation of proletarian internationalism.

Work influenced by the colonial question was also limited. All the party was capable of offering were exhortations in its press objecting to colonialism. The party focused on the imperialism of its 'own' country.¹¹⁹ A key reason for this, in addition to ideological imperatives, was the conviction that the next war would be a Pacific war.¹²⁰ Therefore, to stymie a Pacific conflagration, the party sought to stoke public interest in Pacific affairs and, at the same time, foster solidarity with Pacific workers. It again turned to agit-prop work.¹²¹ As part of this, the party stridently objected to the dispatch of Australian warships to the Solomon Islands, entreating workers to aid the 'unfortunate islanders who are in Britain's murderous clutches.'¹²² It recounted stories of the culturally insensitive character of Pacific colonialism, which was exacerbated by low wages, lack of democratic rights and murder.¹²³ This served as a reminder that Australia possessed Pacific territories, thus obliging workers to struggle against the imperialism of their

¹¹⁸ *Workers' Weekly*, 10 February 1928, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ There was a robust debate on whether Australia was an imperialist country at the Comintern's October 1927 deliberations on the Australian question. Tom Wright, the CPA's representative at the discussions, maintained that Australia was not an imperialist state, while Indian Marxist M. N. Roy expressed the opinion that Australia was. While Wright won the argument, the CPA's subsequent activities and statements, certainly by 1928, strongly suggest that it considered Australia to be an imperialist country. See the discussions on the Australian question in the Political Secretariat of the ECCI, October 1927 (RC 495/3/39-40).

¹²⁰ 'The Australian Situation,' p. 4 (RC 495/94/43).

¹²¹ For instance, see *The Communist*, no. 9, June 1928, pp. 6-13; *Workers' Weekly*, 23 March 1928, p. 2; 25 May 1928, p. 4; 8 June 1928, p. 4; 29 June 1928, p. 4.

¹²² Quote from *Workers' Weekly*, 27 April 1928, p. 4.

¹²³ For examples of imperialist repression in the Pacific see the article on Samoa in *Workers' Weekly*, 2 March 1928, p. 3 and the article on the Solomon Islands in *Workers' Weekly*, 23 March 1928, p. 2 and *ibid.*; on low wages see the article on Papua in *Workers' Weekly*, 30 March 1928, p. 3.

‘own’ country. Despite the admission of shortfalls in this work,¹²⁴ the struggle against the imperialism of one’s ‘own’ country formed a part of proletarian internationalism and was performed, albeit only at the propaganda level, by the CPA. For now the party’s size was its weakness; it lacked the resources to carry out meaningful action. But as the party’s power grew over the next decade, so too did its capabilities, providing it opportunities to back word with deed.

The party’s propaganda was also influenced by the national question and international solidarity. A case in point was its constant rejection of jingoism and racism. The CPA persistently stressed the international and class character of the working class. It expressed anger at the howls of indignation emanating from Labor parliamentarians who called for the deportation of black American performers found in a ‘compromising position’ with white women in Sydney.¹²⁵ It poured scorn over the purported peddlers of nationalism and racism in the labour movement, namely the AWU and some in the ALP, who claimed that the mighty Australian labour movement and equitable industrial relations system were models which other nations admired. The communists responded by insisting that the ‘vicious nationalism which permeates our movement is a weakness which must be overcome.’¹²⁶

In doing this, the CPA, perhaps inadvertently, diminished the achievements of the Australian working class, achievements for which it would claim to be the legatee in the future. ‘When we have to our credit hard fought battles against capitalism such as have the workers of Germany, Britain and China, then can we be proud of our class in Australia.’¹²⁷ During the ‘popular front’ era, such statements were heretical. But in 1928, the Australian working class could not yet be spoken of in the same vein as the German, British or Chinese. This paucity of pride was at variance with proletarian internationalism as conceived by Lenin: communists, while upholding internationalism, remained proud of the achievements of their ‘own’ proletariat.

The issue of immigration, another which fell within the ambit of the ‘national question,’ and how to handle migrants already in Australia, was an abiding concern of the party. Its

¹²⁴ While in Moscow for the 6th Comintern Congress, Australian delegate Esmonde Higgins admitted the CPA’s failure to broaden the protests against Australian intervention in the Pacific. See ‘Report from the Representative of the CEC of the Communist Party of Australia to the MOPR Secretariat,’ 11 September 1928 (RC 495/94/42).

¹²⁵ *Workers’ Weekly*, 6 April 1928, p. 2.

¹²⁶ *Workers’ Weekly*, 10 February 1928, p. 2. See also *Workers’ Weekly*, 24 February 1928, p. 4.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

approach on this issue was a litmus test of its commitment to proletarian internationalism. The Australian labour movement, even among internationalists, had a long tradition of racism and hostility toward ‘coloured’ immigration, enshrined in the White Australia policy.¹²⁸ Southern European immigration was considered little better. Underpinning this hostility was the fear that non-white and Southern European migrants would undermine the wages and conditions of Australian workers. Indeed, the CPA occasionally published articles exposing such use of Southern Europeans and suggested the only solution lay in absorption in trade unions.¹²⁹ Party functionaries admonished ‘claptrap about dagoes’ (terms such as these, although used in good faith, revealed ingrained insensitivities), explaining that divisions only assisted employers and, on the contrary, ‘our duty is to welcome our comrades of other lands into our ranks, and to build up a solid fighting front.’¹³⁰ To this end, the CPA conducted English classes ‘with the object of enabling workers...to play a full part in the Australian class struggle.’¹³¹ Work by individuals such as Fred Paterson in North Queensland, who readily assisted Italian migrants and built strong contacts with their community, was the party’s example for emulation.¹³² This sort of activity was endorsed by the Comintern, which said in 1926: ‘It is one of the most important duties of the Communist Party of Australia to get a foothold not only among the masses of native-born Australian proletarians, but also to champion the interests of the foreign-speaking element of the country.’¹³³ Thus, many strains of proletarian internationalism are observable in the CPA’s work with migrants.

The party’s approach to immigration inevitably involved the issue of the White Australia policy. Its guiding principles towards White Australia and immigration were described in the following terms, and remained unchanged for the time-period of this thesis:

In opposition to the chauvinistic and racial policy of the ALP, as manifested in its White Australia Policy, the CP must put forward a policy of opposition to State aided immigration whilst insisting on the elimination of all racial barriers in the Immigration Laws; at the

¹²⁸ See Edgar Ross, *These Things Shall Be! Bob Ross, Socialist Pioneer-His Life and Times* (West Ryde: Mulavon Publishing, 1988), pp. 129-137 for an example of this widely shared antipathy. See also Julia Martinez, ‘Questioning “White Australia”: Unionism and “Coloured” Labour, 1911-1937,’ *Labour History*, no. 76 (May 1999), pp. 1-2.

¹²⁹ It also published accounts critical of British preference, which expressly excluded Southern European workers from securing employment. For incorporating migrants into the unions see *Workers’ Weekly*, 16 March 1928, p. 2; *Workers’ Weekly*, 13 April 1928, p. 4.

¹³⁰ *Workers’ Weekly*, 15 June 1928, p. 4.

¹³¹ *Workers’ Weekly*, 6 July 1928, p. 1.

¹³² See Fitzgerald, *The People’s Champion*, *passim* for Paterson’s work on behalf of migrants.

¹³³ ‘Resolution on the Australian Question,’ pp. 4-5 (RC 495/2/57).

same time formulating a programme for receiving and organising immigrant workers into the working class movement of Australia.¹³⁴

The Comintern concurred with the policy of opposition to both White Australia and mass migration.¹³⁵ Despite this, the CPA's approach during these years was riddled with reticence, and was thus ineffective. On the one hand, it was opposed to the White Australia policy and mass migration, while on the other, was doing little to implement it, incurring the wrath of the Comintern. The problem, so far as the Comintern was concerned, was not the CPA's commendable opposition to White Australia in the face of virulent racism, but that the CPA was not sufficiently vocal in its opposition, nor sufficiently energetic in its work among migrants. Most of these shortfalls gradually disappeared with the Australian onset of the Third Period in 1930. Yet, even here, some (albeit minor) action complemented sentiment; for instance, communist contribution to the publication in 1927 of the first Australian-Italian anti-fascist newspaper, *Il Risveglio*.¹³⁶ The CPA admitted these criticisms had some substance.¹³⁷ Macintyre aptly encapsulated the antagonistic forces contributing to the party's reluctance to oppose more openly White Australia when he comments that the CPA,

Committed to the unity of the workers of the world, found itself torn between old habits [White Australia] and new loyalties, its difficulties compounded by the fact that it drew support from those manual workers who competed for jobs with the post-war settlers from Southern Europe.¹³⁸

One may also add that opposition to mass migration, whether 'coloured' or British, was made palatable by arguments relating to the protection of Australian jobs. Moreover, in practice, the cessation of all immigration would leave Australia white. Nevertheless, the CPA's stated position, particularly in seeking to break down racial barriers to immigration and to incorporate migrants into the organisations of the Australian proletariat (e.g. unions), was consistent with Leninist stipulates on the national question.

¹³⁴ Central Executive Minutes, 27 January 1928, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 3). Also in *The Communist*, no. 6, March 1928, p. 9.

¹³⁵ 'Political Report on Australia to the British Secretariat,' 5 August 1927, pp. 12-13 (RC 495/3/30).

¹³⁶ R. W. Robson report to Polit-Secretariat, 20 April 1928, pp. 2-3 (RC 495/3/63). For the CPA and Italians see Gianfranco Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, 1922-1945* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1980), *passim*.

¹³⁷ 'To the Political Secretariat, ECCI,' 20 September 1928 (RC 495/94/41).

¹³⁸ Macintyre, *The Reds*, p. 126.

A major contemporaneous issue, the British mass migration scheme, was staunchly opposed by the CPA. The scheme's intention was to solve unemployment in Britain through removing unemployed to Australia, in exchange for cheap British loans. The CPA feared this would flood the Australian labour market and reduce wages and standards of living.¹³⁹ Tom Wright, speaking at the October 1927 Comintern deliberations on the 'Australian Question,' implored the CPGB to take up the fight against mass British migration to Australia.¹⁴⁰ The upshot, however, is unclear. The party also published a series of articles in its paper under the heading 'Migrant Stunts: The Facts Explained,' which purported to reveal the pernicious intentions of immigration to Australia.¹⁴¹ These included a capitalist plot to create a new mass of unemployed in Australia, which would then serve as the recruitment pool for 'scabs'¹⁴² and soldiers to fight in Britain's imperialist wars.¹⁴³ The *Workers' Weekly* urged its readers to write to friends and relatives in Britain in hope of dissuading potential migrants from coming to Australia.¹⁴⁴ It provided letter writers with bountiful examples of migrants arriving in Australia, only to face misfortune and unemployment.¹⁴⁵

Although party policy towards migrants was influenced by Leninist teachings on the 'national question,' the group it held most pertinence for was the Australian Aborigine.¹⁴⁶ The CPA unequivocally objected to the ill treatment of the Aborigines, though it would take some years until this sentiment found expression in a formal party policy. In informing the CPA's approach towards Aboriginal affairs, proletarian internationalism left a positive legacy in Australia, making the CPA a trailblazer on Aboriginal issues,

¹³⁹ 'The Australian Situation,' p. 2 (RC 495/94/43).

¹⁴⁰ See Tom Wright's speeches at the Comintern in (RC 495/3/39).

¹⁴¹ For some of these articles, see *Workers' Weekly*, 8-29 June 1928.

¹⁴² *Workers' Weekly*, 20 January 1928, p. 5.

¹⁴³ Visits by some prominent British government officials roused the suspicion of the CPA, which believed the purpose of such visits was to cajole the Australian government into accepting more British immigrants and taking part in war preparations. See for instance *The Communist*, no. 6, March 1928, p. 6; *Workers' Weekly*, 24 February 1928, p. 1. See also 'The Australian Situation,' p. 3 (RC 495/94/43).

¹⁴⁴ *Workers' Weekly*, 27 January 1928, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ These took the form of small pieces tracking the unfortunate experiences of migrants. See *Workers' Weekly*, 2 March 1928, p. 3 and 11 May 1928, p. 3, for some examples. See also the story of 135 Czechoslovak miners brought to Australia under false pretenses by 'British imperialist agents,' only to face unemployment upon arrival in *Workers' Weekly*, 11 May 1928, p. 1.

¹⁴⁶ For Aborigines and the CPA see also Andrew Markus, 'Talka Longa Mouth: Aborigines and the Labour Movement 1890-1970,' in Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus (eds.), *Who Are Our Enemies? Racism and the Australian Working Class* (Neutral Bay: Hale and Iremonger, 1978), pp. 146-151.

decades ahead of the Australian political mainstream.¹⁴⁷ The CPA did not sanitise the realities of Aboriginal life. Horror stories of harsh treatment at the hands of white Australia appeared in the pages of the party press. Capitalism and squatters were blamed for the mistreatment of Aborigines; only working class rule would rectify the problem.

The aboriginals are an oppressed people. They have been driven from their natural hunting grounds by the capitalist class and they have been degraded into bumming on the Government or Missions.¹⁴⁸

The use of the ‘colour line’ in Darwin, which saw white and aboriginal workers paid at different rates, attracted the party’s opposition. The CPA argued that aboriginal workers were entitled to receive the same rate of pay as white workers. This put the party at odds with Darwin unions, which sought to drive cheaper aboriginal workers out of industry. Colour barriers, argued the party, were a ruse to divide the working class and it was incumbent upon white workers to fight for equal wages for aborigines.¹⁴⁹ In this case, the party adopted a position entirely consistent with the Leninist conception of proletarian internationalism.

In the period leading up to the 6th Comintern Congress, the CPA’s approach to proletarian internationalism was not without its share of ambiguity. The organisational element of proletarian internationalism, entailing the disciplined adherence of communist parties to the Comintern, found the CPA in a troubled relationship with the Comintern, one marked with neglect on the one hand, and non-comprehension of the decisions of the international revolutionary centre on the other. In relation to the other elements of proletarian internationalism – solidarity, the national and colonial questions and opposition to war – the CPA, for now, was confined to agit-prop work. More propitious moments for action came later.

The 6th Comintern Congress

Bukharin opened the 6th Comintern Congress on 17 July 1928. It did not conclude until September. The Congress, affirming the decisions of the 8th and 9th ECCI discussed

¹⁴⁷ As Macintyre correctly points out, this feature of Australian communism ‘marked it off from the Labor Party for more than 40 years.’ Macintyre, *The Reds*, p. 128.

¹⁴⁸ *Workers’ Weekly*, 13 April 1928, p. 4.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* For this case, see also Markus, ‘Talka Longa Mouth,’ pp. 149-150.

earlier, formally proclaimed the Third Period, the era of wars and revolutions, with its associated invective against social democracy. Hence its decisions were expected. A foretaste of the vitriol directed against social democracy was provided from the outset, as German communist Ernst Thalmann said the struggle ‘against imperialist war is struggle against one’s own bourgeoisie and Social Democracy.’ International solidarity also received early attention. A Profintern orchestrated two week campaign of international solidarity with the Chinese proletariat, conducted to redress waning interest in the Chinese cause – and done supposedly in defiance of the reformists – was also endorsed by Congress.¹⁵⁰ The CPA’s response to this campaign, and the Congress’s decisions, are considered in the next section of this chapter. What follows is a detailed exploration of the Congress proceedings relevant to this thesis and the work of the CPA.

The first item on the agenda was Bukharin’s report on the international situation. He was under immense pressure. While delivering his report, Stalin’s henchmen were busily engaged in a whispering campaign or splitting hairs with inconsequential objections to points in his report. Bukharin, however, remained overtly calm. His speech went along similar lines to that delivered at the 15th CPSU Congress. It described the three post-war periods of capitalist development and the simmering capitalist economic crisis, which, as discussed above, signified that capitalism had entered its Third Period of post-war crisis.¹⁵¹ The crisis prompted a search for new markets, which would itself exacerbate international tensions. While war for a redivision of colonies was believed most likely, the attraction of the untapped markets of the Soviet Union and the desire to suppress the shining example it set to the world proletariat made it the object of all war preparations. However, Bukharin continued, as capitalism was not yet fully in the grips of crisis, the menace of war for ‘a fresh distribution of the globe, of colonies or other territories’ was real though not immediate. In a repeat of the 15th CPSU Congress, the Stalinists believed capitalist stabilisation was in decay if not already over, that capitalism had reached a grave crisis, and therefore war was imminent.¹⁵² Regardless, the likelihood of war meant opposition to war, especially anti-Soviet war, and defence of colonial liberation movements were important tasks for communists during the Third Period.¹⁵³ All of these

¹⁵⁰ *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 39, 25 July 1928, p. 709 and 711.

¹⁵¹ For the thesis adopted on Bukharin’s report see *Communism and the International Situation: Thesis on the International Situation and the tasks of the Communist International, Adopted at the 6th World Congress of the Communist International, 1928* (London: Modern Books, 1929).

¹⁵² *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 41, 30 July 1928, pp. 725-730.

¹⁵³ *Communism and the International Situation*, pp. 25-27

tasks were also crucial elements of proletarian internationalism and, as we will see in the next chapter, acted upon by the CPA.

The inexorable move towards war was accompanied with an increase in class antagonisms in the capitalist countries. Bukharin singled out for special criticism the 'treacherous' role of social democracy, nonexistent without capitalism and therefore willing executors of bourgeois policy, as the main counter-revolutionary force in the labour movement. Hence, a confrontation with social democracy for the leadership of the working class was inevitable. To be successful, communists were urged to 'come out' independently through the use of the class against class tactic. Conditions were ripe: workers were swinging to the left, joining and voting for the communists, causing the social democrats to seek support from other social strata such as the petit-bourgeoisie, further contributing to its 'bourgeoisising.' Even greater attention was needed to tackle 'left' social democrats, deemed highly dangerous as they maintained the façade of militancy: their alleged intention, despite 'left' manoeuvres, was to hoodwink and weaken the workers' resistance to the capitalist onslaught and war preparations. However, belligerence was relatively limited; while the crude equation of social democracy and fascism was not yet made, common threads were observed between the two. Here, as with other matters, Bukharin's moderating influence was evident.¹⁵⁴ Later in this chapter, we will see that the CPA failed to adjust its approach to conform with the full rigors of 'class against class,' even though it was bound to do so through its affiliation to the Comintern, thus breaching the requisite discipline of the organisational element of proletarian internationalism.

Caveats to communist relations with social democrats were attached. Bukharin believed that the leaders of social democracy had to be distinguished from the rank and file, which in the event of war would be beset with splits and discontent. The task for communists was to win over the mass of rank and file social democratic members and voters. Hence, the united front from below was the only appropriate tactic. A relentless struggle against the leaders of social democracy, which entailed participation in elections, was integral to the fulfilment of the communist's objectives. In his prescriptions on social democracy,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 13-20. McDermott and Agnew argue that Bukharin resisted the social-fascist formulation. Indeed, it was only formally proclaimed by the Comintern after the removal of the Bukharinites in 1929. McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, p. 77.

Bukharin was reaffirming the decisions of the 9th ECCI; but as will be seen in the next section, the CPA did not comprehend the meaning of these decisions.¹⁵⁵

Communists were instructed to maintain vigilance on left and right deviations. The ‘left’ deviation, however, was of less pertinence. The ‘right danger,’ thought to pervade the communist parties, was confirmed at the insistence of the Stalinists as the main deviational danger. This was undoubtedly directed against Bukharin and his supporters in the International; but its repercussions were international. To be sure, the CPA was not immune from the international struggle against the right and was, as will be observed below, beset with turmoil in an effort to rid itself of the ‘right danger.’ A lack of internationalism, legalist hangovers, failure to obey the Comintern decision to contest elections and an underestimation of the imminence of war, lay at the heart of the right danger, all of which found some local manifestation in the Australian party. Nevertheless, in combating deviations, Bukharin (in a possible swipe at the Stalinists) warned against ‘fractional struggle carried on without adequate political reasons and without adequate political justification,’ which already threatened to spiral out of control in some parties.¹⁵⁶ Instead, parties were urged to solve problems through persuasion and democratic internal party mechanisms. This was another example of Bukharin attempting to moderate the excesses of the Stalinists. But as McDermott and Agnew suggest, the Russian delegation was successful in amending resolutions to focus on ‘iron internal discipline’ and ‘the subordination of the minority to the majority’ coming at the cost of Bukharin’s exhortations to see an amicable solution to problems.¹⁵⁷ Hence, Stalin was successful in manoeuvring Bukharin into a position that would cause his ultimate demise. So too were Moxon and L. L. Sharkey, who by 1930 had displaced the ‘rights’ led by Kavanagh in the CPA.

In light of the international situation, the war danger was ‘the pivot of the whole situation’¹⁵⁸ and, accordingly, was treated separately. The Congress reaffirmed the verity of the decisions of the ‘war scare’ dominated 8th ECCI and did its utmost to generate

¹⁵⁵ *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 41, 30 July 1928, pp. 731-733 and 735. The definition and tactics of the united front from below are expressed in *Communism and the International Situation*, p. 28.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 738-739. These criticisms were also incorporated in the resultant thesis, *Communism and the International Situation*, pp. 33-46. It was ironic that this section of Bukharin’s speech in *Inprecorr* has inserts of ‘applause’ and ‘loud applause’ around sentences where he demands an end to factionalism and calls for unity. For the underestimation of the ‘war danger’ being a right deviation, see *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 49, 13 August 1928, pp. 867-868.

¹⁵⁷ McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, p. 78.

¹⁵⁸ This was Bukharin’s opinion. *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 49, 13 August 1928, p. 866.

greater urgency in the struggle against war. The perceived imminence of war necessitated its elevation to the pinnacle of tasks confronting the communist parties, which, at this point, had been neglected. Every task, even the day to day work of communists, had to be linked to the war danger.¹⁵⁹ The next section of this chapter will demonstrate that, despite a dearth of action, the CPA did not fail to bring anti-war propaganda into prominence.

To prevent war, an assault on various fronts was required. Inactivity on the part of communists would invariably aid the warmongers. Stress was laid on the use of propaganda in unmasking the militarist designs of social democracy, industrial peace, pacifism and the League of Nations. In accordance with Leninist theories, communists had to actively work within imperialist armies for the propagation of anti-war and defeatist propaganda, as well as seek the arming and military training of workers. Such training was useful in anticipation of turning the imperialist war into civil war, which was for communists the only viable solution to the outbreak of imperialist war. In connection with this, one of the speakers maintained: ‘those who want to keep out of war instead of fighting it are in reality helping imperialism.’ The only possible remedy to banish war was to abolish capitalism. Thus, remaining aloof did not constitute either a method of struggle against the danger of imperialist war or, indeed, a method for the overthrow of capitalism.¹⁶⁰

The revolutionary movement in the colonies was also discussed at the Congress.¹⁶¹ It was the first time the Comintern had provided such consideration to this question since its 2nd Congress. Discussion centred on the theory of decolonisation, the role of colonial industrialisation and the tactics most suitable for the colonial liberation movements, with special focus on China and India. As with all other Congress topics, the discussions were conducted within the context of the lingering menace of war. As mentioned earlier, the looming war was intended for a new division of colonies – hence the significance of spreading revolutionary sentiment in the colonial world. The colonial masses, convinced of the sympathy of the Soviet Union, would form a ‘most powerful auxiliary force of the socialist world revolution.’ The Comintern, its sections and the USSR would in turn

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 869.

¹⁶⁰ All of the above is from *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 58, 1 September 1928, pp. 1003-1011 (quotation from p. 1007) and *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 84, 28 November 1928, pp. 1583-1599.

¹⁶¹ See John Callaghan, ‘Storm Over Asia: Comintern Colonial Policy in the Third Period,’ in Worley (ed), *In Search of Revolution*, pp. 26-30, for an account of the colonial question at the 6th Comintern Congress.

support more actively the emancipation movements of the colonies.¹⁶² So far as Australia and the British dominions were concerned, they were not colonies but analogous to small independent European states, and therefore, did not constitute a part of the discussion. Indeed, Australia possessed colonies of its own and could therefore not be considered a colonial country. Nevertheless, objections were raised by the New Zealand delegate, who unsuccessfully sought a reclassification of the British dominions as colonial countries.¹⁶³

Where the colonial discussion held relevance for Australia was on anti-colonial work. The requirement on the part of communist parties in the imperialist countries was to increase solidarity, contacts, assistance and interest in colonial affairs, as these had been hitherto insufficient. More active support, in the form of demonstrations and anti-imperialist propaganda was especially necessary. A simultaneous exposure of the imperialist policy of social democracy had to be carried out.¹⁶⁴ Parties from countries in possession of colonies were instructed not to lead the colonial liberation movement, but rather to win the confidence of the colonial proletariat by acting as a ‘helper and advisor,’ helping to educate and train colonial comrades.¹⁶⁵ The proposed lines of action were in harmony with Leninist expectations for colonial work, yet in the aftermath of the Congress, these decisions were met with inactivity on the part of the CPA attributable, in large part, to a paucity of resources and opportunities.

Disruption and Deviation: The Aftermath of the 6th Congress

The CPA went largely unrepresented at the 6th Comintern Congress. Its delegate, Esmonde Higgins, arrived on the final day of proceedings, giving him enough time to get Kavanagh elected a candidate member of the ECCI.¹⁶⁶ However, Higgins’ absence left

¹⁶² For the tactical line emergent from the discussions, see *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 88, 12 December 1928, pp. 1675-1676 (quotation from p. 1661).

¹⁶³ For the classification of Australia see *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 68, 4 October 1928, p. 1233. Griffin, the New Zealand delegate, believed the dearth of discussion on the British dominions was symptomatic of the Comintern’s general neglect of its antipodean followers. He argued that the thesis on the colonial question had to be radically improved and incorporate the dominions, or else the ‘revolutionary movement in the colonies and dominions will not have confidence in the Communist International.’ For Griffin’s criticisms see *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 76, 30 October 1928, pp. 1391-1392.

¹⁶⁴ For all the above tasks, see *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 88, 12 December 1928, pp. 1675-1676.

¹⁶⁵ *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 68, 4 October 1928, p. 1232.

¹⁶⁶ Higgins’ account of the closing session can be found in *Workers’ Weekly*, 19 October 1928, p. 1. On Higgins’ visit to the Soviet Union in 1928, see Terry Irving, ‘Esmonde Higgins in the Soviet Union,’ in Sheila Fitzpatrick and Carolyn Rasmussen (eds.), *Political Tourists: Travellers from Australia to the Soviet Union in the 1920s – 1940s* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008), pp. 49-50; Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 148-149. For a biographical sketch of Higgins see Terry Irving, ‘Defecting: Esmonde Higgins Leaves the Communist Party,’ *Labour History*, no. 87 (November 2004), pp. 83-102.

him (and the CPA) ignorant of the full implications of Stalinist manoeuvres to oust Bukharin and the 'rights.' He would have been made broadly aware of differences between the two Soviet leaders in subsequent engagements, but not to the extent suggested by Curthoys.¹⁶⁷ It would seem that one had to be present at the Congress to fully appreciate the efforts to undermine Bukharin.

Higgins' schedule following the Congress was crammed with meetings and other engagements, both with the Comintern and various fraternalists. Yet most senior figures were out of Moscow and their deputies were reluctant to 'state anything definitely.' More disconcerting was that 'several important comrades [were] tired of the problems of the Australian party.' The Australians were criticised for being 'little better than a social democratic sect,' an ominous criticism during the Third Period. Further criticism was levelled at the party and its press, considered too aloof from the masses. On this point, a 'ruthless condemnation' of the party press 'and through it our party' was initially intended to be published; that it was not was due to the ECCI conclusion that the CPA was getting 'too much Moscow.'¹⁶⁸

Hence, Higgins' visit to the Comintern did not smooth relations with Moscow. He learnt that, for the previous two years, the CPGB no longer bore the duty of directing the CPA, or of acting as intermediary between the Australians and Moscow. Higgins welcomed this, but complained that the CPA had never been notified. He also reiterated the Australian desire to relocate the party into a ECCI Pacific secretariat. This was again rejected. So too was the suggestion that the CPA be placed in the Eastern secretariat. The only concession was a promise that a 'group' be formed and entrusted with 'reviewing from time to time the problems of Pacific countries in general.' Accordingly, Higgins left empty handed. The CPA was still attached to the AAS, but an understanding had been reached that the Australian representative at the Lenin School was to be brought onto the AAS as the Australian spokesman.¹⁶⁹ After initially considering Kavanagh for this

¹⁶⁷ Curthoys, 'The Communist Party and the Communist International (1927-1929),' p. 59.

¹⁶⁸ All the above from 'Report by Higgins to CE CPA,' 20 December 1928, James Normington Rawling papers (Australian National University, Noel Butlin Archives [hereafter ANU] N57/371). Technical difficulties and other weaknesses with the party press were not sufficient defence to allay the Comintern's scathing attack.

¹⁶⁹ 'Report of the Representative of the CP of A on Matters Arising out of the CI Letter and Resolution,' 6 September 1928, (RC 495/94/42); *ibid.*, pp. 1-2. All quotations from latter source. See also the letter from CPA to Secretariat ECCI, 2 October 1928 (RC 495/6/16), where in addition to the matters raised by Higgins, the CPA wanted the Comintern to dispatch a representative to direct party work and provide financial assistance. While financial assistance was provided promptly, the decision to send Harry Wicks to Australia was not made until late 1929.

vacancy, the CPA finally chose Ted Tripp, who arrived in Moscow in September 1929.¹⁷⁰ This was a strengthening of proletarian internationalism's organisational bonds; yet much more needed to be done before it reached a level necessary to be in full accord with the stipulates described in chapter two.

Meanwhile in Australia, the domestic 'capitalist offensive' appeared to vindicate the Comintern's Third Period. Even prior to the 6th Congress and for months after, mounting evidence of the ubiquitous capitalist offensive against the working class was manifesting itself, particularly in measures such as the ban on communist literature and various pieces of draconian legislation. A spate of unsuccessful strikes throughout 1928-1930 in the waterfront, timber and coal industries gave the 'capitalist offensive' further confirmation. Ruthless strike breaking, especially on the Northern NSW coal fields in late 1929 where miner Norman Brown was killed by police, was reminiscent of methods used in other countries where the class struggle had reached a more developed stage.¹⁷¹ It was increasingly evident that Australia – as foretold in the Comintern's Third Period diagnosis – was not exempt from the general and global capitalist crisis. Whether the Comintern's solutions were suitable for Australia was a matter of deep conjecture, culminating in the dramatic events of late 1929 that are discussed later in this chapter.

The CPA was heavily involved in these disputes. Defeat was laid at the feet of the 'treacherous' reformist union leadership. However, a recounting of this involvement is beyond the ambit of this thesis.¹⁷² But it is worth pointing out that the CPA did not embrace the full rigor of class against class in the industrial sphere for fear of alienating Garden's Labour Council, whose affiliation to the Profintern, employment of leading comrades, and role in securing ACTU affiliation to the PPTUS was significant. Herein lay the party's dilemma. To it, Garden was an unscrupulous opportunist who had been expelled from its ranks years earlier and whose relations with Moscow were unpalatable. But for Moscow, relations with the Labour Council were sacrosanct; without it the

¹⁷⁰ Rawling 'Communism Comes to Australia,' ch. 11, pp. 14-15. For a brief account of Tripp's life and experiences in Russia see Peter Beilharz, 'Trotskyism in Australia – Notes from a Talk With Ted Tripp (1976),' *Labour History*, no. 62 (May 1992), pp. 133-137.

¹⁷¹ For the 1929-1930 NSW coal strike see Robin Gollan, *The Coalminers of New South Wales: A History of the Union, 1860-1960* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1963), ch. 9.

¹⁷² Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 153-157 and Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia*, ch. 3, provide a concise outline of the disputes and the CPA's role therein. Campbell, *History of the Australian Labour Movement*, pp. 126-128, discusses these events from a Marxist perspective and provides the official CPA interpretation of events.

Profintern would have no Australian affiliate.¹⁷³ So long as this relationship (whose slow demise commenced in mid-1929) remained sacrosanct, the CPA was faced with little choice but to desist from building and activating the MMM and from directly challenging the union leadership.

It was at the 1928 ACTU emergency Congress that the PPTUS affiliation was officially endorsed. But the nominal and precarious nature of that affiliation piqued communists.¹⁷⁴ Consequently, there was a short-lived suggestion that Browder himself attend the next ACTU Congress in a bid to defeat the 'reactionaries' and strengthen the PPTUS presence in Australia. This was abandoned upon the realisation that it would be counterproductive.¹⁷⁵ Contradictions between rhetoric and reality were disheartening. For instance, the communist proclamation that the affiliation broke the 'racial barrier' conflicted with the ACTU's commitment to the White Australia policy and its disdain for the plight of workers from other Pacific countries.¹⁷⁶ It is unlikely that Browder would have persuaded Australian unionists otherwise.

Be that as it may, this led to the CPA pondering whether the PPTUS ought to even declare its anti-racist posture in Australia. The upshot was an instruction to Jack Ryan to avoid mention of the PPTUS repudiation of White Australia at the July 1928 ACTU emergency Congress.¹⁷⁷ As Farrell points out, the Secretariat's supporters often sought to 'confuse the meaning of clause four of the preamble to the Secretariat's statutes in order to meet the charge [laid by the AWU] that the organisation was against a White Australia.'¹⁷⁸ One of the methods used was to propose a ban on all migration, thereby keeping coloured labour out without discrimination. Such manoeuvring was typical, at this point in time, of the party's reluctance to adopt policies in complete harmony with proletarian internationalism. Fear of alienating the mainstream was too great. It was only after the change of leadership in 1930 and the adoption of class against class, with its

¹⁷³ This demonstrated that despite its anti-social democratic hyperbole, Moscow valued the cooperation of the 'reformists.'

¹⁷⁴ The CPA expressed its frustration to the Comintern. See 'To the Political Secretariat ECCI,' 20 September 1928 (RC 495/94/41).

¹⁷⁵ 'Charlie' to unknown recipient, undated letter (RC 534/4/224).

¹⁷⁶ For CPA statement on breaking the racial barrier, see *Workers' Weekly*, 27 July 1928, p. 1.

¹⁷⁷ 'Charlie' to unknown recipient, undated letter (RC 534/4/224). The CPA also believed this oversight assisted in securing the ACTU affiliation with the PPTUS. Higgins informed the Comintern of these doings in 'Report of the Representative of the CP of A on Matters Arising out of the CI Letter and Resolution,' 6 September 1928 (RC 495/94/42).

¹⁷⁸ Farrell, 'The Pan-Pacific Trade Union Movement and Australian Labour, 1921-1932,' p. 451.

innate intolerance for mainstream sensitivities, that the party adopted more principled positions.

In doing the above, the CPA was instead seeking to acclimatise communism, and indeed the international line, to the contours of the Australian labour movement. This shows the flexibility in practice of the organisational element of proletarian internationalism. Nevertheless, for communists it remained frustratingly self-evident that only internationally coordinated action could avert war and improve the position of the working class in all lands; racial divisions, after all, were spawned by the capitalist class to divide, and thereby weaken, the working class. In this light, the belief that Prime Minister Bruce's decision to prevent the PPTUS holding its Congress in Australia was a class manoeuvre becomes understandable. It was obvious to the supporters of the PPTUS that 'reactionaries' in the labour movement (supposedly the AWU and some Melbourne unionists), acting upon the behest of capitalists, were opposed to the PPTUS in order to weaken and worsen the position of Australian workers. A statement by an opponent of the PPTUS, that it was '[a] heterogeneous mob of Asiatics, with unpronounceable names, who have got the impertinence to lay down a policy for the ACTU,' incurred the disgust of militants. The *Pan-Pacific Worker* exerted great efforts to dispel the dominance of racial superiority, pointing out that Australian workers, like Asian workers, were victims of white capitalists, and therefore shared common interests in combating a common foe. That the peddlers of racial superiority and opponents of the PPTUS were also opponents of the Australian working class was a link the CPA tried, without much success, to impress upon the ACTU.¹⁷⁹

To highlight the imperative of internationalism, a steady stream of reports in the party press illuminated the danger of employers utilising cheaper foreign labour to reduce wages and working conditions in Australia. And one of the main threats emanated from the British Empire itself. The AAS told the CPA that it 'must stress in its propaganda that the imperial connection means for Australian workers a reduced standard of living...and war.'¹⁸⁰ And the CPA highlighted this nexus. For instance, the cause of the Indian working class was linked with the contemporaneous domestic push for wage reductions in the Australian coal industry. Australian capitalists, according to the CPA, used the pretext of cheaper foreign labour to force down wages in order to meet overseas

¹⁷⁹ The above is from *Workers' Weekly*, 20 July 1928, p. 2; *Workers' Weekly*, 10 August 1928, p. 3; *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 1, nos. 6-8 and 11, 1 July-1 August and 15 September 1928; for quote *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 1, no. 8, 1 August 1928, p. 9.

¹⁸⁰ AAS to the CEC of the CPA, 5 October 1928, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 3).

competition. Exploitation of a similar order was experienced by the workers of New Guinea, the solution to which, according to the CPA and reflecting the influence of Leninist teachings, lay in Australian workers assisting their New Guinea counterparts in forming their own unions. Under such circumstances, it was essential that international coordination and solidarity (integral elements of proletarian internationalism) become a fulcrum of union activity. This was the publicly stated purpose of the PPTUS.¹⁸¹

Following the Bruce government's decision to prevent the PPTUS Congress convening in Australia, it was decided at an otherwise unremarkable October meeting of the PPTUS in Shanghai¹⁸² to relocate the Congress to Vladivostok. PPTUS supporters were quick to point out that Bruce had thwarted the convening of the PPTUS Congress in Australia due to fears it would unmask the government's preparations for war. Indeed, the question of struggle against war was a central topic for the Congress. The Comintern, with another trademark overstatement, stated that the Vladivostok Congress would be the final opportunity for unions around the Pacific to meet before the outbreak of war.¹⁸³

By 1929, and despite its importance, the Australian connection with the PPTUS was in inexorable decline. Indeed, the PPTUS, struggling to maintain its existence under severe repression in Shanghai, was racked with difficulties.¹⁸⁴ In December 1928, Browder left the Secretariat and was replaced with British communist, George Hardy. Stoler himself was due to leave Australia by April¹⁸⁵ 1929. A replacement was requested, though none was appointed. Six delegate positions were allocated to the Australians for the

¹⁸¹ For an example regarding India see *Workers' Weekly*, 20 July 1928, p. 3; for examples regarding New Guinea see *Workers' Weekly*, 1 February and 22 March 1929. The PPTUS played an important role in highlighting exploitation in India. See Jack Ryan's account of his visit to India in 1928 in *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 2, no. 1, 15 January 1929, pp. 7-10 and *Workers' Weekly*, 8 February 1929, p. 4.

¹⁸² No Australians were present at this meeting due to a number of factors, namely, the federal elections and non-availability of suitable delegates, with previous delegates only just returning from the February meeting. See letter 'Dear Father,' 19 September 1928 (RC 534/4/224). The meeting dealt with, among other subjects, a policy in regard to war and the capitalist offensive identical to that adopted by the 6th Comintern Congress. See *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 1, no. 16-17, 1-15 December 1928.

¹⁸³ See *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 1, no. 15, 15 November 1928, p. 7 and *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 82, 23 November 1928, p. 1564. *The Pan-Pacific Worker* said that the PPTUS had moved beyond stating the causes and inevitability of imperialist war. It now had to formulate some 'concrete plans to prevent the slaughter of workers in capitalist wars.' See *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 2, no. 7, 1 June 1929, p. 1.

¹⁸⁴ The difficulties of operating out of Shanghai were exacerbated by a conflict between Browder and Charles Johnson, another member of the secretariat. Things reached a climax in the last months of 1928 when Browder returned to Moscow in order to complain directly to Lozovsky. The frustration caused Stoler to write in a letter to Browder 'Damn you, I feel like having a row with you and the whole United States.' Stoler to Browder, 1 February 1929 (RC 534/4/293). See also McKnight, *Espionage and the Roots of the Cold War*, pp. 108-109.

¹⁸⁵

Vladivostok Congress, though the dearth of finances resulted in only three making the trip. Distance was another problem; as Stoler lamented '[i]t takes two months before one hears an answer to one's hello.'¹⁸⁶ This made it next to impossible for the PPTUS to exert any effective influence over its Australian 'section,' forcing it to permit 'a certain amount of leeway' in dealing with domestic issues.¹⁸⁷

The Vladivostok meeting opened on 15 August 1929. The three Australian delegates, F. Roels, F. Walsh and P.G. Hannett, arrived two days late after delays in Japan.¹⁸⁸ Nevertheless, upon arrival, the Australians promptly accepted the Conference decisions, which largely conformed to Third Period orthodoxy. The main point on the agenda was the struggle against war; this was highly poignant following a recent clash on the Sino-Soviet border. The final resolution adopted on this question was virtually identical to that adopted at the 6th Comintern Congress, and needs no further elaboration here. The resolution on the tasks of the Australian trade unions called for increased militancy, resistance to industrial peace, arbitration, the AWU, White Australia and imperialism. 'The Programme of Action' called for greater internationalism and a more vigorous fight against racial divisions as part of the general struggle against war and colonialism.¹⁸⁹

The Secretariat then went into plenary session. This took place as delegates were en route to Moscow aboard a trans-Siberian train. Presenting their report, the Australians described industrial struggles, the 'capitalist offensive' and the role of the Arbitration Court therein. An interested Lozovsky was present, and perhaps unaware of the leeway given the Australians. He subjected them to lengthy questioning and criticism, believing the Australian affiliates were uncertain as to the line of the PPTUS on a range of issues. While Lozovsky mentioned the war danger and other topics, he singled out for special criticism Australian support for arbitration, White Australia and participation in industrial peace conferences. He further remarked that the struggle against reformism had to be intensified. On these issues, Lozovsky was adamant that serious 'illusions' prevailed within the Australian labour movement, illusions that had to be dispelled. The puzzled delegates defended themselves: they had criticised arbitration in their report, yet Lozovsky maintained that they were entertaining illusions. This encounter gave the Australians a foretaste of the extreme sectarianism of the Third Period that was beginning

¹⁸⁶ Stoler to 'Dear Friends,' 12 December 1928 (RC 534/4/224).

¹⁸⁷ 'Geeeee' [Hardy?] to Jack [Ryan?], 14 October 1929 (RC 534/4/294).

¹⁸⁸ An account of the Australians' trip and activities while in Russia is given in *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1 March 1930, pp. 65-75.

¹⁸⁹ All the above resolutions are from *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 2, no. 13, 2 December 1929.

to infect the PPTUS. Nevertheless, the delegates accepted the line and returned pledged to implement it.¹⁹⁰ Persuading the ACTU to do the same was another matter entirely. As Farrell noted, ‘very few labour organisations outside the communist movement were listening.’¹⁹¹

Lozovsky’s criticism concerning White Australia, and more broadly on work for the national question, was not without foundation, even for the CPA. Despite the CPA’s stance against racism and White Australia, it was forced to confess a certain amount of neglect and apprehension. The abovementioned advice to Ryan at the ACTU is a case in point. But beyond this, Higgins, while in Moscow, admitted that the CPA left White Australia ‘alone except when particular incidents brought it into prominence.’¹⁹² He promised to intensify the party’s work in this respect. But little more was done. In 1929, the CPA was again forced to defend itself against a Profintern allegation that its opposition to White Australia was tinged with a ‘suspicious hesitancy.’ In response, the CPA affirmed its unconditional opposition to White Australia and the racial prejudices of Australian workers, claiming to have made ‘definite gains’ in combating racism. But it refused to ‘make an issue’ of White Australia. While the CPA waged its ‘ideological struggle’ against White Australia ‘with all the vigour and influence of our Party apparatus,’ this was only done ‘commensurate with the other pressing tasks and problems confronting the Communist Party of Australia.’¹⁹³ In other words, White Australia, while of great importance, was not necessarily the foremost concern of the CPA. Hence, despite the CPA’s objection, the criticism of the Profintern was not baseless.

Yet the AAS did not raise objections to different communist organisations adopting positions on White Australia amenable to different audiences or circumstances. For instance, the AAS exhorted the CPA to pursue an active campaign against White Australia in the unions as a precursor to winning over the ACTU to an anti-racist position. But for the PPTUS, while it too had to fight White Australia, the AAS determined the ‘form in which the PPTUS in Australia will fight the White Australia policy, and its concrete steps and strategy, will have to be decided on the spot by the PPTUS and the

¹⁹⁰ The above is from *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1 March 1930, pp. 65-75. See also Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour*, pp. 188-189 for an account of this meeting.

¹⁹¹ Farrell, ‘Australian Labour and the Profintern,’ p. 49.

¹⁹² ‘Report of the Representative of the CP of A on Matters Arising out of the CI Letter and Resolution,’ 6 September 1928 (RC 495/94/42).

¹⁹³ CEC CPA to Lozovsky, 26 September 1929 (RC 495/94/53).

CEC of the Australian Party.’¹⁹⁴ This resulted in the adoption of different tactics by the CPA and the PPTUS, perhaps leading to confusion about (or neglect of) the issue.

Contrasting with its reticence on White Australia, the CPA and its fraternalists displayed little obvious hesitancy regarding work within migrant communities. The influence of the ‘national question’ aspect of proletarian internationalism was crucial in impelling this approach. The CPA organised non-English speaking party branches, making it possible to bring communism to migrants with limited English. The IRA recognised favourable prospects for work among migrants and instructed the ILD (soon to be supplanted by the International Class War Prisoner’s Aid, or ICWPA)¹⁹⁵ to engage in such work, especially among Italians, who could be roused to action against the ‘white terror’ in their former country.¹⁹⁶ Since Italians formed a large portion of migrants, work among that community was highly important.

The risk of Italians being used as strike breakers added a further dimension to this work. In an attempt to avert this problem, Higgins requested the Comintern send ‘two or three good organisers, competent to produce a revolutionary newspaper in Italian... able to give their full attention to the work of editing an Italian paper and visiting country towns and camps where Italians are collected.’¹⁹⁷ In doing this, the CPA intended to establish itself as an influential political force in the Italian community, seeking to weaken the Fascist Consuls and Catholic Priests and simultaneously incorporate Italian workers into the Australian labour movement. However, no evidence has been found to confirm the arrival of the requested cadres.

Work among migrants enabled the CPA to broaden the scope of its international solidarity campaigns. A case in point was the campaign in defence of thirty Italian communists (one of whom was Antonio Gramsci) about to face trial in Italy in mid-1928. In Sydney, Italian migrants, with the assistance of the CPA and the labour movement, sought to organise protests. Their object was Mussolini’s Special Fascist Tribunal, which deprived defendants of elementary legal rights. The significance of the trial was not lost

¹⁹⁴ AAS to the CEC of the CPA, 5 October 1928, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 3).

¹⁹⁵ In August 1929, the foundation of the ICWPA under the leadership of Moxon replaced the ILD as the Australian section of the IRA. See ‘Report of Australian ICWPA Congress,’ 16 October 1929 (RC 539/3/233).

¹⁹⁶ For the IRA instructions, see EC of IRA to ILD Australia, 5 October 1928 (RC 539/3/233).

¹⁹⁷ F.F. Green [Higgins] to Secretariat of the ECCI, 10 October 1928 (RC 495/6/16). The organisers were to come from Italian émigrés in Europe, have their fares paid by the Comintern and Profintern and be sustained while in Australia by the NSW Labour Council.

on the CPA. It argued that if the international working class failed to stir and defend the accused, then fascism would further consolidate and strengthen its attacks on the Italian people. Hence, the party implored working class organisations to utilise all available means to protest directly to the representatives of Italian fascism in Australia.¹⁹⁸ Unfortunately, the protests did not gather momentum and had little bearing on the outcome of the trial.

Of the many campaigns of international solidarity waged in these years, few were as protracted, or exerted as much personal relevance to some CPA members, as the Meerut case in India. This case elicited especial Australian interest as the defendants were associates of Jack Ryan. The Meerut saga commenced in March 1929 and was quickly conflated with the cause of Indian independence. Thirty one unionists, including some Englishmen, were arrested on the ostensible charge of ‘conspiracy to deprive the King of sovereignty over India.’ The trial took place in the town of Meerut, allegedly to minimise working class demonstrations as the labour movement was weaker there than in Calcutta or Bombay and to deprive the accused (with the exception of the English comrades) of trial by jury. Nevertheless, the trial did not conclude until 1933. According to the CPA, the Comintern and various other communist fraternal, ¹⁹⁹ the charge and arrests were a move to strangle the independence movement. As expressed by the PPTUS, the right to criticise British rule was ‘a fight for freedom of speech and assembly, not only in India, but in every colonial and semi-colonial country.’ The PPTUS urged immediate protest demonstrations in every country. For its part, the CPA encouraged unions in the British Empire to protest against the arrests. Dockworkers and seamen were asked to boycott British shipping, though few appear to have heeded the call. Even so, some protest meetings were held around Australia. However, the Australian response was not as robust as the British, where a National Meerut Prisoners’ Defence Committee was established.²⁰⁰ For the Australians, much work remained to be done before a fuller realisation of the international solidarity provisions of proletarian internationalism could be claimed.

¹⁹⁸ *Workers’ Weekly*, 27 July 1928, p. 4.

¹⁹⁹ Among these other fraternal was the LAI, whose declaration on Meerut is in *Inprecorr*, vol. 9, no. 21, 3 May 1929, pp. 448-449. The Comintern’s view is in *Inprecorr*, vol. 9, no. 22, 10 May 1929, pp. 480-481.

²⁰⁰ The PPTUS position and quotations from *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 2, no. 6, 1 May 1929, pp. 25-27. For the CPA’s response to the arrests see *Workers’ Weekly*, 10-17 May 1929. A protest meeting was held in Brisbane. See *Workers’ Weekly*, 5 July 1929, p. 4. On the National Meerut Prisoners’ Defence Committee, see *Inprecorr*, vol. 9, no. 47, 6 September 1929, p. 997. For an account of the activities of the Meerut defendants prior to their arrest and the subsequent trial see John Callaghan, ‘Blowing Up India: The Comintern and India, 1928-1935,’ in Worley (ed), *In Search of Revolution*, pp. 326-328.

While the CPA was highly focused on some international solidarity campaigns, it neglected others. A glaring example was the CPA's neglect of the abovementioned Comintern endorsed and Profintern organised two week campaign of solidarity with China. The Comintern informed the CPA in June 1928 that it 'must take [an] active part' in the campaign, which was supposed to be a broad mass movement of the proletariat regardless of party affiliation and, seemingly, the emerging sectarian line. The campaign was intended to generate solidarity between the proletariat of the industrialised countries and China, 'to give them moral and material aid.' This was in turn to be linked up with the struggle against war and used to expose the 'treachery' of the 'reformists' in aiding the subjugation of China.²⁰¹ But the *Workers' Weekly* either ignored or was unaware of it, while the *Pan-Pacific Worker* belatedly published an appeal for international solidarity from the All-China Federation of Labour.²⁰² If the two week campaign intended to radically increase Australian solidarity with the Chinese, then it cannot be considered a success. There were no protests or boycotts. Higgins was correct when he told Moscow in September that '[n]othing considerable has been done to protest against the White Terror in China.'²⁰³ Hence, insofar as the CPA was involved in the two week campaign, it represented a shortfall of proletarian internationalism.

With the gradual Australian dawn of the Third Period – and notwithstanding the shortcomings of the two week campaign – an expansion of solidarity with colonial liberation movements was gathering pace. While the Chinese revolution continued to receive the greatest attention, the Indian move for independence increasingly gained prominence. The Simon Commission, established by the British government to determine the future of India, was dismissed as a capitalist ruse: only full and immediate independence for India was acceptable for the communists.²⁰⁴ Publicising imperialist exploitation in China and India and exhortations for greater Australian support for the working class of these countries were fixtures of CPA propaganda.²⁰⁵ Indeed, the proceedings of a 1928 meeting between Higgins (en route to the Comintern Congress)

²⁰¹ Agitprop Department ECCI to Agitprop Department of the CC of the Communist Party of Australia, 29 June 1928, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 8).

²⁰² *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 1, no. 10, 1 September 1928, pp. 3-4.

²⁰³ 'Report from the Representative of the CEC of the Communist Party of Australia to the MOPR Secretariat,' 11 September 1928 (RC 495/94/42).

²⁰⁴ The CPA argued that immediate independence, not an inquiry, was the desire of the Indian people and published accounts of the Simon Commission being greeted with protests everywhere it went. See *Workers' Weekly*, 7 June 1929, p. 1.

²⁰⁵ See *Workers' Weekly*, 1928-1929, *passim*.

and some Chinese comrades, at which suggestions were offered on improving Australian assistance to China, were republished in the party press. Among the things that could be done were to launch a strenuous fight against the presence of imperialist troops and their domestic allies in China, financial assistance to the Chinese (said ‘with a grin’), ‘kill’ the White Australia policy and attend the 1929 PPTUS Congress.²⁰⁶ The Australians were only capable of accomplishing the last suggestion.

Although solidarity was highly significant to the CPA, the issue of war overshadowed all others. As has already been shown, the danger of war and defence of the USSR were central themes at the 6th Comintern Congress. As the implications of the Congress – particularly its characterisation of the menacing international situation – became better known by late 1928, the CPA embarked upon incessant anti-war work. Indeed, it is difficult to convey without constant repetition the ubiquitous fear of the imminence of war. The party’s propaganda differed from the Comintern’s only in its neglect to emphasise the role played by social democracy in war preparations.²⁰⁷ This was indicative of ‘reformist illusions’ in the CPA during 1928-9, but was rectified from 1930. Nevertheless, seldom did an issue of the *Workers’ Weekly* appear during these years without the disclosure of a new conspiracy pointing to war over markets between Britain and America, or a plethora of other combinations, or a grand capitalist alliance against Russia.

To be sure, the communists possessed a loose definition of war. Anything from financial blockade and trade sanctions to conventional warfare fell within this definition. But the solution to all forms of war was the same: internationally organised (irrespective of racial divides) and militant (as opposed to pacifist) activity on the basis of proletarian internationalism directed against international capitalism. Centres of anti-war activity had to be established in all countries likely to be belligerents in any future bloodshed.²⁰⁸ In addition to this, the Comintern prescribed for the CPA further measures to combat war. Anti-war work was to be pursued in unions operating in war industries, preparatory to disrupting the home-front in the event of war and in anticipation of transforming imperialist war into civil war. The ‘war aims’ of the Australian bourgeoisie and the Labor Party had to be exposed. Resistance to compulsory military training and a programme of

²⁰⁶ *Workers’ Weekly*, 16 November 1928, p. 4. The Chinese qualified their suggestion for Australian financial assistance by asking Australian workers to donate money to the CPA instead.

²⁰⁷ For instance, compare *Inprecorr*, vol. 8, no. 77, 2 November 1928, pp. 1427-1429 with any contemporaneous issue of the *Workers’ Weekly*.

²⁰⁸ Hence the significance of the PPTUS.

demands addressing the grievances of trainees had to be devised. The fight against pacifism, regular anti-war propaganda in the party press and organisation of women were also key tasks in the fight against war. According to the Comintern, the fulfilment of these tasks would tremendously benefit the CPA's anti-war work.²⁰⁹

Significantly, the CPA was reluctant to implement the Comintern's decisions in the struggle against war. Upon the instruction that the CPA work within the army, it was dismissed as 'another attempt to apply certain tasks of the European Parties to Australia where the conditions calling for the action do not exist.' Instead of the army, work in the navy, especially when it was sent to 'keep order' in China or the Pacific, was considered propitious. But as with other work with an internationalist tone, this had to be held in abeyance until the CPA was numerically 'strong enough.'²¹⁰

Despite the numerical weakness of the CPA, it remained incumbent upon it to organise mass demonstrations against war. Preventing war was, moreover, inseparably associated with proletarian internationalism. One of the key decisions of the 6th Comintern Congress was to earmark a day for protest against imperialist war. Prior to this decision, European social democracy had set the 4th of August, the day of the outbreak of the Great War, as a day of anti-war protest. The Comintern and the CPA typically protested alongside the social democrats, using this day to issue anti-war propaganda.²¹¹ However, with the onset of the Third Period, and the emphasis on communists asserting an independent identity, it was decided in 1929 that the 1st of August, to be known as International Red Day, be the communist's international day of protest against imperialist war. 'The mobilisation of the entire forces of the Comintern' was expected, with meetings and demonstrations to include the participation of armed forces personnel and the widest sections of the proletariat.²¹² The emphasis was on the united front from below. However, an ominous meeting of West European communist parties warned that 'right' elements would stymie

²⁰⁹ Anglo-American Secretariat to the Communist Party of Australia, 20 October 1928, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 3).

²¹⁰ 'Report of Eight Annual Conference, December 22 to 27, 1928,' p. 12, Rawling papers (ANU N57/370).

²¹¹ Propaganda typically focused on a number of themes: an exposition of the Great War as a trade war; the treachery of the reformists; and a pledge to prevent another imperialist war by fighting capitalism. See *Workers' Weekly*, 3 August 1928, p. 1 and *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 1, no. 8, 1 August 1928, p. 5. The CPA also issued anti-war propaganda on Anzac Day. For Anzac Day see *Workers' Weekly*, 26 April 1929, p. 3. See the letter from Agitprop Department ECCI to Communist Party of Australia, 30 June 1928, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 8), informing the CPA that 4 August 1928 was to be a day of agitation against war.

²¹² *Inprecorr*, vol. 9, no. 22, 10 May 1929, p. 490.

the success of International Red Day.²¹³ As will be shown later in this chapter, the Australian party failed to take heed.

The more general ‘right deviation’ foreboding of the West Europeans fell on deaf ears in Australia. So far as the ‘right danger’ applied to the CPA, it bore most pertinence to elections and relations with the Labor Party. This was not as obvious in the weeks and months after the 6th Comintern Congress as it was by 1929. In August 1928 the CPA began publicly explaining the abovementioned Queensland Resolution and the tactics it entailed. Rhetoric conformed with the new orthodoxy emanating from the Comintern: one encapsulated in the slogan ‘class against class,’ which revolved around a communist challenge to Labor’s working class hegemony. In reality, reformist illusions still prevailed. And even the most enthusiastic had to confess that Queenslanders’ dissatisfaction with the McCormack government was directed against its personnel and not reformism itself. Moreover, standing for parliament did not overly concern the CPA. It reasoned that elections were useful only for the purpose of publicising the party platform and recruiting new members.²¹⁴ Capitalist parliaments, according to communist scriptures, could achieve little for the working-class. But the logic of the international line held that the time had come, after many years’ experience of perceived Labor sponsored strike breaking and anti-working-class legislation, coupled with the anti-Soviet utterances of reformists in all countries, for a communist challenge to the ALP. The CPA’s Queensland approach conformed with this logic. This rendered the appearance that the party was at last traversing the same course as the Comintern, an integral part of proletarian internationalism.²¹⁵

But looks can be deceiving. While the CPA was in step with the Comintern for the approaching 1929 Queensland elections, it adopted vastly different tactics for the November 1928 federal elections. With the news of this election, the CPA told workers ‘here is your chance of putting Bruce out.’ There was only one way to achieve this – by voting Labor. The CPA did not contest the 1928 elections, opting instead to release a list

²¹³ *Inprecorr*, vol. 9, no. 26, 31 May 1929, pp. 557-559.

²¹⁴ In his campaign speech, J.B. Miles made this point. *Workers’ Weekly*, 5 April 1929, p. 1.

²¹⁵ The party’s attempts to explain its election tactics are from *Workers’ Weekly*, 3 and 17 August-14 September 1928. See also ‘Workers! Capitalism has Two Parties!! – Fight Both!!!’ November 1928 (RC 495/94/43). See also election material in the April 1929 editions of the *Workers’ Weekly*. The CPA’s stance on parliament is from *Workers’ Weekly*, 26 April 1929, p. 4.

of demands and request Labor candidates accept them.²¹⁶ Not surprisingly, few Labor candidates bothered to respond.

These tactics were inconsistent with the decisions of the Comintern. When in Moscow, and still there during the election, Higgins asked the AAS whether the Queensland tactics were applicable to the federal elections, to which the AAS replied in the affirmative.²¹⁷ This, as discussed above, had been the line since the 9th ECCI in February 1928, which long preceded the 6th Congress and the 1928 federal elections. But the communists chose not to contest the elections because

No real working-class party is in a position to challenge their [Labor's] right to represent the toiling masses, and because many workers still retain faith in the reformist machine, the Communist Party urges the workers of Australia to vote for the Labor candidates on the class basis.²¹⁸

Indeed, following the logic of the Third Period, this seemingly pragmatic position was perpetuating reformist illusions. Moreover, in urging a vote for the ALP on 'the class basis,' the CPA was challenging the Third Period assumption that reformists could not be considered representatives of the working class. It is therefore puzzling why opposition to this tactic internally and in the Comintern was not as fierce as when the same approach was adopted a year later.²¹⁹ It seems likely that the domestic desire to see Bruce out of government overrode Bolshevik discipline to the international line, again revealing the flexibility in the CPA-Comintern relationship. Regardless, the CPA received the swing against Bruce with semi-satisfaction, mitigated by the reality of Bruce retaining office and the continuation of the capitalist offensive.²²⁰

²¹⁶ *Workers' Weekly*, 19 October 1928, p. 1. The demands concerned the lifting of the ban on communist literature, repeal of some legislation and penal clauses directed against unionists, and granting permission to host the 1929 PPTUS Congress.

²¹⁷ For Higgins' query see 'Report of the Representative of the CP of A on Matters Arising out of the CI Letter and Resolution,' 6 September 1928 (RC 495/94/42). For the AAS response see 'To the CEC of the Australian Party October 5th 1928,' CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 3).

²¹⁸ *Workers' Weekly*, 16 November 1928, p. 2.

²¹⁹ Campbell claims that Sharkey and Moxon in Sydney and J.B. Miles in Brisbane opposed this tactic but had their concerns ignored. Campbell adds that 'in the interests of party unity and discipline' they decided to carry out the election tactic, criticism reserved until the campaign was over. Campbell, *History of the Australian Labour Movement*, pp. 127-128. However, Jack Blake rejects this, arguing that no difference existed in the CEC on this occasion. Blake, 'The Australian Communist Party and the Comintern in the Early 1930s,' p. 44.

²²⁰ *Workers' Weekly*, 23 November 1928, pp. 1-2. Indeed, Jack Ryan admitted that the desire to see Bruce defeated was a prime reason for supporting Labor. See *Workers' Weekly*, 27 December 1929, p. 3.

Shortly after the federal elections, the CPA met for its 8th National Conference. This was held from 22 to 27 December 1928.²²¹ The Conference accepted much of the new line emanating from the Comintern; its resolutions were also influenced by the Third Period analysis. This, however, remained a paper commitment. The CPA, with its 300 members, did little anti-war work in the army, or to build a solid militant movement in the unions, or contest elections to ‘expose’ the ALP. Indeed, the Conference did not object to the 1928 federal election strategy. In fact, the resolution on the Labor Party stated that the tendency to transfer electoral tactics from one state (i.e. Queensland) to another was ‘a mistake to be condemned’ and that the party had to take heed of a variety of factors when deciding to stand in elections.²²² Essentially, the CPA was refusing to perform the tasks set out by the Comintern.

Higgins, having recently arrived from Moscow, delivered a major report. Its importance was that it described the Third Period and the decisions of the 6th Comintern Congress. Thus, he was outlining policies that were important, at that time, for a full realisation of the organisational dimension of proletarian internationalism. Additionally, delegates were now fully acquainted with the new line. He discussed the thesis on Bukharin’s report, the ‘right danger,’ the tensions between states contributing to the war danger, the capitalist offensive, the revolutionary movements in the colonies and the growing anti-Soviet and reactionary character of social democracy. In regard to social democracy, Higgins said it was the bounden duty of the CPA to gain the leadership of the working class through an increased struggle against reactionary social democracy – ‘to this end we must lose no opportunity of exposing the [social democratic] leaders as traitors’ – all the while the united front from below was to be maintained. This meant withholding electoral support to Labor and instead working for the election of communists. Needless to say, at the recent federal election, the CPA had just contradicted this and failed to acknowledge a mistake had even been made! He also dealt with the accusation – perhaps from internal critics opposed to the new international line – that the CPA took ‘orders from Moscow.’ He explained that the CPA was a member of a global party that drew on international experience and permitted intervention from the centre to solve problems in its own country. After a process of free discussion and consultation, and once a decision had been made with the Comintern, it was ‘loyally carried out by the section.’ Hence there was ‘no

²²¹ For a detailed account of the 8th Conference, see Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 149-153.

²²² See *Workers’ Weekly*, 11 January 1929, for the CPA’s resolutions regarding these topics. The factors the CPA had to take into consideration when deciding electoral tactics were, 1) the concrete situation in each given case, 2) the relation of forces between the ALP and CPA, 3) the organisational strength or weakness of the CPA, and 4) the prevailing state of ideology of the workers.

sense in the talk of one section “giving orders” to another.’ But it was also ‘quite true, and we glory in the fact that special attention is paid to the opinions of the leaders of the Russian Party, which has made its own revolution. We must not forget what the Russian workers have taught us.’ Yet over the course of the next year, the guidance of the Russians, particularly advice concerning social democracy, was often overlooked. Proletarian internationalism, so far as its provisions regarding international association were concerned, was more ambiguous than Higgins cared to acknowledge.²²³

Tom Wright delivered the report of the CEC. Wright said that the CEC had established closer contact with the ECCI, but that a number of questions remained unanswered. Despite the policies Higgins had just enunciated, one unanswered question was whether the Queensland Resolution was applicable nationally. Some delegates cited the PCF and CPGB tactics and argued in the affirmative, though appear to have been in the minority. In regard to the 1928 federal elections, Wright defended the party’s strategy, though provided little justification.²²⁴

It is worth noting at this stage that some dissent was registered against certain aspects of CPA policy, related specifically to its application of the national question. Delegate Bostick lamented the dearth of reference to the question of immigration in Wright’s report, and indeed, in the party press generally. He asserted that the ALP was responsible for antagonisms between Southern Europeans and Australians, which in turn presented an opportunity for the CPA to devote greater attention to work among migrants. Ross responded, saying that it was up to comrades living and working among migrants to devise their own strategies and not wait for the CEC ‘to give a detailed answer to everything.’ Another delegate, Duncan, added that immigrants were contributing to unemployment and suggested that upon arrival they be met and brought immediately into the labour movement. This time Wright responded by assuring Duncan that his suggestion was already party policy, but that the scarcity of available cadres prevented it from being implemented.²²⁵ Nevertheless, the resolution on Wright’s report conceded that more attention to migrants was required, that organised labour make efforts to ‘win the

²²³ Higgins’ report can be found in ‘Report of Eight Annual Conference, December 22 to 27, 1928,’ Rawling papers (ANU N57/370).

²²⁴ ‘Report of Eight Annual Conference, December 22 to 27, 1928, CE Report for 1928,’ Rawling papers (ANU N57/370). See Curthoys, ‘The Communist Party and the Communist International (1927-1929),’ pp. 59-61 for an account of the Conference deliberations on whether the Queensland resolution was applicable nationally.

²²⁵ ‘Report of Eight Annual Conference, December 22 to 27, 1928,’ Rawling papers (ANU N57/370).

newly arrived workers away from capitalist influences' and that CPA groups be more active in establishing contact with new arrivals.²²⁶

Following the Conference, Queensland remained the sole focus of the party's electoral attention. The 1929 state election resulted in the defeat of the McCormack Labor government. The CPA considered its performance a success. Its five candidates (two CPA candidates and three 'left-wing' candidates), and 'comrade informal' where there were no communist or 'left-wing' candidates, attracted 3,000 votes. The distribution of communist literature and well received meetings were further cause for optimism. So too was the mere fact of the CPA challenging Labor, signalling the counterattack against capitalism and its 'lackeys.' Indeed, even before election day the *Workers' Weekly* declared the campaign a success, notwithstanding the number of votes gained.²²⁷ In the election post-mortem, the consensus was that the party's tactics (with the exception of the use of non-party 'left-wing' candidates) were effective and should continue.²²⁸ Such was the perceived success that Moxon called for the application of the Queensland tactic for all state and federal elections.²²⁹

Moxon was merely echoing the international line, which had already proclaimed the national importance of the Queensland election tactics. This was reiterated at the 10th ECCI Plenum, which sat in Moscow in July 1929.²³⁰ This Plenum confirmed and supplemented the decisions of the 6th Comintern Congress.²³¹ It invoked the ostensible imminence of revolution to cleanse the Comintern of undesirable elements. It therefore escalated the internecine struggle against the deniers of the Stalinist Third Period who constituted the 'right danger.' The upshot was the expulsion of Comintern president, Bukharin, and most of his supporters from the Comintern. Henceforth, Stalinists were in complete control of the International.²³² V. M. Molotov replaced Bukharin as president, though his tenure lasted only until 1931.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ The CPA's post-election analysis is from *Workers' Weekly*, 17 May 1929, p. 2. The CPA's pre-election claims of success are from *Workers' Weekly*, 3 May 1929.

²²⁸ For the discussions see *Workers' Weekly*, 24 May – 5 July 1929.

²²⁹ *Workers' Weekly*, 9 August 1929, p. 4.

²³⁰ Unless indicated otherwise, the following discussion of the 10th ECCI is based on *Inprecorr*, vol. 9, no. 46, 4 September 1929, pp. 973-978 and *The Path to Power: The International Situation and the Immediate Tasks of the Communist Parties* (Sydney: The Communist Party of Australia, 1929).

²³¹ Although as Worley argues, the Plenum 'exaggerated and somewhat distorted...Bukharin's original conception of the Third Period.' Worley, 'Courting Disaster?', p. 9.

²³² For the resolution on Bukharin's expulsion see *Inprecorr*, vol. 9, no. 45, 30 August 1929, pp. 964-965.

The Plenum's most significant innovation was its proclamation of the notorious 'social fascist' line. It took political sectarianism to new, dizzying, heights. The twisted logic underpinning this term of abuse (first used by *Izvestiia* in 1922)²³³ stemmed from the notion that social democracy was an integral component of the 'fascising' capitalist system. As Third Period capitalism resorted to social democratic governments and 'fascisation' of the bourgeois state under the exigencies of the economic crisis – 'fascisation' being the bourgeoisie's final attempt to prolong the life of capitalism before revolution – the social democratic stooges of capitalism also resorted to fascist methods. Hence, social democracy, both in government and opposition, acting upon the behests of its bourgeois masters, was pursuing 'repressive' policies intended to sustain capitalism with deleterious ramifications for the working class. In the words of well known Finnish communist Otto W. Kuusinen, '[t]he social-fascists are acting as a rule like the fascists, but they do their fascist work not with an open face, but behind a smoke-screen.'²³⁴ In short, they maintained a façade of benevolence to the working class. Confusing matters was the existence of a left-wing of social-fascism, which typically utilised pacifist, democratic and socialist slogans. Through the demagogic use of such slogans, left-wing social fascists allegedly slowed the demise of social democracy. Yet it was no different from the rest of social democracy in aiding the bourgeoisie. Therefore, on account of its deception, left social-fascism warranted greater exposure as a bourgeois deception barring the road to revolutionary advance.

Yet the right-wing (reconfirmed as the greatest deviational 'danger') within the communist parties was thwarting the revolutionary wave. Indeed, defence of right deviationist views was deemed incompatible with membership of the communist party.²³⁵ Hence, it was imperative that the parties purge themselves of right-wing elements and take up the offensive against social democracy.²³⁶ This meant communist participation in elections in opposition to the 'social-fascists.' The Australian repercussions of these developments, that will be discussed below, were to both disrupt and transform the party. Tremendous pain was necessary before the CPA could finally intersect the line espoused by the organisational element of proletarian internationalism.

²³³ McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, pp. 98-102 for a discussion on the origins and meaning of 'social fascism.'

²³⁴ Kuusinen jointly delivered the main report at the Plenum titled 'The International Situation and the Tasks of the Communist International.' Quoted from *Inprecorr*, vol. 9, no. 40, 20 August 1929, p. 848.

²³⁵ *Inprecorr*, vol. 9, no. 46, 4 September 1929, p. 977.

²³⁶ *Inprecorr*, vol. 9, no. 40, 20 August 1929, p. 851.

The struggle against war assumed added urgency due to the perceived exacerbation of international tensions since the 6th Congress.²³⁷ Pursuant with a decision of the 6th Congress and the West European communist parties, the 10th ECCI Plenum officially sanctioned 1 August as the day of international protest against war. The demonstrations were intended to serve as the foundations for further activity in preparing communists for the coming round of revolutionary struggles and as a precaution against underestimation of the war danger. Just as the aforementioned conference of West European communists warned, failure to demonstrate on 1st August was itself a sign of the underestimation of the war danger, and therefore a right wing deviation. It was a day for activating the united front from below through a mobilisation of the broadest ‘proletarian and working masses against imperialism and social democracy.’²³⁸ But as will be seen, the CPA failed to act upon the Plenum decisions.

The CPA’s first deviation came during the 1st August anti-war day. The CPA enlarged upon this day by embarking on a broader ‘War Week’ between 28 July and 4 August. Numerous activities were conducted in the lead-up to and during this week. An anti-war conference of trade unionists convened by the NSW Labour Council pledged itself to militant action in the event of any imperialist war. A Labour Council sponsored demonstration was also organised in Sydney for 4 August, the social democratic day against war. There were also anti-war meetings at various other towns around Australia. But despite the CPA’s endless stream of anti-war propaganda, it chose not to organise a demonstration on 1 August. Instead, it participated in the 4 August demonstration. This decision was justified on the grounds that the Australian class struggle had not yet reached the same intensity as that in Europe. The foreboding of the West European communists and ECCI came to fruition in Australia. This was a serious deviation from the Comintern line, and therefore, from the organisational requirements of proletarian internationalism.²³⁹

The next and more significant breach in the Comintern line came during the 1929 federal elections. The elections provided an opportunity to expand on the ‘success’ of the Queensland election and act upon the decisions of the 10th ECCI. Held under a cloud of economic misery, the election, so far as the CPA was concerned, was going to be fought over industrial issues and war preparations. As Macintyre aptly remarked, the election

²³⁷ For the ECCI’s analysis of international tensions see *Inprecorr*, vol. 9, no. 46, 4 September 1929, pp. 973-974; *The Path to Power*, pp. 2-3.

²³⁸ Quote from *Inprecorr*, vol. 9, no. 35, 24 July 1929, p. 748.

²³⁹ All of the above is from *Workers’ Weekly*, 19 July – 9 August 1929.

presented ‘the very circumstances the Communist International had identified as the Third Period of revolutionary class struggle, the moment at which capitalism fell back on reformists to solve its crisis and communists could at last expose their treachery.’²⁴⁰

But the CPA chose not to contest the elections. After a confusing chain of events, where Moxon first voted against a proposal to contest some seats then demanded the party contest other seats, the CEC decided not to run any candidates. The CPA told the AAS that financial and organisational difficulties, as well as the recognition that only Labor could topple Bruce, prevented it from fielding candidates. This was no empty defence: the party was indeed stretched to breaking point, lacking both human and financial resources, leaving it woefully ill-prepared to face another resource sapping election so soon after the Queensland campaign.²⁴¹ At any rate, communists reasoned that Labor would provide some relief from the capitalist offensive, and accordingly welcomed Scullin’s victory.²⁴²

Not surprisingly, the 1929 federal election strategy, in the weeks before election day, exacerbated factional differences to the point of open conflict. Moxon, joined by L. L. Sharkey,²⁴³ ignored party rules and appealed directly to the Comintern for intervention on the grounds that the CEC had committed a right deviation.²⁴⁴ Moxon called the decision not to contest the elections ‘the greatest deviation’ from the Comintern line and an abnegation of the fundamental tasks of world communism during the Third Period. He further added that the ALP was not a working class party, but a capitalist party, support for which might spell the end of the Communist Party. Moxon deprecated the argument that tactics towards the federal ALP had to be different from those employed against state Labor; he asked whether there was any real difference between state and federal Labor. Both supposedly pursued the same policy, shared the same individuals (some MPs had made the transition from state to federal politics) and were ‘controlled’ by the same state executives.²⁴⁵ The experience of state Labor in office was sufficient to dispel illusions

²⁴⁰ Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 158-159.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

²⁴² *Workers’ Weekly*, 20-27 September and 18 October 1929. For the CPA’s explanation to the Anglo-American Secretariat see ‘Minutes No. 2 of Anglo-American Secretariat,’ 28 September 1929 (RC 495/72/52).

²⁴³ Sharkey had previously opposed class against class. Indeed, he had initially supported the decision not to contest the 1929 election, but was adept at associating himself with stronger personalities he believed were in the ascendancy. In this instance, Moxon was the personality. See also Macintyre’s description of Sharkey in *The Reds*, p. 152.

²⁴⁴ Telegram, 22 September 1929 (RC 495/94/53).

²⁴⁵ The above is from HJM [Moxon] to CEC CPA, 16 September 1929 (RC 495/94/53) and *ibid.*

about federal Labor. Hence there was only one ALP in Australia that required a uniform tactic. It therefore fell to the CPA to present itself as the only true working class party by opposing the ALP with candidates of its own and the informal vote.

Upon learning of these events, the Comintern promptly insisted the party change course. The AAS, with Moxon supporter Ted Tripp participating in its deliberations, told the CPA that its election strategy breached the decisions of the 6th Comintern Congress and that only ‘class against class’ was permissible. ‘Support of Labour [sic] Party in no form possible.’ It insisted the CPA field its own and ‘left-wing’ candidates. If it were too late to do this, the party was to run demonstrative candidates.²⁴⁶ Wright cabled on 27 September on behalf of the CEC, claiming that since election day was on 12 October, it was too late to field candidates. He added that the CEC had decided to maintain the 1928 approach and issued a list of demands and asked voters to support Labor.²⁴⁷ The Comintern retorted by insisting on compliance with the approach it had already decreed. The CEC ignored the instructions in this latest missive and continued to defy the Comintern. Meanwhile, Wright sent Moscow a written report (which took weeks to arrive) explaining the rationale behind the electoral strategy. This, and a further rejection to meet the Comintern’s demands, prompted Moxon and Sharkey to appeal once more on the 8th of October. The Comintern sent another cable requesting confirmation of its previous telegram, to which Wright informed the Comintern that its cables had been received and that a report had been dispatched. But by this time it was too late.²⁴⁸ Election day was approaching and Labor was on the brink of taking office. For their role in the affair and for circulating Comintern documents and cables before CEC members had seen them, Moxon and Sharkey were censured. A further Comintern telegram was sent on 18 October, which demanded the CPA ‘ruthlessly combat’ the right deviation in its ranks and align itself with the International.²⁴⁹ It further informed the CPA that an open letter had been dispatched and that this letter was to form the basis of discussion in the lead up to the party’s forthcoming national Conference. The turmoil in the CPA was far from over.

²⁴⁶ These instructions reached the Australians on the 26th of September. ‘Minutes No. 2 of Anglo-American Secretariat,’ 28 September 1929 (RC 495/72/52).

²⁴⁷ Wright to Anglo-American Secretariat, 27 September 1929 (RC 495/94/53).

²⁴⁸ The CPA 9th Conference in December 1929 documented this chain of events under the heading ‘Story of the Cables’ in, ‘Ninth Annual Conference of the Communist Party of Australia,’ CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 1). See also Stuart Macintyre, ‘Dealing With Moscow: The Comintern and the Early History of the Communist Party of Australia,’ *Labour History*, no. 67 (November 1994), pp. 139-140; Curthoys, ‘The Communist Party and the Communist International (1927-1929),’ pp. 61-63.

²⁴⁹ Macintyre, *The Reds*, p. 161.

The depth of feeling was immense. In the wake of the election, the Comintern forced the leadership to open the pages of the party press to discuss recent events.²⁵⁰ In a move that sealed the fate of the incumbent leadership, contributors were encouraged to take into account the decisions of the 10th ECCI. This made it starkly obvious to the membership, and crucially party conference delegates, that the CPA was pursuing a right deviator policy at odds with the Comintern. It also demonstrated the prevalence of the ‘right danger’ among the leading circles of the CPA – a danger the Comintern had demanded the parties purge themselves of for almost two years. Indeed, such was the severity of the deviation that the Comintern demanded the whole party participate in self-criticism.²⁵¹

The post-election discussion revealed a party riven with venomous personal animosity and factionalism. The majority of the CEC, led by Kavanagh and Wright, approved of the CPA’s conduct during the election. The CEC minority, spearheaded by Moxon and Sharkey, were vehemently opposed. An increasing number of party members fell in behind Moxon and Sharkey. Some contributors, as Macintyre commented, sought to ‘outbid each other in left virtue.’²⁵² Both sides repeated now familiar arguments: the Kavanagh-Wright supporters argued that the Queensland approach was correct, but that the same tactic – as insisted by the Comintern, Moxon and Sharkey – was inapplicable in the federal sphere. This fused into the general argument that objected to ‘mechanically’ applying the Comintern’s decisions in Australia, and that some of the Comintern’s analysis had no foundation in Australian conditions. It is, thus, fair to comment that these arguments were essentially ‘exceptionalist’ and reflected a ‘right deviation’ by the Comintern’s definition. In contrast, the Sharkey-Moxon arguments were heavily influenced by the Comintern line. They revolved around the accusation that support for Labor was ‘treachery’ in light of reformism’s abetting the capitalist offensive and its increasingly ‘social-fascist’ form during the Third Period. For Sharkey-Moxon, the arguments pursued by their opponents revealed the prevalence of the right danger in Australia and represented a deviation from ‘the single world line of the revolutionary working class,’ or – for the purpose of this thesis – the organisational aspect of

²⁵⁰ Macintyre, ‘Dealing With Moscow,’ p. 140.

²⁵¹ This was revealed in the Comintern’s open letter to the CPA published in *Workers’ Weekly*, 6 December 1929, p. 3.

²⁵² Macintyre, *The Reds*, p. 161.

proletarian internationalism. With growing support behind them, Moxon and Sharkey promised to redress these deviations.²⁵³

In December 1929, weeks before the party conference, the *Workers' Weekly* published the Comintern's open letter. While most delegates had already made up their mind, the letter's publication, together with circumstantial evidence (Wall Street crash, Northern NSW coal strike and death of Norman Brown) confirming the Third Period diagnosis, undoubtedly had the impact of persuading waverers in the party to throw their support behind Moxon and Sharkey. The letter appeared under the unambiguous subheading that demanded the CPA 'overhaul policy; alter course!' It stated that it was not the first time the Comintern had to deal with its bothersome Australian section. It affirmed the validity of the Third Period for Australia and underscored the favourable conditions opening for the CPA. However, it could only fully capitalise if it assumed the leadership of mass struggles (i.e. strikes) and unmasked reformism (i.e. contest elections against the ALP). Judging its work thus far, the Comintern scolded the CPA for failing to perform either activity. Moreover, it condemned the CPA's 'impermissible' support for Labor at the recent federal election and its decision not to protest on 1st August. Consequently, if it had not done so already, the CPA was at risk of slipping into the 'right danger.' The Comintern painted a grim picture; but it also offered hope. It counselled the party, among other things, to assert its position as leader of the working class, recognise reformism as 'social-fascism' and wage 'open warfare' against it and submit to the line of the Comintern.²⁵⁴ Only after the party had truly changed its ways could it repent for its sins. The CEC welcomed the letter as a corrective to past mistakes and begrudgingly accepted 'without reservation' the instructions contained therein; only to ignore them at the ensuing 9th CPA Conference.²⁵⁵ Nevertheless, alarmed at events, the AAS determined the CPA required further assistance to fulfil its obligations. It resolved to despatch a Comintern representative, Harry Wicks (alias Herbert Moore) to Australia, the consequences of whose visit from 1930 to 1931 had far-reaching ramifications.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ For these discussions see *Workers' Weekly*, 25 October – 27 December 1929. Quotation from *Workers' Weekly*, 25 October 1929, p. 3.

²⁵⁴ *Workers' Weekly*, 6 December 1929, p. 3. The Central Committee accepted the criticism in the open letter. See the CC resolution in *Workers' Weekly*, 13 December 1929, p. 2. Curthoys, 'The Communist Party and the Communist International (1927-1929),' pp. 63-65 deals in detail with the open letter and its upshot.

²⁵⁵ Untitled letter [CC CPA to Anglo-American Secretariat?], 16 December 1929 (RC 495/94/53).

²⁵⁶ 'Minutes of the meeting of the Anglo-American Secretariat,' 11 December 1929 (RC 495/72/52).

In the midst of these internal recriminations, the Victorian elections took place. Here the CPA decided to stand in one electorate, but asked its supporters in other electorates to either write the name of the party's demonstrative candidate on the ballot and mark it accordingly or write 'communist' on their ballot paper. The party's campaign slogan was 'class against class,' and indeed, the campaign itself was conducted in accordance with the Comintern's stipulates, seeking to challenge and unmask reformism.²⁵⁷ Belatedly, the CPA had heeded the new line of the Comintern.

But the Victorian tactics did not placate Moxon and Sharkey. At the CPA's 9th Conference in December 1929, Moxon and Sharkey executed their takeover. In this endeavour they were assisted by the Comintern, which sent a cable to conference affirming the verity of their criticism and confirming that the Kavanagh-Wright led Central Committee (CC) had long committed 'opportunist' mistakes. The task of the Conference, stated the ECCI cable, was to subject the election tactic to the severest criticism. Accordingly, Conference repudiated the party's conduct during the election and disapproved its failure to pursue the decisions of the 6th Comintern Congress. Kavanagh, while admitting some mistakes, was characteristically defiant. He claimed that Australia, unlike Europe, was entering a second, not third period. As for the open letter, he dismissed it as 'a lot of tripe.' In arguing this, he provided further evidence of his deviation from the Comintern line. Higgins for his part blamed the Comintern's lack of guidance for the turmoil in the CPA. Queensland rising star J. B. Miles attempted to claim the high ground by blaming the whole party, not just the leadership, for the right deviation. But self-defence and blame shifting were insufficient to avert a thoroughgoing purge. With the exception of Moxon, Sharkey and Higgins, all of the previous CC were voted out. Proletarian internationalism, in the shape of delegates wishing to be in step with the Comintern was the major factor in delivering this outcome. Although these events have been documented elsewhere,²⁵⁸ it is worth noting that the new CC was dominated with individuals that immediately declared their 'unswerving loyalty' to the Comintern's new line and pledged to prove this in future activity. Conference then proceeded to adopt resolutions harmonising CPA policy and tactics with the Comintern.

²⁵⁷ *Workers' Weekly*, 15-22 November 1929.

²⁵⁸ See for instance, Morrison, *The Communist Party of Australia and the Australian Radical-Socialist Tradition, 1920-1939*, pp. 280-287; Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 162-163; Curthoys, 'The Communist Party and the Communist International (1927-1929),' pp. 65-67.

The whole party was put on notice – it had to free itself of the right danger. Australia was finally about to enter the Third Period.²⁵⁹

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the equivocal nature of the CPA's practice of proletarian internationalism. Here I will briefly recapitulate the main points concerning the CPA's application of the four elements of proletarian internationalism. As discussed in chapter two, an important element of proletarian internationalism was the need for a disciplined, international organisation, free from 'reformist opportunists' and entrusted with the coordination of world revolution. Deviation from the decisions of the world body was impermissible. Yet for most of the period considered during this chapter, the CPA was in conflict with the Comintern: either in disagreement with the line emanating from the Comintern or in conflict with the Comintern itself over its neglect of the Australian party. While other international organisations, such as the PPTUS, were also in existence, they too were unable to exert any significant control over Australian adherents, owing either to difficulties associated with distance or the realities of the situation in Australia. Hence, there was a significant shortfall in the realisation of the organisational element of proletarian internationalism, demonstrating that the CPA-Comintern relationship was not a simple case of servility.

Another aspect of proletarian internationalism was a commitment to international proletarian solidarity supported with action. While the CPA embarked on an incessant campaign of propaganda encouraging international proletarian solidarity, it was seldom able to provide practical expression in any form. Although, for instance, it raised funds on behalf of striking miners in Colorado, this was hardly the activist, militant commitment expected for campaigns of international proletarian solidarity. Circumstances were certainly not advantageous for such work; nor was the party sufficiently resourced to carry out practical international solidarity, as it would become by the mid-1930s.

A third dimension of proletarian internationalism was the national and colonial questions, which entailed a commitment, in word and deed, to assist colonial liberation movements

²⁵⁹ The discussion on the 9th CPA Conference was based on 'Ninth Annual Conference of the Communist Party of Australia,' CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 1). The ECCI cable can be found in (RC 495/3/181). The declaration of 'unswerving loyalty' was made in a cable to the Comintern, 30 December 1929 (RC 495/94/53). The resolutions were published in *Workers' Weekly*, 10 January – 14 February 1930.

and ensure equality and inclusion for national minorities. In this respect, the CPA provided paper commitments to the Chinese and Indian cause for independence, but was again unable to translate rhetoric into action due to a want of opportunities and resources. As concerned the national question, despite performing work aimed at ensuring migrant inclusion in the Australian labour movement and occasionally speaking against racial barriers to immigration, an ambiguous position was adopted towards the White Australia policy. However, the CPA was constrained by the prevailing mood of racism among the working class and its own sensitivities to mainstream attitudes; this led the party to downplay its opposition to White Australia in a bid to win supporters.

The final element of proletarian internationalism, militant opposition to war, found the CPA incapable of fulfilling its responsibilities. This was despite the party ceaselessly publishing anti-war propaganda in its press. As argued in chapter two, militant action, not simply anti-war verbiage, was a necessary tool in the fight against war. Yet the CPA was unable, at this point in time, to organise communist cells in the army or protests on 1st August, both in the face of Comintern decisions. And due to shortcomings in resources and membership, it was ultimately incapable of turning the imperialist war into civil war if the need arose. While the CPA was largely unable to meet the demands of proletarian internationalism in December 1929, the beginning of 1930 saw the CPA demonstrate a greater ability to abide by the stipulates of proletarian internationalism. This transformation is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Four: From the Third Period to the Popular Front

Third Period communism is traditionally seen as the most obvious Comintern imposition on reluctant communist parties. But for the Australian party, whose members were frustrated at its inability to make industrial and political inroads, it was a welcome corrective to past practice. Harmony with the international line was welcome; but it did not last long.

This chapter will examine the period between 1930 and 1935. This period covers international communism's transition from the Third Period to the popular front. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first deals with the period between January 1930 and the CPA's Easter 1931 Congress. The second will focus on the period between the 1931 Easter Congress and the accession to power of Adolf Hitler in Germany in January 1933. The third will examine the years between February 1933 and the eve of the 7th Comintern Congress in mid-1935.

This chapter will show that the CPA underwent massive improvement in its application of proletarian internationalism during 1930-1935. However, the CPA-Comintern relationship continued to be riddled with complexities. This chapter will show that the CPA was again at variance with the Comintern line during these years. At the same time, the chapter will demonstrate the extensive transformation Third Period communism exerted over the CPA's adherence to proletarian internationalism. It will discuss the party's adoption of more effective modes of work to bring practical effect to international solidarity and peace work. It will also show that the Third Period saw an improvement in the party's colonial work and its adoption of a more principled public stance on racism and White Australia than before. These improvements were the Third Period's legacy, permanently transforming the party.

The CPA under the New Leadership: 1930 to the 10th Party Congress

As the first day of 1930 dawned over Australia, a severe economic crisis had engulfed the nation. The teeth-marks of the Great Depression left an indelible imprint on society. The painful bite of the economic crisis would be felt for years. Unemployment rose; business collapsed. The severity of the unprecedented crisis seemed to make tenable the Comintern's economic and political assessments elaborated over the course of the previous two years. Capitalist stabilisation, as Stalin had maintained, was in unmistakable

decay and crisis. Wall Street crashed in October 1929; so too did the world economy. Stalin's assessment of the impending catastrophe was verified; that of his opponents had been utterly refuted. The coincidence of the Comintern's and Stalin's prophecies becoming reality had vindicated the party's international ties and boosted the myth of Moscow's mystical ability to predict the future. Worse was still to come; Moscow predicted as much. The capitalist offensive had intensified and spread to new industries, reflected in a series of bitter strikes, lockouts and awards. Social democracy was increasingly displaying its social fascist traits. That many communists were victims of police violence under state Labor administrations, made this absurd term and its dubious theoretical foundation seem sound. For communists, it appeared that capitalism's only solution was war. If the gloomy predictions of previous years seemed unrealistic, now they appeared plausible. Such was the milieu in which the new leaders of the Communist Party of Australia assumed and exercised control.

The CPA's transformation under the new leadership, of general secretary Moxon and chairman Sharkey, was almost instant. Like an irrepressible surge, the Third Period, then being expounded by the organisational aspect of proletarian internationalism as its major policy, swept over the CPA. On 6 January 1930, Moxon asserted the triumph of the Comintern line; but triumphalism could not consume the new leaders. Work remained undone – the 'carrying of a resolution is not sufficient; We must realise the Comintern Line in practice...,' warned Moxon.¹

Yet serious tension afflicted the party. And loyalty to the Comintern line, an important aspect of proletarian internationalism, was at the core of the problem. The dominance of the new leadership, based around fidelity to the Comintern and the New Line, was precarious. Third Period communism was not popular among some in the ranks of the Australian party. Elimination of the 'right danger,' antagonistic to Comintern policies, was a central concern of the CC.² Internecine squabbling between the right-wing and Moxon-Sharkey grouping plagued the party. This was an inauspicious beginning for the new CPA. A split was avoided, but only after a spate of haphazard expulsions and intimidation of members associated with the Kavanagh-Wright group. These events, however, need not occupy space here and have been well documented elsewhere.³ It is,

¹ Circular letter no. 30/1, 6 January 1930 (RC 495/94/61). Emphasis in original.

² For the CC's view of the pervasiveness of the 'right danger' see *Workers' Weekly*, 21 March 1930, p. 4.

³ For accounts of the new leadership's intimidating style see Penrose, 'Herbert Moxon, A Victim of the "Bolshevisation" of the Communist Party,' p. 99; Morrison, *The Communist Party of Australia and the Australian Radical-Socialist Tradition*, p. 296. See, especially, Curthoys, 'The Comintern, the CPA, and the

however, worth considering the treatment of Jack Ryan, since he was the main figure in the operations of the PPTUS in Australia and consequently, an important link for proletarian internationalism in Australia.

Ryan, a member of the old Kavanagh-Wright CC, though still editor of the *Pan-Pacific Worker*, fell into almost immediate difficulty with the new leadership and was ultimately expelled.⁴ Two ostensible causes underpinned his expulsion from the party. His first sin was publication of an appeal for aid on behalf of locked-out miners on the Northern NSW coalfields in the *Pan-Pacific Worker*. Contained in this appeal was a passing statement that the miners faced prosecution from the conservative Bavin Government of NSW. To this, Ryan's detractors saw a right deviation. Was NSW Labor leader Lang any different from Bavin? Third Period communism said no. Yet in stating that the Bavin government was prosecuting the miners, Ryan was allegedly implying that Lang, if in office, would not prosecute the men. Ryan's second error was in relation to an appeal on behalf of the Meerut prisoners. This appeal asked that donations be sent to Garden at the Labour Council and not, as was expected by the CPA, to the ICWPA and its secretary, Moxon. The CC deemed it impermissible that donations for the Meerut prisoners, a communist *cause celebre*, be sent to a left social fascist ahead of the 'proletarian' ICWPA. Despite correcting this error in the following issue of the *Pan-Pacific Worker*, Ryan was charged with perpetuating reformist illusions and raising 'the status of the counter revolutionary Garden.' He was asked to provide a written explanation for his errors or face a vote of censure.⁵

Ryan refused to cower into submission. He did not submit his written explanation on the grounds that no date had been specified for compliance. To this the party offered an extension, which he again failed to meet. Expulsion followed. In the meantime, he informed a PPTUS confidant that his persecution was not due to deviation, but animosity from Moxon. He pleaded with his comrade for assistance, asserting that, despite his tribulation, his loyalty to the party remained unshaken.⁶ Little was done by the PPTUS to

Impact of Harry Wicks,' and Macintyre, *The Reds*, ch. 7, for a detailed description of the new leadership's victimisation and expulsion of internal critics.

⁴ Some of Ryan's problems are described in Ryan to unknown recipient, 10 February 1930 (RC 534/4/334).

⁵ For both appeals see *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1 February 1930. For the CPA's indictment of Ryan and its ultimatum see Moxon to Ryan, 6 February 1930 (RC 534/4/334). Curthoys incorrectly writes that the CPA wished the Meerut donations be sent not to the ICWPA but to the Profintern. Curthoys, 'The Comintern, the CPA, and the Impact of Harry Wicks,' pp. 25-26.

⁶ For the above, see Ryan to unknown recipient, 10 February 1930 (RC 534/4/334) and Moxon to Ryan, 10 February 1930 (RC 534/4/334).

alleviate Ryan's plight.⁷ Nor, however, was Ryan replaced as PPTUS representative in Australia. This was not a comfortable arrangement for PPTUS functionaries who begged Ryan to do all he could to win readmission into the party. One wrote as follows:

Haven't you yet learned that the Party is always right, always, – regardless of mistakes it may commit, of personal characteristics or idiosyncracies [sic] of the one or the other leading comrade, etc. Of course when I say the PARTY is always right, I mean PARTY in the CI sense. If you as an individual must swallow a bitter pill or two, that does not matter at all.⁸

Hence Rawling's assertion that Ryan left the party 'quietly, but definitely, never to return' is inaccurate.⁹ Ryan remained informally associated with the CPA. He also retained links with the international communist movement, especially with the powerful Lozovsky, until at least mid-1931.¹⁰

Ryan's expulsion came at a critical juncture for the PPTUS in Australia. At the February 1930 ACTU Congress, the affiliation with the PPTUS was narrowly discontinued. With the disaffiliation, a crucial bond of proletarian internationalism was broken. The CPA predicted the ACTU was preparing to break with the Secretariat on the grounds of preserving the White Australia policy; indeed, differences on White Australia, arbitration and the increasing belligerence of Third Period communism, were the central issues behind the disaffiliation.¹¹ For this, Ryan blamed the CPA. Had the party not excluded him from the communist fraction, not expelled him on the eve of his departure for the Congress and instead focused on organising the numbers, Ryan claimed that 'we may

⁷ Farrell writes that the Comintern unsuccessfully attempted to reinstate Ryan. Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour*, p. 181. Curthoys reveals that in October 1930, the ECCI was critical of the method of Ryan's expulsion though not of the expulsion itself and that reinstatement should be considered if Ryan indulged in self-criticism. Accordingly, the leadership, certain Ryan would comply, prepared a statement on Ryan's behalf, acknowledging his errors, requiring only his signature. But Ryan refused to sign the statement and remained out of the party. Curthoys, 'The Comintern, the CPA, and the Impact of Harry Wicks,' p. 27.

⁸ Stoler to Ryan, 28 October 1930 (RC534/4/334). Emphasis in original.

⁹ Rawling, 'Communism Comes to Australia,' ch. 13, p. 1.

¹⁰ An August 1931 issue of *Inprecorr* carried an article by Ryan. See *Inprecorr*, vol. 11, no. 44, 20 August 1931, pp. 817-818. However in October, F. Emery (alias for Richard Dixon who was attending the Lenin School in Moscow at the time) responded to Ryan's article, pointing out that he was an expelled member of the CPA and that the content of his article served 'to further the propaganda of the enemies of the working class.' See *Inprecorr*, vol. 11, no. 53, 15 October 1931, pp. 968-969.

¹¹ *Workers' Weekly*, 14 February 1930, p. 2; Farrell, 'Australian Labor and the Profintern,' p. 49; Farrell, 'The Pan-Pacific Trade Union Movement and Australian Labour, 1921-1932,' pp. 453-454.

have gained the 3 votes necessary to win the day.’¹² Be that as it may, when the break was formalised the *Workers’ Weekly* devoted surprisingly little attention to it.¹³ Garden’s Labour Council was also increasingly disdainful of the Profintern and the PPTUS, particularly after a Profintern letter, sent following the 1929 PPTUS Conference, criticised certain aspects of the Council’s policy. By early 1931, it too had severed all ties with Moscow.¹⁴

Yet the ACTU’s disaffiliation and the shaky nature of the Labour Council’s relationship to the Profintern had the ironic effect of liberating the CPA. With the knowledge that the PPTUS affiliation was doomed, and where communists were previously reserved in their criticism of the union mainstream due to fear of jeopardising the affiliation, the new situation permitted the CPA to go on the offensive and establish itself in the unions.

The PPTUS retained a presence in Australia, albeit one that was further weakened and obscured by the tyranny of distance. It was aware that the CPA was in the grips of an internal conflict, but incorrectly believed the party had split in two, making its work in Australia more difficult. It also understood, this time correctly and to the consternation of some PPTUS officials, that Ryan was expelled from one of the parties but was uncertain as to whether he was a member of the ‘real party.’¹⁵ *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, struggling financially but still under Ryan’s editorship until early 1931, continued publication at the behest of the PPTUS.¹⁶ Its Australian supporters, publicly spearheaded by the LAI although the real driving forces were Comintern emissary Harry Wicks and the CPA,¹⁷ attempted to obtain permission from the Scullin government to hold the next PPTUS Congress in Australia.¹⁸ This served a dual purpose: on the one hand, there was the genuine desire to host the Congress in Australia (despite strong pessimism about the

¹² Ryan to unknown recipient, 20 March 1930 (RC 534/4/334). There were six members of the communist fraction at the Congress, who Ryan claimed were inexperienced, supposedly leaving him to lead the fraction, despite his recent expulsion.

¹³ A perfunctory and obscure article was the most the CPA could provide the disaffiliation. *Workers’ Weekly*, 7 March 1930, p. 3.

¹⁴ For the Labour Council’s hostility to the Profintern, see Ryan to unknown recipient, 24 January 1930 and 10 February 1930 (RC 534/4/334). For the Profintern’s repudiation of Garden see Farrell, ‘Australian Labor and the Profintern,’ p. 51.

¹⁵ For the situation in the party and Ryan’s position therein see Undated letter (RC 534/4/312).

¹⁶ The PPTUS, and Lozovsky himself, instructed Ryan to continue with the publication of the journal. For Lozovsky’s instruction see Lozovsky to Ryan, undated telegram (RC 534/4/334). Ryan was also eager to continue with the journal’s publication, though complained about lack of funds. See Ryan to unknown recipient, 20 March 1930 (RC 534/4/334).

¹⁷ This arrangement was suggested by the PPTUS. See letter, 28 October 1930 (RC534/4/334).

¹⁸ *The Pan-Pacific-Worker*, vol. 3, nos. 10-12, 1 October – 1 December 1930.

likelihood of success¹⁹); on the other hand, a refusal by the Labor government, as hoped by the PPTUS, would provide communists with a propaganda windfall and further opportunities to expose ‘the true nature of the “Labor” Government.’²⁰ In the event, the Congress was not held on Australian soil, nor for that matter anywhere else. By 1931, the PPTUS was effectively moribund, especially after the Kuomintang intensified its persecution of the Secretariat’s Chinese affiliates, and unable to convoke another Congress. After the arrest of leading Secretariat members in Shanghai in mid-1931, whose Australian reaction is considered later in this chapter, the Secretariat’s demise was assured.²¹

Meanwhile in Moscow, the Enlarged Presidium of the ECCI met in February 1930. As a condition for complete adherence to proletarian internationalism, the CPA was bound to accept and act upon ECCI decisions. As will be shown below, the party failed to take the hints emanating from this Presidium. The ECCI made subtle alterations to the Third Period line, intended to restrain puritans like Lozovsky, Bela Kun and Vilgelm Knorin. While the ECCI retained much of the crude invective flung at its reformist foe, there was a discernable attempt to gently apply the brakes on some Third Period excesses. The over-abundant parroting of the ‘social fascist’ insult was frowned on, though the term itself was not repudiated and remained highly visible. Alongside this, and although the ‘right danger’ (now exemplified in communists ‘lagging behind’ the revolutionary temperament of the masses) remained the main deviation, the Comintern now warned against the menace posed by the ‘left’ deviation. This criticism was ostensibly directed at Trotskyites; but it is more likely that communists ‘rushing ahead’ and exaggerating the potential for revolutionary advance and therefore, as Worley stated, ignoring ‘the preparatory work needed to build worker support’ through immersion in the united front from below, were the Comintern’s true targets. The main task was clear: a fight on two fronts, against right and left deviations, was now required.²²

¹⁹ This was due to the ACTU disaffiliation. Vladivostok was again broached as the substitute host. See undated letter (RC 534/4/312) and unknown sender to ‘Alex,’ 22 February 1930 (RC 534/4/316).

²⁰ See letter, 28 October 1930 (RC534/4/334).

²¹ For the demise of the PPTUS see Farrell, ‘Australian Labor and the Profintern,’ p. 48. Farrell argues elsewhere that the PPTUS essentially became a branch of the Comintern’s Far Eastern Bureau underground apparatus. See Farrell, ‘The Pan-Pacific Trade Union Movement and Australian Labour, 1921-1932,’ p. 455. McKnight, *Espionage and the Roots of the Cold War*, pp. 116-123, concurs with Farrell and provides an elucidation of this transformation.

²² The above is from *Inprecorr*, vol. 10, no. 13, 13 March 1930, pp. 229-233; vol. 10, no. 21, 30 April 1930, pp. 391-393; vol. 10, no. 22, 8 May 1930, pp. 407-409; vol. 10, no. 23, 15 May 1930, pp. 423-426; vol. 10, no. 24, 22 May 1930, pp. 439-441; Worley, ‘Courting Disaster?’, p. 11. A *Pravda* article summarising the work of the Presidium was published in the *Workers’ Weekly*, 9 May 1930, p. 2, and another emphasising the ‘fight on two fronts’ was published in *Inprecorr*, vol. 10, no. 25, 28 May 1930, pp.

The line proclaimed by the February Presidium was reinforced in the writings and speeches of significant Soviet figures. The first was an article by Dmitry Manuilsky, a Comintern moderate and the main figure at the Presidium. Appearing in *Inprecorr* shortly after the Presidium, it enjoined comrades to work in the existing unions where it was possible to form the united front from below. Manuilsky observed that this was necessary as a revolutionary situation had not yet materialised,²³ and that focusing on ‘partial demands’ (i.e. demands aimed at improving the economic condition of the toilers), neglected until now, was integral to forging the united front from below.²⁴ Stalin himself was next to intervene. His ‘Dizzy with Success’ letter in March 1930, which criticised excesses in Soviet collectivisation and called for a struggle against right and left deviations in the CPSU, echoed the Comintern’s change of direction. The excoriation of ‘ultra-left tendencies’ at the 16th CPSU Congress in mid-1930 presented a further development from leftist excesses.²⁵ If the retreat from sectarianism didn’t already have Stalin’s imprimatur, it now had his unmistakable blessing. The Comintern had begun the protracted process of reining in Third Period communism.

Nevertheless, this did not cause a respite in the CPA’s attacks on Labor or the union mainstream. As Kavanagh, from a right-wing perspective, encountered difficulty adhering to the full requirements of proletarian internationalism, via the Comintern, so too did Moxon from a left-wing perspective. Even after the Presidium’s decisions reached Australia (which took months to do so) the CPA’s Comintern inspired anti-Labor frenzy and criminal lunacy reached dizzying heights. There are copious examples to draw upon; I will offer a few.

The first example was the CPA’s oft repeated contention that ‘a filthy record’ of ‘betrayal’ was accumulating for the various Labor governments around Australia. These accusations crystallised around various incidents. A notable example was the visit of the British banker, Sir Otto Niemeyer. The Scullin and various state Labor governments’ adoption of his austere economic remedies for the Depression was adduced as

449-450. See also McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, pp. 96-97, who persuasively argue that the Presidium’s criticism of left sectarianism was predicated on fears that ‘foreign “leftists” had taken the revolutionary posturings of the Comintern too literally and in so doing had threatened the security of the isolated Soviet Union at a particularly sensitive time.’

²³ This was a not so subtle rebuff to certain ‘left’ tendencies prevalent in some of the Comintern’s sections.

²⁴ *Inprecorr*, vol. 10, no. 17, 3 April 1930, pp. 329-331.

²⁵ The 16th CPSU Congress was reported in *Workers’ Weekly*, 29 August 1930, p. 4.

confirmation of the anti-working class proclivities of the ALP.²⁶ Another example was the accusation that Labor was aiding fascism, breaking strikes and using the police to suppress ‘worker’ (i.e. communist) gatherings. A further example was the severe vitriol directed at ‘left social-fascists,’ with Lang and E. J. Ward acting as chief bogeymen. These two men, and Labor’s socialisation units, were dangerous incarnations of ‘left social-fascism,’ a menace towards which the CPA needed to direct its ‘fire.’²⁷ Another example of senseless Third Period bellicosity was the common incitement of comrades to violence, especially against the police. A case in point was violence in Sydney. A notable incident occurring shortly after Lang’s election win in 1930 and during the celebrations of the 13th anniversary of the Russian revolution, it only succeeded in securing the imprisonment of comrades and the consequent delay of the 1930 party congress.²⁸

Proletarian internationalism, via the Comintern, was to blame for this Third Period imbecility. Had the Comintern never come into existence, these incidents would never have taken place. That individuals, instead of using simple common sense, took up with alacrity its misplaced and foolish bellicosity is an indictment on their naivety and blind faith. Communists during these years exaggerated, misinterpreted and distorted facts to justify the contrived accusation of ‘treachery’ or social fascism. This was commonly followed up with the declaration that only the Communist Party was the real working class party to which workers should be aligned.²⁹ If nothing more, the Third Period at least injected this sort of quixotic, yet delusional, romanticism in the hearts and minds of individuals who had little else going in their favour.

With the passage of time such sectarian excess was increasingly out of step with the Comintern line. The extent of the Comintern’s changing line after February 1930 was discovered in Australia only at the end of that year. This was after Sharkey and William Orr, who were attending the 5th Profintern Congress in Moscow, were rebuked by Comintern officials for the party’s excessive zeal and had returned in late 1930.³⁰ But part of the Australian party’s sectarian problems stemmed from the presence of an

²⁶ For the Niemeyer visit see *ibid*, p. 2 and Wicks’s article on Labor support for ‘Niemeyerism,’ ‘the policy of trying to place the entire burden of the capitalist crisis upon the backs of the working class,’ in *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 4, no. 1, 5 January 1931, pp. 3-6.

²⁷ *Workers’ Weekly*, 13 March 1931 and 17 April 1931.

²⁸ For the violence during the celebrations of the Russian revolution see *Workers’ Weekly*, 14 November 1930; Macintyre, *The Reds*, p. 174.

²⁹ For examples of the above see *Workers’ Weekly*, 7 February 1930, p. 2; 21 March 1930, p. 3; 4 April 1930, p. 2; 18 April 1930, p. 2; 16 May 1930, p. 4; 15 August 1930, p. 2; 12 September 1930.

³⁰ Penrose, ‘Herbert Moxon, A Victim of the “Bolshevisation” of the Communist Party,’ p. 104.

American Comintern official who showed more interest in encouraging the party's excesses than reining them in.

The American Comintern emissary was Harry Wicks, known as Herbert Moore in Australia.³¹ Wicks possessed a drill-sergeant appearance that was replicated in his expectation of military style discipline. A former member of the rightist Lovestone group in the CPUSA, he turned on his erstwhile collaborators after sensing their imminent defeat. Seen as an opportunist, he was not held in high regard by his American comrades. The news of his mission to Australia 'was received by the Americans at the Lenin School...with great hilarity. But with commiseration for Australia. So low was their opinion of Wicks and his capabilities.'³² In more recent years, compelling evidence has emerged suggesting that Wicks was a spy for the entirety of his party career. This lends credence to the argument that Wicks was an *agent provocateur*, encouraging counterproductive militancy and violence.³³ While Wicks remained in Australia, any chance of moderating the party line was about as likely as extracting blood from a turnip. Attempting to persuade the hard-headed American to rein in excess also ran one the risk of expulsion. It is difficult not to remark on the irony that the man entrusted with enforcing the Comintern line was the main barrier standing in the way of its realisation. Some comrades harboured illusions about Wicks. Higgins for one believed Wicks' arrival would ease the tumult in the party. He was soon disillusioned.³⁴

Arriving in April 1930, his impact was immediate. Wicks' primary mission was to assist the new leadership rid the party of internal dissent and to oversee its 'Bolshevisation,' meaning the CPA had to adopt rigid 'democratic centralism'³⁵ and reorganise on a factory nuclei basis. But it was the task of hounding right deviators and former leaders out of the party that Wicks set about with relish, singling out Kavanagh for special

³¹ For Wicks' autobiography, which barely mentions his Australian sojourn or his activities as a spy, see H. M. Wicks, *Eclipse of October: How a Revolution that Proclaimed the Emancipation of all who toil was Negated into an Instrument of Tyranny* (London: Holborn Publishing Company, 1957). For accounts of Wicks' activities in Australia see Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour*, pp. 182-183; Curthoys, 'The Comintern, the CPA, and the Impact of Harry Wicks'; Penrose, 'Herbert Moxon, A Victim of the "Bolshevisation" of the Communist Party'; Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 170-178; Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia*, pp. 51-54; Dixon, 'The CPA in the Thirties,' pp. 28-29.

³² Rawling, 'Communism Comes to Australia,' ch. 14, p. 4.

³³ For Wicks' career as a spy see Bernard K. Johnpoll and Harvey Klehr (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 414-415.

³⁴ Higgins to Pollitt, 11 January 1931, Guido Barrachi papers (ML MS 5765, box 1).

³⁵ For the theory and practice of democratic centralism see Michael Waller, *Democratic Centralism: An Historical Commentary* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981).

attention.³⁶ He was also intent on severing any remaining contact between Ryan and Moscow.³⁷ With the Comintern's imprimatur, Wicks was able to dominate the CC and force his views on party leaders; he often amended speeches and reports and had the final say on nominations for office. He cultivated a new generation of leaders, among whom were Richard Dixon, Jack Blake and Len Donald, sent on Wicks' recommendation to the Lenin School.³⁸ After overseeing the party's reorganisation and completing his Australian mission, Wicks installed his favoured individuals in leadership positions where they remained for decades.

The CPA held its Central Committee Plenum in late June 1930, shortly after Wicks' arrival. It was here that Wicks first attempted to set the CPA on the path of 'Bolshevisation,' encouraging it to reorganise on a factory nuclei basis. These changes have little relevance to a study on the CPA and proletarian internationalism. Where the influence of proletarian internationalism was evident at this gathering was on the issue of race. As always, White Australia was the focal point for combating racism. Opportunism or evasion of issues likely to attract hostility to the party, as in the instance of the previous leadership's supposed evasion of the White Australia issue, mentioned in the previous chapter, was to be replaced with heroic defiance. Racial barriers to migration did not protect white workers from economic crisis; they only served to divide the international proletariat and thereby make imperialist war possible. The CPA pledged to energetically oppose both the practice and exponents (such as the AWU) of 'British preference,' which discriminated against Italian workers in the sugar cane industry. Furthermore, the party desired greater non-white representation in its ranks:

Let the contemptible scoundrels of social fascism scornfully sneer at us as a 'coloured party'...we will accept it as a tribute to our revolutionary determination to unite the entire working class for the destruction of capitalism. Just as the capitalists exploit us regardless

³⁶ At the June 1930 CPA Plenum, when pressed by Kavanagh for an explanation for this relentless pursuit, Wicks allegedly replied 'that the attacks were for the purpose of "killing" him politically.' Rawling, 'Communism Comes to Australia,' ch. 14, p. 6. For other discussions of Wicks' attempts to oust Kavanagh see Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour*, p. 182; Curthoys, 'The Comintern, the CPA, and the Impact of Harry Wicks,' pp. 28-30; Penrose, 'Herbert Moxon, A Victim of the "Bolshevisation" of the Communist Party,' pp. 100-101; Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia*, pp. 52; Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 172-175.

³⁷ Curthoys, 'The Comintern, the CPA, and the Impact of Harry Wicks,' pp. 26-27.

³⁸ Rawling, 'Communism Comes to Australia,' ch. 14, p. 7; Macintyre, *The Reds*, p. 176.

of colour or nationality, so we mobilise these exploited masses to crush our common enemy.³⁹

The influence of proletarian internationalism was now complemented by Third Period intolerance for the mainstream. Accordingly, the party desired to be more assertive in proclaiming its long-standing antipathy to White Australia, a brave course of action in light of the overwhelming support in the labour movement for that racist policy. However, so far as the organisational aspect of proletarian internationalism was concerned, reining in sectarianism was not part of the Plenum's work. Belligerence to Labor and the unions remained intact. Thus, on this point, the CPA remained at variance with Moscow.

This began to change, albeit slightly, by the end of 1930. A realignment with the Comintern, by then, was on the cards. A shift, of course, was only possible after Sharkey and Orr returned from Russia and discussed Moscow's changed tune with Wicks.⁴⁰ A more significant change would have to wait until Wicks was sailing back to America. However, it is important to state at this point that any correction of sectarianism was nuanced and did not lead to a wholesale abandonment of the Third Period and its Siamese twin, sectarianism. To be sure, there were observable attempts to mitigate sectarianism prior to Sharkey's and Orr's return. But these attempts were also nuanced. The first example of this comes in April, where the difference between social fascism and fascism was clarified; it was pointed out that although both shared 'identical aims,' the two were not the same in social composition or in public rhetoric.⁴¹ In May the *Workers' Weekly* published a letter from the ECCI that objected to the Third Period impulse of blanket expulsion. While recognising the need to 'cleanse' the parties of deviators as was done in the CPSU, the ECCI deprecated attempts to purge the ranks in the present period. Self-criticism, building a mass party and improving local party work would remove 'careerists' who had found their way into communist parties. Internal discipline and

³⁹ All the above from *Australia's Part in the World Revolution: Thesis of the Central Committee Plenum, Communist Party of Australia, June 28th and 29th, 1930* (Sydney: Communist Party of Australia, 1930). Quote from p. 39.

⁴⁰ See Penrose, 'Herbert Moxon, A Victim of the "Bolshevisation" of the Communist Party,' p. 104, for Sharkey's discussions with Wicks and their upshot. An ECCI letter, sent in October 1930, reinforced the Comintern line. It called for vigilance against right and left deviations, the reorganisation of the party and greater work in party fraternal. Macintyre comments that the ECCI admonition of right and left deviations and 'perpetually calling for strikes without adequate preparation' was a clear rebuke to Moxon. As we have seen, the Comintern had already embarked on the long process of reining in left excesses. While the letter was a rebuke to Moxon in the Australian context, the political line contained in the letter cannot be considered Australia-specific; rather the tasks enumerated by the ECCI had been a part of Comintern proclamations intended for the entire communist movement since the February 1930 Presidium. For the ECCI letter and Macintyre's opinion see Macintyre, *The Reds*, p. 179.

⁴¹ *Workers' Weekly*, 25 April 1930, p. 2.

democratic centralism, not expulsion, was the essence of the International's suggestions.⁴² No doubt, the Comintern believed retention of members, so long as the deviation was not too significant, could solve the membership haemorrhage afflicting most parties. It is worth noting in passing, that the CPA was one of the few parties that increased its membership during the Third Period.⁴³

In the months following Sharkey's and Orr's return, a subdued campaign against 'left' elements commenced. The deviation from the line expounded by the general staff of the world revolution was slowly narrowing. But again, this should not be overstated as it was not until the second half of 1931 that the party began to take more affirmative action to weaken sectarianism. Nevertheless, with the commencement of this campaign came the beginning of Moxon's end. In 1930, some party leaders harboured concerns about the adventurist policies championed by Wicks; a resolute domestic stand had to be assumed against his more extreme suggestions. Penrose contends that Moxon disagreed and instead desired to inform Moscow of the emissary's extremism, to which Sharkey objected.⁴⁴ This was indicative of a clash between Moxon and Wicks. In late 1930, the prosaic yet efficient Scott from Queensland J. B. Miles, had succeeded Moxon as general secretary and was formally installed at the Easter 1931 party congress. To prevent him from muckraking in Sydney, Moxon was dispatched to Melbourne, ostensibly to perform party work among the unemployed. While there he ironically committed the Third Period sin of right deviation for suggesting communist unemployed dissolve their associations and join those of the reformists. When Moxon was forced to indulge in self-criticism in early 1931 for his Melbourne failures, his fate was sealed. By the time of the Easter congress, Moxon had been sidelined.⁴⁵ Moreover, as the new Miles-Sharkey leadership sought scapegoats for the party's sectarian extremes of the early 1930s, which were inflamed by Wicks as well as the rest of the party leadership, Moxon found himself on the receiving end of the blame. After relentless criticism, which has been well covered elsewhere,⁴⁶ Moxon was finally expelled in 1932 for a litany of sins for which he was not the sole perpetrator. Moxon's scalp, like Kavanagh's before him, was the cost of defying

⁴² *Workers' Weekly*, 16 May 1930, p. 3.

⁴³ Duncan Hallas notes that the CPA, Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and CPSA were the few communist parties to defy the trend and grow their membership. Hellas, *The Comintern*, p. 130.

⁴⁴ Penrose, 'Herbert Moxon, A Victim of the "Bolshevisation" of the Communist Party,' p. 104. Moxon's habit of cabling Moscow whenever he faced a problem or his resort to expulsion, exasperated Comintern officials. It was indicative of his leadership shortfalls and was one of the reasons he lost the confidence of the Comintern. Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 175-176.

⁴⁵ Penrose, 'Herbert Moxon, A Victim of the "Bolshevisation" of the Communist Party,' pp. 105-106.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-111; Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 175-176.

the organisational element of proletarian internationalism. The champion of Bolshevisation and sectarianism had become its victim.

The CPA's observance of the stipulates governing the organisational component of proletarian internationalism have so far dominated this first part of the chapter. However, there was notable activity on other fronts of proletarian internationalism. As described in chapter two, the prevention of war was also a major pillar of proletarian internationalism. It is to the CPA's work in that sphere to which we now shift our attention.

A sacred tenet of Third Period communism held that the exacerbation of the economic crisis commensurately increased the threat of war. Accordingly, the 'war danger' received increased attention from the new leadership. Gibson conveyed the deep sense of the imminence of war when he wrote:

In the early 1930s, even before Hitler's coming to power in Germany, we felt a deep and pressing urgency to rally public opinion against a new war on the Soviet Union which already seemed all too probable.⁴⁷

The rise of fascism and heightened diplomatic tensions implied that the danger of war was increasing daily. Accordingly, opposition to war acquired newfound militancy. LLL Week in 1930 demonstrated an increased emphasis on turning the imperialist war into civil war, signalling the new leaders' dedication to Leninist orthodoxy, at least in word. With social democratic or labour governments in various countries, and following Third Period dogma that held reformists as the main enemy of the Soviet Union, the CPA now accused Labor of leading the charge to war and fascism. This was absent during the tenure of the previous CC. Scullin's participation at the Imperial Conference in 1930 was interpreted as another step in the direction of war. There was no abatement in the stream of anti-Soviet plots reported in the *Workers' Weekly* – originating allegedly from imperialist frustration at the success of the Stalinist five year plan. Prominent coverage was provided in the communist press to numerous plots within Russia aiming at the sabotage of the five year plan or food supplies. The trials and exposure of the conspirators, whose machinations supposedly had some support from Western Governments, served to crystallise the war danger. The trial of the so-called 'Industrial Party,' reportedly consisting of subversive Mensheviks and some right wing elements

⁴⁷ Gibson, *The People Stand Up*, p. 80.

from the CPSU, was a case in point. This plot, particularly the revelation that its work was a precursor to war planned for 1931, galvanised the perceived imminence of conflict. A further dimension was the alleged incitement to war by various religious figures, signalling a new manoeuvre of the bourgeoisie in the ideological preparation of workers for war. As a prelude to any conflagration, the CPA sought to organise workers in industry, especially industries conducive to war production, by creating communist factory nuclei for the purpose of causing disruption in the event of war.⁴⁸

The unemployed posed a unique problem for the CPA's anti-war work. Grave concerns were held about the inability of the unemployed to resist the attraction of work in the shape of service in the armed forces. The anti-war movement would find it difficult to dissuade unemployed from taking up arms if the great powers decided to solve their problems through a general conflagration. Compounding the problem was the desire on the part of some in the labour movement to secure an amelioration of unemployment through an increase in armaments. For the CPA, the 'unorganised and degraded' unemployed were 'ready material to be stamped into imperialist bloodbaths.'⁴⁹ Due to such fears, the Comintern designated 26 February⁵⁰ as a day of international solidarity and protest against unemployment. Despite shortfalls observed by the CC, the Comintern's call was heeded in Australia: protests against unemployment were held in a variety of locations around Australia, some with violence and arrests.⁵¹ These events were accompanied with the decision to organise the unemployed, a purpose met by the Unemployed Workers Movement (UWM).⁵² Hence the UWM served a dual purpose: to

⁴⁸ The above pervaded the *Workers' Weekly*; for some examples see, *Workers' Weekly*, 17 January 1930; 21 February 1930, p. 3; 14 March 1930, p. 2; 18 April 1930, p. 3; 8 August 1930, p. 4; 3 October 1930, p. 2; 5 December 1930. For war plots see, especially, *Workers' Weekly*, 7 November 1930. For the trial and outcome of the 'Industrial Party' see *Workers' Weekly*, 5-19 December 1930 and 6 February 1931; *ibid.*, p. 80. Moore's (Wicks) article in *Workers' Weekly*, 17 October 1930, p. 5, exemplified most of the above points.

⁴⁹ *Workers' Weekly*, 7 February 1930, p. 1.

⁵⁰ For Europe, the 6th of March was the designated day. See *Inprecorr*, vol. 10, no. 9, 20 February 1930, p. 164. See also Lozovsky's article illuminating the nexus between unemployment and capitalism and explaining the importance of International Fighting Day Against Unemployment in *Inprecorr*, vol. 10, no. 11, 27 February 1930, pp. 187-188.

⁵¹ For International Unemployed Day in Australia see *Workers' Weekly*, 7-14 March 1930. For the CC's critical appraisal of the events of International Unemployed Day see *Workers' Weekly*, 21 March 1930, p. 2.

⁵² For the CPA's decision to organise the unemployed see *Workers' Weekly*, 18 April 1930, p. 3. For the upshot of NSW unemployed conference held on 26 April see *Workers' Weekly*, 9 May 1930, p. 3. For the party's work among the unemployed and the UWM see Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 190-198; Len Fox (ed), *Depression Down Under* (Potts Point: Len Fox, 1977); Richard Dixon, 'Industrial Policy in the 30s,' pp. 19-31. For an account of the political activism of the organised unemployed during the Depression see Fox, *Fighting Back*; Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia*, pp. 60-61; Nadia Wheatley and Drew Cottle,

build unity between employed and unemployed workers and to prevent the unemployed being employed as cannon fodder.

Another body established to thwart war, and more importantly promote the Soviet Union, was the Friends of the Soviet Union. The Australian chapter of the FOSU was integral to the party's attempts to highlight Soviet achievements in the 1930s. Formed in September 1930, it was created to both resist imperialist intervention and refute negative publicity emanating from the capitalist press by proliferating 'the truth' about the Soviet Union.⁵³ Sunday night lectures, literature and magazines formed a part of the gamut of activities intended to dispel anti-Soviet 'lies' (such as Soviet wheat dumping and slave labour in the timber industry).⁵⁴ The efforts of the FOSU were not without reward: the endless demand for speakers to extol the virtues of the Soviet regime are testament to this. There was also great demand from the faithful for pilgrim-style tours to the socialist utopia. The FOSU arranged tours for multiple Australian delegations so that they may acquaint themselves with 'the truth,' doubtlessly intended for delegates to return as purveyors of socialism and Soviet propaganda. Worker's rights, conditions and progress in Russia were contrasted with the capitalist offensive and Depression afflicting Australia. Through such comparisons, it was intended to generate proletarian indignation at imperialist plans to invade Soviet Russia thereby raising an insuperable barrier founded on public opinion to actual military intervention.

The CPA was active on another front of proletarian internationalism – international solidarity. In particular, the Meerut case continued to receive the attention of the CPA. Most information about the case was received via letters sent from one of the prisoners, B. F. Bradley, to Ryan. Ryan had made acquaintance with some of the prisoners in 1928 as part of his PPTUS mission to India. These letters detailed the injustice experienced by the prisoners as well as the arbitrary nature of British rule in India. Stories of hunger strikes, overly lengthy and unfair court proceedings, tension among prisoners, illness, the supposedly imperialist and anti-working class activities of the British MacDonald Labour government, chronic lack of funds and implorations for greater international assistance

'Sydney's Anti-Eviction Movement: Community or Conspiracy?,' in Raymond Markey (ed), *Labour and Community: Historical Essays* (Wollongong: University of Wollongong Press, 2001), pp. 146-173; Macintyre, 'The New Line in the Antipodes,' pp. 257-258.

⁵³ *Workers' Weekly*, 21 November 1930, p. 2; Rawling, 'Communism Comes to Australia,' ch. 16, p. 29.

⁵⁴ *Workers' Weekly*, 3 April 1931, p. 3.

were among the persistent themes contained in these letters.⁵⁵ Ryan was not unresponsive to Bradley's pleas. He organised financial assistance for the Meerut prisoners along similar lines to that organised in Britain, though as related above, was expelled from the CPA for his efforts. Bradley also asked Ryan to present himself as a defence witness. However, as Ryan's name was mentioned frequently among those of the prisoners in the court proceedings, he was unable to travel to India as he was not granted immunity from prosecution. Indeed, one letter informed Ryan that he had 'escaped Meerut Jail very narrowly' after his Indian sojourn in late 1928.⁵⁶

Protest meetings were arranged to stimulate solidarity for the Meerut prisoners. On 27 April 1930, a mass meeting organised by the ICWPA was held in the Sydney Domain. Senator Arthur Rae, chair of the meeting, received a court summons after requesting a collection be raised and sent to aid the prisoners. A resolution was carried, expressing the assembled throng's solidarity with the prisoners, which called on the British Labour Government to release the men and pledged to prevent troops or supplies being sent to India to aid in the suppression of workers' revolts.⁵⁷ These were fine sentiments inseparable from proletarian internationalism.

The Meerut case was only one example of broader interest in India. This was heightened by the perceived imminence of British military intervention to quell mass discontent; a role, according to communists, already played by Gandhi. Indeed, the CPA, in accord with Third Period orthodoxy and even after Gandhi's arrest following the famous Salt March, accused him of performing the work of British imperialism. But the greatest abuse was reserved for Ramsay MacDonald. 'The Czar and Mussolini are mere novices beside the social fascist MacDonald,' so far as ruthless suppression of India was concerned. The CPA predicted the Scullin government was prepared to dispatch soldiers 'to go forth and participate in the murder of our Indian fellow workers.' It was prepared to resist this contingency, as the Indian 'fight is our fight.'⁵⁸ Even the Minister for Defence's explicit and unambiguous denial of plans to send troops and munitions to India

⁵⁵ For some of these letters see *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 3, nos. 2-5 and 8, 1 February-1 May and 1 August 1930 and vol. 4, no. 1, 5 January 1931. See also *Workers' Weekly*, 20 February 1931, p. 3.

⁵⁶ *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1 March 1930, p. 76.

⁵⁷ *Workers' Weekly*, 2 May 1930, p. 3 and *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 3, no. 5, 1 May 1930, p. 141.

⁵⁸ Above quotations from *Workers' Weekly*, 16 May 1930, p. 1. Although spiteful attacks were made on both Gandhi and MacDonald throughout the period under review in this section, *Workers' Weekly*, 6 March 1931, p. 4, offers a typical example of the twisted logic underpinning such abuse. For an example of the importance attached by Australian communists to the situation in India see Higgins' article in *The Pan-Pacific-Worker*, vol. 3, no. 8, 1 August 1930, pp. 225-227.

was not sufficient to allay communist's suspicions of a conspiracy. A sceptical party warned that it was prepared to 'set up organisational machinery that will stop any attempt to transport troops, arms, munitions or supplies' for the British in India.⁵⁹

True to its word, the CPA took the initiative in organising a Hands Off India Movement. International solidarity with the struggles of colonial comrades had finally found organisational expression. The Hands Off India Movement was formally created following a delegate conference held in Sydney on 23 July 1930. The CC had already determined in June 1930 that it was to be established on a broad basis, include liberal and sympathetic elements, and was to be associated with the party's campaign against war and the capitalist offensive.⁶⁰ But as Farrell observed, the party's sectarianism and deception during these years made collaborative work impossible.⁶¹ With Higgins as general secretary,⁶² and despite J.B. Steel (a member of the ALP) holding the chairmanship, all aspects of work were decided on and performed by communists.⁶³ It was claimed that the movement had already established itself in numerous cities across Australia and that it was in the process of forming a presence in factories. The movement's primary task was to generate solidarity with the Indian masses and organise resistance to the transportation of troops and war materials. It was also entrusted with disseminating information on the negative impact of imperialist rule and checking intrigues concerning the alleged or contemplated recruitment in Australia of 'Black and Tans' for service in India. Work in war industries, such as transport or munition industries, was deemed highly important: this was due simply to the fact that disruption in such industries would hamper the ability of governments to effectively wage war.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Quote from *Workers' Weekly*, 1 August 1930, p. 2. For the Minister's continual denials and the CPA's unwarranted scepticism see *Workers' Weekly*, 8-15 August 1930.

⁶⁰ CEC Meeting, 15 June 1930, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 3). See also circular from Org. Department to all District Committees, 20 June 1930, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 3), for the projected role of the Hands Off India movement, its policy and fields of work.

⁶¹ Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour*, p. 211.

⁶² The hostile Rawling concedes that Higgins was indefatigable, efficient and fast-working in his capacity as secretary of the Hands Off India Committee and the LAI. Rawling, 'Communism Comes to Australia,' ch. 15, p. 25. The party leadership also praised Higgins for his LAI work. See, Irving, 'Defecting,' p. 92.

⁶³ Another prominent ALP figure was Senator Arthur Rae. It is highly likely that his cooperation was sought to add both 'respectability' and to present the movement with a public appearance less dominated by communists. Yet his support for various communist inspired fraternals remains a peculiarity and was seemingly at odds with the stipulates of the Third Period when the emphasis was on the united front from below and the participation of prominent 'reformists' like Rae was expressly forbidden. Yet Rae, in the face of incessant vitriol, very often lent his support, as did certain other 'reformist' individuals in other countries.

⁶⁴ *Workers' Weekly*, 1-8 August 1930; *The Pan-Pacific-Worker*, vol. 3, no. 8, 1 August 1930, pp. 225-227; Org. Department to all District Committees, 20 June 1930, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 3); Rawling, 'Communism Comes to Australia,' ch. 15, p. 23-28. These tasks reflected the party's favoured

The Hands Off India Movement had a short lifespan. At its founding conference, resolutions expressing solidarity with the struggle of the Egyptian workers resisting British imperialism were carried, thereby taking the movement beyond its stated ambit. Upon the further realisation that the economic downturn had caused revolts in other colonies, it was decided to widen the Hands Off India movement into an Australian chapter of the League Against Imperialism.⁶⁵ The rapidity of the transformation suggests that this chain of events had been devised well in advance by the CPA.⁶⁶ Indeed, at the party's same June meeting that decided for the creation of a Hands Off India movement, it was resolved that the "Hands off India" campaign be used as a basis for the creation of a League against Imperialism.⁶⁷ On 6 August, the Australian LAI was formed, with the purpose of 'combatting [sic] war plans and fostering internationalism.' It promised 'to support the fight of the oppressed peoples against their imperialist masters,' and to work with likeminded bodies, such as the PPTUS. Higgins and Steel retained their positions. The LAI set itself lofty ambitions: wherever imperialism reigned, it promised to provide assistance for the achievement of national independence.⁶⁸

The LAI was never capable of providing the sort of practical international solidarity as espoused by Lenin and discussed in chapter two. To be sure, scant opportunity presented itself for international solidarity to be backed up with action. Thus, most of its activities were confined to agit-prop. Numerous articles on colonial oppression appeared in *The Pan-Pacific Worker* and the *Workers' Weekly*. Pamphlets on the Chinese situation, with an appeal for solidarity to Australian workers, were also issued.⁶⁹ In Sydney on 25 March

tactics for thwarting imperialist intervention in India. See *Australia's Part in the World Revolution*, pp. 42-44.

⁶⁵ *Workers' Weekly*, 8 August 1930, p. 3. For a hostile account of the founding of the LAI see James Normington Rawling, 'Recollections in Tranquillity,' *Quadrant*, vol. 5, no. 4 (Spring 1961), pp. 25-26.

⁶⁶ Indeed, Higgins admitted that 'the Communist Party has from the commencement played a leading part in building the League.' *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 3, no. 11, 1 November 1930, p. 326.

⁶⁷ See CEC Meeting, 15 June 1930, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 3).

⁶⁸ *Workers' Weekly*, 15 August 1930, p. 5 and 3 October 1930, p. 2; Rawling, 'Communism Comes to Australia,' ch. 15, p. 23-29. See also *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 3, no. 11, 1 November 1930, pp. 323-326.

⁶⁹ For this appeal see *China's Appeal to Australian Workers* (Sydney: League Against Imperialism, 1931). See also the discussion on LAI propaganda on China in Frank Cain, 'Australia and China 1920-1940: Perceptions and Relationships Between the China Communist Party and the Communist Party of Australia,' Paper presented at the Tokyo Colloquium on Political Interactions Between Asia and Europe in the Twentieth Century, Tsukuba 10-12 September 1998, pp. 146-148. The British branch of the LAI conducted similar work. See Callaghan, 'The Communists and the Colonies,' pp. 13-16.

1931, the LAI held a conference concerned largely with the group's structure, although resolutions were adopted objecting to war measures and colonialism in India and China. Interestingly, there was some short-lived dissent over a reference to Lang in the resolution on fascism. That resolution, nevertheless, was carried with the reference to Lang intact. A further point of friction was Ryan's accusation that the CPA had placed a ban on his participation as a LAI speaker. The communists denied this charge, at the same time accusing Ryan of treachery to the Profintern and PPTUS. The conference, however, rebuffed the CPA and narrowly decided that no barrier be placed on Ryan's activities in the LAI. This was a minor setback for the CPA but enabled it to exclaim that the LAI was not under communist control. Nevertheless, it did not prevent communists from denying Ryan an opportunity to participate in LAI work. The conference was followed with a demonstration. Though under the auspices of the LAI, other communist inspired groups also participated and reportedly augmented the total number of demonstrators to one thousand. The demonstration raised objections to war and sought to illuminate the nexus between the capitalist offensive and imperialism. The protestors also conflated their message with contemporaneous issues, both communist and otherwise.⁷⁰ The LAI was limited to this sort of activity. It had neither the opportunity, as was afforded other groups in the years ahead especially during the Spanish Civil War, nor the resources to make international solidarity more effective.

The CPA was no more effective at engendering wider solidarity between Australian and migrant workers, though exhibited little reticence in undertaking such work. Propaganda was the most the party could offer in its application of the national question aspect of proletarian internationalism. In early 1930, the CPA had committed itself to conducting a more robust struggle against White Australia and its ALP and AWU exponents.⁷¹ Such was the depth of feeling that in June 1930, the party decided to issue a leaflet dealing with anti-Italian feeling, which would clearly state 'that we will break strikes if they are organised against Italians.'⁷² The CPA highlighted cases where abuses of migrants and 'coloured labour' had occurred. The alleged strikebreaking activities of the Yugoslav consul during a shearer's strike, were brought to light and condemned by the CPA. So too was Scullin's inaction.⁷³ The pearling industry in Darwin was illuminated as another case

⁷⁰ These issues consisted of opposition to fascism, Labor and the capitalist offensive. For the conference and demonstration see *Workers' Weekly*, 3 April 1931, p. 6.

⁷¹ For the CPA's policy regarding White Australia see *Workers' Weekly*, 7 March 1930, p. 3.

⁷² CEC Meeting, 15 June 1930, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 3). However, I have found no evidence to suggest the CPA carried out this threat.

⁷³ *Workers' Weekly*, 22 August 1930, p. 6.

of unacceptable exploitation of workers owing to the White Australia policy. Here white employers were not only, among other things, paying low wages to workers but apparently providing opium to Malay and Aboriginal employees. Further, it was underlined that the perpetuation of racial divisions enabled such employment practices to prevail on Australian soil. Only through united action between white and coloured workers, claimed the party, could a better outcome be achieved for all workers.⁷⁴

There were serious shortfalls in realising the anti-racist tenets of proletarian internationalism within the CPA's own ranks. Perhaps the party's failure to make headway in galvanising cross-racial unity throughout Australia could be attributed to the inherent racism of certain individual comrades. There is some basis to such claims. One example can be found in the party's upper echelons. Sharkey, party chairman and one of the Australian delegates at the 5th Profintern Congress, inadvertently revealed a racist strain when, commenting on the internationalism on display at the Congress, he wrote that any lingering 'remnants of "white superiority"...in our minds' were dispelled.⁷⁵ Sharkey's comments are incriminating when taken in conjunction with other evidence. This is found in the self-confessed 'weak and half-hearted' manner in which the party objected to White Australia, demonstrating that there were 'definite white chauvinist tendencies in the ranks and even in the leadership of the party.'⁷⁶ It is therefore not surprising that the party failed to direct greater attention to the issue of racism, at least during these two years. By the CPA's 10th Congress in Easter 1931, it was considered that most of these problems had been overcome, especially by comparison to the 'opportunist' previous CC which did not wish to 'antagonise the labor [sic] bureaucrats.' It had not. Wicks' comments on this subject, during a rare moment of lucidity, are instructive: '[w]e have placed the fight against this policy [White Australia] in our programmes, but far too often our speakers and writers do not aggressively bring it out and unhesitatingly denounce it for what it is.' Although there were discernable improvements, much more remained to be done if proletarian internationalism was to find more complete expression in the Communist Party of Australia.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ *Workers' Weekly*, 10 January 1930, p. 4; *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1 February 1930, p. 44.

⁷⁵ Sharkey quoted in *Workers' Weekly*, 9 January 1931, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Quotes from *Workers' Weekly*, 28 November 1930, p. 3. According to Rawling's testimony, Sharkey, a product of the Australian bush and imbued with a narrow sense of Australian chauvinism, can definitely be counted among the racists in the party leadership. Rawling, 'Communism Comes to Australia,' ch. 10, p. 4. As will be shown towards the end of this chapter, Dixon was another.

⁷⁷ 'Antagonise labor bureaucrats' quote from 'Resolution on the Report of the Central Committee, Sydney, 2.4.31,' pp. 10-11, Andrew Reeves papers (NLA MS 8076, series 9, box 41). Wicks quote from Herbert Moore [Harry Wicks], *Australia and the World Crisis: Political Report Delivered to the Tenth Congress of*

As the CPA was caught in the throes of Third Period communism, the ECCI met and made further subtle changes to the international line. The International was yet again moving the political goal posts. This happened just as the Australian party was lurching closer to the Comintern line, and therefore closer to realising the relevant stipulate of proletarian internationalism. The 11th ECCI Plenum met in Moscow from late March to early April 1931. While much of the pre-existing analysis remained unchanged, significant attempts were made to scale back anti-social democratic hostility. The obnoxious tune heard at the 10th Plenum had moderated at the 11th Plenum. On the one hand, the assessment of social democracy continued to place it as the main bulwark of the ‘dictatorship of the bourgeoisie,’ capitalism and as an abettor of capitalism’s steady evolution to fascism. The Plenum also chastised parties for failing to adequately ‘expose’ the leaders of social democracy, committing right deviations and for ‘lagging behind,’ instead of leading, the radicalised masses. On the other hand, the ‘social fascist’ term of abuse was rarely mentioned. Additionally, the Plenum expanded on what had already been set out at the February 1930 Presidium on the danger of left deviation – which as Carr maintained ‘overestimated the prospect of immediate revolutionary action, and failed to draw the line between the social democratic leaders and the social democratic masses.’ Henceforth, the menace of left deviation assumed increased importance. The ECCI also chided ‘liberal’ comparisons of fascism with reformism and bourgeois democracy made by some communists. Although attacks on social democracy remained venomous, and the united front from below remained central to the work of communists, the ECCI had unmistakably retreated from some of the irrational excesses of previous years that saw fascism and social democracy as twins.⁷⁸

As the 11th ECCI Plenum was in session, the CPA held its 10th Congress over Easter 1931. Initially intended for Christmas 1930, it was postponed due to the large number of comrades serving terms of imprisonment, mainly for violence at a street demonstration on the anniversary of the Russian Revolution in 1930.⁷⁹ A harbinger of the Congress was evident as early as November 1930, when writers in the *Workers’ Weekly* pledged to

the Communist Party of Australia, April 5, 1931 (Sydney: Communist Party of Australia, 1931), p. 50. For the assessment of the 10th Congress on the issue of White Australia see *Workers’ Weekly*, 10 April 1931, p. 6.

⁷⁸ All of the above from *Inprecorr*, vol. 11, no. 22, 27 April 1931, pp. 409-420 and vol. 11, no. 30, 10 June 1931, pp. 541-556; *Workers’ Weekly*, 17-24 July and 7-21 August 1931. For a detailed description of the 11th ECCI Plenum see Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern*, ch. 2. Carr quote from p. 34. See also Worley, ‘Courting Disaster?’, pp. 11-13.

⁷⁹ Macintyre, *The Reds*, p. 175.

‘correct our tendencies to deviate – “left” and “right”,’ followed with a string of articles criticising certain facets of party work.⁸⁰ Wicks placed the party on notice with an article claiming the right deviation had not been ‘liquidated’ and that the present CC had failed to sufficiently counter a broad range of ‘right tendencies.’ Reflecting the subtle alterations in the international line, Wicks accused the Moxon-Sharkey CC of having perpetrated ‘leftist’ deviations and that much still remained to be done in order to overcome such tendencies.⁸¹ There is little doubt that Moxon (and definitely not Sharkey) was the target of Wicks’ criticism. But it was left to Miles to purge the party of ‘left’ sinners.

Not surprisingly, the Congress endorsed the activities of the party since the inception of the new leadership and accepted the applicability to Australia of the international line. Wicks dominated the Congress. He delivered a lengthy report and saw through his Australian mission at the subsequent ‘organisation conference’ that formally completed the party’s restructuring to a factory nuclei basis.⁸² With the reorganisation of the party complete, Wicks departed Australia.⁸³ His legacy for party democracy was conspicuous. Dissent was minimal: Loughran, Tripp, Higgins and Charlie Nelson raised objections about the level of freedom in the party since Wicks’s arrival in Australia. All except Higgins retracted their criticism. The Congress registered approved of the ‘sincere efforts’ of the CC to implement the decisions of the Comintern and to ‘liquidate’ the right danger (still considered the main deviational danger and represented at the Congress in the form of Loughran, Tripp, Higgins and Nelson) while also seeking to eradicate ‘left sectarian errors’ (whose sole representative was Moxon). In line with Comintern policy, the CC was instructed to wage an ‘ideological fight on two fronts,’ against right and left, on the path to its conversion into a Bolshevised mass party.⁸⁴ Despite criticism of left sectarianism, the Congress approved of the attacks on ‘social fascist governments’ and the united front from below. Unlike the 11th ECCI Plenum, ‘social fascism’ was still common parlance. The gravity of the economic crisis brought to attention diplomatic

⁸⁰ Quotes from *Workers’ Weekly*, 21 November 1930, p. 2. See also *Workers’ Weekly*, 28 November – 12 December 1930.

⁸¹ *Workers’ Weekly*, 5 December 1930, p. 2.

⁸² For the reorganisation see Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 177-178.

⁸³ However, far from being relieved at Wicks’ departure, in June 1931 the CPA desired to have Wicks remain in Australia to continue directing the party. ‘Another comrade, as instructor, would not be so satisfactory.’ See CC CPA to unknown recipient, 2 June 1931 (RC 95/94/70).

⁸⁴ Macintyre writes that ‘some prescient delegates to the Tenth Congress discerned a left as well as a right danger in the party rank.’ As has been shown above, the struggle on two fronts had been advised by the Comintern as early as the February 1930 ECCI Presidium and was not a sign of delegate prescience. Macintyre, *The Reds*, p. 225.

tensions and the danger of war, the imminence and seriousness of which was customarily impressed on the Congress. Some delegates spoke of the underestimation of the war danger, a tendency urgently requiring correction. Wicks also mentioned the ‘bestial’ oppression prevailing in New Guinea and suggested the party increase its stalled agitation for New Guinea’s independence. To these problems there was only one solution: ‘The only way out of this crisis is the revolutionary way – the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of workers’ and farmers’ governments.’⁸⁵

The Congress revealed that more needed to be done in order for the party to fully realise proletarian internationalism. This section of the chapter has conveyed the party’s irregular practice of proletarian internationalism. It was closer to fulfilling some stipulates, less so for others. It was lagging behind the Comintern and therefore the organisational element of proletarian internationalism, although moves were made to fall into line with the International; in comparison to the previous leadership, it performed more work, though not enough, to aid colonial comrades to meet the solidarity and national and colonial questions aspects of proletarian internationalism; and it had underestimated the war danger. But this was not for a want of trying. In the post-Wicks era, the focus shifted to rectifying these imbalances.

The Twilight of the Third Period: Easter 1931 to the rise of Hitler

In the interlude between the completion of the party Congress and the leadership’s cognisance of the 11th ECCI Plenum decisions, the CPA persisted with its strident attacks on the ALP and social fascism. Sectarianism continually intruded on attempts to create the united front from below. In July 1931 the *Workers’ Weekly* told its readers that

No honest worker can longer remain in the Labor Party, except at the price of becoming an open enemy of his class...he has now the choice: – with the Communist Party to the workers’ revolution, or becoming an open social fascist defender of capitalism and all its crimes.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ *Workers’ Weekly*, 10 April 1931. See also Moore, *Australia and the World Crisis*; ‘Resolution on the Report of the Central Committee, Sydney, 2.4.31,’ Andrew Reeves papers (NLA MS 8076, series 9, box 41); ‘1931 Congress, Communist Party of Australia,’ CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 1); ‘Minutes of Congress of Communist Party of Australia, April 1931,’ (RC 495/94/67). For scholarly accounts of the Congress see especially *ibid.*, pp. 177-178 and 224-225; Curthoys, ‘The Comintern, the CPA, and the Impact of Harry Wicks,’ pp. 31-32.

⁸⁶ *Workers’ Weekly*, 3 July 1931, p. 2.

The Labor Party at this point was in the midst of a serious schism. According to Third Period dogma, there was no difference between the various protagonists in Labor's internecine strife. Hence, the CPA interpreted the dispute as a quarrel between forces representing different sections of capitalism, with both committed to its sustenance. The 'left' posturing of Lang, his allies and the Labor 'socialisation units' incurred particular wrath because, as described in the previous chapter, the role of left social fascism was to harness the discontent of the proletariat and steer it away from revolutionary action and into harmless political channels. That both Scullin and Lang participated in and accepted the decisions of the 1931 Premiers' Conference, dubbed the 'Second Niemeyer Conference,' demonstrated that there was no real division between the two.⁸⁷ Thus the difference between Scullin and Lang was a matter of style not substance.

This sort of abuse was precisely the cause of the Comintern's chastisement of the rampant sectarianism preoccupying some of its sections. As discussed above, the Comintern had, from as early as February 1930, recoiled from some of the more extreme elements of the Third Period. The CPA had not, by mid-1931, managed to replicate the Comintern and remove a large amount of sectarianism from its activity. Proletarian internationalism, via the party's affiliation to the Comintern, had failed to erode trenchant sectarianism for almost two years.

But where internationalism failed to moderate the party's excessive zeal, local realities succeeded, ironically aligning the party with the international line. Miles's growing influence over the party was, unexpectedly, a moderating factor. By August 1931, the *Weekly* was advising comrades that sectarianism was not conducive to the united front from below and permitted contributions criticising sectarianism to appear in its pages.⁸⁸ Kavanagh noticed a changed mood by December 1931, one that was signally different from that which had prevailed during the Moxon era.⁸⁹ If communists harboured any doubt about the CPA's move from sectarianism, criticism at the December 1931 CC Plenum dispelled many of them. It warned those who did not free themselves of the 'irresponsibility and crudity of the propaganda indulged in by Party agitators' that they

⁸⁷ For the 'second Niemeyer conference' and examples of the other points see *Workers' Weekly*, 12-26 June, 16 October 1931. See also *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 4, no. 6, 8 June 1931, pp. 1-4.

⁸⁸ For examples, see *Workers' Weekly*, 7 – 14 August and 20 November – 4 December 1931.

⁸⁹ Penrose, 'Herbert Moxon, A Victim of the "Bolshevisation" of the Communist Party,' p. 111.

would be disciplined.⁹⁰ But was this newfound moderation attributable to Miles alone or were other factors at play?

It is arguable that more significant factors developing simultaneously underpinned this newfound moderation. When confronted at the end of 1931 with the hostile Lyons government, whose open anti-communism presented a real threat to the existence of the party, and taken in conjunction with the emergence and violence of the quasi-fascist New Guard, the CPA recognised the pragmatic imperative of common action for the sake of preserving itself. Thus, insults hurled at the reformist rank and file evaporated. And through the course of 1932, abuse hurled at the Labor leadership, and the social fascist epithet, were less favoured (though still visible)⁹¹ replaced with attacks on conservative politicians. This was a significant departure from standard practice since 1930.

The timing of this change of approach conveys the complexity of Comintern-CPA relations and, more broadly, proletarian internationalism. There are few better examples to demonstrate the point that the CPA did not simply ‘follow’ the Comintern, and that on the contrary, there was much flexibility in that relationship. It is apparent that the CPA’s shift in focus could not have come as a result of a change in Comintern policy. The International had softened its line towards reformism as early as February 1930. As the discussion has shown so far, the CPA did not follow suit. Hence, while proclaiming unswerving loyalty to the Comintern, the CPA was selective in implementing the International’s policy vacillations. This suggests that a considerable factor in the party’s change of line was domestic imperatives. That the Comintern had long since softened its tune allowed the CPA to do likewise when domestic circumstances necessitated it. It is precisely this sort of manoeuvre that prompted Fishman to observe the following:

It may indeed be more appropriate to describe the Third Period line as a curve or bend which veered between the centre and extreme left according to varying circumstances. It is also clear that

⁹⁰ See *Workers’ Weekly*, 8 January 1932, p. 2. However, these cautions were insufficient to dissuade some communists. For example, some comrades heartily incited an angry mob of unemployed to attack the Victorian Trades Hall Council (THC) platform on the Yarra Bank on May Day 1932. It resulted in the physical assault of Acting Labor Premier Tunnecliffe. That the attack occurred in spite of the party’s softening line challenges the old ‘totalitarian’ paradigm that assumed the central party leadership exerted complete control over a docile membership. Gibson states that the Victorian branch of the party was in the grips of an extreme leftist tendency at the time of the assault. For this assault, and Gibson’s opinion, see Gibson, *My Years in the Communist Party*, pp. 17-18 and Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 200 and 225-226.

⁹¹ In April 1932, the CPA reiterated its use of the social fascist slogan but clarified the difference between fascism and social fascism. *Workers’ Weekly*, 15 April 1932, p. 2.

leaders...possessed and exercised considerable latitude both in arriving at domestic political policies and in manoeuvring their parties inside their particular national circumstances.⁹²

Such manoeuvring demonstrates the flexibility in the practice of the organisational aspect of proletarian internationalism. But this was also at odds with Lenin's theoretical stipulate that sought a more rigid relationship structure between the 'general staff of the world revolution' in Moscow and their globally scattered foot soldiers. The following discussion on the CPA's response to the Lyons government and the New Guard will illustrate this point.

For communists, Lyons represented the conversion of bourgeois democracy into near fascist dictatorship. Throughout the Third Period, deep concerns abounded about the so-called 'dry road' (i.e. legal and/or parliamentary) to fascism.⁹³ The fear of the 'dry road' and Labor's role therein had been repeated *ad infinitum* during Wicks' period in Australia.⁹⁴ Fears about the 'dry road' soared after the advent of the Lyons government, characterised as a 'fascist Government for the suppression of the broadest masses of the small farmers and workers.'⁹⁵ Indeed, foremost among those slated for suppression was the Communist Party. Hence, the serious risk of the 'dry road,' and possible illegality, compelled the CPA to seek a rapprochement with Labor. Expediency, not adherence to the Comintern line, brought about this change in approach. The latitude Fishman wrote about reflects far more accurately the reality of the party's relationship with the Comintern than does the rigid bonds envisaged by Lenin.

Evidence of the government's anti-communism lent momentum to the change in direction. In February 1932, the government declared numerous communist publications, including the *Workers' Weekly*, to be publications of an unlawful association. This effectively imposed a ban on communist literature and directly challenged the legality of the CPA. In response, the party stated that the 'revolutionary workers will not surrender one legal position,' and was bracing itself for a protracted battle, significantly on a united

⁹² Nina Fishman, *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions, 1933-1945* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1995), p. 35.

⁹³ See *Workers' Weekly*, 1 April 1932, p. 2, for the CPA's description of the 'dry road'.

⁹⁴ For example see Wicks' article in *Workers' Weekly*, 26 June 1931, p. 3. Even during the immediate post-Wicks era, the CPA feared that various governments, including the Scullin government, were adopting increasingly repressive measures aimed at hampering its work. For example, see the correspondence from CC CPA, Agit-prop Department to all Committees and Units, 23 September 1931 (RC 495/94/70).

⁹⁵ *Workers' Weekly*, 25 December 1931, p. 2.

front basis, to preserve its legality.⁹⁶ This was followed with the prosecution of the publisher of the *Workers' Weekly*, Harold Devanny, ostensibly for publishing a paper that sought to solicit funds for an illegal association.⁹⁷ Devanny was found guilty, before a High Court appeal resulted in his acquittal in December 1932. Yet despite the serious threat to the legality of the party, the leadership felt the need to caution communists against underestimating the dangerous implications of the government's attacks. 'Legalist illusions' (following the High Court's acquittal of Devanny) that the constitution would protect the CPA, were dangerous.⁹⁸ Some of the party's leading cadres in Melbourne, whose ambivalent response to the threat of illegality challenged the authority of the CC, ultimately resulted in their expulsion.⁹⁹ Physical manifestations of fascism, like the New Guard, were harder to ignore. They were of considerable concern to the party from 1931 onwards and formed the second domestic factor in the party's retreat from sectarianism.

The emergence of quasi-fascist organisations was the catalyst for increased efforts to create the united front. The most prominent group to occupy the attention of the CPA was the New Guard. Renowned for its violence and attempts to use high placed sympathisers to stifle working class activity, it posed a serious problem to the entire labour movement.¹⁰⁰ For communists, the New Guard represented a group based purely around bourgeois reactionaries who drew little distinction in their hatred of the working class movement. Mild reformists to militant communists were together its victims.

⁹⁶ *Workers' Weekly*, 25 March – 1 April 1932.

⁹⁷ For this trial see *Workers' Weekly*, 9 September, 7 and 28 October, 4 November and 16 December 1932; *Communist Party of Australia on Trial: Crimes Act in Operation* (Sydney: International Labour Defence, 1932); Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 214-215; Roger Douglas, 'Let's Pretend? Political Trials in Australia, 1930-39,' *University of New South Wales Law Journal*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2002), pp. 55-56.

⁹⁸ *Workers' Weekly*, 2 and 16 December 1932. See also *Illegality* (Melbourne: International Labour Defence, 1932), for the ostensible reasons the CPA and some of its fraternal were facing the threat of illegality and an explanation of the laws available to suppress the CPA. For a more detailed discussion of governments' endeavours to employ the law to hamper communist work see Don Watson, 'Anti-Communism in the Thirties,' *Arena*, no. 37 (1975), pp. 40-51; Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 207-208 and 214-217; L.J. Louis, 'The Victorian Council Against War and Fascism: A Rejoinder,' *Labour History*, no. 44 (May 1983), pp. 40-43 and 45-46; Frank Cain, *The Origins of Political Surveillance in Australia* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson Publishers, 1983), pp. 245-250. For the CPA's retrospective assessment see Sharkey, *An Outline History of the Australian Communist Party*, pp. 27-28.

⁹⁹ *Workers' Weekly*, 6-20 January and 3 February 1933. For the Melbourne expulsions see footnote 114.

¹⁰⁰ For histories of the New Guard see Keith Amos, *The New Guard Movement 1931-1935* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1976); Eric Campbell, *The Rallying Point: My Story of the New Guard* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1965); Andrew Moore, *The Secret Army and the Premier: Conservative Paramilitary Organisations in New South Wales, 1930-32* (Kensington: NSWUP, 1989).

Expediency dictated that erstwhile social fascists quickly become Labor comrades. On the threat posed by the New Guard to the entire labour movement, the *Workers' Weekly* stated:

The Communist Party draws the attention of all workers to this fearful menace. United action must immediately be taken for the protection of the working class and its activities.

This Fascist outfit is conspiring to bring about the assassination of all regarded by them as the leaders of the militant movement. Not only within the Communist Party, but right throughout the entire movement.¹⁰¹

A series of violent assaults on communists, unemployed and Labor members in rural areas ensued.¹⁰² The existence of the labour movement appeared under threat. For communists, who possessed an internationalist perspective, events were doubly worrying; Nazi style anti-working class violence was sprouting all over New South Wales. The lessons of Nazi violence in Germany dictated that decisive action was required to stop the fascist threat from coming to maturity. Proletarian internationalism, in the form of the experience of other parties, was important in leading the party to this conclusion.

The CPA turned to united action. For it, a strengthened Workers' Defence Corps (WDC), a near para-military body organised by communists, 'to protect the movement from attacks by any fascist morons' was essential.¹⁰³ By the final weeks of 1931, the CPA was boasting victories against the New Guard. This continued into 1932.¹⁰⁴ In April 1932, Sharkey insisted that the party had much to do in its fight against fascism and that communists had to exercise vigilance against sectarianism. But, Sharkey added, the anti-fascist measures hitherto undertaken did not amount to the extension of the united front to the leaders of reformism.¹⁰⁵ Despite Sharkey's insistence, efforts to counter fascism were one of the contributing factors to the party's turn away from the sectarian excesses of the Third Period.

¹⁰¹ *Workers' Weekly*, 14 August 1931, p. 1. It is more than coincidence that in the same issue of the *Workers' Weekly*, the editorial concerned the question of the united front from below and how communists were to go about building it.

¹⁰² The most notable incidents were in Mildura, Bourke, Dubbo and Wagga, the latter where Lang supporters were attacked. For these see *Workers' Weekly*, 6-13 and 27 November 1931. See also McGillick, *Comrade No More*, pp. 73-76, whom was subjected to violence in Mildura; Gibson, *My Years in the Communist Party*, pp. 13-14; Beilharz, 'Trotskyism in Australia,' p. 135; Michael Cathcart, *Defending the National Tuckshop* (Fitzroy: McPhee Gribble, 1988); Moore, *The Secret Army and the Premier*.

¹⁰³ *Workers' Weekly*, 31 July 1931, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ See *Workers' Weekly*, 4, 25 December 1931 and 4 March 1932.

¹⁰⁵ See *Workers' Weekly*, 22 April 1932, p. 3.

So by 1932, the CPA was the closest it had been to realising the Comintern line since February 1930. Yet it wasn't Moscow that lured the CPA closer to the Comintern; rather, it was domestic imperatives. This was one of the unintended consequences of the Lyons government winning power and the New Guard assaulting its first victim. Their existence brought the CPA to a closer attainment of proletarian internationalism than hitherto, particularly so far as the organisational element of proletarian internationalism was concerned.

The fight against fascism was now a major preoccupation. To provide its anti-fascist activities with a semblance of coordination, the CPA established a new fraternal called the United Front Against Fascism (UFAF). This short-lived organisation was first formed on 20 September 1931 and consummated at its NSW and Victorian state conferences on 31 October and 21 November 1931 respectively. It was 'wide enough to embrace all opponents of fascism.'¹⁰⁶ At a Political Bureau meeting in October 1931 it was decided that communists dominate the new organisation to prevent Garden and his associates from elevating their influence.¹⁰⁷ The UFAF aimed to provide organisational expression to working class opposition to fascism; proliferate anti-fascist propaganda; establish a solid presence in workplaces; and assist in the creation of local branches of the Workers' Defence Corps and the UFAF.¹⁰⁸ Providing further evidence of the shift away from sectarianism, the Third Period practice of disdain toward capitalist democracy was supplanted with an emphasis on the defence of rights commonly associated with bourgeois democracy.¹⁰⁹ This did not prevent the ALP from proscribing the organisation, leading to communist claims that Labor was aiding fascism and splitting the united front.¹¹⁰ But it was also hardly likely that the Labor Party would sanction its members playing an active role in an organisation whose origins rested with the party that had subjected Labor to so much recent vitriolic abuse. Nevertheless, Labor's proscription of the UFAF, combined with communist mismanagement, reduced it to a short-lived and

¹⁰⁶ See *Workers' Weekly*, 24 September – 2 and 16 October, 6-13 November 1931. Quote from *Workers' Weekly*, 6 November 1931, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Political Bureau Meeting, 10 October 1931 (RC 95/94/70).

¹⁰⁸ See *Workers' Weekly*, 24 September – 2 October and 6-13 November 1931.

¹⁰⁹ For instance, communists spoke of the defence of freedom of thought and the rights of citizens, when at the height of the Third Period such freedoms were dismissed as non-existent for workers under capitalism. For defence of individual rights see *Workers' Weekly*, 2 October 1931 and 27 November 1931.

¹¹⁰ *Workers' Weekly*, 29 January 1932, p. 2.

minor position in the constellation of communist fraternal. On 25 June 1932, the UFAF was amalgamated with the ICWPA to re-establish the ILD in Australia.¹¹¹

These were encouraging moves for unity notwithstanding the shortfalls. But the leadership was not satisfied. Sectarianism was still a problem. Criticism, both local and exogenous, increasingly appeared. In September 1932, an *Inprecorr* article took the party to task for its failure to ‘overcome all the manifestations of sectarianism which permeate our ranks’ and its inability to organise a ‘united front [from below].’¹¹² A month later the leadership was still haranguing its followers to curb sectarianism, noting that ‘we have not succeeded...in overcoming all the manifestations of sectarianism which permeate our ranks.’¹¹³ The leadership’s efforts to quell sectarianism led to the expulsion of many comrades. This culminated in the expulsion of numerous individuals (including Moxon) in mid-1932 for disruption stemming from various deviations.¹¹⁴ The expulsions had some effect. Over a period of months, the leadership succeeded in mitigating sectarianism. The scene was almost, though not quite, set for the united front approaches of the mid-1930s.

We now turn to the party’s anti-war work, another constituent component of proletarian internationalism. It assumed new urgency in 1931. The catalyst was the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. Russia was now confronted with an ambitious and expansionistic power on its eastern borders, with (so communists believed) the approval of some Western powers, the Australian bourgeoisie and the League of Nations.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ The ILD was entrusted with leading the ‘struggle against the repressive laws of the exploiting classes’ (i.e. the Lyons government) and leading a ‘united front of the whole working-class movement.’ *Workers’ Weekly*, 1 July 1932, p. 3.

¹¹² *Inprecorr*, vol. 12, no. 41, 15 September 1932, pp. 878-880.

¹¹³ *Workers’ Weekly*, 21 October 1932, p. 4. See also ‘Resolution on the Situation in Australia and the Immediate Tasks of the Party,’ 15 October 1932 (RC 495/3/338).

¹¹⁴ For the party’s attempts to expunge left errors and the resultant expulsions refer to Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 225-228. Leaders of the Victorian branch of the party were expelled in early 1933 after criticising the CC at the December 1932 CC Plenum. For this criticism see ‘Political Statement of NO. 4 District Committee, To the ECCI and Party Plenum 1932 (December),’ (RC 495/94/98). This criticism was repudiated at the Plenum, but upon the meeting’s conclusion and the dissidents’ return to Melbourne, they ‘repudiated their repudiation.’ The dissidents waited until their return to Melbourne to ‘repudiate their repudiation’ out of fear that if they did not recant their criticism at the Plenum in Sydney, the party would refuse them money for the journey home! For an account of the chain of events, see CPA NO. 4 District to the Comintern (RC 495/94/109).

¹¹⁵ See *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 4, nos. 10 and 12, 1 October and 14 December 1931. The LAI held similar sentiments. See *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 5, no. 1, 16 January 1932, p. 11 and *Information Bulletin No. 2: The War Crisis in China* (Sydney: League Against Imperialism, 1932). See also the analysis in *Workers’ Weekly*, 19 February 1932, p. 2 and *War and the Workers: Material for Working Class*

Australian involvement was another concern, owing to its alleged role as Britain's 'junior partner' in the Pacific.¹¹⁶ If the gloomy predictions of the past seemed to overstate the danger posed to Soviet security, this incident unnerved complacent comrades.

International solidarity with Russia spurred individuals into action. Comrades in Australia would help save Soviet Russia; but they faced formidable obstacles. A coalition of capitalist states was said to be on the verge of launching an anti-Soviet war. The Russians moved troops to their eastern frontier. The *Workers' Weekly*, sensing the proximity of conflict, declared that the workers would not permit the Manchurian conflict to embroil the Soviet Union and called for the strengthening of the anti-war movement.¹¹⁷ As some communists went about smashing Japanese goods in Sydney in protest at that country's foreign policy,¹¹⁸ others held their breath; but, as Japan annexed Manchuria, war against Russia did not eventuate.

While support for Russia in a war with Japan was not required, the party leadership felt that the response of comrades did not reflect the gravity of the incident. Self-criticism was called for. When it arrived, it pertained to inadequate exposure of the aggressive intent of Japanese imperialism. The party also acknowledged its collective failure to illuminate the great danger a Soviet-Japanese conflict would pose to Australian workers.¹¹⁹ And despite some protests,¹²⁰ the failure to organise a solid protest movement was another sore point.¹²¹ Action to reinforce anti-war sentiments remained absent from CPA activity and, therefore, revealed a shortfall in the party's practice of the anti-war aspects of proletarian internationalism.

Propaganda, International Red Day Against Imperialist War, August 1st 1932 (Sydney: Communist Party of Australia, 1932).

¹¹⁶ *Workers' Weekly*, 5 and 19 February 1932; *War and the Workers*, pp. 15-16.

¹¹⁷ For the *Workers' Weekly* declaration that the workers would not permit this conflagration to embroil the Soviet Union see *Workers' Weekly*, 24 September 1931, p. 1. For the rest see *Workers' Weekly*, 24 September – 2 October and 13 November 1931 and 19 February 1932; *Information Bulletin No. 2: The War Crisis in China*.

¹¹⁸ Moran, *Reminiscences of a Rebel*, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ 'Resolution on the Situation in Australia and the Immediate Tasks of the Party,' 15 October 1932, pp. 16-17 (RC 495/3/338).

¹²⁰ See *Workers' Weekly*, 19 February 1932, p. 4, for a brief account of a demonstration, held under the auspices of the LAI, against the war in Manchuria.

¹²¹ For criticism of the CPA's Manchurian campaign see *ibid.*, p. 2. Further criticism was leveled at the party's anti-war work in *Workers' Weekly*, 6 May 1932, p. 2 and 13 January 1933, p. 1. See also 'Resolution on the Situation in Australia and the Immediate Tasks of the Party,' 15 October 1932, pp. 16-17 (RC 495/3/338).

By 1931 the party was engaged in anti-militarist work among the armed forces. This stands in contrast to the party's dismissive position on the question at its 1928 National Conference. Nevertheless the leadership was dissatisfied with this work, deemed essential to transform the anti-Soviet imperialist war into civil war. However, that a British Royal Navy mutiny in Invergordon in 1931 over pay cuts was emulated by the Australian Navy in 1932 over the same issue suggests, as McKnight has demonstrated, that communist work among members of the armed forces was not without results, notwithstanding the fact that pay cuts, not ideology, was the major factor underpinning the mutiny.¹²²

Undeterred by shortfalls, the CPA relentlessly asserted its anti-war credentials. It reminded whoever was listening that only it was committed to resisting war, that Labor was feigning opposition to war and contrasted the record of the Bolsheviks with the ALP and European social democracy during the First World War to buttress its claims.¹²³ In claiming the Bolshevik's opposition to the Great War as its own record, the CPA was invoking another aspect of proletarian internationalism that permitted the militant heritage of one nation to be claimed by the militants of other lands. But effective anti-war work required palpable action. The absence of strong factory nuclei represented the weakness of the CPA's application of correct communist anti-war work. International assistance was forthcoming in the form of a new organisation conceived for the express purpose of opposing war.

This organisation was formed at an anti-war congress in Amsterdam in August 1932 and was commonly known as the Amsterdam movement against war. With many flashpoints around the world, the creation of this body was timely. The congress was another of Willi Münzenberg's creations. It intended to assemble 'anti-war organisations of all shades of opinion,' and claimed the adherence of many prominent intellectuals, such as Henri Barbusse, Romain Rolland and Albert Einstein.¹²⁴ That the congress was convoked

¹²² For the CPA's self-criticism of its anti-militarist work see *Workers' Weekly*, 28 August 1931, p. 2. For the British and Australian mutiny see *Workers' Weekly*, 24 September 1931, p. 1 and 11 March 1932, p. 2; *Inprecorr*, vol. 11, no. 59, 19 November 1931, p. 1057. The *Inprecorr* article, citing *Smith's Weekly*, noted that there was 'enough revolutionary literature aboard [the Australian vessel] to equip a public library.' For a detailed discussion of the Australian mutiny see McKnight, *Espionage and the Roots of the Cold War*, pp. 88-93. Subsequently, prominent Comintern figure Karl Radek adduced the mutinies to substantiate his assertion that the 'maturing of the revolutionary crisis' was proceeding globally. Karl Radek, *The Birth of the First International and 15 Years of the Communist International* (Sydney: Modern Publishers, 1935), p. 32.

¹²³ *Workers' Weekly*, 31 July 1931 is a typical example. See also *Workers' Weekly*, 19 February 1932, p. 2, for the CPA's assertion that Labor was in agreement with the Japanese action in Manchuria.

¹²⁴ *Workers' Weekly*, 14 October 1932, p. 3.

successfully despite government interference;¹²⁵ that there was claimed widespread support of the world working class for its work; and that unity had been successfully forged with socialist workers on the issue, were understood to demonstrate the depth of anti-war sentiment. Nevertheless, traces of the old sectarianism were evident. One example was the assertion that the struggle against war was inseparably bound with the struggle against capitalism. Another was the emphasis on militant resistance to war, not pacifism. This made the new body's stated aim of establishing a united front difficult. But sectarianism did not preclude the attainment of some successes in extending the united front beyond the working class. The presence of a sailor from the Italian Navy, who was permitted to address the congress in full uniform, was a case in point. Ada Wright, mother of two of the Scottsboro defendants, was also present and can certainly be considered, at this point in time, a symbol of the united front. She was in the midst of a European tour (which was greatly aided by communists) aimed at generating greater European support, from both communists and socialists, for the defence of the Scottsboro Boys.¹²⁶ Although sectarianism bedevilled any real move to unity, the new movement against war was the first communist fraternal predicated on the united front, of any form, since the inception of the LAI. By 1933, it had a presence in Australia. The rigid Third Period was unmistakably cracking.

It is important to resist the temptation to view the Third Period as a complete failure due to the Communist Party's self-imposed isolation. On the contrary, its romanticism positioned the CPA as a champion of progressive causes. An instance of this arrived in September 1931 when the CPA, ironically liberated by the Third Period intolerance for the mainstream, released its draft policy on Aborigines. It was heavily influenced by the national question and disproves Williams's assertion that by the early 1930s the 'Communist Party as yet had no detailed policy' for Aborigines.¹²⁷ The policy recognised that the Aborigines were 'among the most exploited subject peoples in the world' and had

¹²⁵ The congress was originally scheduled for Switzerland, but the Swiss government successfully thwarted its convocation. This forced a last minute re-location to Amsterdam. The Dutch government was not entirely cooperative, refusing the Soviet delegation, led by Maxim Gorky, the right to enter the country. Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern*, p. 390.

¹²⁶ For an account and decisions of the Amsterdam congress see *Workers' Weekly*, 18 November 1932, p. 4; *Inprecorr*, vol. 12, no. 31, 14 July 1932, pp. 632-633; vol. 12, nos. 39-41, 1-15 September 1932; *United Front Against War: 27 Countries Represented by 2,196 Delegates from 30,000 Organisations and 30,000,000 People and Report and Manifesto of the World anti-War Congress at Amsterdam August 27th-29th 1932* (London: British Delegation to the World anti-War Congress, 1932); Rawling, 'Recollections in Tranquillity,' pp. 27-28. For Ada Wright's international tour see J.A. Miller, S.D. Pennybacker and E. Rosenhaft, 'Mother Ada Wright and the International Campaign to Free the Scottsboro Boys, 1931-1934,' *American Historical Review*, vol. 106, no. 2, (2001).

¹²⁷ Justina Williams, *The First Furrow* (Willagee: Lone Hand Press, 1976), p. 103.

been subjected to ‘mass physical extermination,’ deprived of political rights, had Aboriginal women persecuted and were heavily exploited by employers. They were ‘the slaves of slaves.’ For the Communist Party,

Henceforth no struggle of the white workers must be permitted without demands for the Aborigines being championed; no political campaigns without political programs applicable to our fellow exploited – the Aborigines – being formulated.

The party outlined a list of demands and asked that white Australians unite to redress Aboriginal injustice. Here again, the national question aspect of proletarian internationalism heavily influenced party policy: Aborigines were to receive equal economic, social and political rights on a par with white Australians; colour restrictions were to be removed; forced labour of Aborigines was to be abolished; there was to be ‘absolute prohibition of the kidnapping of Aboriginal children’ and ‘full and unrestricted right of Aboriginal and half-caste parents with their children.’ Aborigines were also to be entitled to develop their native culture, run the affairs of their own society and train their own teachers with money provided by the Commonwealth government. The communists suggested that large tracts of land be handed over to Aborigines, who would possess full freedom and a right to independence.¹²⁸ As with most of the CPA’s internationalist work, shortfalls became quickly evident. The stipulate that no struggle of the white workers was possible without raising demands for Aborigines was neglected. Communists seldom made Aboriginal rights a centrepiece of political campaigning and only raised the issue in an intermittent manner. Nevertheless, this quixotic policy, well ahead of its time, reveals the influence of proletarian internationalism in shaping party policy.

Indeed, the internationalist emphasis on class ahead of race brought to the attention of Australian communists racial oppression, not only in Australia, but also in other countries. An example was the plight of the Scottsboro Boys in the United States. It is necessary to point out from the outset that it is beyond the purview of this thesis to recount the rollercoaster of events that characterised this case, which has been done elsewhere.¹²⁹ It is, however, worth briefly recalling some of the key elements. It involved nine African-American youths who allegedly raped two white women, were found guilty in dubious

¹²⁸ *Workers’ Weekly*, 24 September 1931, p. 2. See also Moxon’s article in *Inprecorr*, vol. 11, no. 54, 22 October 1931, p. 986; Markus, ‘Talka Longa Mouth,’ p. 148; Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 265-266.

¹²⁹ For an account of the Scottsboro case see Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979).

circumstances with eight sentenced to death. This triggered a widespread, largely American, campaign for the release of the youths, or at least, the granting of a retrial. A retrial was granted, but was followed with a guilty verdict and another death sentence. In the meantime, one of the alleged rape victims withdrew her testimony and appeared as a defence witness. Another retrial resulted in another guilty verdict, this time minus the death penalty. This campaign stretched over many years, but most activity was confined to the 1930s. An international campaign, the Australian part of which is the focus of this thesis, was also undertaken, though never reached the intensity seen in America. The case was represented as one of American capitalism resorting to any method to sow discord between white and black workers in order to thwart the emerging unity between the two in resisting the 'capitalist offensive.' It seemed to exemplify the ease with which American law could be manipulated to allow the 'legal lynching' of young American 'negro' workers. It also lent credibility to both accusations of class justice and, for communists at least, confirmed the Comintern's analysis that dying capitalism would lash out at the working class and resort to 'fascist' methods in an attempt to preserve itself.¹³⁰

This case had double reasons to stir the internationalism of communists. Firstly, Australian and international communism was extending solidarity to class war victims on the other side of the globe. Secondly, Scottsboro was a clear case of race oppression in the United States. Protests to save the Scottsboro Boys, such as that in the Sydney Domain on 8 May 1932, though held infrequently, maintained international solidarity as a central theme. Other protests broadened out to incorporate separate international issues. For example, a Scottsboro solidarity protest of Greek workers and shopkeepers in Sydney also called on the Greek government to permit unfettered working class (i.e. communist) activity in that country.¹³¹ The ACTU protested on behalf of the union movement, demonstrating that Australian sympathy for the Scottsboro defendants extended beyond the communist movement.¹³² That the Scottsboro defendants were young added another dimension to the campaign for their release. Thus, the Australian Young Communist League (YCL) played a more important role in this campaign than others. The YCL claimed to speak on behalf of the working class youth of Australia when it demanded the release of fellow young workers in America, combining international solidarity with the

¹³⁰ These themes pervaded *Workers' Weekly* and *Inprecorr* reports on the case. For example see *Workers' Weekly*, 13 May 1932, p. 3; *Inprecorr*, vol. 12, no. 15, 31 March 1932, p. 288; vol. 12, no. 49, 3 November 1932, pp. 1051-1052; vol. 12, no. 51, 17 November 1932, pp. 1103-1104.

¹³¹ *Workers' Weekly*, 22 April and 13 May 1932. For communist activity in the Greek-Australian community see Con K. Allimonos, 'Greek Communist Activity in Melbourne: A Brief History,' *Labour History*, no. 86 (May 2004), pp. 137-155.

¹³² *Workers' Weekly*, 25 November 1932, p. 4.

solidarity of youth.¹³³ But as with the senior party, and apart from rhetorical expressions of solidarity, very little real assistance was forthcoming from the YCL, as was required in the model of proletarian internationalism expounded in chapter two.

The CPA's continued work on behalf of the Meerut prisoners was another example of international solidarity. By June 1931 the protracted legal proceedings had yet to run their course. The prosecution had just completed its case; the defence had only commenced, claiming the defendants were being punished for nothing more than their activities as unionists. In fact, the British and Indian defendants were attempting to establish an Indian communist party and, moreover, were its leaders, with one of the British defendants being a Comintern emissary.¹³⁴ But bickering divided the prisoners. Their solidarity had crumbled; some managed to secure bail though most remained incarcerated.¹³⁵ The defendants exhibited defiance in the dock – a fine example of 'a working class defence' in court, whose intention it was to expose the class bias of 'capitalist justice' and whose most famous exponent was Georgi Dimitrov at the Reichstag fire trial in 1933.¹³⁶ In January 1933, and after almost four years of incarceration, the trial was completed and the verdicts were announced. Twenty eight defendants were found guilty and sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. For communists, the cause was not over; the release of the Meerut prisoners remained of great consequence, 'a focal point against British imperialism as a whole.'¹³⁷ As with other campaigns of international solidarity, mere expressions of support were all communists could offer. Little practical internationalism was forthcoming, although opportunities for such help were limited. Nevertheless, for these years it is difficult to demur with Farrell's observation: 'For the most part these campaigns were abject failures, attracting very little support or even interest outside

¹³³ See the YCL's letter of protest to the American Consul in Sydney in *Workers' Weekly*, 31 July 1931, p. 3.

¹³⁴ For an overview of the case see Callaghan, 'Blowing Up India,' pp. 326-328 and 333. See also Phillip Spratt, *Blowing Up India: Reminiscences and Reflections of a Former Comintern Emissary* (Calcutta, 1955).

¹³⁵ Six managed to secure bail, twenty five remained imprisoned. *Inprecorr*, vol. 11, no. 29, 4 June 1931, p. 531; *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 4, no. 9, 5 September 1931, p. 9.

¹³⁶ For an example of the defiant speeches of the Meerut prisoners see *Workers' Weekly*, 23 October 1931, p. 3. See also Roger Douglas, 'Let's Pretend? Political Trials in Australia, 1930-39,' pp. 33-70, for a discussion on the politicisation of trials by the CPA and an explanation of a working class defence.

¹³⁷ *Workers' Weekly*, 27 January 1933, p. 4. The defendants were found guilty in August 1932. See *Inprecorr*, vol. 12, no. 38, 25 August 1932, pp. 792-793. See *Inprecorr*, vol. 12, no. 49, 3 November 1932, pp. 1050-1051, for continued appeals for the release of the Meerut prisoners and vol. 13, no. 4, 26 January 1933, pp. 92-93, for the sentences imposed on the Meerut prisoners. For other descriptions of the Meerut case see Gibson, *The People Stand Up*, pp. 276-277.

communist circles. They were principally campaigns in which communists talked to communists about issues on which even they only shakily agreed.¹³⁸ But by the second half of the 1930s, as will be seen in the next chapter, the range of activities performed in the name of international solidarity disproved Farrell's observation. Activity during the second half of the 1930s brought the party into closer alignment with the model of proletarian internationalism expounded in chapter two than had been experienced hitherto.

The absence of any real international solidarity in the CPA's work was perhaps symptomatic of broader inertia in the international communist movement. This was most acutely expressed in the ease with which organisations ostensibly founded to promote international solidarity either disappeared or suffered a slow death. The latter was the fate of the PPTUS. By mid-1931, it was nearing its end. Despite the affiliation of the Australian Railways Union (ARU) in July 1931,¹³⁹ nothing could prevent the inexorable decline of the Shanghai based PPTUS, struggling under the savage repression of the Chinese Kuomintang. By January 1932, *The Pan-Pacific Worker* produced its last edition. Bizarrely, the PPTUS death came sooner. In June 1931, the Kuomintang arrested the executive of the PPTUS, including its 'general secretary' Paul Ruegg and his 'wife' Gertrude.¹⁴⁰ The couple were arrested, on information provided by the British, allegedly for involvement in espionage. This was predictably dismissed by communists.¹⁴¹ However credible evidence has emerged suggesting otherwise: most notably we now know that Paul Ruegg was in fact an integral player in clandestine Comintern activities in Shanghai.¹⁴²

The international communist movement predictably embarked on a campaign to free the Rueggs. It possessed an urgency generated by fear of torture or imminent execution. It

¹³⁸ Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour*, p. 211.

¹³⁹ The ARU also affiliated to the Profintern. For this see *Workers' Weekly*, 31 July 1931, p. 1 and *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 4, no. 8, 5 August 1931, p. 4. Queenslander Frank Nolan, a key advocate of the union's affiliation with the Profintern, stated that after the affiliation, 'nothing further was done by either party to make the affiliation effective.' The affiliation was discontinued shortly afterwards. Frank Nolan, *You Pass This Way Only Once: Reflections of a Trade Union Leader* (Stafford, Queensland: Colonial Press, 1974), p. 72.

¹⁴⁰ Paul Ruegg was known by the surname Noulens to Chinese authorities. His real name was Jakov Rudnik and Tatiana Moiseenko was that of his 'wife'. McKnight, *Espionage and the Roots of the Cold War*, p. 119.

¹⁴¹ For example, see *Inprecorr*, vol. 11, no. 52, 8 October 1931, p. 952.

¹⁴² For an elucidation of the clandestine activities engaged in by the Rueggs see McKnight, *Espionage and the Roots of the Cold War*, pp. 116-123; Frederick S. Litten, 'The Noulens Affair,' *China Quarterly*, no. 138, (June 1994), pp. 492-512. See also Farrell, 'The Pan-Pacific Trade Union Movement and Australian Labour, 1921-1932,' p. 455. For an account of the spy stories of the Secretariat see C. A. Willoughby, *Shanghai Conspiracy: The Sorge Spy Ring, Moscow, Shanghai, Tokyo, San Francisco, New York* (New York: Dutton, 1952).

was repeatedly claimed that their lives, or at least well being, were at risk; that the British shared culpability for the Rueggs' predicted deaths as they were responsible for their arrest and handover to the Kuomintang. It was also claimed that the Rueggs were arrested for being both living proof of the unity between European and Asian workers and having the temerity to organise the toilers of the Pacific in a challenge to capitalism. This invited the ubiquitous Münzenberg, who was leading an international protest movement for the pair's release, to write that 'the imperialists and their Chinese confederates intended to strike a blow...against the Chinese proletariat and the European proletariat allied with it.'¹⁴³ Taking the lead of prominent figures such as Münzenberg, Australian supporters of the Rueggs, coalescing around the near moribund LAI, appealed to Australian workers to act in the spirit of international solidarity. A little action was carried out. This was largely confined to the dispatch of telegrams and protest resolutions to the Chinese Consul-General and the Commonwealth government. Soon after it was claimed, questionably, that international protests had forced the Chinese to abstain from executing the pair. Next to this, little more appears to have been undertaken. A suggested boycott of Chinese goods was abandoned for fear of fostering racial hatred of Australian-Chinese shopkeepers. In the case of the Ruegg campaign, as in the others before it, international solidarity was given limited practical expression. The party was yet to discover the more innovative ways of displaying international solidarity that it would practice successfully later in the decade.¹⁴⁴ As a postscript to the Ruegg campaign, McKnight stated that the pair were ultimately released to the Soviet Union in 1939, fortuitously escaping the Stalinist terror.¹⁴⁵

Amidst these various attempts at solidarity, the 12th ECCI Plenum met during August-September 1932. Much of the Comintern's existing assessments on economic and international relations were reaffirmed. It exhorted communist parties to prepare for the 'fight for power, for the dictatorship of the proletariat' by winning over the proletariat. Once again, communists were enjoined to establish and strengthen contacts with workers from below, wherever they may be found – in the factories, unions and the unemployed. Exposing the 'treachery' of the social democrats, towards whom the 'main blows' of communists were still directed, remained a key task. Fulfilment of these tasks, set by the

¹⁴³ *Inprecorr*, vol. 12, no. 38, 25 August 1932, p. 790.

¹⁴⁴ The above is from *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 4, nos. 10 and 12, 1 October and 14 December 1931 and vol. 5, no. 1, 16 January 1932; *Workers' Weekly*, 16, 30 October 1931. The CPA's Ruegg propaganda reflected that issued by *Inprecorr*. For example see *Inprecorr*, vol. 11, no. 55, 29 October 1931, pp. 1000-1001; vol. 12, no. 31, 14 July 1932, p. 639.

¹⁴⁵ McKnight, *Espionage and the Roots of the Cold War*, p. 120.

organisational element of proletarian internationalism, was necessary in order to fully meet the stipulates of proletarian internationalism enunciated in chapter two.

But the Plenum also criticised the work of communists. Its signal criticism pertaining to mass work, was directed at the inability of communist parties to build a genuine united front from below. Left sectarianism was the unmistakable cause of this deficiency. ‘Left deviations,’ while not yet as reproachable as ‘right opportunism,’ were increasingly frowned upon. And although the social fascist insult was still in use, the insults that had characterised Comintern edicts on relations with social democrats since 1928 were less favoured than in the past. This again signified an evolutionary step in the Comintern’s attitude to social democracy.¹⁴⁶

The Australian leadership accepted the decisions of the 12th ECCI with solemn diligence. It promptly ascertained its tasks arising from the ECCI. Yet at the same time, the CPA attempted to perform a perilous balancing act. On the one hand, the CPA cautiously noted that the situation in Australia did not fully reflect the Comintern’s analysis; on the other hand it hastened to discourage any exceptionalist outlook. Certainly, the situation in Australia was not comparable to that prevailing in turbulent Germany. Nevertheless, the assumption was that the Australian masses would eventually be confronted with revolutionary crises. Accordingly, the party’s role became one of ensuring that the proletariat was prepared to face the challenges of a revolutionary crisis leading finally to the party’s increased influence and leadership of the proletariat at the expense of Labor. Leftism was heavily discouraged. This was particularly the case in regards to Labor politicians, who were no longer to be subjected to crass abuse but ‘clear, simple and concrete exposure.’¹⁴⁷ However, there was little discernable change in the party’s work as a result of the 12th ECCI. It would take another eighteen months and events in Germany, France and Austria to bring about a more fundamental change.

The first event that heralded the change of line occurred in Germany in early 1933. The international rise of fascism had been underestimated by international communism, including the CPA. The party triumphantly reported the gains of the Communist Party of

¹⁴⁶ All quotations from *Workers’ Weekly*, 18 November 1932, p. 3. The above is from *Workers’ Weekly*, 18 November – 24 December 1932; *Inprecorr*, vol. 12, nos. 44-46, 6-20 October 1932. Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern*, ch. 4, provides a comprehensive discussion of the 12th ECCI Plenum. See also Worley, ‘Courting Disaster?’, p. 13.

¹⁴⁷ The decisions of the 12th ECCI were considered in detail at the CC Plenum in December 1932. For this and related material see ‘Third Plenary Session of the Central Committee, Communist Party of Australia,’ 25 to 27 December 1932 (RC 495/94/92); *Workers’ Weekly*, 16 December 1932 and 6-13 January 1933.

Germany (KPD) at the July 1932 German elections and erroneously observed that ‘the Hitler “wave” has significantly come to an end.’¹⁴⁸ The KPD’s further gains at the November election were again cited as a symptom of ‘the rapid revolutionisation of the German masses.’ Hitler’s losses were a sign that ‘the fascist wave has broken on the rock of the Red Front.’¹⁴⁹ Yet it was Hitler who emerged triumphant. This exposed the inherent contradiction of the communist response to the rise of fascism: on the one hand, communists were ever vigilant towards what they casually labelled fascist governments at home (Lyons among others); contrasting this was the communists’ flippant response to genuine fascists making menacing strides to power. This complacency, shared by the Comintern,¹⁵⁰ continued until Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. His appointment, argued the CPA astonishingly, demonstrated a weakening of the German bourgeoisie and a strengthening of the revolutionary wave: ‘the German working class cannot be conquered by fascism, a proletarian triumph in Germany is assured.’¹⁵¹ The Comintern was more sober in its reaction to Hitler becoming Chancellor.¹⁵² As Hitler rapidly consolidated his power, the international communist movement belatedly roused from its slumber, recognised the catastrophic consequences Nazism posed to communism and the Soviet Union and initiated a fundamental shift in policy that aimed to provide a serious response to the threat of fascism and war.

Dawn of the Popular Front: February 1933 to the 7th Comintern Congress

Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor sent alarm bells ringing in Moscow. Fascism’s victory in Germany was disturbing enough. Worse was the prospect of its spread to other countries. The International’s response was to radically change policy, hastening the demise of the Third Period. In March, following an appeal for united anti-fascist struggle from the Socialist International, the Comintern issued a half-hearted appeal for working class unity against fascism.¹⁵³ The statement absolved the Comintern’s Third Period

¹⁴⁸ *Workers’ Weekly*, 5 August 1932, p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ *Workers’ Weekly*, 11 November 1932, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ This was clearly evident in the Comintern’s refusal to permit an open united front from above, which prevented the KPD from arranging an agreement with the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) for more effective resistance to Hitler. The Comintern’s stance was exemplified in *Inprecorr*, vol. 12, no. 18, 21 April 1932, pp. 348-350. See also Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern*, *passim*. For a discussion of the broader and more fundamental factors behind the division of the German left in the prelude to Hitler’s accession see McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, pp. 109-118.

¹⁵¹ *Workers’ Weekly*, 10 February 1933, p. 1.

¹⁵² *Inprecorr*, vol. 13, no. 5, 2 February 1933, pp. 117-118. The front page headline of this edition stated simply ‘Hitler Chancellor of Germany.’

¹⁵³ For this appeal see *Inprecorr*, vol. 13, no. 11, 9 March 1933, pp. 261-262 and *Workers’ Weekly*, 21 April 1933, p. 1. See also the discussion in Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern*, pp. 84-85; Donald Sassoon,

policies and the KPD's application of those policies of any culpability for the German catastrophe. It called on

Communist Parties to try once again to establish the united front of struggle with the masses of the socialist workers through the intermediary of the Socialist Parties....the EC of the CI recommends to the Communist Parties to propose to the Central Committee of the Socialist Parties adhering to the 2nd Socialist International, joint actions against Fascism and the offensive of capital.¹⁵⁴

The Comintern suggested the united front be formed around certain 'elementary conditions.' These included resistance to 'fascist' attacks on working class organisations through the establishment of self-defence associations and mass protests; mobilisation of the working class against reductions in wages and conditions; and, crucially, the cessation of communist attacks on social democracy.¹⁵⁵ This was a significant change of policy: the united front from below was to be expanded into a united front from above. It was a radical departure from class against class, signifying the Comintern's de facto recognition of socialist parties as 'legitimate and representative working-class organisations.'¹⁵⁶ The organisational component of proletarian international had changed line; it was now up to its national sections to follow suit.

Upon discovering the Comintern's initiative, the CPA issued its own half-hearted united front proposal to the NSW branch of the ALP in April. It did so expecting rejection.¹⁵⁷ The proposal focused on government attempts to whittle away working conditions and the menace of fascism. The party offered to cease attacks, but not criticism, of Labor, on

'Togliatti, Italian Communism and the Popular Front,' in Helen Graham and Paul Preston (eds.), *The Popular Front in Europe* (London: Macmillan Press, 1987), p. 134; McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, pp. 121-122.

¹⁵⁴ *Workers' Weekly*, 21 April 1933, p. 1. The Comintern blamed the SPD and exonerated the KPD of any blame for Hitler's triumph in April and again at the 13th ECCI Plenum in late 1933. For the April resolution exonerating the KPD see *Inprecorr*, vol. 13, no. 17, 13 April 1933, pp. 377-378. For the 13th ECCI Plenum's discussions on this matter see Wilhelm Pieck, *Germany: The Workers' Fight Against the Hitler Terror: Report of Wm. Pieck to the 13th Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, December, 1933* (Sydney: Modern Publishers, 1934); V. Knorin, *Thirteenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International – December 1933: Fascism, Social-Democracy and the Communists, Speech by V. Knorin* (Moscow: Co-Operative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the USSR, 1934).

¹⁵⁵ *Workers' Weekly*, 21 April 1933, p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ Sassoon, 'Togliatti, Italian Communism and the Popular Front,' p. 134.

¹⁵⁷ The proposal for the united front, and the prediction that it would be rejected, was decided at a Polit-Bureau meeting on 14 April 1933, a week before the *Weekly* published both the Comintern's and CPA's unity proposals. For the Polit-Bureau meeting see 'P.B. Meeting,' 14 April 1933 (RC 495/94/105).

condition of the acceptance of the united front and as long as cooperation between Labor and the Communist Party continued.¹⁵⁸

The conditions the party articulated for the united front were near identical to those prescribed by the Comintern. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the party would have made a united front offer during this period had the Comintern (which was responding to European, not Australian, developments) not issued its appeal. Not surprisingly, doubt about the necessity of a united front against fascism in Australia, especially in the absence of a serious fascist threat was, publicly at least, brushed aside by the communist leadership.¹⁵⁹ In the absence of a Nazi style threat, the CPA substituted conservative governments as incarnations of fascism: attempts to curtail freedom of speech in Victoria, proposed legislation with anti-communist objectives in NSW, a referendum to abolish the NSW Upper House and efforts to prevent the dissemination of the *Workers' Weekly* through the post were adduced to demonstrate the fascist tendencies of Australian governments.¹⁶⁰ Fascism, it was claimed, 'seizes upon one country after another.' If doubt about the need for unity against fascism did not persuade some of its necessity, there was no doubt that renewed attempts were underway to reduce wages and conditions. Any united front could, at least, be aimed at resisting such incursions. However, the CPA warned that 'tendencies to establish a united front at any price, leading to the submerging of the identity of the party' would be resisted.¹⁶¹ It appears that the CPA, whose leaders had claimed ascendancy through championing robust hostility towards reformism, could not yet reconcile itself to cooperation with the – until recently – 'social-fascist' ALP.

The ALP predictably ignored the CPA's offer for unity. It had little to gain from a united front with the CPA. The 'red bogey' had previously been utilised effectively by conservatives and retained its potency in frightening voters. Additionally, the communists' derisory election results were not enough to persuade Labor leaders into believing the communist claim to leadership of the masses. Hence, the electoral danger to

¹⁵⁸ This was a departure from the discussions at the Polit-Bureau meeting on the 14th, where Dixon said '[w]e must make the position clear that we maintain our independence, the absolute right to criticise *and attack* the Labor Party leaders immediately we see any question of betrayal.' [emphasis added]. Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Privately, Dixon admitted that 'we cannot seize upon anything like what can be seized upon in European countries as far as fascist acts are concerned. We can seize upon the question of wage cuts, dole cuts and the hours question. Fascism does not exist like it does in Poland, Germany etc.' Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ For this see *Workers' Weekly*, 19-26 May, 9 June, 14-21 July, 4-11 August 1933, 13 April 1934.

¹⁶¹ *Workers' Weekly*, 21 April 1933, pp. 1-2. Within a week, the CPA was scolding activists for promising to forego criticism of the Labor Party and trade union leadership in the event of the creation of the united front. It urged communists to make distinctions between criticisms and attacks. See *Workers' Weekly*, 28 April 1933, p. 2.

Labor of association with the CPA, coupled with the latter's puny standing among voters and the recent history of vituperation, swiftly sealed the fate of the CPA's united front proposal.

Rebuffed, the CPA resorted to abuse of Labor leaders and renewed its determination to forge the united front from below. It attacked Labor which had, in communist eyes, betrayed

[T]he workers' interests...It illuminates their [Labor's] united front with the capitalists, not only against Communists and militants...but also, above all, against the interests of the working class.

The CPA committed itself to the unity of the workers, 'irrespective of the attitude of the official ALP.'¹⁶² Spurned, the party stated that it would not make a further offer for unity; claimed that the fight against fascism was inextricably bound up with the fight against bourgeois democracy; and that Labor's approach would lead to fascism. Accordingly, the CPA reemployed the social fascist insult. Although its use was significantly less than in previous years, it was still found in CPA publications by at least as late as December 1934.¹⁶³ Clearly the party found it difficult to excise its sectarianism and anti-Labor bitterness. These were undeniable barriers to any united front and were never truly overcome.

The 13th and final ECCI Plenum sitting in late 1933 is best remembered for its indecision. The discussion below will reveal that far from providing international communism with a clear direction, pursuant with its responsibilities described in chapter two, the Comintern was itself beset with differences on the most effective means of combating fascism. Hence, in the absence of a clear lead from the Comintern, the CPA reverted to the old methods, sometimes even predating the initiatives of the 12th ECCI.

Unsurprisingly, the 13th Plenum focused on devising appropriate strategies to check fascist expansion and the danger of war.¹⁶⁴ By the time the Plenum met, however,

¹⁶² *Workers' Weekly*, 16 June 1933, p. 2.

¹⁶³ See *Workers' Weekly*, 7 and 21 July, 18 August 1933. For the latest use that could be located of the 'social fascist' epithet see *Communist Review*, vol. 1, no. 9, December 1934, p. 6.

¹⁶⁴ For the decisions of the 13th ECCI Plenum see *Eve of Revolutions and Wars: Resolution of the 13th Plenum of the Communist International* (Sydney: Modern Publishers, 1934). Unless indicated otherwise, the following discussion on the 13th ECCI Plenum is from this source. The 13th Plenum decisions can also be found in *Inprecorr*, vol. 14, no. 1, 5 January 1934, pp. 12-16.

ambivalence for the united front, issued only in March of the same year, appears to have set in. Deep division in senior ranks prevented a more assertive reaction to Hitler's triumph. A statement from Kuusinen, who delivered the main report, was symptomatic of the predicament:

We say: against Social-Democrats – for a united front with the masses of the workers. This is the most important thing at the present time. Does this mean that the Communist Parties, while pursuing a correct, Bolshevik line, cannot under any circumstances propose a united front with the leading bodies of the Social-Democratic Parties and the reformist trade union? ...Our reply is: there is no such principle in Bolshevik tactics.¹⁶⁵

While not endorsing the united front from above, Kuusinen also did not disapprove of it. This despite a subheading in the Plenum's resolution stating 'Against Social-Democracy and for a United Front from Below.'¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the Comintern did not revert to the abuse of the recent past. For example, reference to social fascism was barely visible in the Plenum's published record. Kuusinen, while ritualistically upholding the Third Period dogma of the imminence of revolution and the 'fascisation' of reformists, admitted that genuine disagreements between fascists and social fascists were possible. Hence, McDermott's and Agnew's assertion that '[a]ny steps towards a more differentiated analysis of bourgeois democracy and fascism remained strictly limited' overlooks the nuances of Kuusinen's report.¹⁶⁷ If anything, Kuusinen's report reveals the extent of the quandary in which the Comintern found itself in this period. The ECCI was uncertain which tactic was appropriate for its sections: as capitalism wallowed in its crisis, 'the world is closely approaching a new round of revolutions and wars,'¹⁶⁸ the logical conclusion was that communists should prepare themselves for the struggle for power and assume a combative posture. Yet fascism's recent successes brought to the fore the serious risk of fascist dictatorship, not 'Soviet power' (which was proclaimed as the 'chief' slogan), replacing bourgeois democracy. Communists were faced with the task of defending the 'lesser evil' within the framework of a broad mass movement. As will be seen shortly, this uncertainty largely evaporated following events in France and Austria. Suffice it to say that by the Plenum's conclusion, it had not committed itself to either

¹⁶⁵ O.W. Kuusinen, *Thirteenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International – December 1933: Fascism, the Danger of War and the Tasks of the Communist Parties, Report by O.W. Kuusinen* (Moscow: Co-Operative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the USSR, 1934), pp. 79-81.

¹⁶⁶ *Eve of Revolutions and Wars*, n.p. [p. 15?]

¹⁶⁷ McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, p. 123.

¹⁶⁸ *Eve of Revolutions and Wars*, n.p [p. 8?].

course. Thus the Comintern, in failing to provide leadership, was not fulfilling its duties under proletarian internationalism as the directing centre of the world revolution.

No sooner had the Plenum concluded when European events decided matters. These occurred in France and Austria in February 1934. In both countries, events concerned resistance to perceived fascist attempts to seize power and lessons were learned about the most effective method to check fascist ambitions. In France, a massive joint socialist-communist strike on 12 February was the left's response to what was believed an attempted *coup d'état* by Colonel Francois de La Rocque's right-wing Croix de Feu (in fact it was a right-wing inspired riot). There the anti-fascists were successful. In Austria, where forces backed by Chancellor Dollfuss crushed the social democrats with force (and where communist played a negligible role), they were not.¹⁶⁹ Australians were urged to demonstrate international solidarity and assist the defeated Austrian workers. One example of proletarian internationalism in this case was a rally held in the Sydney Domain, where speakers elaborated on events in Austria, sold literature and collected money in defiance of police bans.¹⁷⁰ The Austrian defeat attracted more attention and solidarity in Australia than the French success. But it was the French example that the Comintern urged its sections to emulate, signalling the irrevocable repudiation of the Third Period.

Thus European events resolved the 13th ECCI's dilemma. A new direction was necessary to defeat fascism. Events in Vienna discredited the old approach. The united front, from above and below, as the French had demonstrated, could effectively check fascism's advance. It was also the preference of the Comintern general secretary in waiting, Georgi Dimitrov.¹⁷¹ More than any other figure in Moscow, Dimitrov galvanised the move to

¹⁶⁹ For contemporaneous accounts of the events in France and Austria see *Inprecorr*, vol. 14, nos. 10-11, 16-23 February 1934; *Austrian Workers Unite Under Banner of Communist Party* (Sydney: Modern Publishers, 1934); Palme Dutt, *The Austrian Revolt* (Sydney: Modern Publishers, 1934). For scholarly accounts of the events and their aftermath see Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern*, pp. 123 and 189-190; Martin Kitchen, 'The Austrian Left and the Popular Front,' in Graham and Preston (eds.), *The Popular Front in Europe*, pp. 49-50; David A.L. Levy, 'The French Popular Front, 1936-37,' in Graham and Preston (eds.), *The Popular Front in Europe*, pp. 60-61; Irwin M Wall, *French Communism in the Era of Stalin: The Quest for Unity and Integration, 1945-1962* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), pp. 14-15; M. Adereth, *The French Communist Party, A Critical History (1920-84): From Comintern to 'the Colours of France'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 69-71; Braunthal, *History of the International, 1914-1943*, pp. 403-446; McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, p. 123; Borkenau, *World Communism*, pp. 380-383; Stern, *The Rise and Decline of International Communism*, p. 76.

¹⁷⁰ For the call for solidarity see *Workers' Weekly*, 2 March 1934, p. 1. For the rally on behalf of the Austrians see *Workers' Weekly*, 13 April 1934, p. 1.

¹⁷¹ For a biographical sketch of Dimitrov see Banac (ed), *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, pp. xv-xlv; Dallin and Firsov (eds.), *Dimitrov and Stalin*, pp. 4-6. Dimitrov's opinions could not be taken lightly though, of

unity. Because of his advocacy, and coupled with diplomatic developments that saw the USSR relinquish its policy of isolationism, the Comintern, after much procrastination and heated internal debate (Stalin himself was not finally won over until late 1934), had little option but to sanction the French road to the united front. The erstwhile strategy of unity from below that had been a hallmark of the Third Period and led the Germans and Austrians to catastrophe, was discredited and duly discarded.¹⁷²

The CPA received the indecisive results of the 13th Plenum at its 4th CC Plenum. This was approximately at the time as the Comintern was forced out of its hesitancy by the bloodshed in France and Austria. Circumstances obliged it to become more assertive. The main change to the international line – the shift of emphasis from fighting the capitalist offensive to struggle against fascism and war – was noted. Next to this, the 13th Plenum's indecision was taken to mean the continuation of the status quo. Thus the CC Plenum did not mark a dramatic change in policy, as was then being contemplated in Moscow. It was business as usual, operating under the Comintern's postulates up to the 12th ECCI Plenum. Attacks on Labor continued (the CPA invoked the experience of Social Democracy in Germany and Austria to suggest the ALP was assisting fascism, but also cautioned against loosely labelling everything fascist). Communists' 'main blow' were still directed at the reformists. Moreover, demands for the establishment of the united front from below were maintained. The party also continued to fret about the 'fascisation' of the capitalist state, danger of war, revel in the capitalist crisis and confirm the appropriateness of the 'Soviet power' slogan for Australia.¹⁷³ Hence, before the full implications of the events in Europe were known to the CPA, and for well over half of 1934, it abided by old Comintern policies that were being repudiated in Moscow, leaving the Australian party once again at variance with the International.

course, no change of line was possible without Stalin's approval. Carr provides an apt reason why Dimitrov could not be easily ignored: 'The Leipzig trial, by providing a forum for his [Dimitrov's] rugged and independent personality, had made him the symbol of a world-wide wave of indignation and protest against a monstrous regime; and the immense prestige which this brought to him gave him a standing and an influence in Moscow such as no other foreign communist ever attained.' Carr also states that Dimitrov had pleaded with the Comintern for a united front as early as 1932. Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern*, p. 125. Dimitrov's importance for engendering the Comintern's change of policy is also well covered in McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, pp. 124-125; Dallin and Firsov (eds.), *Dimitrov and Stalin*, pp. 10-16; Banac (ed), *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, pp. xxviii and 9-24.

¹⁷² For a useful discussion on the Comintern's internal ructions preceding the change in policy see Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern*, ch. 7. See also McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, pp. 124-127.

¹⁷³ For the 4th CC CPA Plenum see *Towards Soviet Power: Communist Party's Tasks* (Sydney: Central Committee of the Communist Party of Australia, 1934); *Communist Review*, vol. 1, nos. 2-3, April-June 1934; *Workers' Weekly*, 6-20 April 1934; 'Political Report,' n.d. (RC 495/94/123); 'Communist Party of Australia, Fourth Plenary Session Held March 31st, April 1st and 2nd 1934,' CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 3).

The Comintern's move to the united front was not replicated in Australia until the second half of 1934. The first tentative sign of change came in the aftermath of the 1934 federal elections, when Sharkey criticised 'leftist' mistakes that were thought to hinder the party's campaign.¹⁷⁴ This was not a thoroughgoing shift in approach. At the same election, the party did not allocate its second preference to Labor, instead instructing its voters to distribute preferences at their own discretion.¹⁷⁵ This ran counter to international developments. In July 1934, the PCF and the French Socialist Party (SFIO) entered into an agreement that crystallised the united front. This was extended into what was called a 'popular front' after the PCF leader Maurice Thorez approached the left-wing bourgeois Radical Party with a proposal for it to join the SFIO-PCF agreement in October 1934. After this event, and in light of the seniority of the PCF in the international communist movement, the Australians were left in little doubt as to the trajectory of Comintern policy.¹⁷⁶

In the weeks after the conclusion of the federal election in mid-September, the Communist Party commenced its lurch to the united front from above. By doing so, it was realigning itself, after a period of deviation, with its obligations under the organisational dimension of proletarian internationalism. In early November 1934, the *Weekly* published the first unity proposal of the CC CPA to the ALP since April 1933. The proposal was near identical to that submitted in 1933: united action against the 'capitalist offensive,' resistance to fascism (which in the Australian context meant anti-

¹⁷⁴ *Workers' Weekly*, 27 July 1934, p. 3.

¹⁷⁵ *Workers' Weekly*, 7 September 1934, p. 1.

¹⁷⁶ For the French agreements, the inspiration of which has been the subject of much academic debate, and their upshot see Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern*, pp. 189-203; Levy, 'The French Popular Front, 1936-37,' pp. 61-62; Wall, *French Communism in the Era of Stalin*, p. 15; Daniel Brower, *The New Jacobins: The French Communist Party and the Popular Front* (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 1968); John F. Santore, 'The Comintern's United Front Initiative of May, 1934: French or Soviet Inspiration,' *Canadian Journal of History*, vol. 16, no. 3 (December 1981), pp. 405-423; Adereth, *The French Communist Party*, pp. 65-68 and 71-73; Braunthal, *History of the International, 1914-1943*, pp. 415-446; McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, p. 125. See also the explanation on the origins of the Popular Front from Albert Vassart, a cynical former prominent figure in the PCF, in Albert Vassart and Celie Vassart, 'The Moscow Origin of the French "Popular Front",' in Drachkovitch and Lazitch (eds.), *The Comintern: Historical Highlights, Essays, Recollections, Documents*, pp. 234-252. It is also worth consulting Maurice Thorez's supposed autobiography, which in fact was ghost written by Jean Freville under Comintern supervision. The partisan nature of this source means one must be cautious when consulting it. Maurice Thorez [Jean Freville], *Son of the People* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1938), ch. 3.

democratic attempts to curb free speech, in addition to fascist inspired organisations like the New Guard) and war.¹⁷⁷ The social fascist epithet was at last repudiated:

It is true that here and there a Communist... would brand the workers of the reformist organisations as Social Fascists. In the heat of argument, meeting resistance from the reformist workers to agree to the position of the Communists, the latter loses patience, becomes angry, and hurls at his class brother, the misguided worker, the epithet of Social Fascism. This is wrong.¹⁷⁸

Despite reports suggesting Labor rank and file members were enthusiastically embracing the CPA's proposal,¹⁷⁹ weeks elapsed before Labor, not surprisingly, rejected the offer. The CPA condemned it for pursuing the 'fatal line that led to Hitlerism in Germany' and cried foul over the alleged abuse hurled at the party on the question of communist sincerity for the united front.¹⁸⁰ The CPA insisted that only the united action of the working class could prevent further fascist victories and the outbreak of war, not merely voting Labor into office.

But unlike 1933, rejection did not deter the CPA. In February 1935, the party outlined its approach to the forthcoming elections in Victoria, Queensland and NSW: it would allocate second preferences to Labor and would not call for the informal vote where no communist stood as a candidate. In connection with the new election policy, the CC demanded 'the need to end finally the calling of names and abuse of the Labor Party leaders...the abuse...in reality, serves only to drive the workers away.' Communist campaigning was to focus on the economic demands of workers, done, if possible, in collaboration with the Labor rank and file. In adopting this strategy, the CC argued that it was only attempting to facilitate the united front by removing certain obstacles to its realisation – namely the anger of Labor supporters at communists not explicitly directing preferences to Labor – and that this was not a sign of confidence in the ALP. The old line, maintained the CC, had not been incorrect. In fact, '[t]he Labor Party is the main enemy

¹⁷⁷ *Workers' Weekly*, 2 November 1934, pp. 1-2. See also Dixon's article on 'The Burning Question of Unity,' *Communist Review*, vol. 1, no. 8, November 1934, pp. 1-9.

¹⁷⁸ *Workers' Weekly*, 23 November 1934, p. 4.

¹⁷⁹ For these reports see *Workers' Weekly*, December 1934 – March 1935, *passim*.

¹⁸⁰ *Workers' Weekly*, 25 January 1935, p. 1. A subsequent unity proposal to the NSW ALP was also rebuffed. For this see *Workers' Weekly*, 26 July 1935, p. 2. The ALP's Victorian branch also rejected a unity proposal on 10 April 1935, arguing that the party in the strongest position to resist fascism and war was Labor. The CPA's reaction was similar to that of the rejection of the NSW ALP. Nevertheless, it renewed its proposals for unity shortly after. For the Victorian's rejection and the CPA's response see *Workers' Weekly*, 3 and 24 May 1935; *Communist Review*, vol. 2, no. 6, June 1935, pp. 20-26.

in the ranks of the working class. To-day it is paving the way for fascism...'¹⁸¹ The CPA clearly had some way to go before it fully embraced the tenets of the new international line, which was formally promulgated at the 7th Comintern Congress and will be the subject of the next chapter.

What is evident from the above discussion and, indeed, throughout this chapter was that the CPA found it much harder to remain in step with Comintern strategy than is traditionally thought. As outlined in chapter two, a major component of proletarian internationalism was strict adherence to the directives proclaimed by the organisational centre of the world revolution – the Comintern. This chapter has so far shown the CPA continuously at variance with the Comintern line. Such deviation reflects the complexity of the Comintern-CPA relationship, challenging the 'Comintern say, Communist Party do' interpretation of the past. Increasingly, however, the party's relationship with the Comintern paled in importance by comparison to proletarian internationalism's other elements. One that assumed greater significance during this period was international solidarity. Thus, we now turn our attention to the CPA's practice of international solidarity.

Events in Hitler's Germany consumed the energies expended on international solidarity during these years. That German workers were subjected to savage repression stirred the sympathies of many comrades. This was aided by the communist press, which publicised cases of fascist terror in Germany. Australian comrades did not consider the fight against German fascism the sole duty of German communists. German workers were merely 'in the front trenches of the fight [against fascism] of the whole working class throughout the capitalist world' and required the support of sympathetic forces internationally with moral or material assistance.¹⁸² True to the requirements of proletarian internationalism outlined in chapter two, the CPA endeavoured to buttress solidarity with deed. Meetings exposing the character of Nazi rule were held around Australia usually resulting in protest resolutions to the German Consul.¹⁸³ During 16 to 23 July 1933, the CPA participated in International Anti-Fascist Week, described as 'a week of protest against the barbarous Hitler Fascist dictatorship in Germany.' Through demonstrations and

¹⁸¹ *Workers' Weekly*, 8 February 1935, p. 2. The new policies went too far for some communists forcing the leadership on the defensive. For some of these criticisms and defences see *Workers' Weekly*, 15-22 February 1935; *Communist Review*, vol. 2, no. 4, April 1935, pp. 26-32.

¹⁸² Quote from R. Palme Dutt, *For a United Front Against Fascism* (Sydney: International Labor Defence, 1933), p. 3. See also *Workers' Weekly*, 10 March 1933, p. 4, where the CPA called for protest demonstrations and declarations of 'fraternal sympathy' on behalf of German comrades.

¹⁸³ For example see *Workers' Weekly*, 24 March 1933, p. 2.

donations to provide relief for the victims of Nazi fascism, it allowed Australian workers the opportunity to demonstrate their solidarity with the German working class.¹⁸⁴

In particular, Australian workers were encouraged to demand the release of the Reichstag fire defendants. Their innocence was never questioned, though many did not believe the Nazi courts would find likewise. The Reichstag fire trial proved a surprising success. The campaign for the defendants was one of the earliest examples of international solidarity under Nazi rule. The case itself appeared to symbolise the crudity of the Nazi regime. Upon the burning of the Reichstag building, some prominent communists, notably Georgi Dimitrov, were tried for allegedly lighting the fire. From the outset, the *Workers' Weekly* protested the innocence of Dimitrov and his co-defendants and accused the Nazis of having started the blaze to provide a pretext for intensified repression of communist activity.¹⁸⁵ It repeatedly expressed concern that the defendants would not receive a fair trial and called on workers to voice their disapproval in the form of protest resolutions to the German Consulate in Sydney. This call was fitfully answered.¹⁸⁶ In 1933, an ILD deputation held a two hour long conference with the German Consul in Sydney. The ILD delegates were in no mood for diplomatic soft-talk. They 'challenged the Consul to defend the Reichstag trial' and affirmed 'to the Consul that the real incendiaries were Gobbels [sic], Goering and Hitler.'¹⁸⁷ Many individuals, not only communists, harboured doubt as to whether the defendants would receive a fair hearing. Arising out of such fears, and the mind of propaganda extraordinaire Willi Münzenberg, a so-called counter-trial was arranged in London that exonerated Dimitrov and his co-accused of any involvement and laid the blame at the feet of senior Nazis.¹⁸⁸

Unexpectedly the Reichstag defendants were acquitted and repatriated to Russia.¹⁸⁹ Communists credited international solidarity with forcing the acquittal of Dimitrov and

¹⁸⁴ For International Anti-Fascist Week see *Workers' Weekly*, 7-21 July 1933. International Anti-Fascist Week was coordinated by the International Red Aid. See its declaration in *Inprecorr*, vol. 13, no. 26, 16 June 1933, p. 569; Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern*, pp. 395-396.

¹⁸⁵ See *Workers' Weekly*, 3 March 1933.

¹⁸⁶ The *Workers' Weekly* between March and December 1933 sporadically published copies of protest resolutions, largely from communist fraternal and union branches.

¹⁸⁷ ILD to IRA Headquarters, 4 December 1933 (RC 539/3/234).

¹⁸⁸ See *Workers' Weekly*, August – November 1933, for the CPA's coverage of the London counter trial.

¹⁸⁹ For the CPA's reaction to the acquittal see *Workers' Weekly*, 5 January 1934, p. 5. For the trial and its aftermath Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern*, p. 102; Banac (ed), *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, pp xxvi-xxviii and ch. 1, which contains Dimitrov's obscure and bland diary entries for his period in custody; Fritz Tobias, *The Reichstag Fire* (New York: Putnam, 1964). It was upon the suggestion of German party exile and Comintern official Wilhelm Pieck that Dimitrov and the other Bulgarians (all of whom had been

his comrades.¹⁹⁰ But it was Dimitrov's defiant performance that was remembered long after the trial and sent his star shooting into the communist stratosphere. His confrontation with Hermann Göring served as a classic example of communist conduct in the face of the class enemy.¹⁹¹

Proletarian internationalism made Dimitrov a hero to Australian comrades. His fight, communists thought, was identical to that of all workers, including Australians. It warranted unflinching support. His acquittal was a victory for all workers and was reported as such. The *Workers' Weekly* celebrated Dimitrov's stand with a front page splash: it contained a doctored image of a furious and blood splattered Göring clutching a hatchet, with a subheading reading 'Drug Fiend Göring Exposed' by 'Heroic Communists.' Such was the importance of Dimitrov's performance, as much for communist morale as for anti-fascist propaganda, that reports of celebrations commemorating the 16th anniversary of the Russian revolution were largely overshadowed. For the CPA, Dimitrov's performance was a cause for pride and increased solidarity:

Every Communist in Australia, every worker that is a fighter for his class, must feel proud of such a man. Everyone must feel encouraged to strengthen his or her efforts to bring about the release of Dimitrov and his fellow working class revolutionaries from the hands of the Fascist hangmen.¹⁹²

The Reichstag defendants were not the only beneficiaries of international solidarity. Australian comrades also campaigned for the release of KPD leader Ernst Thaelmann from Nazi custody. The *Workers' Weekly* carried many articles on his plight and suspected mistreatment. Thaelmann's incarceration without charge was emblematic of working class repression in the Third Reich. It is therefore unsurprising that demands for Thaelmann's release also included objections to Nazi rule and its treatment of the German working class. Action accompanied propaganda in this campaign. Countless

stripped of Bulgarian citizenship) be bestowed Soviet citizenship and repatriated to Russia as 'it would be politically expedient.' Dallin and Firsov (eds.), *Dimitrov and Stalin*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁹⁰ *Inprecorr*, vol. 14, no. 16, 9 March 1934, pp. 404-406. Likewise Dimitrov credited international solidarity, in the form of telegrams and protests, with his release. For this see *Workers' Weekly*, 9 March 1934, p. 1.

¹⁹¹ For Dimitrov's closing speech at the trial see Georgi Dimitrov, *Selected Articles and Speeches* (Lawrence and Wishart: London, 1951), pp. 17-36. See also *Dimitrov Accuses the Nazis* (Current Book Distributors: Sydney, 1942).

¹⁹² *Workers' Weekly*, 10 November 1933, p. 1.

resolutions calling for his release were carried around Australia.¹⁹³ In May 1933, a demonstration for Thaelmann's release was held in Brisbane and was followed with a lecture describing the 'horrors of fascism.'¹⁹⁴ Another rally was held in Sydney on 20 May 1934, organised as soon as unconfirmed reports reached Australia of Thaelmann's impending secret trial.¹⁹⁵ Demonstrators demanded Thaelmann receive a fair and open trial or else be set free. Similar protests were staged in other countries.¹⁹⁶ The intention was undoubtedly to stimulate public hostility to the Nazi regime. By directing public opinion against Hitler, the maintenance of cordial Australian-German relations would become increasingly difficult. If this strategy was successful and replicated elsewhere, it would lead to Hitler's international isolation and, perhaps, place a lid on his expansionistic ambitions.

But the party observed numerous shortcomings in its work. In December 1933, the CC issued a circular stating that '[s]ince the commencement of the Nazi terror in Germany a totally inadequate campaign has been carried out in Australia in defence of those courageous fighters of our class.'¹⁹⁷ One speaker at the CPA's 4th CC Plenum in 1934 reinforced this criticism, conceding 'that our work of exposure and organisation to mobilise Australian workers in defence of German workers has not reached a high level.'¹⁹⁸ The consensus view of the Central Committee was that comrades were not rendering sufficient aid to German comrades in a spirit of international proletarian solidarity. With the serious risk of war on the horizon, it was imperative that solid international bonds be built, thereby allowing closer activity between the world's workers in order to stave off another global conflagration. Opposition to imperialist war was a major part of proletarian internationalism. And from 1933, the danger of a repeat of 1914 was a growing menace.

From 1933, the threat of war was gathering in Europe and Asia. Above all Hitler's policies contributed to growing tensions. Nazi policies forced Western democracies to embark on a programme of rearmament. It also forced the Soviet Union to shed isolation and adopt a policy of rapprochement; first by establishing diplomatic relations with certain Western nations, notably France and America; and, second, in 1934 by joining the

¹⁹³ For examples see *Workers' Weekly*, 22 September 1933, 1 and 15 June, 20 July, 10 August 1934.

¹⁹⁴ For a brief description of this event see *Workers' Weekly*, 2 June 1933, p. 3.

¹⁹⁵ *Workers' Weekly*, 11 May 1934, p. 1.

¹⁹⁶ These were often reported by the party press. See *Workers' Weekly*, 18 May, 8 June, 3 August and 28 September 1934.

¹⁹⁷ CC CPA to all districts, 16 December 1933, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 5).

¹⁹⁸ 'Political Report,' n.d. (RC 495/94/123).

erstwhile ‘thieves kitchen,’ the League of Nations, a heretical contemplation for the CPA as late as April 1934.¹⁹⁹ These were the notable Soviet diplomatic developments up to 1934. It is not the intention of this thesis to provide a detailed survey of Hitler’s and Japan’s expansionistic ambitions, the issue of rearmament and a recounting of diplomatic history, as these are, at any rate, well known.²⁰⁰ Suffice to say that the menace of war from any power, but especially Germany and Japan, did not escape the CPA’s attention. A cursory perusal of the *Workers’ Weekly* during this period conveys the party’s deep conviction in the imminence of war, whether the threat was real or imagined. The danger to Soviet survival was of greatest concern. The communist project hinged on its success. It was the embodiment of all that communists’ held sacred. Its preservation had to be assured.

An Australian response to the growing menace of war in Europe and Asia, in which communists played a leading role, was the formation of an Australian chapter of the Amsterdam based international movement against war in April 1933.²⁰¹ With the blessing of the Political Bureau, the Australian chapter grew out of the pre-existing LAI: the ‘anti-war committees have already shown broader appeal than LAI.... Organisations that have kicked out all militants are taking it up and sending delegates.’²⁰² The new body was established expressly around the principles of the united front, which included the

¹⁹⁹ For the Soviet leadership’s explanation of the changes in policy see *Our Foreign Policy: Stalin, Molotov, Litvinov* (Sydney: Modern Publishers, 1934). For the CPA’s late criticism of the League months before the entry of the USSR see *Workers’ Weekly*, 27 April 1934, p. 1. For an explanation of the reasons for the Soviet Union’s entry into the League see *The Soviet Union and the League of Nations* (Sydney: Modern Publishers, 1934); *Communist Review*, vol. 1, no. 9, December 1934, pp. 7-11. The CPA defended the Russians from accusations that their entry into the League of Nations represented the Soviet abandonment of proletarian internationalism. One writer claimed it to be a ‘splendid gesture of proletarian internationalism’ in that it strengthened international peace. For this writer’s defence of the Soviet’s internationalist credentials see *Workers’ Weekly*, 21 September 1934.

²⁰⁰ For some accounts of Soviet foreign policy in the 1930s consult Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe, 1933-39* (London: Macmillan, 1984); Jonathan Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930-1933: The Impact of the Great Depression* (London: Macmillan in association with the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Birmingham, 1983); Jiri Hockman, *The Soviet Union and the Failure of Collective Security, 1934-1938* (London: Cornell University Press, 1984); Jon Jacobson, *When the Soviet Union Entered World Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); R. C. Tucker, ‘The Emergence of Stalin’s Foreign Policy,’ *Slavic Review*, no. 4 (1977), pp. 563-589.

²⁰¹ For the anti-war movement’s founding conference see *Workers’ Weekly*, 14 April 1933; ‘United Front Against War...[sic.]Report of the All Australian Congress Against War, National Council Against War,’ (RC 495/94/111). For a brief and inadequate outline of the foundation of the Australian branch of the Amsterdam movement against war see David Rose, ‘The Movement Against War and Fascism, 1933-1939,’ *Labour History*, no. 38 (May 1980), pp. 77-78.

²⁰² ‘P.B Meeting,’ 4 April 1933 (RC 495/94/105).

participation of Laborites, trade unionists and intellectuals.²⁰³ Its task was to mobilise popular opposition to war, resist the alleged preparations for imperialist war undertaken by the Australian government and in the event of imperialist conflict, hasten its termination.²⁰⁴ In a prelude to future tension between communists and pacifists on the question of war,²⁰⁵ Sharkey pointedly told the founding gathering that his opposition was directed only to imperialist wars, not wars of national liberation.²⁰⁶ As Lenin stated, communists were not pacifists and not opposed to war in principle. Rather, they were duty bound to aid wars of national liberation as part of the process of dismantling imperialism and, by extension, capitalism. Sharkey's statement merely affirmed his, and the party's, commitment to Leninist thinking on war.

Meanwhile, another European gathering influenced the development of the Australian movement against war. This was the European Anti-Fascist Congress held at the Salle Pleyel in Paris in June 1933, from which it derived its name, 'the Pleyel movement against fascism.' It was communist in inspiration, but publicly claimed to be independent of all political parties. Its purpose was to unite anti-fascists, including social democrats (who were still subjected to sectarian attacks) and direct a global fight against fascism. Yet a realisation was soon reached: that war and fascism were synonymous. A joint struggle was required against both. Thus, unity between the Amsterdam movement against war and Pleyel would make such work more effective.²⁰⁷ By August 1933, the Amsterdam and Pleyel movements merged to create the international body of what was known in Australia as the Movement Against War and Fascism (MAWAF).²⁰⁸

The abovementioned peace body established in April 1933 greatly enhanced the party's anti-war work, contributing to the realisation of an important component of proletarian internationalism. After the establishment of Amsterdam affiliated anti-war branches around Australia, the 'Anti-War Movement' was consummated at a national congress in

²⁰³ Carolyn Rasmussen, *The Lesser Evil? Opposition to War and Fascism in Australia, 1920-1941*, Melbourne University History Monograph Series, No.15 (Parkville: The History Department, University of Melbourne, 1992), pp. 31-32. See also Rawling, 'Recollections in Tranquillity,' pp. 28-29.

²⁰⁴ At the 27 May 1933 Polit-Bureau meeting, Dixon stated that the main focus of the anti-war movement should be to reveal the war preparations of the Australian government. See 'P.B. Meeting,' 27 May 1933 (RC 495/94/105).

²⁰⁵ This tension is considered in depth in Rasmussen, *The Lesser Evil?*

²⁰⁶ See Sharkey's statement in *Workers' Weekly*, 14 April 1933.

²⁰⁷ For the Pleyel movement see *Workers' Weekly*, 14 and 28 July – 4 August 1933; *Inprecorr*, vol. 13, nos. 26 and 28, 16 and 23 June 1933; Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern*, pp. 392-394.

²⁰⁸ For an explanation and justification of the amalgamation see *Inprecorr*, vol. 13, no. 39, 8 September 1933, pp. 856-857.

September 1933. It ‘enthusiastically’ pledged to oppose imperialist wars, war plans and intervention in the Soviet Union. The faithful were tasked with ‘ceaseless agitation and work among the masses...we must conquer the factories and turn them into anti-war fortresses.’ In these pre-popular front days, unity at the congress was exposed as a pretence by the persistent accusation that the ‘social-fascists’ were warmongers for both proscribing the Anti-War Movement and splitting the peace movement by staging their own campaign against war.²⁰⁹ Communists were then told:

Here is a main task, then, of our anti-war work, combating and defeating the manoeuvres of the Social-Fascist lackeys of imperialism. Without the exposure of their treachery, to allow them leadership of the mass struggle against imperialist war would mean simply the victory of the imperialists and the shackling of the masses to the war machine.²¹⁰

The Anti-War Movement did not remain in this form for long. In autumn 1934, following the amalgamation of the Amsterdam-Pleyel movements, the Australian Anti-War Movement decided to follow suit. It adopted the title Movement Against War and Fascism.²¹¹ Largely inactive at first,²¹² it quickly embarked on a frenzy of activity, making it perhaps the best remembered of the CPA’s fraternal. As Edgar Ross explained, its primary task was to organise militant mass opposition (activities included agitation, sabotage and strike action) to war and fascism. Its work was meant to revolve around ‘Hands Off’ committees established around Australia and in the event of war were

²⁰⁹ The Victorian ALP and THC formed their own Labor Anti-War Committee in 1934, which was intended to provide Labor members with an outlet to express their opposition to war and to both rival and prevent the haemorrhage of members to the communist dominated MAWAF that had been banned by the ALP. For an account of the Labor Anti-War Committee see David Rose, ‘A History of the Labor Anti-War Committee, 1934-1938,’ *Labour History*, no. 43 (November 1982), pp. 53-63; Louis, ‘The Victorian Council Against War and Fascism: A Rejoinder,’ pp. 47-52.

²¹⁰ See *Workers’ Weekly*, 6 October 1933; *Workers’ Weekly*, 13 October 1933. These sources provide a report of the proceedings of the Congress. Sectarianism was also displayed in the speeches of apparently non-communist delegates. See also the testimony of Rawling, ‘Recollections in Tranquillity,’ p. 29.

²¹¹ For histories of the MAWAF see Rasmussen, *The Lesser Evil?*; Len Fox, ‘The Movement Against War and Fascism: A View from Inside,’ *Labour History*, no. 39 (November 1980), pp. 78-82; Len Fox, *Broad Left, Narrow Left*, ch. 5; Rose, ‘The Movement Against War and Fascism, 1933-1939’; A.F. Howells, ‘Inside the “Movement Against War and Fascism” and “The Writers’ League”,’ *Labour History*, no. 32 (May 1977), pp. 27-32; Louis, ‘The Victorian Council Against War and Fascism: A Rejoinder,’ pp. 39-54; Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 268-274.

²¹² The MAWAF’s inactivity was also a problem of its predecessor. According to Rose, Rawling, an important figure in the MAWAF, criticised the ‘lackadaisicalness and laziness’ of CPA members towards the anti-war movement’s work. Rose, ‘The Movement Against War and Fascism, 1933-1939,’ p. 80.

encouraged to undertake ‘definite sabotaging action.’ Ross also wrote that opposition to fascism hinged on mass defence of democratic rights (such as free speech, lifting of literature bans).²¹³ Pacifism certainly did not constitute a part of the MAWAF *modus operandi*.²¹⁴ By forming the MAWAF and in setting it on a path at variance with pacifism, the CPA demonstrated that it was in harmony with the tasks required under the anti-war stipulates of proletarian internationalism.

The MAWAF is best remembered for the Kisch-Griffin affair. It is not the intention here to recount at length the events of this well documented affair.²¹⁵ However, it is worth pointing out that had it not been for the Kisch-Griffin affair, it is likely the MAWAF would have petered out as had other communist fraternals. Instead, Kisch-Griffin gave the MAWAF unprecedented publicity and won it new recruits. The incident itself occurred in connection with the second national congress of the MAWAF in Melbourne during November 1934. The pair had been invited as guest speakers to discuss the dangers of war and fascism.²¹⁶ The congress was also a ‘counter-demonstration’ as it was intentionally timed to coincide with the Melbourne centenary celebrations, for which purpose the Duke of Gloucester was invited to officiate. His visit was also believed a smokescreen for negotiations between Australian and British officials for war preparations. Indeed, the visit of Royalty was an occasion for renewed nationalism and numerous ‘navy week’ and ‘defence week’ were held in the lead up to the centenary celebrations.²¹⁷

²¹³ See Edgar Ross, *Stop that War Now! A Concise Statement of the Position of the Movement Against War and Fascism, the Reasons for its Formation, its Objectives and the Method of Working for their Attainment* (Broken Hill: Broken Hill Movement Against War and Fascism, 1934).

²¹⁴ As MAWAF official Arthur Howells wrote: ‘We in the Anti-War Movement were not starry-eyed pacifists. Far from it! We were militant opponents of all forms of imperialist war and fascist aggression.’ A.F. Howells, *Against the Stream: The Memories of a Philosophical Anarchist, 1927-1939* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1983), p. 80.

²¹⁵ For the Kisch-Griffin affair see Heidi Zogbaum, *Kisch in Australia: The Untold Story* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2004); Fox, *Broad Left, Narrow Left*, ch. 5; Egon Kisch, *Australian Landfall* (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1969); Ken Slater, ‘Egon Kisch: A Biographical Outline,’ *Labour History*, no. 36 (May 1979), pp. 94-103. See also the sycophantic account by Julian Smith [pseudonym for Tom Fitzgerald], *On the Pacific Front: The Adventures of Egon Kisch in Australia* (Sydney: Australian Book Services, 1936).

²¹⁶ Kisch had experienced first hand the horrors of fascism, having been temporarily incarcerated in a Nazi prison after the Reichstag fire. His account was reported in the *Workers’ Weekly*, 19 May 1933, pp. 1-4.

²¹⁷ See *Workers’ Weekly*, 18 May 1934, p. 1, for the MAWAF decision to hold its congress during the centenary celebrations, its reasons why and the various ‘war weeks.’ See also *Workers’ Weekly*, 12 October 1934, for the CPA’s suspicion that the royal visit was a pretext for secret negotiations in preparation for war. The British were led by the secretary of the British Cabinet Committee on Imperial Defence, Sir Maurice Hankey.

As part of its counter-demonstration the MAWAF held an ‘anti-war week.’ It was intended to be ‘a week of struggle against fascism and war’ amidst ‘the poisonous fumes of chauvinism, patriotism and militarism.’²¹⁸ Demonstrations, meetings and protests were intended for the whole nation. Unsurprisingly, the congress organisers experienced stumbling blocks: the St. Kilda town hall, booked months in advance for the purpose of hosting the congress, was denied at relatively short notice.²¹⁹ This event was symptomatic of the determination of the ruling class to thwart the work of the MAWAF. A greater setback was the refusal of the authorities to permit special guests Czech communist Egon Kisch and New Zealand comrade Gerald Griffin to land after both failed the dictation test. This obstacle, however, proved no barrier to determined men. Both subsequently managed to land and successfully purvey their anti-war creed on Australian soil, much to the government’s embarrassment. For communists, the government’s scandalous attempt to prevent Kisch and Griffin commencing their peace mission provided further proof of the ‘hatred and fear of the capitalist class of Australia, who are preparing for a new war...driving them to extreme measures against the anti-war movement.’²²⁰

The MAWAF congress, at which Kisch was supposed to be guest of honour, went ahead despite his absence. Opening on 10 November 1934, the congress was ‘a clarion call to every anti-war fighter to be up and doing to ensure the defeat of the war conspiracies of the imperialists.’ It continually underscored the threat to peace posed by European fascism and Japan and contrasted the conduct of these states to the peace policy of the Soviet Union. The Australian government was also accused of engaging in aggressive war preparations and utilising fascist measures to stifle the anti-war movement. As already mentioned, the Duke’s visit was thought to have the purpose of creating a ‘war psychology’ in Australia, supplying further impetus for closer Australian and British defence cooperation. Speaking at the congress, Sharkey stated his solution to war: build a united front capable of rallying all forces opposed to war, and if this failed, carry on the struggle during wartime. According to Sharkey, only the banishment of the fundamental cause of war, capitalism, could prevent its occurrence.²²¹ This message was reinforced by Kisch during his Australian speaking tour. Kisch, ostensibly speaking on behalf of the workers of Europe, repeatedly urged the creation of the widest united front against war

²¹⁸ Quotations from *Workers’ Weekly*, 12 October 1934, p. 2.

²¹⁹ Louis discusses the role of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch in the decision of the St. Kilda Council to revoke the lease. Louis, ‘The Victorian Council Against War and Fascism: A Rejoinder,’ pp. 42-43.

²²⁰ *Workers’ Weekly*, 9 November 1934, p. 1.

²²¹ For an account of the congress see *Communist Review*, vol. 1, no. 9, December 1934, pp. 3-7; *Workers’ Weekly*, 16 November 1934. ‘Clarion call’ quote is also from the *Weekly* source.

and fascism as the only effective means of combating both.²²² At last, it appeared the CPA, through its fraternal, was performing serious anti-war work pursuant with proletarian internationalism.

International solidarity between the world's workers was highly important for the prevention of war. By necessity, this entailed joint activity connecting people of different backgrounds. For such work to be effective, the ugly face of racism could not be permitted to show itself. Solid bonds of trust had to transcend differences; racism could not stand in the way. As was shown in the model of proletarian internationalism described in chapter two, Lenin and others considered this an axiom. For Australian comrades, objection to racism was highly significant. Activity countering racism was essential for the fulfilment of two crucial aspects of proletarian internationalism – international solidarity and the national and colonial questions. Accordingly, we now turn our attention to the CPA's anti-racist work as an example of its commitment to proletarian internationalism.

This period witnessed greater communist efforts to tackle racism. The Kalgoorlie race riot of 1934 provided Australian comrades a major test of their true commitment to proletarian internationalism. The causes and events of the riot have been well documented elsewhere and need not occupy us here.²²³ What concerns us is the party's official reaction to the riot. What is obvious is that the party officially deplored the riot, describing it as a distraction orchestrated by the class enemy to divide the workers. Contemporaneous allegations that 'a few disgruntled communists from Perth' were behind the riot are unfounded.²²⁴ On the contrary, the party counselled workers not to fall under the influence of racism. Unity in a common struggle against the class enemy would guarantee the best outcome for workers:

The foreign worker is not our enemy; is not the one who is robbing us, paying small wages, speeding us up and compelling us to work long hours. Our enemy, our class enemy, is the mineowner [sic], and

²²² For Kisch's message to Australians see *Workers' Weekly*, November 1934 – March 1935, *passim*.

²²³ For some accounts of the riot see Rolf Gerritsen, 'The 1934 Kalgoorlie Riots: A Western Australian Crowd,' *University Studies in History*, vol. 5, no. 3 (1969), pp. 42-75; Ted Docker and Rolf Gerritsen, 'The 1934 Kalgoorlie Riots,' *Labour History*, no. 31 (November 1976), pp. 79-82; Sarah Gregson, "'It All Started on the Mines'": The 1934 Kalgoorlie Race Riots Revisited,' *Labour History*, no. 80 (May 2001), pp. 21-40; Williams, *The First Furrow*, pp. 143-145.

²²⁴ The CPA strongly repudiated these accusations. For this and the above quote see handbill, 'Our Answer to Collier,' CPA records (ML MS 5021, box 56).

it is in his interests for the miners to be divided into rival sections, fighting each other.²²⁵

The importance of proletarian internationalism is clear in this statement. The actions of the Kalgoorlie CPA, directed by leading cadre Ted Docker, who was coincidentally in Kalgoorlie during the riot, conformed with the requirements of proletarian internationalism.²²⁶ Subsequently when discussing the riots, Sharkey, in a seeming reversal of his previous racist proclivities, invoked the authority of the 13th ECCI, which stated that communists must ‘daily and concretely expose chauvinism to the masses in every country and oppose it by proletarian internationalism.’²²⁷ He also stated that a united working class could not become a reality so long as the purveyors of racism, like the ALP, held sway among the working class. Sharkey reasoned that a struggle against Labor and its racist ideology was the sole means by which a united working class could be realised in Australia. These sentiments again reveal the influence of proletarian internationalism in taking the party against the prevailing mood of the mainstream: class unity, despite colour, was indispensable for a common struggle against the common oppressor. The party bravely upheld these values in the face of countervailing, and at times violent, public attitudes.

Proletarian internationalism also emerged strongly during the 1934 federal elections. On this occasion the CPA presented itself as the only party seeking to represent all Australia’s disparate migrant groups. The party explained that it stood for

The recognition of the right of all to freedom and happiness, irrespective of race or nationality. The Communists...oppose all forms of discrimination, political, social and economic against foreign born workers living in Australia.

The party highlighted its record opposing discrimination, pointing to its opposition to language tests, deportation and ‘British preference.’ It also claimed that during the

²²⁵ Quote from handbill, ‘A Call for Unity,’ 30 January 1934, CPA records (ML MS 5021, box 56). For examples of the CPA’s response and the response of bodies under its influence see *Workers’ Weekly*, 2-9 March 1934; ‘The Communist Party’s Reply on the Riots in Kalgoorlie: Another Step in the Direction of the Fascist Dictatorship,’ Andrew Reeves papers (NLA MS 8076, series 9, box 41). Speakers at the 1934 4th CC Plenum expressed similar sentiments. For these see ‘Political Report,’ n.d. (RC 495/94/123).

²²⁶ See Docker’s recollection in Docker and Gerritsen, ‘The 1934 Kalgoorlie Riots,’ pp. 79-81.

²²⁷ *Workers’ Weekly*, 9 March 1934, p. 3. At the 13th ECCI, Kuusinen remarked on the need to struggle against chauvinist ideology, and uphold proletarian internationalism, as part of the struggle against fascism. For this see Kuusinen, *Fascism, the Danger of War and the Tasks of the Communist Parties*, pp. 76-79. See also *Eve of Revolutions and Wars*, n.p. [p. 13?].

Kalgoorlie riots, communists ‘did everything within their power, fighting to restrain the frenzied mobs.’ Its subsequent attempts to restrain the spread of ‘pogrom sentiments,’ through issuing anti-racist leaflets and agitating in unions, was presented as a practical demonstration of the internationalist principles of the CPA. The party contrasted these principles to those of its rivals, the UAP, United Country Party (UCP) and ALP, which all exhibited varying degrees of racism for different purposes but with the same conclusion – the division of the working class.²²⁸ Hence, the communist logic went, there was little choice but to vote communist. But few heeded this call. Nor was the party free from racism. Macintyre commented that in 1934 and 1935, some comrades were rebuked for using racially derogatory terms. Earlier, in 1932, CPA assistant general secretary, Richard Dixon, was excoriated while attending the Lenin School in Moscow for remarking that he was ‘as black as a nigger’ after working in a collective farm during the Russian summer.²²⁹

Ensuing events in 1934-35 provided cause for optimism that cooperation between Australian and migrant workers could be attained. A strike in the North Queensland sugar industry, commonly known as the Weil’s disease strike, was a clear example. Following an outbreak of Weil’s disease, cane cutters, both Australian born and migrants, struck to force employers to accept the practice of burning cane before harvest. It was believed that by doing so, the chance of cane cutters contracting Weil’s disease was significantly reduced. The cane grower’s resistance was based around the point that burnt cane was of less value because of its reduced sugar content. Consequently, cane would only be burnt if workers were prepared to accept a wage reduction. However, most of the Australian born and migrant workers involved in the industry went on strike; but were unsuccessful.²³⁰ The joint actions of the Australian and migrant workers were one of the positives to emerge from the dispute. The CPA lauded the united strike action, arguing that it was a clear example of the efficacy of united action, irrespective of nationality, for the benefit of workers.²³¹

The mistreatment of Aborigines continued to receive the attention of the CPA. In response to a 1934 murder in northern Australia of Japanese pearlers by eight Aboriginal

²²⁸ All of the foregoing is from *Workers’ Weekly*, 10 August 1934, p. 3.

²²⁹ Macintyre, *The Reds*, p. 267.

²³⁰ For the CPA’s account of the dispute see *Workers’ Weekly*, 24 August, 26 October-2 November 1934. See also *ibid*, pp. 258-259; Diane Menghetti, *The Red North: The Popular Front in North Queensland* (Townsville: History Department, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1981), chs. 2-3; Penrose, *The Communist Party and Trade Union Work in Queensland in the Third Period*, ch. 7.

²³¹ *Workers’ Weekly*, 26 October 1934, p. 1.

men after the former had abused Aboriginal women, the federal government dispatched a 'punitive' expedition to serve 'justice' on the alleged killers. Besides the barbarity of the venture, this raised questions from communists about the propriety of applying white law to Aborigines. The party pointed out that Aborigines were only upholding the long held tenets of traditional law. Put simply, white law was not the law of Aborigines who did not understand it.²³² With the apprehension of the suspected killers, which resulted in the death penalty after the non-observance of due legal process, some believed themselves witnesses to an Australian Scottsboro.²³³ The CPA urged its adherents to send protests to the federal Attorney-General demanding he overturn the death penalty.²³⁴ The death penalty was commuted to life imprisonment, but the CPA demanded a retrial, with a jury composed of individuals familiar with Aboriginal law.²³⁵ On 6 August, the ILD organised a rally in Sydney against the mistreatment of the eight men, where protests were registered against the mistreatment of Aborigines in general. Appeals were also raised for the release of the eight and supplemented with a demand for the recall of the presiding judge.²³⁶ On the same day, another Aborigine, named Tuckiar, was sentenced to death for the murder of a policeman, also apparently for the policeman's mistreatment of Aboriginal women. The same judge that sentenced the eight also presided in this trial. Again, the CPA pointed to judicial irregularities that it argued denied Tuckiar a fair hearing. The ILD took up the case, demanding Tuckiar's solicitor lodge an appeal. On 27 August, another protest under the auspices of the ILD was held in Sydney, demanding the release of Tuckiar and the withdrawal from duty of the judge who had convicted him. When Tuckiar was granted leave to appeal by the High Court, the ILD claimed its protests had forced the decision.²³⁷ By late November, Tuckiar was unexpectedly freed, and according to the *Weekly*, was returning to his tribe.²³⁸ The cases were yet another example where the perspectives of proletarian internationalism provided the party a viewpoint that called into question the racist values of mainstream Australia. It offered an alternative that became mainstream decades later.

²³² See *Workers' Weekly*, 4 May 1934, p. 6.

²³³ For a communist interpretation of the case see *Workers' Weekly*, 8 June 1934, p. 6. For the observation that this case was an Australian Scottsboro see *Workers' Weekly*, 10 August 1934, p. 1.

²³⁴ *Workers' Weekly*, 15 June 1934, p. 1. For some of the protest resolutions see *Workers' Weekly*, 6 July 1934, p. 6. Markus writes that these protests were taken seriously by the federal government. Markus, 'Talka Longa Mouth,' p. 150.

²³⁵ *Workers' Weekly*, 27 July 1934, p. 3.

²³⁶ *Workers' Weekly*, 10 August 1934, p. 1.

²³⁷ For Tuckiar's case see *Workers' Weekly*, 24 August – 7 September 1934.

²³⁸ *Workers' Weekly*, 23 November 1934, p. 6.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that, despite some shortfalls, the years 1930-35 were a crucial period in the party's evolution towards a more complete attainment of proletarian internationalism. A large overall improvement in this work is observable. Yet, the party's adherence to the organisational dimension of proletarian internationalism continued to be more complicated than a mere dutiful adoption and implementation of 'orders' from Moscow. Clear evidence for this was the CPA failing to restrain left excesses in the wake of the February 1930 ECCI Presidium and the numerous other hints that followed in the months after. Instead, the party leadership only commenced efforts to restrain left-sectarianism in a meaningful way when domestic circumstances necessitated it. Thus, the CPA embarked upon the long road to the popular front after the accession of the Lyons government and the emergence of the New Guard; both of which were believed to threaten the existence of the CPA and only united reformist-revolutionary action to resist their attacks was thought effective. Yet the party remained suspicious of the reformist leadership. It was not until the French demonstrated the effectiveness of the united front from above and below, winning over the Comintern by the middle of 1934, that the CPA, following the 1934 federal election, moved to intersect the international line by seeking to forge its own unity with Labor. While the CPA ultimately aligned itself with the Comintern, this only happened belatedly and after domestic imperatives forced the party to do so.

However, the CPA improved its international solidarity activities. Indicative of the frenzied activity that characterised the transformative impact of Third Period communism, the party's work now moved beyond mere sermonising in its press. The LAI and FOSU strengthened solidarity with the colonial liberation movements and the Soviet Union respectively. It also pursued more practical efforts, in the form of demonstrations, to display international solidarity with, for instance, the Meerut prisoners, Scottsboro boys and with the victims of the Nazi reign of terror in Germany. This was a step in the party's evolution to a greater attainment of international solidarity, one that reached maturity, as we shall see in the next chapter, during the Spanish Civil War.

The party's work on the national and colonial questions also saw improvements. It established associations, such as the LAI, intended to concentrate energies on assisting colonies, especially India, win independence. It adopted a more principled stance on White Australia and racism, evident in particular during the Kalgoorlie race riot, and

notwithstanding the individual shortcomings of some leading comrades on separate occasions. As seen in the Weil's disease strike, it encouraged closer relations between Australian and migrant workers. It also devised its first comprehensive policy for Aborigines in 1931. Here again is evidence of the transformative effect of Third Period communism on the CPA's implementation of proletarian internationalism, one that left a positive legacy and which was never reversed.

The CPA's work to prevent war was also injected with a heavy dose of activism during the years under review in this chapter. To be sure, there was a steady evolutionary process also involved here. In 1931, the party's response to the Japanese occupation of Manchuria was relatively mute. Nevertheless, the party always maintained its support for wars of colonial independence, in keeping with Lenin's writings on war in chapter two, and did so again for the Chinese plight. Greater activism was evident by 1934, with the establishment of the MAWAF, which signalled the party's genuine determination to assume a leading role in preserving peace, preventing its 'own' government from waging war and defeating fascism, the driving force behind tension during the 1930s. Additionally, the MAWAF was not predicated on pacifism or opposition to war *per se*; rather, support for wars of colonial liberation and militant opposition to imperialist war were its preference, in keeping with Leninist ideology. Thus, the work performed by the MAWAF, and by extension the CPA, in seeking to avert imperialist war was in keeping with proletarian internationalism. The platform established through the clarification and elaboration of policy during these years equipped the party to face a plethora of future wars with a more principled approach than was hitherto possible. It is to these future conflicts that we turn to next.

Chapter Five: Proletarian Internationalism, the Popular Front and War

The time-period of this chapter is between August 1935 and June 1941. The CPA, during this period, prioritised and attained a fuller realisation of some dimensions of proletarian internationalism, while neglecting others. For example, international solidarity (especially during the Spanish Civil War and the Sino-Japanese War) was often backed with deed and was of considerable importance during these years. Yet the CPA-Comintern relationship dwindled in significance. Recurrences of themes seen during the course of this thesis also mark these years. This was the case with the CPA-Comintern relationship, where the party, as it had done in preceding years, adopted Comintern policy when domestic necessity required it do so (such as the use of the united front to save the party from the Crimes Act), and on other occasions acted in advance of Comintern instructions (when it discerned the imperialist character of the Second World War ahead of the Comintern). This chapter is divided into three parts where these themes will be explored. The first section of the chapter will examine the decisions arising from 7th Comintern Congress. The second section will explore the CPA's activities from the completion of the Congress to the outbreak of the Second World War. The third section will consider the CPA during the period between the outbreak of war and the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.

The 7th Comintern Congress

The 7th and final Comintern Congress opened in Moscow on 25 July 1935.¹ It was the last major foray into policy making during the pre-war years from the organisational component of proletarian internationalism. Yet its policy framework was significant in deciding the direction and strategies of the CPA for years afterwards, as was the expected practice of proletarian internationalism. Therefore, the following discussion will focus, at length, on the major policies proclaimed here.

The 'popular front' ratified here was the diametric opposite of the Third Period proclaimed at the previous Congress. The Russian's internal quarrels that simmered beneath the surface in 1928 and resulted in international repercussions had no equivalent in 1935. There was no dissent; unity, both among comrades and within the broader labour

¹ For the abridged stenographic record of the 7th Congress see *VII Congress of the Communist International: Abridged Stenographic Report of Proceedings* (Sydney: Modern Publishers, 1939). For detailed scholarly accounts see Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern*, ch. 18 and McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, pp. 130-136.

movement, was the keynote. In contrast to the previous Congress, the cult of the individual was conspicuous in the effusive praise showered on Stalin and his planned economy. The praise lavished here was repeated *ad infinitum* by every communist party for years after. Although there were vast differences, the 6th and 7th Congress shared at least one thing in common: the line proclaimed at both had been developed well in advance, was not unexpected and left the Congress to ratify a *fait accompli*.

Dimitrov was the star of the Congress. In the years ahead his report on the united front against fascism assumed canonical status. It provided international communism a framework for activity for the remainder of the decade and, indeed, for most of the Second World War. In his report Dimitrov argued that the bourgeoisie, as a way out of the economic crisis, intended to place the bulk of the economic burden on the workers and at the same time prepare for imperialist war. To accomplish this, the bourgeoisie required the assistance of brutal fascist dictatorships capable of suppressing the revolutionary movement. Therefore, fascism was naked class rule, 'the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital.'² Fascism was inimical to the interests of the working class, requiring forceful opposition wherever it dare raise its head.

Dimitrov argued that the most effective method to resist fascism was to form an alliance embracing broad sections of society. This alliance would not be limited to a united front of the working class. It needed to be widened to incorporate other strata of society – the peasantry, the petit-bourgeoisie and intellectuals among others. Its breadth was intended to erect an insuperable barrier to any further fascist advances. The alliance was named the 'popular front.'

Dimitrov articulated the tasks required to establish the popular front. He emphasised that a united front embracing all sections of the working class, with a strong and influential communist party at its centre, was the bedrock upon which the popular front must be established.

The first thing that must be done...is to form a united front, to establish unity of action of the workers in every factory, in every district, in every region, in every country, all over the world. Unity

² George [sic] Dimitrov, *The United Front Against Fascism: Speeches at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International, August 1935* (Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1945), pp. 7-9.

of action of the proletariat...is the mighty weapon which renders the working class capable not only of successful defence, but also of successful counter-offensive against fascism, against the class enemy.³

If a correct policy were pursued, Dimitrov contended, the influence of a united working class would neutralise fascism and win over to the anti-fascists other classes, who would have faith in, and follow the lead of, the strengthened working class. However, Dimitrov discouraged unconditional unity. For it to be effective, unity had to be explicitly directed against fascism, war, the capitalist offensive and the class enemy. Additionally, he urged vigilance against right and left deviations of the line; fiercely attacked 'self-satisfied sectarianism' that resented the new line; and emphasised the necessity of discerning the difference between the right and left wings of social democracy. In stark contrast to the Third Period vituperation of 'left social fascists,' left-wing social democrats were now valued partners for the united front and for the struggle against reaction. Indicative of the vast transformation from seven years before, Dimitrov now counselled communists of the necessity for organisational unity even to the point of communist and social democratic amalgamation. However, this was possible only on certain conditions that would effectively transform the new political entity into a communist party. Be that as it may, the above stipulates, Dimitrov announced, were 'the main conditions for preventing the growth of fascism and its accession to power.'⁴ The contrast with the policies espoused at the 6th Comintern Congress, which revolved around the struggle against the bourgeoisie and social democracy, could not be sharper.

As part of the resistance to fascism, Dimitrov told the Congress, communists were to defend all democratic rights. Dimitrov deprecated tendencies to ignore the distinction between bourgeois rule under fascism and democracy. 'In the capitalist countries,' Dimitrov said, 'we defend and shall continue to defend every inch of bourgeois-democratic liberties which are being attacked by fascism and bourgeois reaction.'⁵ Furthermore, Dimitrov stressed that communists were not faced with the choice of 'proletarian dictatorship and bourgeois democracy, but between bourgeois democracy and fascism,' dashing any hope of a revolutionary breakthrough.⁶ He also condemned the paradoxical tendency to underestimate the threat of fascism and the fatalistic assumption

³ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴ Quotations from *ibid.*, pp. 21-22. The foregoing is from pp. 27-28, 64-65 and 74-78.

⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

⁶ Ibid., p. 98.

that fascism was inevitable. Comrades were enjoined to mobilise the broadest strata of the toilers in defence of democratic rights and remain vigilant against government erosions of freedom, which Dimitrov argued, usually preceded the establishment of a fascist dictatorship.⁷ The CPA, as described in the previous chapter, was already resisting government attempts to erode certain freedoms and continued to do so; this will be discussed further below.

Dimitrov also spoke about the correct attitude to nationalism, and in so doing, injected nationalism into proletarian internationalism. He said that while communists remained the ‘irreconcilable opponents’ of bourgeois nationalism, it was incorrect to adopt a position of ‘national nihilism.’ As communists were told to educate the ‘workers and toilers in the spirit of proletarian internationalism’ they were forbidden ‘to sneer at all the national sentiments of the broad toiling masses.’⁸ Dimitrov then made what would have been considered a heretical statement a decade earlier:

Proletarian internationalism must, so to speak, “acclimatise itself” in each country in order to sink deep roots in its native land. National forms of the proletarian class struggle and of the labour movement in the individual countries are in no contradiction to proletarian internationalism; on the contrary, it is precisely in these forms that the international interests of the proletariat can be successfully defended.⁹

Hence domestic actions were, according to Dimitrov, also internationalist. Later in this chapter we will see how the CPA’s domestic actions in its work during the Spanish Civil War and the Sino-Japanese War also possessed internationalist dimensions. However, it is arguable that in saying this, Dimitrov sought to ensure that communists did not leave unchallenged the fascist assertion to be the custodians of nationalism. Dimitrov was doubtlessly aware of the potency of nationalism in fostering mass support. Perhaps in a tacit recognition of internationalism’s inability to attract comparable enthusiasm, he did not wish communists to relinquish the political benefits offered through nationalistic posturing. Thus, Dimitrov was motivated by expediency not ideology.

Dimitrov’s report was complemented with two further reports. One was delivered by the general secretary of the Communist Party of Italy (PCI) Palmiro Togliatti, who reported

⁷ Ibid., pp. 10 and 19-20.

⁸ All quotations from *ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

on the imperialists' preparations for a new war and the communist tasks to prevent it. The other was by German Wilhelm Pieck, who reported on the activities of the ECCI since the 6th Congress. Pieck's report need not occupy space here as it merely approved of the Comintern's activities from 1928 and the new line expounded by Dimitrov.¹⁰

Togliatti's report outlining a strategy to resist war was more significant. He started his oration with the observation that since the onset of the Depression, tensions over contracting markets had led to wars in Asia, Africa and the accession of fascism in Europe. A new partition of the world had already begun. Encircled by hostile neighbours publicly howling for war, the security of Soviet Russia was at genuine risk. Hence, communists were tasked with forming and leading a united front of workers, peasants, petit-bourgeois, intellectuals and any other groups determined to oppose war. Togliatti told delegates to defend peace and explicitly focus attention on the threats posed by Germany and Japan. At the same time, there was to be no restraint in the tussle with the imperialism of one's 'own' country and any domestic elements sympathetic to Germany's eastern ambitions.¹¹ In the event of war, Togliatti recommitted to turning the imperialist war into civil war, but added that this was to be accomplished with the assistance of united front partners and not by the working class or the communist party alone.¹² He deprecated wartime refusal to serve in the military and disruption of war industries.¹³ Additionally, Togliatti warned any conflagration, even if it did not initially involve Russia, 'will inevitably tend to develop into and will inevitably become a war against the Soviet Union.' Thus, '[i]n struggling for peace, we are carrying out the best defence of the Soviet Union.'¹⁴ But upon Russia's entry into war, 'the communists must call on all the toilers to help by all means and at any cost to bring about the victory of the Red Army against the imperialist armies.'¹⁵ This was precisely the course of action pursued by the Australian party after the Soviet entry into the Second World War. But it was still another six years before Australian communists would be called upon to defend the Soviet Union.

¹⁰ For Pieck's report and its accompanying resolution see *Inprecorr*, vol. 15, nos. 34-35, 10-15 August 1935 and *VII Congress of the Communist International*, pp. 15-71, 115-123 and 565-568.

¹¹ Ercoli [Palmiro Togliatti], *The Seventh World Congress of the Communist International: Ercoli's Report, the Tasks of the Communist International in Connection with the Imperialists' Preparation for a New World War, Delivered on August 13-14, 1935* (Sydney: Modern Publishers, 1935?), pp. 33-35 and 41-42.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 41 and 78.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Australians wielded a negligible influence at the Congress. Sharkey, Docker and Stan Moran represented the CPA. Sharkey was elected a candidate member of the ECCI – a major achievement for an individual from a relatively minor party. Sharkey's and Docker's contribution was to recount the activities of the Australian party since the 6th Congress, noting the triumph over the right danger, the growth of the party and its industrial gains.¹⁶ Upon the Congress's conclusion and Sharkey's return to Australia, the CPA promptly threw itself into implementing the new line.

After the 7th Comintern Congress: The CPA from August 1935 to the Outbreak of War

The 7th Congress left a deep and lasting impact. It galvanised the hitherto dilatory struggle against fascism and war. To many progressives, the importance of resisting fascism and war was difficult to over-exaggerate. The world teetered on the brink of disaster; war could erupt at any moment and only frantic anti-fascist work could stop it. As Len Fox, a school teacher who sacrificed his career to pursue peace work throughout the 1930s, wrote decades later:

...we knew that the future of the world was to be decided in the next ten or twenty years, and that we had become caught up in a major political maelstrom that would sweep us – and the rest of the world – into a future that could only be guessed at.¹⁷

After the 7th Congress, it was the duty of comrades to influence the future toward peaceful directions. Yet the optimism fostered by the Comintern and the Soviet Union, both of which were seen as beacons of hope for anti-fascists, was tempered by the macabre spectacle of the Stalinist show trials. Old Bolsheviks were accused and convicted of preposterous crimes, confounding world opinion yet sycophantically applauded by most communists. It is not my intention to recite the CPA's nauseating defence of the show trials.¹⁸ It suffices to mention the CPA's predictable fawning on all the trumped up charges and howled furious agreement with the executions of men convicted on little more than confessions extracted through coercion. In a study such as

¹⁶ For Sharkey's speech see '7th Congress CI, 6th Day-10th Session, Sharkey No. 45,' 30 July 1935 (RC 494/1/181); *Inprecorr*, vol. 15, no. 52, 10 October 1935, pp. 1303-1304. For Docker's speech, which appears under his pseudonym 'Billet,' see *Inprecorr*, vol. 15, no. 67, 12 December 1935, p. 1664.

¹⁷ Fox, *Australians on the Left*, p.13.

¹⁸ For accounts of Australian responses to the terror see Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists*, pp. 62-63; Macintyre, *The Reds*, ch. 13; Sparrow, *Communism: A Love Story*, pp. 219-225 and 233-238.

this, it is essential to always bear in mind the contradiction between the noble concerns of communists and the grim events in Russia. Nothing better symbolises the cynicism of Stalin's Russia than the fact that at precisely the moment when it attempted to convey a benevolent global image by ostensibly leading the resistance to fascism and other forms of oppression, Stalin had unleashed an unprecedented terror that claimed the lives of nameless millions. Ironically, this was precisely the sort of government repression the Comintern had enjoined its sections to resist to the death. It is to the CPA's implementation of that same Comintern line to which we now turn.

The Communist Party of Australia committed itself to the Comintern decisions at its 11th Congress in December 1935. Consistent with the practice relating to the organisational aspect of proletarian internationalism, the Congress utilised the policy framework set by the Comintern to establish the party's tasks. Hence Labor-Communist unity for the preservation of peace and democracy, as a preliminary to the broader popular front (sometimes called a 'people's front'), was the keynote of the congress. This permeated all reports and contributions. Also prominent was the desire to see the CPA obtain affiliation to the ALP. The importance of the Labor left to the new tactic was recognised; the party committed itself to pursuing closer ties with the former 'left social fascists.' But unity was impossible if the party failed to cleanse itself of sectarianism. In view of that Miles dealt at length with the deleterious consequences posed by sectarianism.¹⁹

With a second world war highly possible though not inevitable, united Labor-Communist action for the maintenance of peace and exposure of the instigators of war in all countries (i.e. fascists and their sympathisers) was a supreme task. While the main warmongers were identified as the fascist states of Europe and Asia, the Congress resolution highlighted British complicity in encouraging German, Italian and Japanese aggression.²⁰ The consensus was that the Lyons government was in complete agreement with British foreign policy, including the policy of directing Hitler's attention eastwards. Furthermore, the Lyons government was seen to be increasingly repressive. This encouraged suspicions that it was preparing the 'fascisation' of Australia before the outbreak of war. The federal government's Crimes Act case against the CPA and FOSU, discussed below,

¹⁹ For Miles's speech see *Communist Review*, vol. 3, no. 2, February 1936, pp. 10-27.

²⁰ A manifesto issued after a conference of British Empire communist parties (which included the CPA) following the 7th Comintern Congress reinforced suspicions of British foreign policy. It accused the British government of planning to plunge the world into war with the ultimate aim of destroying Russia. The manifesto echoed the recently concluded Comintern congress by stating that British plans could only be frustrated by anti-war activity based on the united front. For the manifesto see *Supplement to the Workers' Weekly*, 17 January 1936, p. 2 and *Inprecorr*, vol. 15, no. 64, 30 November 1935, p. 1598.

lent credence to such suspicions. Therefore, Lyons's removal from office was essential for the preservation of peace and democracy. A progressive government committed to peace, collective security and democracy was the best guarantee against fascism and war. For this a popular front government was required, or failing that, a left-wing Labor government. Hence the main tasks in the Australian context arising from the 7th Congress were the defeat of the Lyons government 'of hunger and war' and its replacement with a Labor government amenable to mass pressure from progressive elements.²¹

It serves little purpose in a study of proletarian internationalism to comprehensively trace CPA agitation for a united front or the election of a Labor government in the post-7th Congress era. Besides, this has been documented elsewhere.²² What follows, therefore, will only be a brief description of united front work. It must be observed from the outset that the most striking constant was the CPA's unrelenting commitment to see a federal Labor government elected. It was willing to render any possible assistance to meet this objective. It frequently discussed the benefits that would accrue to the working class with the election of a Labor government. It offered every possible assistance at election time, even to the extent of not standing candidates, the very issue that brought about Kavanagh's demise in 1929.²³ But the CPA's offers of unity, affiliation or assistance were ignored, leaving the party to build the popular front alone.

Facing continual frustration, it is unsurprising that the CPA adopted different methods to implement the Comintern line. Unlike previous attempts to forge unity, via direct approaches from above, the focus was now on building unity over specific issues. Some of these issues, such as the defence of democratic rights and opposition to various wars, are discussed in this chapter. But mostly the party focused on building unity over grassroots issues like wages, taxation or working hours. This approach reaped rewards among some sections of the Labor rank and file. In particular considerable successes

²¹ All of the above from 11th Congress CPA (RC 495/94/122-123); *Supplement to the Workers' Weekly*, 10 January 1936, pp. 1-2; *For Unity of the Working Class: Decisions of the Eleventh Congress of the Communist Party of Australia, December 1935* (Sydney: The Forward Press, 1936). For some of the more significant Congress speeches see *Communist Review*, vol. 3, nos. 1-2, January – February 1936.

²² For the CPA's endeavours to kindle a united front and assist Labor win government see especially Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia*, pp. 75-78 and Macintyre, *The Reds*, ch. 11 and pp. 340-346.

²³ The CPA's support for a Labor government was a constant throughout this period, but for examples in the lead-up to the 1937 federal election see articles by J. B. Miles, L. L. Sharkey, J. D. Blake and others in *Workers' Weekly*, March – October 1937, *passim*. The CPA endorsed two candidates, Fred Patterson for the seat of Herbert and Ralph Gibson for the seat of Flinders, at the 1937 federal election. The CPA's 1937 election tactics and policies are detailed in *Workers' Weekly*, 25 June 1937, p. 2; 1 October 1937, pp. 2-3; 12 October 1937, p. 2. See also Dixon's election post-mortem contained in, R. Dixon, *Unite! Defeat Fascism, Defend Peace and Achieve Socialism* (Sydney: Modern Publishers, 1938).

were made in infiltrating the NSW branch of the ALP – a very unique form of the united front. As McKnight's research has shown, the spectacular success of this Comintern-inspired strategy (whose intention was to force the ALP to accept collective security as part of its foreign policy) is found by the late 1930s when most of the NSW ALP's executive positions were held by secret members of the CPA.²⁴ Yet even with Labor's NSW branch executive dominated with communists, the CPA still failed to manoeuvre Labor parliamentary leaders to a position that even vaguely represented the united front.

There was greater success in enticing individual ALP members into united action. Some cooperation was forthcoming from Labor politicians, such as left-wingers Maurice Blackburn (who was expelled from the ALP in 1937) and Eddie Ward, and numerous unions. Lloyd Ross, NSW secretary of the ARU and by the close of 1935 a secret member of the CPA, was the most prominent union official to advocate the united front.²⁵ The participation of the ostensibly non-communist Ross, who at countless public meetings expounded the communist line, was highly useful for the CPA and its claims of growing unity between reformists and revolutionaries. He legitimised the façade of a non-existent united front. In doing so Ross seemed to validate the Comintern observation that the working class was moving naturally and inexorably to unity.

We now need to consider in detail the party's stance on war under the Comintern's new policies. Wars were fought during every year from 1935 until 1945. Hence, the CPA's policies on war and the relevance of proletarian internationalism in determining its approach will form a dominant part of this chapter. During this section of the chapter, I will focus on the CPA's reaction to the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, the Spanish Civil War and the Sino-Japanese war. The subsequent section will consider the party's reaction to the Second World War.

The anti-war policies guiding the party for the remainder of the decade were articulated at the 11th party Congress. Miles set the tone by criticising Labor's 'defence of Australia' doctrine. Miles argued that such a policy 'necessarily means being committed to defence

²⁴ David McKnight, 'The Comintern's Seventh Congress and the Australian Labor Party,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 32, no. 3 (July 1997), pp. 395-407.

²⁵ Blackburn was ostensibly expelled for his association with the MAWAF. See the ARU declaration of support for the united front and the CPA's commentary in *Workers' Weekly*, 4 October 1935, pp. 3-4. For a biography of Lloyd Ross see Stephen Holt, *A Veritable Dynamo: Lloyd Ross and Australian Labour 1901-1987* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1996).

of capitalist Australia in any war' and would inevitably result in a repetition of the great betrayal of 1914.²⁶ But certain wars did merit communist support. Steve Purdy, reflecting the importance of the teachings on war described in chapter two, stated precisely which wars communists could and should not support.

We are opposed to imperialist wars. We support the wars of the colonial peoples against the imperialist aggressors. We support wars in defence of socialism against reactionary imperialism.²⁷

Communists had to assume a stance on every war. As Miles spelled out, neutrality, in the sense of not assuming a position on the war's character, was impermissible, again pointing towards the extent of influence exerted by Lenin's teachings on war. However, neutrality, in the sense of refusing to take sides, was a different matter.

Of course, we are neutral as to who wins between two imperialisms under which we do not live. If we are involved in imperialist war we are for the defeat of our own direct oppressors, to facilitate the seizure of power. If the war is a war of colonial plunder then we must take a position of opposition to the plunderers, for victory for the attacked and defeat for the aggressor. If the war is a war of intervention, then, comrades, our duty is most positive action against imperialism, the most positive assistance to the land of Socialism.²⁸

This principle directed the CPA's response to every war, including the Second World War. However, in 1939, the party, seething with justified indignation at Hitler, publicly overlooked that 'we are neutral as to who wins between two imperialisms under which we do not live,' taking weeks to correct itself. After initial confusion, principle returned to party policy. As will be demonstrated, the communist party was neutral towards a war that it perceived to be between rival imperialisms, a principle to which it had committed itself in 1935.

Miles qualified these principles with scenarios where the nation's defence was justified. He suggested the defence of Australia was justified if it fell victim to an unprovoked invasion by a major imperialist power (such as Japan). This was considered unlikely. Australian membership of the British Empire meant British involvement in any Australian war and vice versa. Thus, Australian participation alongside Britain would be

²⁶ Miles speech and quotation from *Supplement to the Workers' Weekly*, 24 January 1936, p. 2.

²⁷ *Communist Review*, vol. 2, no. 13, January 1936, p. 55.

²⁸ *Communist Review*, vol. 3, no. 2, February 1936, p. 15.

of an imperialist character and therefore could not be supported by the Communist Party and the working class, as was the scenario during the pre-June 1941 phase of World War II.²⁹ The prospect of Australian forces fighting on the same side as the British and Soviets, as happened during World War II, never seems to have been considered possible. Nevertheless, it remained party policy that if Australia, standing alone, fell victim to unprovoked aggression from a major power, defence of Australia was justified.

Inextricably associated with the question of national defence is the issue of nationalism. War and nationalism go hand in hand. Nationalistic sentiment rises commensurately whenever the threat of war rears its ugly head. Fascism, with its nationalistic bombast and militarist trappings, gained tremendous political advantage feeding off nationalist feeling. This provided double the reason for popular front communism not to vacate nationalism, especially the progressive achievements of one's 'own' people, to the class foe.

This realisation led to the fervent embrace of almost all things national by communist parties during the popular front era. As discussed above, Dimitrov rebuked communists who 'sneer' at the national sentiments of their 'own' working class. This was unacceptable 'national nihilism' that needed to be expunged. It was also at odds with the model of proletarian internationalism based on Lenin's writings articulated in chapter two.

The CPA, along with many other communist parties,³⁰ accepted Dimitrov's arguments. Throughout the remainder of the 1930s, it chose to parade its newfound love of nationalism through a study of Australian history. The local impetus came at a public meeting in Toowoomba in June 1936, where the CPA's Scottish general secretary, J. B. Miles, told an audience of two hundred that he 'wished that the Australian people knew more of their own history.' Miles reasoned that Australian history was littered with exemplary cases of the liberty loving traditions forged in the struggle against convictism. For Miles, the convict struggle for freedom presented parallels with the contemporaneous

²⁹ *Supplement to the Workers' Weekly*, 14 February 1936, p. 2.

³⁰ For the embrace of nationalism by other communist parties see, for example, John Manley, "'Communists Love Canada!': The Communist Party of Canada, the 'People' and the Popular Front, 1933-1939," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 36, no. 4 (Winter 2002), pp. 59-86; Marc Lazar, 'The French Communist Party Between Nation and Internationalism,' in Saarela and Rentola (eds.), *Communism: National and International*, pp. 41-59.

struggle against fascism. Democratic rights won decades before would have to be maintained with a fight.³¹

Thus, understanding the democratic struggles of the past, so as to enlighten the struggles of the future, became a priority. J. N. Rawling, active in the peace movement and editor of the MAWAF journal *War? What For!*, was entrusted with researching and writing short articles on Australian history. These became regular features in the *Workers' Weekly* and *Communist Review*, focusing on struggles such as the Eureka Stockade and the anti-conscription campaigns of the First World War. Indeed, a 1936 rally organised by the NSW Labour Council to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the 1916 conscription plebiscite was held with much support from the party, which provided publicity and speakers.³² The focus on Australian history found more comprehensive expression in Rawling's six part *The Story of the Australian People*.³³ Like Rawling's articles, *The Story* was a history from below, of mass struggle, seeking to position the working class as the legatee of progressive achievements in Australian history and to salvage those achievements from Kings and Governors. The articles on Australian history were popular and ceased only with Rawling's expulsion from the CPA during the early months of the Second World War. They not only enlightened the struggle against fascism in the 1930s but also equipped comrades with an understanding of Australian history. With this understanding, comrades could take pride in their 'own' radical traditions and place the CPA within the Australian radical tradition.³⁴ This culminated in 1945 with the publication of E.W. Campbell's *History of the Australian Labour Movement*.³⁵ Campbell's work sought to position the party as inheritor of all the great and progressive struggles of militant labour's past; his argument, though historically flawed, posited that the CPA was the latest, and presumably final, product of decades of militant struggle that would lead inevitably to the overthrow of capitalism.

There were significant weaknesses in the communist study of Australian working class history. The greatest was the party's failure to grapple sufficiently with militant labour's racist proclivities. Perhaps it was far too inconvenient and embarrassing for the party to

³¹ Miles's speech in *Workers' Weekly*, 23 June 1936, p. 1.

³² For this rally see *Workers' Weekly*, 27 October – 3 November 1936. Around this period, Rawling released a pamphlet tracing the history of conscription. See J. N. Rawling, *Conscription in Australia: Speaker's Notes* (Sydney: Modern Publishers, 1936).

³³ J. N. Rawling, *The Story of the Australian People*, parts 1-6 (Sydney: Modern Publishers, n.d.).

³⁴ See Morrison, *The Communist Party of Australia and the Australian Radical-Socialist Tradition*, for a study of the CPA's place within the Australian radical-socialist tradition.

³⁵ Campbell, *History of the Australian Labour Movement*.

reveal the ugly racist underbelly of its labour pioneer heroes whom it claimed as its own. This, however, did not preclude the *Workers' Weekly* from providing prominent positions to articles dealing with abuses of Aborigines since white settlement.³⁶ Blame for the abuse of Aborigines was laid at the feet of the ruling class and large graziers. Indeed, the powerful were always blamed for dark incidents in the nation's past. The CPA's study of Australian history concentrated on the progressive role of the underdog; accordingly the underdog could not be responsible for Aboriginal abuse. The radical element of the Australian labour movement had committed no sin. This assessment was a simplistic caricature. Its purpose was to leave communists with a clear conscience. It provided a narrative that instilled pride in the nation's past, and especially in the achievements of one's 'own' working class, while the party quietly repented for the racist mistakes of militant labour's pioneers. It was inextricably bound with the stipulates of the popular front; Dimitrov insisted as much at the 7th Comintern Congress. Lenin, in his teachings on the national question, had also argued that pride in the achievements of one's 'own' working class did not preclude one being an internationalist. And as discussed in chapter two, both adherence to the policies of the Comintern and the principles inherent in the national question were important constituent elements of proletarian internationalism.

But it was another of Dimitrov's exhortations that was of more immediate importance. For most of its own history, the CPA was faced with government imposed barriers shamelessly intended to deprive left wing activists (though usually aimed squarely at communists) of freedom of speech and association. Barely weeks after the conclusion of the Comintern Congress, the CPA faced another challenge to its legality. Dimitrov's exhortation for the defence of democratic rights, like others before it, was timely by coincidence, though to the faithful appeared almost supernaturally prescient. But before we consider this latest example to suppress the CPA, it is worth noting that there were many attempts to suppress the work of the CPA and its fraternal before the outbreak of the Second World War. It will serve scant purpose to examine all of these in this thesis. Some, such as the federal government ban on Clifford Odet's anti-Nazi play *Till the Day I Die*, are well covered elsewhere and need not occupy space here.³⁷

Instead, I will focus on the High Court case brought against the CPA and FOSU in August 1935, and withdrawn in May 1937. At the time, these proceedings appeared to

³⁶ *Workers' Weekly*, 14 January 1938, p. 1.

³⁷ Robert Darby, 'New Theatre and the State: The Ban on *Till the Day I Die*, 1936-41,' *Labour History*, no. 80 (May 2001), pp. 1-19.

validate the Comintern's foreboding about the menace of fascism in democratic countries and therefore underscored the importance of the party's links with the International and its dedication to proletarian internationalism. The proceedings of this case commenced when the federal Attorney-General applied to the High Court to call on the CPA and FOSU to 'show cause why they should not be declared unlawful associations under the Crimes Act.' In the meantime the Commonwealth would refuse transmission through the post of publications by the CPA and its fraternal. The announcement shattered illusions that democratic rights were 'immune from developments towards fascism.' Experience of European fascist dictatorships had shown communists to be the first target of repression, followed by moderate sections of the labour movement. Hence the government's action was a menace to the labour movement as a whole.³⁸ With profound tension mounting over Abyssinia, the twin menace of war and fascism again seemed close.³⁹ Put in this context this latest threat to legality was serious indeed. Drawing upon the anti-fascist framework established at the 7th Comintern Congress, the CPA found little alternative but to forge a united front in defence of democratic rights as the only means to check nascent fascism before it bloomed into the destruction of the entire labour movement.

On 27 August the CPA Political Bureau issued a statement calling for the creation of a 'great mass campaign to defend legality.' It claimed the threat of illegality stemmed from the bourgeoisie's resort to fascism to suppress dissent prior to the commencement of war.⁴⁰ The mass campaign in defence of the party attracted swift support. Within days the *Weekly* could report the adoption of protest resolutions by union and Labor branches.⁴¹ On 29 August, the NSW Labour Council declared that the Crimes Act case was a challenge to the working class and a step toward fascism and war. It established a broadly representative 'Committee for the Defence of Democratic Rights,' which was tasked with coordinating the defence of organisations and individuals threatened by the Crimes Act.⁴² In early October a well attended public meeting in Sydney heard Lloyd Ross, J. B. Miles

³⁸ Above from *Workers' Weekly*, 23 August 1935, p. 1.

³⁹ Richard Dixon argued at a public meeting in Sydney on 17 September 1935 that the Crimes Act case was connected with the imminent invasion of Abyssinia. See *Workers' Weekly*, 20 September 1935, p. 1.

⁴⁰ For the Political Bureau statement see *Workers' Weekly*, 27 August 1935, p. 1.

⁴¹ Quotation from *Workers' Weekly*, 30 August 1935, p. 1. For some of the protest resolutions see *Workers' Weekly*, 30 August 1935 – 18 October 1935, *passim*.

⁴² *Workers' Weekly*, 3 September 1935, p. 1. Similar committees were established around the country. See P. T. Thorne to Executive Committee – IRA, 13 November 1935 (RC 539/3/235). For the objections to the Crimes Act raised by the committee established by the NSW Labour Council see *Defend Democratic Rights: This Concerns You – Read It* (Sydney: Committee for the Defence of Democratic Rights, Labour Council, NSW, 1935).

and Fred Paterson detail the threat to democratic freedom posed by the Crimes Act.⁴³ For its part, the ALP was officially non-committal and was criticised as a result.⁴⁴ But some individual parliamentarians, such as erstwhile renegade Jock Garden and firebrand Eddie Ward, lent their support.⁴⁵ The participation of individuals like Garden and Ward provided grounds for the flimsy claim that a united front had been created to resist the Crimes Act.

But the case, which brought such diabolical predictions and doom-saying, did not run smoothly. It was delayed for almost two years. Finally set to go before Justice H. V. Evatt on 17 May 1937, the case was withdrawn by the federal government on 20 May 1937. The CPA claimed a ‘big victory for democracy’ and asserted that there were no longer any justifiable grounds to deny communist publications transmission through the post.⁴⁶ The CPA had vanquished this Goliath without resort to stone-throwing. But elation was tempered by Miles’s grim warning that so long as Lyons was in government, vigilance for the defence of democracy would continue.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the united front against fascism, the tactic used to preserve the party’s legality, appeared to vindicate the decisions of the 7th Congress, and for the purpose of this thesis, the party’s commitment to the organisational affiliations of proletarian internationalism.

Despite the Comintern’s importance, it was the anti-war and international solidarity elements of proletarian internationalism that assumed greater significance during the second half of the 1930s. The first major test came with the Italian aggression against Abyssinia. While the CPA’s deeds of international solidarity in this case were not as extensive or effective as those of the Spanish Civil War or the Sino-Japanese war, they were greater than those for previous conflicts, such as China in 1931.

The Italo-Abyssinian conflict came as no surprise. The *Workers’ Weekly* kept a close watch over events from mid-1935 and predicted war on countless occasions. The prolonged failure of the League of Nations, Britain and France to act decisively seemed to make war a certainty.⁴⁸ The CPA’s oft repeated solution to the crisis was the

⁴³ For this meeting see *Workers’ Weekly*, 4 October 1935, p. 1.

⁴⁴ For examples of the criticism leveled at the ALP see *Workers’ Weekly*, 27 September 1935, p. 4.

⁴⁵ See *Workers’ Weekly*, 4 October 1935, p. 1.

⁴⁶ *Workers’ Weekly*, 21 May 1937, p. 1.

⁴⁷ *Workers’ Weekly*, 28 May 1937, p. 2.

⁴⁸ See *Workers’ Weekly*, August-October 1935, *passim*, for its coverage of the events leading up to the Abyssinian invasion. See also Dixon’s article in *Communist Review*, vol. 2, no. 8, August 1935, pp. 1-9; K. Frobisher, *Unconquered Abyssinia* (Sydney: Labor [sic] Research Bureau, 1935).

imposition of sanctions, especially to refuse Mussolini war materials and oil. On this the CPA found little support – neither Labor nor the ACTU was willing to countenance the possibility of sanctions for fear of embroiling Australia in an unwanted foreign entanglement. Neutrality was reformism’s answer to the Abyssinian war. When sanctions, the CPA’s preference, were belatedly imposed, they were too little (they did not ban oil) and too late.

In the weeks leading up to the Italian invasion, the CPA was eager to do all possible to prevent war. A *Workers’ Weekly* editorial declared the prevention of war the primary task.⁴⁹ Anti-war meetings and adoption of protest resolutions were crucial if war was to be stopped. Shortly after, on 4 September, a ‘mass united front protest,’ presided over by MAWAF secretary W. H. Nugent, though foreshadowed in a CC circular on 26 August, was held in Sydney. Speakers called on the Lyons government to raise the question of Italian sanctions at the League of Nations and the withdrawal of British and Italian forces from territory neighbouring Abyssinia.⁵⁰ This was followed by meetings with a more notable communist presence. One example was in Sydney on 17 September. Here Dixon forcefully put the case for sanctions and collective security as a policy essential for the preservation of peace, castigating Labor’s neutrality policy in the process.⁵¹ Many other meetings urging the imposition of sanctions followed. But protest meetings and resolutions were not enough. It was imperative that the Abyssinians ‘must be supported by the working class with all the means in its power.’⁵² Boycotts of Italian shipping in Alexandria, Marseilles and Capetown featured prominently in the *Weekly* and were described as ‘magnificent anti-war actions in other countries [that] should inspire us to raise to a higher level our activity in Australia against war.’⁵³ Though there is scant evidence to suggest any organised Australian boycott of Italian shipping.

⁴⁹ *Workers’ Weekly*, 3 September 1935, p. 1.

⁵⁰ *Workers’ Weekly*, 6 September 1935, p. 1. These arguments echoed those found in the CC circular of the 26th of August. For the circular see CC CPA to all district committees, 26th August 1935, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 5).

⁵¹ *Workers’ Weekly*, 20 September 1935, p. 1. For an in depth exposition of the case for sanctions see Richard Dixon, *Peace or War: The Case for Sanctions Explained* (Sydney: Modern Publishers, 1935). The CC decided on a ‘careful’ campaign against the Labor party’s non-intervention policy. See CC CPA to all district committees, 26th August 1935, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 5).

⁵² *Workers’ Weekly*, 3 September 1935, p. 1.

⁵³ *Workers’ Weekly*, 6 September 1935, p. 1.

There was a degree of confusion on how to respond to the crisis.⁵⁴ The popular front emphasis on peaceful resistance to aggression, exemplified in boycotts, demonstrations and sanctions, was occasionally supplanted with frustrated advocacy of more militant action. Merely sermonising on the need to eradicate the bad habits of the Third Period was unlikely to have much success. Tom Wright provides a striking example of both the confusion and latent sectarianism in party ranks. When asked for the communist policy in the event of war, he urged a boycott of Italian trade. He then reflexively blurted out that ‘the mass movement against fascism must...change the imperialist war into a war for the overthrow of capitalism.’⁵⁵ That such a senior comrade could make a complete hash of party policy is remarkable yet symptomatic of a deeper misunderstanding shared by many comrades of the realities of popular front communism. That the CPA never intended to transform the Italian imperialist war into an Australian civil war was confirmed by the absence of any subsequent comments along similar lines.

Nevertheless, the CPA’s approach, despite its limitations, contrasted heavily to the isolationist policies of the ALP and the obedient adherence to British foreign policy carefully pursued by the Lyons government. This set the pattern for a half-decade. Reactions by advocates of collective security, isolationism and appeasement to the Abyssinian conflict were repeated, almost identically, during every subsequent international crisis during the 1930s, irrespective of the different circumstances of each conflict.⁵⁶ The CPA certainly did not think it acceptable that ‘the working class...remain neutral, as called upon by Mr. Lang’ during the Abyssinian, or subsequent, conflicts.⁵⁷ Neutrality ‘would be to the everlasting shame of the Australian working class if we agreed to such an infamous policy.’⁵⁸ Lang Labor’s *Labor Daily* had ‘lined up with Mussolini’ by its refusal to endorse sanctions.⁵⁹ But criticism did not unnerve Labor. It doggedly clung onto neutrality and rejected collectively enforced sanctions under the League of Nations. This did not prevent individuals like Maurice Blackburn and NSW state parliamentarian Donald Grant from joining with the CPA in calling for sanctions.⁶⁰ But Blackburn and Grant did not reflect Labor policy. The Abyssinian conflict exposed

⁵⁴ Andrews, *Isolationism and Appeasement in Australia*, pp. 37-38, alludes to confusion in communist ranks on how to respond to the events in Abyssinia. However, he does not provide anything to substantiate his assertion.

⁵⁵ *Workers’ Weekly*, 27 September 1935, p. 1.

⁵⁶ The reactions of disparate Australian groups to the international crises of the 1930s is the subject of Andrews, *Isolationism and Appeasement in Australia*.

⁵⁷ *Workers’ Weekly*, 10 September 1935, p. 1.

⁵⁸ *Workers’ Weekly*, 20 September 1935, p. 1.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4. See also the criticism in *Workers’ Weekly*, 26 November 1935, p. 4.

⁶⁰ *Workers’ Weekly*, 1 November 1935, p. 1 and 26 November 1935, p. 1.

unmistakably the fundamental philosophical chasm separating the revolutionary and reformist wings of the labour movement. The former held international class solidarity as a fundamental tenet. The latter eschewed international class solidarity because it might embroil Australia in a bloody conflict where there was no clear national interest. This elementary difference plagued Labor-Communist relations throughout the decade. It made any collective security scheme or united front predicated on interventionist resistance to the global menace of war and fascism impossible.

With the commencement of Mussolini's invasion, the CPA intensified its anti-war campaign. The Abyssinian cause was just and merited support. It was the struggle of an oppressed colonial people against rapacious imperialism. Lenin had always taught that in such wars, support for the oppressed people was justified. This was the ideological bedrock of communist policy on war, an intrinsic part of proletarian internationalism and reasserted at the 1935 party Congress. The CPA did not waver from this principle. The CC declaration on the invasion incorporated these sentiments. It graphically described the horrors of war, hubristically committed the Australian working class to support the Abyssinians and demanded the immediate application of sanctions and a boycott of Italian trade. '[T]heir's is a just war, which must evoke the sympathy and support of the working-class movement and the people of Australia.'⁶¹ A plethora of resolutions and protests in defence of Abyssinia flooded the *Weekly's* editorial office. In this conflict, protests and resolutions were backed up with action, albeit minor by comparison to later efforts for Spain. The following are a few examples. On 4 October a deputation from the NSW MAWAF (acting on the suggestion of the CC) which included communists and union officials Bill Orr and Charlie Nelson, called on the offices of the Italian Consul in Sydney. The deputation demanded a meeting with the Consul so that they may 'acquaint his government with our demands that all Italian troops and war machinery be immediately evacuated from Abyssinia.' The deputation was greeted with Consulate staff slamming shut the office door and police truculently telling them to 'get out.' Despite that, Orr somehow managed to obtain a brief yet fruitless interview with the Consul.⁶² Another example was in Melbourne, where the efforts of the local MAWAF met with similar disdain. However there was success in hoisting a 'Hands off Abyssinia' flag over the building housing the Consulate.⁶³ The CPA itself appears to have played a nominal

⁶¹ CC declaration and quotation from *Workers' Weekly*, 8 October 1935, p. 1.

⁶² Quotations and events at the Italian Consul in Sydney from *ibid.* The CC circular of 26th August encouraged protests against the Italian Consul. See CC CPA to all district committees, 26th August 1935, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 5).

⁶³ For the Melbourne events see *Workers' Weekly*, 11 October 1935, p. 1.

official role in these events. However, those comrades who participated received the encouragement of senior party figures.

The party was presented with more propitious opportunities to work on the basis of international solidarity during the Spanish Civil War. Since the demise of the monarchy in 1931, deep tensions plagued Spanish politics. The election of a popular front government in February 1936 sent tensions spiralling out of control. Chaos erupted with a military rebellion in July 1936. Loyalties swiftly crystallised. The rebels, led by General Franco, drew their support from conservative elements hostile to the popular front government, and the Republic itself, and could count on Hitler and Mussolini for backing. The left and other forces loyal to the government rallied around the Republic, with little assistance from the democracies. The much anticipated showdown between democracy and fascism had begun.

Reactions to these events varied in Moscow and Sydney. The Comintern did not state its official attitude to Spanish events until September 1936.⁶⁴ In contrast, the Australians bypassed the passive International and moved quickly behind the Spanish government. A *Workers' Weekly* editorial from July 1936 succinctly encapsulated the communist understanding of the motivations underpinning the rebellion: it was orchestrated by reactionaries who could not accept the concessions granted the working class by the popular front government. Hence the civil war was not only a war between fascism and democracy; it was also a class war where the most reactionary capitalists were attacking the toilers, intelligentsia and the petit-bourgeoisie. As the *Weekly* warned,

It is too horrible even to contemplate the results of victory for the reactionaries, not only for the Spanish masses, but for the forces of liberty the world over.⁶⁵

Clearly much was at stake in Spain. Working class unity for the defence of Spain was a familiar refrain during these years, but one that went unheeded. Labor's staunch isolationism precluded joint action. This was another setback for the popular front. Such was the importance of the Spanish cause that the CPA implored Labor (fruitlessly) to take

⁶⁴ For a discussion of the Comintern's internal debates on the attitude international communism should assume see Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 20-22. But Dallin and Firsov (eds.), *Dimitrov and Stalin*, pp. 45-48, show that Dimitrov acted much sooner by providing guidance to the Spanish Communist Party.

⁶⁵ *Workers' Weekly*, 24 July 1936, p. 2.

up the Spanish cause separately if united action was unpalatable.⁶⁶ It called for an end to the non-intervention policy, which was signed in August 1936 and bound major powers such as Britain, France, Russia, Germany and Italy not to interfere in the conflict. That Hitler and Mussolini were flouting the non-intervention agreement made its repudiation doubly important. Stalin's announcement that the Soviet Union was withdrawing from the non-intervention agreement after flagrant violation from the fascist states was welcomed.⁶⁷ In contrast, Western compliance with the policy was thought to only aid Franco and his fascist patrons. 'Does acquiescence in the foul activity of fascism in Spain, in Abyssinia, remove the war danger? Decidedly not,' cautioned the *Workers' Weekly*.⁶⁸ High quality weapons to match those provided the insurgents by Hitler and Mussolini were needed, not solemn declarations of fidelity to the arms embargo.⁶⁹ Money, medical equipment and food were urgently needed for the desperate Spanish people. These demands were issued, with some variation or shift in emphasis that reflected the needs of the hour, every week for the duration of the conflict in the pages of the *Workers' Weekly*. Despite the solid support of individuals, unions and other bodies, it had no effect in changing the government's appeasement policy or Labor's jealously guarded isolationism. The outcome of the civil war itself would either vindicate or vanquish the popular front as a tactic for resistance to fascism and war. Many also suspected the war's outcome would determine whether democracy or fascism would emerge triumphant at the conclusion of the contest for global hegemony. The stakes were too high for internationalists to remain neutral.

It is beyond the ambit of this thesis to provide a blow by blow account of the Spanish Civil War. It is the purpose of this thesis to demonstrate the extent of international solidarity extended to the Spanish republicans by Australian communists. What follows is a consideration of two examples of international solidarity with the Spaniards: the first is the role of Australians in the International Brigade that took an active part in the defence of the republic; the second is the activities of the Spanish Relief Committee (SRC).

⁶⁶ This plea grew shriller as the Spanish government's position deteriorated. For example see *Workers' Weekly*, 27 October 1936, p. 3.

⁶⁷ *Workers' Weekly*, 20 October 1936, p. 1 and *ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁸ *Workers' Weekly*, 29 September 1936, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Weapons were in fact being supplied by the Soviet Union. See Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 153-173.

That communists felt a deep sense of international solidarity with the Spanish plight is understandable in light of the contemporary political milieu.⁷⁰ The emotions stirred by the plight of the Spanish Republic actuated many Australians to volunteer their services for its defence. The Central Committee condoned this and even helped organise volunteers. This was the finest expression of international solidarity, where word was backed with deed, demonstrated by communists throughout the years under review in this thesis. The Central Committee said as much in a 1937 letter to Australians serving in Spain: ‘You [are] carrying out a sacred international duty [and] have brought great honour to the Australian labour movement and democracy.’⁷¹

The exact number of Australians who served in Spain is unknown. Reasonable estimates put the figure at approximately forty Australians, many of whom were communists. About fifteen made the ultimate sacrifice.⁷² Laurie Aarons later described these people as ‘working class patriots who combined nationalism and internationalism in their lives and activity.’⁷³ It is difficult to demur with his characterisation. Some, like Ron Hurd and Ted Dickenson took an active part in the fighting. Others, like Sam Aarons, drove trucks. Agnes Hodgson, Una Wilson, May MacFarlane and Mary Lowson went as nurses.⁷⁴ All were deeply upset by reports of civilian massacres perpetrated by the rebels. All yearned to help the Spaniards, in any capacity, to defeat fascism before it consumed yet another European country. One Australian volunteer, Aileen Palmer, did not require reports of atrocities to sway her to action – she was in Spain when the revolt began and witnessed first hand its horrors.⁷⁵ Volunteers decided to head to Spain shortly after news reached

⁷⁰ The following discussion will concentrate on the CPA’s response to the Spanish civil war. For an account with a broader ambit that considers reactions from other sections of the Australian community, see Amirah Inglis, *Australians in the Spanish Civil War* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987).

⁷¹ *Workers’ Weekly*, 12 November 1937, p. 1.

⁷² At the 12th CPA national congress in 1938, the report of the central committee recognised that many Australian International Brigadiers were communists. *Report of the Central Committee to the 12th National Congress, Communist Party of Australia, to be held in Sydney, NSW, November 1938* (Sydney: Central Committee, CPA, 1938), p. 7. Macintyre, *The Reds*, p. 299 provides the figure of forty Australians who served in Spain.

⁷³ Laurie Aarons, ‘Introduction,’ in *Australians and the Spanish Civil War: Two Historic War-Time Pamphlets* (Melbourne: Red Pen Publications, 1986), n.p. [p. iv?].

⁷⁴ Sam Aarons, ‘Reminiscences of the Spanish Civil War,’ *Australian Left Review*, no. 39 (March 1973), pp. 24-29. For the nurses motives in going to Spain and their send-off see *Workers’ Weekly*, 23-27 October 1936; *Spain: The Spanish People Present their Case: Australian Nurses’ Response, with Special Article by Nettie Palmer* (Camberwell, Vic: Spanish Relief Committee, 1936), pp. 8-10. For a contemporaneous account of Australians in Spain see Len Fox and Nettie Palmer, *Australians in Spain* (Sydney: Spanish Relief Committee, 1938).

⁷⁵ For Palmer’s Spanish experiences see Judith Keene, ‘A Spanish Springtime: Aileen Palmer and the Spanish Civil War,’ *Labour History*, no. 52 (May 1987), pp. 75-87.

Australia of French and English volunteers making their war to the war zone.⁷⁶ Within weeks, after a torrent of individuals from various countries had presented themselves for service, an International Brigade of foreign combatants was formed under the supervision of the Comintern.⁷⁷ Australians took an active part in the International Brigade, ‘the first united proletarian army of the world’ as Ron Hurd described it.⁷⁸ By October 1936, the *Workers’ Weekly* began to publish letters from Australians in Spain.⁷⁹ One of the first was from CPA member Jack ‘Bluey’ Barry, who described the *esprit de corps* among the Republic’s defenders: ‘The comradeship [sic] among them is wonderful and they keep telling me that they are all brothers and sisters now, and that I am one of them. I am proud that I am,’ wrote Barry three months before he made the ultimate sacrifice.⁸⁰ The tenor of his letter was reflected in numerous others. Such was the spirit of internationalism that motivated Australians to join the International Brigade, which was withdrawn from combat after September 1938.

The CPA played a highly important role in securing Australian recruits for the battlefields of Spain. Indeed, the Comintern had instructed West European communist parties to organise recruitment for the Brigades.⁸¹ The Australian party also assumed the role of chief recruitment officer. A glimpse into how it secured volunteers is found in a Central Committee circular from January 1938. The Central Committee called on district committees to secure twenty-five volunteers for service. Difficulties in ‘getting away and into Spain’ made open recruitment impossible. Nevertheless, the leadership expected a ‘stampede’ of volunteers. The party could not bear the financial burdens if this happened. Hence, stringent conditions were imposed. Volunteers needed to be between twenty to forty years of age, preferably (though not necessarily) Communist Party members, have no dependents, be fit and ‘the moral stamina to stand up to hardship and danger.’ It was also preferable that volunteers pay their own fare. Having satisfied these requirements, volunteers then required to make their own way to England, from where they would be

⁷⁶ The first reports in the CPA press of volunteers arriving in Spain are in *Workers’ Weekly*, 7 August 1936, p. 1.

⁷⁷ Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 22-23; McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, p. 141.

⁷⁸ *Workers’ Weekly*, 15 February 1938, p. 1.

⁷⁹ For a collection of letters by one Melbourne International Brigadier, see Lloyd Edmonds, *Letters from Spain*, edited by Amirah Inglis (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1985).

⁸⁰ *Workers’ Weekly*, 2 October 1936, p. 1. Reports of Barry’s death were contradictory. In *Workers’ Weekly*, 1 December 1936, p. 1, it was reported that Barry had died. But one week later, the *Workers’ Weekly*, 8 December 1936, p. 1, reported Barry alive, only to report him dead again, this time authentically, in *Workers’ Weekly*, 15 January 1937, p. 1. This typified the unreliability of the channels of communication that informed Australians of events in Spain.

⁸¹ Carr, *The Comintern and the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 22-23.

sent to Spain, all the while avoiding the clutches of authorities determined to sever the flow of volunteers.⁸²

The enthusiasm fostered by the Spanish struggle tempted the leadership to consider leaving a deeper Australian impression on the war. Such are the origins of the short-lived plan of creating an Australian battalion of the International Brigade. In the era of popular front communism, communist parties had to exhibit all the finest militant traditions of their 'own' national heritage. That Australians were scattered among various battalions, though found mainly in the British battalion, instead of flying the flag in a stand-alone battalion was an affront to those fine militant traditions. That Australians, too, were largely under the command of nationals from the old colonial master added insult to injury. Something had to be done to fix this intolerable situation. In October 1937, the Central Committee sought to rectify the problem by proposing the creation of an 'Australian International Brigade,' composed exclusively of Australian volunteers. Considerable funds were required for this proposal, which the leadership would oversee itself. Potential recruits were required to have prior military experience and be under the age of forty. Recruitment, however, was difficult. There was good reason to be concerned. Passports could be withheld if authorities found individuals intended to journey to Spain. Under such circumstances public recruitment was impossible. It was for this reason the leadership insisted such activity 'cannot be brought out directly,' thereby narrowing the potential recruitment pool to communists and close sympathisers.⁸³ The problems of finance compounded by recruitment difficulties meant the Australian International Brigade never came to fruition, leaving comrades to nurse their bruised national vanity in the British battalions.

Alongside sacrifice on the battlefield, Australian comrades exhorted the public to provide financial and other aid to Spain. In August 1936, party assistant secretary Dixon impressed upon an audience in Leichhardt the duty of Australian supporters of peace and democracy the service rendered to that cause by the Spanish anti-fascists. As Dixon told the audience,

The liberties for which the Spanish people are fighting are dear to
the working class in all lands and to keep fascism out of Spain will

⁸² All the above from CC CPA to all district committees, 7 January 1938, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 5).

⁸³ For the Australian International Brigade see CC CPA to all district committees, 2 October 1937, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 5).

help in the defence of democratic freedom in Australia. For the working class to remain neutral in this situation would be tantamount to rendering support to fascism. The Australian working class has an international responsibility which must not be sunk by any neutrality policy.⁸⁴

At the very least Australians could demonstrate their gratitude through financially aiding the Spanish struggle. Pressure was applied on the ACTU to establish a fund to assist the Spaniards. This fund was set up, but did not succeed in raising much money. It was overshadowed by the efforts of another group.

That group was the Spanish Relief Committee. It provided much practical internationalism to Republican Spain. Formed on the initiative of the MAWAF and ILD on 26 August 1936, its express purpose was raising money and other relief.⁸⁵ Donations were then sent to the Paris based Coordination Committee of Spanish Relief for distribution.⁸⁶ By the conclusion of the civil war, a purported £15000 had been raised by the SRC.⁸⁷ It claimed broad representation, yet communists, such as secretary P. T. Thorne, were its most enthusiastic workers and responsible for overseeing its day to day affairs. Among other forms of aid, it managed to send seven ambulances. After Franco's victory it shifted focus to the plight of Spanish refugees. It only ceased work with the CPA's proscription in 1940.⁸⁸

The SRC was highly active. Thousands of pounds were raised from individuals, a plethora of unions and other associations. Particular generosity was forthcoming in North Queensland, with its sizable Southern European population, where a disproportionately high amount of money was collected.⁸⁹ At only its second meeting on 2 September, the SRC resolved to send a Red Cross unit to the government controlled areas of Spain.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ *Workers' Weekly*, 25 August 1936, p. 1.

⁸⁵ P. T. Thorne Secretary ILD to unknown recipient, 24 August 1936, P. T. Thorne papers (ANU P15/5/1).

⁸⁶ *Workers' Weekly*, 1 July 1938, p. 1.

⁸⁷ *Workers' Weekly*, 18 July 1939, p. 2. Macintyre provides the figure of £17,000. Macintyre, *The Reds*, p. 299.

⁸⁸ P. T. Thorne, 'Spanish Civil War 1936-1939: Spanish Relief Committee. Paper Delivered to 3rd Year History Students,' Sydney University, 24 September 1985, P. T. Thorne papers (ANU P15/13), p. 9. Even prior to, though very much on the verge of the declaration of illegality, the CPA Central Executive had determined that the SRC be terminated in January 1940. Minutes of Central Executive, 16 January 1940, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 4).

⁸⁹ In addition to finance, North Queensland provided a large number of volunteers that served in Spain. See Diane Menghetti, 'North Queensland Anti-Fascism and the Spanish Civil War,' *Labour History*, no. 42 (May 1982), pp. 63-73.

⁹⁰ *Workers' Weekly*, 4 September 1936, p. 4.

After the necessary funds were raised, this along with four Australian nurses (Hodgson, Wilson, MacFarlane and Lawson) were sent in October 1936.⁹¹ The Red Cross unit was followed with the dispatch of ambulances in subsequent years.⁹² Such appeals provoked a self-sacrificing sense of solidarity. For example, a woman donated her wedding-ring to the collection for the Red Cross unit.⁹³ On a separate occasion a Queenslander donated £1, which amounted to his daily wage, and urged others to make similar sacrifices in defence of priceless freedom.⁹⁴

The SRC's work extended beyond the collection of monetary aid. It unsuccessfully sought to obtain appointments with the German Consul to express its opposition to Hitler's Spanish intervention.⁹⁵ It grilled the Italian Consul in Sydney, whose only response to a question about the alleged Italian participation in the 1937 bombing of Guernica was 'I have nothing to say.' Meanwhile, outside the Consulate, police stopped a demonstration of four SRC women dressed in heavy mourning garb with black veils covering their heads and faces. A placard held by the protestors read 'we mourn for the Spanish children killed by Italian fascist bombs.'⁹⁶ National speaking tours of various personalities, such as international brigadier Ron Hurd, were also among the gamut of activities arranged by the SRC.⁹⁷ Films on the conflict were shown. Clothing was sent and at least two knitting circles were established to knit socks to send to Spain.⁹⁸ Thousands of pounds were sent for the purchase of x-ray equipment, sterilisers and other medicines and equipment.⁹⁹ A Spanish food appeal was also organised and succeeded in raising thousands of pounds that were used to purchase and send a consignment of food to hungry Spaniards.¹⁰⁰ Collection stamps were another of the SRC's fundraising

⁹¹ *Workers' Weekly*, 20-23 October 1936. Before the nurses could depart, Thorne felt compelled to assure the Spanish Consul in Sydney of their political reliability. Secretary SRC to Spanish Consul-General, 15 October 1936, P. T. Thorne papers (ANU P15/1).

⁹² The SRC was raising funds for five new ambulances in 1938. See *Workers' Weekly*, 6 and 31 May 1938, p. 1.

⁹³ *Spain: The Spanish People Present their Case*, p. 9.

⁹⁴ *Workers' Weekly*, 29 January 1937, p. 1.

⁹⁵ *Workers' Weekly*, 6 October 1936, p. 4.

⁹⁶ The SRC meeting with the Italian Consul and the demonstration are from *Workers' Weekly*, 3 December 1937, p. 1.

⁹⁷ For some of Hurd's appearances see *Workers' Weekly*, 26 November 1937, p. 1; 11-15 February 1938.

⁹⁸ The knitting circles are reported in *Workers' Weekly*, 22 January 1937, p. 1.

⁹⁹ For example, see the report of £100 cabled to Spain for the purchase of medical equipment in *Workers' Weekly*, 29 January 1937, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ By March 1937, the Spanish food appeal had already raised over one-thousand pounds. See *Workers' Weekly*, 5 March 1937, p. 1. The SRC again cabled £1000 in March 1938 to Paris for the purchase of food and medicines to be sent to Spain. *Workers' Weekly*, 29 March 1938, p. 1.

initiatives.¹⁰¹ The Young Communist League supplemented the SRC's food appeals by holding dance parties in Sydney, where the entry fee was 1/- and a tin of milk with all proceeds sent to Spain.¹⁰²

Communists took a more direct role in other demonstrations. One example was at the Adelaide test cricket match in February 1937, where comrades showered leaflets over spectators and unfurled banners bearing the inscription 'Help Spain' from roofs around the ground.¹⁰³ Similar demonstrations were held in Sydney and Melbourne among Friday night shoppers. In Melbourne in March 1938, thousands of leaflets with a caricature of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain were showered over shoppers from the roof of the Myer Emporium.¹⁰⁴ Another example was the CPA, in conjunction with the SRC, organising Spain Week during February of every year. This was held during the anniversary of the election of the Spanish popular front government. The venture's aim was to stimulate solidarity with the Spanish Republic by recounting, through lecture or film, some of the gruesome atrocities perpetrated by Franco's forces. For instance, during Spain Week in 1938 Ron Hurd recounted the 'most unpleasant' experience of his life when he was forced to seek shelter in a shell hole between two dead English International Brigadiers. The Brigadiers had been killed by incendiary bullets and were slowly burning. Hurd capped off his oration with an appeal for financial aid to starving Spanish refugees. In subsequent days, he was followed by other speakers, among who were the passionate Spanish Consul-General Ricardo Baeza, the ubiquitous Miles and the lanky journalist son of a former Australian Prime Minister, John Fisher. All addressed specific aspects of the Spanish struggle. All impressed the importance of aiding the Spanish fight for democracy.¹⁰⁵ Without doubt, the CPA expended much effort to save Spanish democracy. Its efforts received official praise from Baeza, who on the eve of his return to Spain sincerely thanked communists: 'The communists have everywhere displayed the greatest enthusiasm and human solidarity in regard to the struggle of the Spanish people. My countrymen will be eternally grateful.'¹⁰⁶

But the party leadership was often dissatisfied with efforts on behalf of Spain. The irony of this is that the Spanish Civil War was the only notable example where international

¹⁰¹ For the commencement of this initiative see *Workers' Weekly*, 9 March 1937, p. 1.

¹⁰² For example see *Workers' Weekly*, 24 May 1938, p. 1.

¹⁰³ *Workers' Weekly*, 5 March 1937, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ For the Sydney and Melbourne demonstrations see *Workers' Weekly*, 29 March 1938, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Hurd's oration is recounted in *Workers' Weekly*, 15 February 1938, p. 1. For Spain Week 1938 see *Workers' Weekly*, 15-22 February 1938.

¹⁰⁶ *Workers' Weekly*, 4 October 1938, p. 1.

solidarity found a direct and tangible expression. It also challenges the consensus of historians and participants that, perhaps nostalgically, convey the impression of satisfaction with the Communist Party's endeavours for Spanish democracy.¹⁰⁷

Criticism came early. The CC reprimanded district committees for their 'unsatisfactory' response to the Spanish situation as early as August 1936.¹⁰⁸ In October 1937, the CC again criticised 'the serious neglect of the Spanish campaign' and indicted the neglect of the district committees by pointing out that not a single one had ordered any copies of the SRC pamphlet *From the Battlefields of Spain*.¹⁰⁹ This was followed by Sharkey's admission at the November 1937 Central Committee plenum that party work for Spain 'has been poor.'¹¹⁰ Then again in December 1937, with the Spanish situation deteriorating rapidly, the *Workers' Weekly* stated that 'Australian labour, Australian democracy have done too little...passive sympathy is not enough...' and urged that more SRC committees be established around the country.¹¹¹ Days later, the CC, referring to the inadequate amount of finances raised, reinforced the point by accusing party members of 'failure to comprehend our international duty and reflects upon our internationalism.'¹¹² Party members, it claimed, had shuffled a large share of the work onto the slender shoulders of the SRC. The party, not the SRC, had to be recognised as the most active defender of Republican Spain. In March 1938 it was Ron Hurd who criticised the level of financial support, arguing that the £5000 then raised did not reflect the importance of the Spanish war for the future of Australian democracy.¹¹³ In July 1938, Miles echoed Hurd's criticism: 'we cannot say that our efforts have brought to the results demanded by the magnitude of the task of freeing the world from fascism.'¹¹⁴ Many more such criticisms can be cited. Clearly the party leadership did not believe the effort for Spain sufficiently reflected the importance of the issue.

¹⁰⁷ For example see Fox, *Broad Left, Narrow Left*, pp. 38-40; Gibson, *My Years in the Communist Party*, pp. 48-51.

¹⁰⁸ CC CPA to all district committees, 29 August 1936, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 5).

¹⁰⁹ CC CPA to all district committees, 2 October 1937, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 5); *From the Battlefields of Spain: Vivid Pen Pictures from Australian Nurses* (Sydney: Spanish Relief Committee, 1937).

¹¹⁰ CC Plenum, 7 November 1937, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 4), p. 1.

¹¹¹ *Workers' Weekly*, 10 December 1937, p. 2.

¹¹² CC CPA to all party units/section committees/district committees/editorial boards, 14 December 1937, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 5), p. 1.

¹¹³ *Workers' Weekly*, 25 March 1938, p. 1.

¹¹⁴ *Workers' Weekly*, 15 July 1938, p. 1.

Nevertheless, criticism may be overly harsh in hindsight. The work of the party and its membership did meet the stipulates of proletarian internationalism. There was no greater demonstration of international solidarity in the history of communism than the example set by the International Brigade. Similarly, the thousands of pounds raised for the Spanish Republic also conveyed the deep sense of international solidarity. Despite shortfalls, the CPA played a crucial role on both accounts.

The party also devoted considerable attention to the issue of Spanish refugees. International solidarity was again a key driver. The situation in Spain was irredeemable by early 1939. The Republic was hurtling inexorably towards defeat. Australian International Brigadiers were already being welcomed home.¹¹⁵ Franco was about to receive formal diplomatic recognition from the democracies. Inevitably refugees (numbering in the hundreds of thousands) fleeing the vengeance of Franco's troops swamped what little remained of Republican Spain. With the imminent fall of Barcelona in January 1939, the *Weekly* insisted that neighbouring nations open their borders to refugees and urged the SRC to focus on providing them aid.¹¹⁶ It concisely stated the party's position in February 1939: 'The manner in which we Australians act towards the refugees from fascism is the test of our sincerity as democrats.'¹¹⁷

The SRC had little option but to shift its focus to refugees. It received appeals requesting various forms of assistance. For example, P. T. Thorne cabled £500 for the purchase of food after receiving an appeal on behalf of Spanish children.¹¹⁸ Another example was the decision of the Miners' Federation, via the SRC, to sponsor a child languishing in a French refugee camp.¹¹⁹ The decision of the federal government to accept 15,000 European refugees, which included but was not confined to Spaniards, attracted the party's criticism. Particularly objectionable was the discriminatory nature of the federal government's processes in granting refugees entry into Australia. The fact that a landing permit was required to enter and was only obtainable after a large deposit was paid was considered discriminatory against poorer, therefore working class, refugees. Furthermore, the bureaucratic barriers to entry were daunting. Thorne wrote to W. M. Hughes, then Minister for External Affairs, inquiring into the possibility of increasing the

¹¹⁵ For the reception of Australian veterans of the International Brigade see *Workers' Weekly*, 24 January – 21 February 1939.

¹¹⁶ *Workers' Weekly*, 20 January 1939, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ *Workers' Weekly*, 21 February 1939, p. 1.

¹¹⁸ *Workers' Weekly*, 7 March 1939, p. 1.

¹¹⁹ *Workers' Weekly*, 16 May 1939, p. 1.

representation of Spanish refugees among the quota of 15,000.¹²⁰ This proved unsuccessful. On the eve of the outbreak of World War II, Hughes wrote to Jessie Street, who was highly active in the SRC, expressing his personal sympathy ‘with the efforts of your council to help these unfortunate people’ but that he was unable to assist due to European tensions.¹²¹

Amidst the events in Spain, a simultaneous conflict was raging in China. The CPA’s policies during this conflict, the Sino-Japanese war, are another example of international solidarity. The recommencement of Japanese expansion in China in 1937 presented new dangers for the region. The developments forced the CPA to resume its contention that Australia’s fate was linked with that of China. A Japanese triumph would ‘be a grave menace to us’ because, once China was subjugated, Japan’s only realistic option for further expansion lay southward.¹²² For communists, disinterest in the outcome was near treason. Matters were made easier by political developments in China. The CPA welcomed the decision of the Chinese communists and KMT in mid-1937 to cease hostilities and unite against the Japanese.¹²³ It opened a new chapter in the struggle against Japan and was another example of the employment of the popular front tactic to resist fascism and war. Support could now be rendered, with a clear conscience, to a coalition at peace with itself. It obviated the confusing needs of the past to differentiate between the ‘treacherous’ KMT and the Chinese communists when explaining which side was waging the genuine struggle against Japanese imperialism. One side was always worthy of solidarity though not the other. But now, as both were committed to the same struggle, there was only one side in the equation.

As with the Spanish Civil War, the CPA exerted tremendous efforts for the defence of China. In March 1937, a CC circular signalled the leadership’s intention to instigate a propaganda campaign against Japanese expansion, where ‘a real hate and opposition of Fascism must be created.’¹²⁴ This soon transformed into a movement for the boycott of Japanese trade.¹²⁵ That Australian workers, by mining and loading metals likely to be

¹²⁰ P. T. Thorne to W. M. Hughes, 28 February 1939, P. T. Thorne papers (ANU P15/1).

¹²¹ W. M. Hughes to Jessie Street, 29 August 1939, P. T. Thorne papers (ANU P15/1).

¹²² *Workers’ Weekly*, 30 July 1937.

¹²³ *Workers’ Weekly*, 8 June 1937, p. 1.

¹²⁴ CC CPA to all district committees, 12 March 1937, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 5).

¹²⁵ The emphasis of the party’s work in this respect was detailed in a letter from the CC CPA to the Communist Party of China printed in *Workers’ Weekly*, 12 November 1937, p. 1. See also Len Fox, *Stop War on China!* (Melbourne: Movement Against War and Fascism, 1937), who presents a comprehensive case for a boycott.

converted into war equipment, were unwittingly assisting Japan kill thousands of Chinese led the CPA to this conclusion. The call for a boycott for such reasons was an expression of international solidarity. To be sure, international solidarity was not the sole justification for a trade boycott. Equally important was objection to the almost suicidal export of war materials to a country that openly proclaimed its desire to conquer Australia.¹²⁶ So an element of national defence was also a factor in the call for a boycott.

A boycott campaign had already come into fruition internationally. A message from the American Committee of Industrial Organisations calling for a boycott of Japanese trade was received by the *Workers' Weekly* and immediately endorsed. Indeed, the *Weekly* noted that an Australian boycott movement, instigated by communists with the help of union officials, was already in its embryonic stages. The *Weekly* stated that protests needed to take place against 'any manner of assistance, economic, financial or diplomatic, being rendered by capitalists and the governments of this country' to Japan.¹²⁷ It wasn't long before these took place. In Melbourne, a protest meeting addressed by Ralph Gibson and the general secretary of the ARU, J. F. Chapple, demanded a boycott of Japanese made consumer goods and called for an embargo on the export of all materials likely to be used for war purposes.¹²⁸ In Sydney, the NSW District Committee of the CPA organised a broadly attended 'Defend China!' rally, with participation from communists, Labor members and Australian supporters of the KMT. Speakers at the rally condemned Japanese aggression and the export, with the Lyons government's approval, of war materials to Japan.¹²⁹ By late September 1937, the Adelaide Trades and Labour Council and the federal council of the ARU resolved to support a boycott of Japanese trade.¹³⁰ The NSW Labour Council was next, boycotting goods and trade and organising 'Hands off China' committees.¹³¹ This culminated, weeks later, in the ACTU executive's declaration for a boycott of all Japanese trade.¹³² On this issue, the industrial wing of the labour movement had effectively declared itself on the CPA's side. But the ALP again refused to relinquish isolation, incurring ridicule and scorn from the CPA. As Miles wrote prior to the 1937 federal election, on the issue of a Japanese boycott, the ALP was

¹²⁶ This was the thrust of a radio address given by Dixon in October 1937. For this see *Communist Review*, vol. 4, no. 11, November 1937, pp. 11-13.

¹²⁷ The foregoing is from *Workers' Weekly*, 7 September 1937, p. 2.

¹²⁸ *Workers' Weekly*, 10 September 1937, p. 2.

¹²⁹ *Workers' Weekly*, 24 September 1937, p. 1.

¹³⁰ *Workers' Weekly*, 28 September 1937, p. 1.

¹³¹ *Workers' Weekly*, 5 October 1937, pp. 1 and 4. Tom Wright and Lloyd Ross were among the communists on the Hands off China committee.

¹³² *Workers' Weekly*, 2 and 12 November 1937.

‘not only out of step with Australian trade unions, but also with the world labour movement.’¹³³

Communist solidarity with the Chinese cause did not remain a paper commitment. It was complemented with action – whether by providing support to the Chinese crew of the *S. S. Silksworth*, who claimed mistreatment at the hands of the ship’s captain and refused to sail to Japan, or in organising rallies during Sydney’s peak Friday night shopping hours, publicising the justice of the Chinese cause and hopefully persuading shoppers to avoid Japanese goods.¹³⁴ Some of the activities reflected work done during the Spanish campaign. For instance, with the approach of the northern winter, the *Weekly* appealed on behalf of the Australian KMT for ‘clothes for China,’ a similar appeal issued by the SRC.¹³⁵ Another example was the plethora of meetings held around the nation advancing the case for the boycott.¹³⁶ The *Workers’ Weekly* praised the NSW Labour Council’s ‘fine example of... international solidarity’ in resolving to send a medical unit to China. Again drawing on the example of the SRC, the Labour Council, at the instigation of its communist delegates, planned to raise the necessary funds through public donations. By February funds had been raised. The unit, with bullet-proof steel walls, fifty beds, operating theatre and dressing room, was sent in October 1938.¹³⁷ The sale of Japanese onions was another issue that the CPA brought to public notice. The party urged consumers to avoid purchasing Japanese onions, the proceeds of which were thought to be financing the war. ‘Every Japanese onion sold is a bullet speeding to the heart of a little Chinese tot!’ proclaimed a dramatic handbill issued by the NSW state committee of the CPA.¹³⁸ The *Workers’ Weekly* praised the self-sacrificing decision of Chinese-Australian onion dealers to accept a loss in profit rather than sell these deadly onions.¹³⁹

However, again reminiscent of the Spanish campaign, the party leadership was dissatisfied with some efforts. In January 1938 it bemoaned what it perceived to be a lull

¹³³ *Workers’ Weekly*, 12 October 1937, p. 2. For an elucidation of the differing attitudes to foreign policy with respect to the Sino-Japanese war within the labour movement see Derek McDougall, ‘The Australian Labour Movement and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1939,’ *Labour History*, no. 33 (November 1977), pp. 39-52.

¹³⁴ For the *S. S. Silksworth* dispute see *Workers’ Weekly*, 19-22 October 1937; Vic Bird, *S.S. Silksworth Dispute of 1937: A Memoir* (Melbourne: May Day Committee, 1991). For the rally during Friday night shopping see *Workers’ Weekly*, 5 October 1937, pp. 1 and 4

¹³⁵ *Workers’ Weekly*, 22 October 1937, p. 3.

¹³⁶ A typical meeting is reported in *Workers’ Weekly*, 7 December 1937, p. 1.

¹³⁷ For the Chinese medical unit see *Workers’ Weekly*, 14-18 January, 4 and 15 February and 14 October 1938.

¹³⁸ ‘Don’t Buy Japanese Onions!’ <http://nla.gov.au/nla.ans-vn2597242-1-v.jpg>, sighted on 27 April 2005.

¹³⁹ *Workers’ Weekly*, 27 June and 18 August 1939.

afflicting the campaign. That Japanese-produced toys were still on sale and being purchased during Christmas 1937 was symptomatic of the perceived shortfall. ‘This situation calls for more strenuous activity on the part of the Communists to activate [sic] the labor [sic] movement and make the boycott of Japanese goods 100% effective.’ Applying pressure on organisations that had carried boycott motions, but had not brought them into effect, picketing shops handling Japanese products and even lighting bonfires of Japanese goods were some of the practical measures suggested to overcome the lull in activity.¹⁴⁰

This criticism contrasts with the most celebrated incident to emerge from the boycott, the Port Kembla pig iron dispute. It marked the culmination of months of agitation to cease Australian exports of war materials to Japan. Trade of this character had long been a cause of consternation for the CPA. In March 1937, Sharkey wrote about the dangers posed to Australian security by Japanese exploitation of the Yampi Sound iron ore deposits and the broader problem of Japanese economic penetration. If Australia were not enslaved economically, then the Japanese ‘made no bones about their plans to conquer Australia...’ by force.¹⁴¹

Then in January 1938, wharfies in Pyrmont refused to load a Japanese bound ship with five-hundred tons of bullion lead and tin clippings fearing its conversion into ammunition. The refusal to load originated from a dispute related to the amount of work the men were expected to perform under the award. It then transformed into a dispute with political connotations. This did not occur by accident; it was the outcome of months of agit-prop work carried out by the local communist fraction. The ship was forced to leave Sydney minus the metals. The CC immediately instructed all waterfront party units to initiate similar bans. The *Weekly* was delighted with this action and urged wharfies around the nation to follow suit. ‘To send such cargoes is a betrayal of Australia’s security. It is open

¹⁴⁰ The above from CC CPA to all district committees, 14 January 1938, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 5), p. 1.

¹⁴¹ Sharkey’s article and this quotation are from *Workers’ Weekly*, 9 March 1937, p. 2. See also the article in *Workers’ Weekly*, 19 March 1937, p. 2, that details the Japanese military threat in the Pacific and to Australia in particular. The Lyons government subsequently banned the Japanese exploitation of Yampi Sound. See Jon White, ‘The Port Kembla Pig Iron Strike of 1938,’ *Labour History*, no. 37 (November 1979), pp. 63-65; McDougall, ‘The Australian Labour Movement and the Sino-Japanese War,’ pp. 50-52.

treachery to the Australian people. It must be stopped.’¹⁴² Near identical incidents followed in other ports days later.¹⁴³

Attempts were made to break the boycott. In March, Labor leader John Curtin persuaded Fremantle wharfies to lift their ban on loading Japanese whaling vessels, much to the *Workers’ Weekly’s* fury.¹⁴⁴ In response, Jim Healey, the communist general secretary of the Waterside Workers’ Federation (WWF), called attention to the fact that the boycott was in complete harmony with the decisions of the ACTU and unions throughout the world. Moreover, the men were acting according to their consciences.¹⁴⁵ Compelling the men to lift the boycott, as Curtin had done, was unconscionable and contrary to the men’s sense of internationalism. Healey’s leadership on the issue encouraged Melbourne wharfies to impose a boycott days later.¹⁴⁶ In turn, the Lyons federal government decided to apply the draconian ‘Dog Collar’ Act, attempting to force the men to resume loading.¹⁴⁷ The men were not intimidated and the boycott continued. The *Weekly* applauded the wharfies’ courage, stating that they were ‘right in the vanguard of Australia’s fight for peace.’¹⁴⁸ But by July 1938, the threat of the Dog Collar Act forced the suspension of the boycott. Sharkey sardonically noted that Lyons was ‘very pleased’ before accusing the Prime Minister of treason.¹⁴⁹

Then in November 1938, the celebrated Port Kembla pig iron boycott commenced when wharf labourers refused to load the British steamer *Dalfram*. The events of this particular dispute have been sufficiently recounted elsewhere and need not be re-examined.¹⁵⁰ What will be considered here is the influence of proletarian internationalism on the CPA in its reaction to the pig iron dispute. The CPA greeted the news of the boycott by observing that the men’s action in denying Japan pig iron ‘really meets the defence needs of our

¹⁴² For the refusal to load lead and tin clippings and the *Weekly’s* reaction see *Workers’ Weekly*, 21 January 1938, pp. 1 and 4. For the work of the party at the Pyrmont wharf and the CC instruction to spread the ban see CC CPA to all district committees, 25 January 1938, (RC 495/14/305).

¹⁴³ The foregoing is from *Workers’ Weekly*, 28 January – 1 February 1938.

¹⁴⁴ *Workers’ Weekly*, 18 March 1938, p. 2. The boycott was reimposed in July 1938. See *Workers’ Weekly*, 1 July 1938, p. 1.

¹⁴⁵ *Workers’ Weekly*, 15 April 1938, p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ *Workers’ Weekly*, 22 April 1938, p. 1.

¹⁴⁷ *Workers’ Weekly*, 10 May 1938, p. 1.

¹⁴⁸ *Workers’ Weekly*, 13 May 1938, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ *Workers’ Weekly*, 8 July 1938, p. 3.

¹⁵⁰ Among the abundant literature on this subject see Mallory, *Uncharted Waters*, ch. 5; Rupert Lockwood, *War on the Waterfront: Menzies, Japan and the Pig-Iron Dispute* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1987); Greg Mallory, ‘The 1938 *Dalfram* Pig-Iron Dispute and Wharfies’ Leader, Ted Roach,’ *The Hummer*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Winter 1999), pp. 9-26; White, ‘The Port Kembla Pig Iron Strike of 1938,’ pp. 63-77.

country.’¹⁵¹ Yet the appearance of the federal government aiding Japan caused consternation in the minds of communists. Japan menaces Australia, so why aid its armament programme? Refusal to load war material destined for Japan was the most effective local measure wharf labourers could perform to guarantee both Australian defence and aid the Chinese cause. In the words of WWF Port Kembla branch secretary and communist, Ted Roach, ‘we would be saying as we loaded each piece of pig iron “this will kill a dozen Chinese...this will be thrown back at us in Australia in the form of shells and bullets.”’¹⁵² The government and profit hungry capitalists, especially those responsible for pig iron exports, could not be trusted with Australian defence. They had already sold out Australian security. Thus it was incumbent on the working class to take the lead in national defence. This was the basic rationale underpinning the CPA’s (and wharfies’) objection to Australian pig iron exports to Japan.¹⁵³

This rationale accorded fully with proletarian internationalism and the decisions of the 7th Comintern Congress. As discussed in chapter two, proletarian internationalism placed tremendous importance on communist support for the wars of colonised people against imperialist aggressors. This was undoubtedly the case in the Sino-Japanese war. On the point of international solidarity, Dimitrov argued at the 7th Congress that domestic actions could have an internationalist impact. The refusal to load war material onto Japanese bound ships exemplified Dimitrov’s point. Thus the CPA’s support for, and role of individual communists during, the pig iron strike conformed with the model of proletarian internationalism outlined in chapter two.

Amidst international turmoil, the CPA was provided with two notable opportunities to confront representatives of European fascism in Australia. The first was the visit of the mysterious German adventurer, Count Felix Von Luckner. The second was the visit of the Italian warship *Raimondo Montecuccoli*. Both incidents illuminate proletarian internationalism in that the CPA displayed solidarity with the workers of Germany and Italy and continued to adhere to the Comintern’s anti-fascist line.

The announcement of Von Luckner’s Australian tour in April 1937 was greeted with immediate hostility. His visit to promote ‘German ideals,’ which many interpreted to mean Nazi propaganda, caused considerable consternation among left wing circles. So

¹⁵¹ *Workers’ Weekly*, 18 November 1938, p. 1.

¹⁵² Gibson, *My Years in the Communist Party*, p. 75.

¹⁵³ See line of argument pursued in *Workers’ Weekly*, 29 November 1938, p. 2 and 24 January 1939, p. 2; *Communist Review*, vol. 6, no. 1, January 1939, pp. 1-3.

too did his technologically well equipped yacht, the *Seeteufel*, which was believed to be so equipped for the purpose of disseminating Nazi propaganda and conducting espionage. International tensions compounded the danger of propaganda, as explained by Len Fox: '[f]alse statements and deceitful propaganda can help to push us over the edge – as they did in 1914, at the cost of forty million lives.'¹⁵⁴ The NSW Labour Council, on the motion of communist Edgar Ross and vocally supported by Sharkey, decided to 'arouse the trade union movement to actively oppose and prevent Nazi agitation in this country.' On 20 May, the Council, with the full backing of the CPA, decided to launch an ultimately unsuccessful campaign to prevent Luckner from landing.¹⁵⁵ A plethora of unions and other groups followed the Council's lead and pledged their opposition to Luckner's tour.¹⁵⁶ Responding to correspondence from the Sydney District Committee of the CPA, J. A. Carrodus, secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Interior, wrote that the federal government could not deny Luckner entry on the basis of hearsay. However, Carrodus added that upon entry Luckner would be cautioned from making statements that 'might be to the detriment of law and order in Australia.'¹⁵⁷ The *Weekly* had long anticipated such a reaction and wryly noted that Kisch and Griffin were administered the dictation test while Luckner was warmly welcomed by Menzies.¹⁵⁸

Luckner did not arrive until May 1938, having gone to New Zealand first.¹⁵⁹ The *Workers' Weekly* was adamant the 'Sea Devil' should not land:

He's not wanted here! He proposes to conduct a two months lecture tour. To lecture on what? The beauties of the Nazi concentration camps? The virtues of the executioner's axe? The morality of fascist war? The 'principle' of smashing trade unions and torturing and imprisoning union members?¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ Len Fox, *Von Luckner: Not Wanted* (Sydney: National Council, Movement Against War and Fascism, 1938), p. 9.

¹⁵⁵ 'arouse the trade union movement' quote from *Workers' Weekly*, 13 April 1937, p. 1. For the Council's campaign to prevent Luckner from landing and the CPA's endorsement see *Workers' Weekly*, 25 May 1937, p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ For examples of some unions' protest resolutions see *Workers' Weekly*, 11 May 1937–15 June 1937.

¹⁵⁷ *Workers' Weekly*, 28 May 1937, p. 1. Indeed, the security services kept a close watch on Luckner. Margaret Bevege, *Behind Barbed Wire: Internment in Australia During World War II* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1993), pp. 3-4.

¹⁵⁸ *Workers' Weekly*, 13 April 1937, p. 1.

¹⁵⁹ For Luckner's tours of Australia and New Zealand see Carl Ruhen, *The Sea Devil: The Controversial Cruise of the Nazi Emissary Von Luckner to Australia and New Zealand in 1938* (Kenthurst: Kangaroo Press, 1988).

¹⁶⁰ *Workers' Weekly*, 22 April 1938, p. 1. See also Fox, *Von Luckner*, for arguments – which at times tended to personal denigration – why Luckner should not be permitted to land.

Luckner arrived amid a storm of protests organised by the CPA.¹⁶¹ One of its demonstrations was held among Sydney shoppers on 7 May 1938. Bystanders were treated to a chorus of slogans objecting to Luckner and Nazism, while two comrades were arrested for their efforts.¹⁶² Wherever Luckner went, protests followed. Such was the significance attached to harassing this symbol of German fascism that even Sharkey, Dixon and Docker were in attendance at demonstrations in Sydney.¹⁶³ To be sure, Luckner's behaviour (besides his amusing ability to bend coins between his fingers or tear apart thick phone directories) did little to mitigate hostility. His purported statement that KPD leader Ernst Thaelmann, who was languishing in a concentration camp, 'lives in a beautiful villa, with tennis courts and an ally for bowling' provoked the *Weekly's* retort that Luckner was not 'fit to wipe the boots, either of Thaelmann or any one of the Australians fighting in the International Brigades.'¹⁶⁴ Matters were made worse by police violence. The incident outside the Tivoli Club in Abbotsford (Victoria) in July 1938, where mounted police charged demonstrators leaving scores injured, heightened anger at both the police and Luckner. It also served to further suspicions that official sympathies lay with the Count.¹⁶⁵

Another direct confrontation with European fascism occurred during the February 1938 visit of the Italian warship *Raimondo Montecuccoli* to Melbourne. The confrontation was prompted by the interrogation and bashing of an Italian-Australian, Ottavio Orlando, by members of the crew on board the ship. Orlando was allegedly visiting the ship when he was abducted after being mistaken for an anti-fascist who had an altercation with rowdy members of the crew days earlier in Carlton.¹⁶⁶ Upon discovering the incident, anti-fascists swung into action. The British communist parliamentarian, Willie Gallagher, raised the assault in the House of Commons at the request of the CPA.¹⁶⁷ A demonstration was arranged on the initiative of Victorian comrades after news of the assault became public.¹⁶⁸ This took place on 17 February at Port Melbourne pier where the ship was moored. The demonstration was a huge success. Between four to five

¹⁶¹ See *Workers' Weekly*, 3 May 1938, p. 1, for an appeal to all party members and sympathisers to attend a protest at Luckner's arrival.

¹⁶² *Workers' Weekly*, 10 May 1938, p. 1.

¹⁶³ For example see *Workers' Weekly*, 10 June 1938, p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ *Workers' Weekly*, 24 May 1938, p. 1.

¹⁶⁵ For the Abbotsford events see *Workers' Weekly*, 12 July 1938, p. 1; Gibson, *My Years in the Communist Party*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁶⁶ The above is from *Workers' Weekly*, 22 February 1938, pp. 1 and 4.

¹⁶⁷ Fox (ed), *Depression Down Under*, p. 126.

¹⁶⁸ See the Political Bureau minute congratulating the initiative of the Victorian comrades. Political Bureau minutes, 18 February 1938 (RC495/14/305).

thousand were in attendance. An effigy of Mussolini was burned and speakers railed against fascist atrocities in China and Europe. The federal government's reluctance to punish the crew was marked as another sign of its fascist sympathies. That Orlando was interrogated in the presence of a Commonwealth Investigation Branch officer only heightened indignation. The government's failure to lodge a protest with the Italian embassy reflected, at best, 'an open capitulation to Italian fascism,' placing itself out of step with the anti-fascist sentiments of the Australian public aroused by the bashing.¹⁶⁹

Although confrontation with representatives of European fascism may have provided much satisfaction, it did little to halt the march to war. With the progression of every month during the second half of the 1930s, war seemed increasingly likely. Hitler's Germany was the obvious culprit of heightened tensions. Alarm at every provocative move manifested itself in the CPA's pronouncements. The German remilitarisation of the Rhineland in 1936 made European peace 'hang by a thread.'¹⁷⁰ British appeasement, with the alleged objective of instigating a Russian war, exacerbated the already precarious peace.¹⁷¹ Hitler's 1936 Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan was believed to have increased the aggressiveness of those two states and accordingly caused considerable concern. The NSW District Committee held a protest rally against it, where Sharkey, Dixon and Tom Payne emphasised its threat to peace and democracy.¹⁷² That the pact was explicitly directed against the Comintern was not necessarily the cause of anxiety; rather, it was believed to imperil peace in the Pacific and Australian security in particular. Collective security extended to the Pacific and with the participation of all Pacific powers, including Japan, was proffered as a guaranteed means of ensuring peace.¹⁷³ In subsequent crises, British appeasement only encouraged Hitler's ambitions. The CPA recognised the menace to peace posed by 'sleep walker' Hitler and ceaselessly warned of the perils of appeasement.¹⁷⁴ But few with power to influence policy were listening.

By 1938, focus shifted to Hitler's irredentist policies. With Spain and China already at war, it seemed Hitler was on the verge of unleashing a European conflagration with repercussions in the Pacific. Hitler's 1938 move into Austria was another step on this

¹⁶⁹ *Workers' Weekly*, 8 March 1938, p. 4. For a vivid participant's recollection of this incident see Fox, *Australians on the Left*, pp. 64-65. See also Macintyre, *The Reds*, p. 310.

¹⁷⁰ *Workers' Weekly*, 10 March 1936, p. 1.

¹⁷¹ *Workers' Weekly*, 17 March 1936, p. 1.

¹⁷² *Workers' Weekly*, 19 November 1937, p. 1.

¹⁷³ For the CPA's interpretation of the Anti-Comintern Pact and its call for collective security in response see *Workers' Weekly*, 1 December 1936, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ 'Sleep walker' Hitler phrase used in *Workers' Weekly*, 20 March 1936, p. 3.

path. 'The independence of a small country has been trampled underfoot,' declared the sombre *Weekly*.¹⁷⁵ Would Britain and France accept annexation of Austria? What would happen next? Britain and France acquiesced and Hitler turned his sights on Czechoslovakia. With Hitler's next move now clear, the CPA was obliged to determine a policy that would thwart the dictator's ambitions. This was announced at a Sydney rally in March 1938. Sharkey and Dixon stated that the British Empire and France, along with the Soviet Union and other countries had to guarantee Czechoslovakian independence.¹⁷⁶ Only a resolute stand of united nations would deter Hitler.

Suddenly, European tensions were overshadowed by Japanese incursions into Soviet territory in August 1938. Japanese soldiers unexpectedly opened fire on Soviet border guards and occupied two miles of Soviet territory. This incident set off alarm bells at the CPA's Sydney headquarters. Could it be that the long anticipated war had finally arrived? Reflexive solidarity with the socialist fatherland was immediate. The Political Bureau appealed to comrades to prepare for war at any moment. 'World peace hangs in the balance' and only mass protest could force the Japanese to desist from full scale hostilities.¹⁷⁷ Miles cabled Stalin pledging the unyielding solidarity of the Australian proletariat. The party leadership called for the intensification of the Japanese goods boycott and a revival of the momentarily stalled shipping boycott. A plethora of party branches, fraternal, and even 'lower deck RAN ratings,' expressed their objections in the form of protest resolutions and promises to defend Soviet Russia. The NSW Labour Council also registered its protest at the Japanese provocation.¹⁷⁸ A CPA organised rally in defence of Russia was held at Sydney Trades Hall. The normally phlegmatic Sharkey uncharacteristically failed to contain his emotions. His exhortation reflected the feelings of all communists on the question of Soviet survival. He boomed from the platform

Every man and woman, at your post! The land of Socialism; the greatest miracle in history, is being attacked! And by whom? By the scum of the earth, by bandits, by gangsters, by mass murderers, by the burners of books and the enemies of everything progressive, by

¹⁷⁵ *Workers' Weekly*, 15 March 1938, p. 1.

¹⁷⁶ For the rally see *Workers' Weekly*, 18 March 1938, p. 1. For the CPA's reaction to Hitler's annexation of Austria and its determination to defend Czechoslovakia see CC CPA to all district committees, 18 March 1938, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 5).

¹⁷⁷ For a brief account of the Japanese incursion and the Political Bureau appeal see *Workers' Weekly*, 5 August 1938, p. 1.

¹⁷⁸ For the CPA and Labour Council reactions see *Workers' Weekly*, 9 August 1938, pp. 1 and 4; *Communist Review*, vol. 5, no. 9, September 1938, pp. 1-6. For the protest resolutions see *Workers' Weekly*, 9-12 August 1938.

the fascist monsters who gloat over their butcheries of women and children!¹⁷⁹

Yet almost as soon as the clashes were known in Australia, resolution had been reached. The Soviets and Japanese settled the dispute peacefully.¹⁸⁰ No doubt the incident had an unnerving effect on communists. They were forced to face the possibility of an undeclared war on Russia, which despite decades of dire predictions came as a complete surprise. The Soviet position was hardly reassuring: it was isolated, surrounded with hostile powers and without its much craved for collective security agreement. It was a frightening predicament made worse by an event in Europe.

The pivotal event was, of course, the Munich agreement in September 1938. Neville Chamberlain, arriving home from Munich at the windswept Heston airport and brandishing that piece of paper, famously proclaimed that the Munich agreement had secured ‘peace in our time.’ This was one of the great misstatements of the 20th century. Hitler confirmed this in March 1939 by occupying the remainder of Czechoslovakia, placing Europe on the inexorable path to war. The wind may as well have blown away Chamberlain’s meaningless scrap of paper.

After Chamberlain concluded his infamous deal at Munich, indignation engulfed communists. It was the peace to end peace.¹⁸¹ Dixon offered his unambiguous perspective at the 12th CPA National Congress in November 1938: ‘IT MEANS WAR...IT MEANS FASCISM AND THE ENSLAVEMENT OF THE PEOPLE.’¹⁸² Before the Congress, Miles pondered ‘[h]ow long will it be before Chamberlain sells Australia?’ Such fears, while unrealistic and exaggerated, reflect concern at the Australian government’s approval of the British handling of the crisis. The British had ‘sold out’ democratic Czechoslovakia. Why would Chamberlain not do the same to Australian democracy? Hitler had, after all, demanded the restoration of New Guinea to German control. Again Miles reiterated the party’s standard response to international crises – that appeasement was a menace to world peace and that only a popular front and collective security could prevent war.¹⁸³ But the prospects for arriving at a collective security arrangement were

¹⁷⁹ *Workers’ Weekly*, 12 August 1938, p. 1.

¹⁸⁰ For the diplomatic moves to resolve the incident see *Workers’ Weekly*, 9-12 August 1938.

¹⁸¹ This was the title of a pamphlet by Len Fox on the Munich agreement. See L. P. Fox, *The Peace to End Peace: Czechoslovakia – What Next?* (Melbourne: League for Peace and Democracy, 1938).

¹⁸² *Workers’ Weekly*, 25 November 1938, p. 1. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸³ The ‘how long will it be’ quote and the rest of Miles’s statements are from *Workers’ Weekly*, 23 September 1938, p. 1.

shattered with the dismantling of Czechoslovakia, the remainder of which was occupied in March 1939. And the French popular front, the Comintern's exemplar, had unravelled earlier in 1938. And at any rate, Labor continued to ignore requests for cooperation with the CPA. Worse still, Hitler's hunger for expansion had not been sated.

After Hitler's absorption of the remainder of Czechoslovakia, Chamberlain finally approached Stalin in the hope of cobbling together an agreement that would deter Hitler. At the 18th CPSU Congress in March 1939, Stalin warned that his country would not be used 'to pull the chestnuts out of the fire,' or in other words, suffer large casualties so that the mistakes of Franco-British policy could be corrected. Nevertheless, he was willing to engage in discussions. Britain and France sent a team of negotiators to Moscow in April. The CPA was desperate to see any agreement and welcomed the prospect of Anglo-Franco-Soviet cooperation.¹⁸⁴ Negotiations bogged down in June and, having reached a stalemate, were abandoned in July. Recriminations for their failure started soon afterwards,¹⁸⁵ but were overshadowed by ensuing events. Nobody had an inkling of what was to follow, least of all the Communist Party of Australia.

What unfolded was a textbook example of Machiavellian politics and caused immense turmoil within the communist movement. The mortal foes, Hitler and Stalin, whose ideologies were polarised and whose mutual loathing was publicly flaunted, unexpectedly signed a pact of non-aggression on 23 August 1939.¹⁸⁶ It was an unimaginable breach of principle. It flew in the face of the Comintern's and Soviet Union's six year pretence to unyielding anti-fascism which had on its own gained communism hundreds of thousands of adherents and sympathisers. It dealt a mortal blow to the communist assertion that only they were fascism's true antagonists. The CPA's suspicions that Chamberlain would arrive at an agreement with Hitler, a suspicion evident in the *Weekly's* unequivocal editorial headline 'NO BARGINS [sic] WITH THE FASCIST WARMAKERS,' were

¹⁸⁴ For examples of the CPA's arguments refer to *Workers' Weekly*, 11 April and 23 June 1939; see also Sharkey's speech to the Central Committee in *Communist Review*, vol. 6, no. 7, July 1939, pp. 393-396.

¹⁸⁵ For examples see *World News and Views*, vol. 19, no. 37, 22 July 1939, pp. 805-806; V. M. Molotov, *On the Ratification of the Soviet-German Pact of Non-Aggression: Statement by the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the U.S.S.R. and People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs at the Special Fourth Session of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., August 31, 1939* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1939), pp. 5-8; E.W. Campbell (ed.), *Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact Explained* (Sydney: Central Committee, Communist Party of Australia, 1939), pp. 2-13. For a discussion of the events surrounding the negotiations see Anthony Cave Brown and Charles B. MacDonald, *On A Field of Red: The Communist International and the Coming of World War II* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1981), pp. 500-502.

¹⁸⁶ For a description of the events leading to the non-aggression pact see Brown and MacDonald, *On A Field of Red*, pp. 503-507.

entirely unfounded.¹⁸⁷ As those words were going into print, Molotov and Ribbentrop were putting the final touches on their non-aggression pact. Stalin, not Chamberlain, had embraced Hitler and opened the door to war.

Rather predictably, the CPA found justification for Stalin's cynical behaviour. The pact was necessary because the discussions between the French, British and Russians had failed. Moreover, it had 'forced [Hitler] to seek terms' and enabled Stalin to thwart Chamberlain's strategy of turning Hitler eastwards.¹⁸⁸ Therefore, so the argument went, the pact had ensured peace. Suggestions that the pact represented a breathtaking *volte face* in Soviet foreign policy were strenuously denied.

The Soviets agree to sign a non-aggression pact; but that does not mean, and could never mean, that they are prepared to give Hitler a free hand to conquer the small states of Europe....It does not and could not mean that the Soviet Union agrees to a new 'Munich'; to leave Hitler with a free hand for new and greater aggressions.¹⁸⁹

We now know that the secret clauses of the Hitler-Stalin pact provided Hitler just that sort of freedom. The party leadership was faced with the unenviable task of explaining the pact after years of unrelenting anti-Nazi propaganda. Sharkey and Dixon took this task up themselves, seeking to justify it to the public, and more importantly to incredulous comrades.¹⁹⁰ Most were stunned by the pact; but still thought a military showdown between fascism and communism inevitable.¹⁹¹ Soviet security was in jeopardy; now was not the time to question the wisdom of the Soviet leadership. Unlike other communist parties, most Australian party members accepted Soviet sophisms, either enthusiastically, reluctantly or naively.¹⁹² For a few, it was too much; they soon found themselves out of the party. For those left, the war brought further turbulence.

¹⁸⁷ *Workers' Weekly*, 22 August 1939, p. 2. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸⁸ Quotation from *Workers' Weekly*, 25 August 1939, p. 1. For the most comprehensive justification of the Hitler-Stalin pact published by the CPA see Campbell (ed.), *Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact Explained*.

¹⁸⁹ *Workers' Weekly*, 25 August 1939, p. 1.

¹⁹⁰ Accounts of some of Sharkey's and Dixon's public engagements can be found in *Workers' Weekly*, 29 August 1939 – *Tribune*, 1 September 1939. On 1 September 1939, the *Workers' Weekly* changed its name to *Tribune*.

¹⁹¹ Taft, *Crossing the Party Line*, p. 37.

¹⁹² For the reactions of European communists see Paolo Spriano, *Stalin and the European Communists* (London: Verson, 1985), ch. 9.

The CPA During the Imperialist War

Hitler's invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, followed with the British and French declaration of war on Germany on the 3rd, triggered the Second World War. Britain's involvement meant Australia was also at war. Enthusiasm was minimal. Prime Minister Menzies considered it his 'melancholy duty' to inform the nation that it was at war. There was no stampede to enlist. And there was no immediate threat to Australian national security. For the time being, it was business as usual.

The CPA's support for the war was far from enthusiastic and reflected the nation's ambivalence. In an underwhelmed circular dated 4 September 1939, the party pledged its support for the war, but significantly added

[T]he present war is an imperialist war...The working class, whilst supporting the war of the Polish people, must have its own independent position. It must not become the willing tool of the reactionary capitalists.¹⁹³

The importance of this passage cannot be overstated. It was indicative of the party's confusion. How could it support an 'imperialist war' when opposition to such wars formed a crucial component of its ideology? Clearly it drew the wrong conclusions. Yet even at this early stage there was, albeit a privately held, sense that the party would have preferred to oppose the war. But opposing a war against fascism was difficult in light of the anti-fascist undertakings of the 7th Comintern Congress. Were its decisions still valid? The answer to this question was unclear during those hazy days in early September. The Comintern needed until 9 September to formally announce its position. Without any directives from the general staff of the world communist party, the CPA, despite misgivings and uncertainty, opted to continue with the anti-fascist line of 1935. By the end of September, guarded support had turned into forthright opposition.

In the meantime, the CPA issued a manifesto which characterised the war a just war for Polish independence. German fascism was responsible for the war, though British appeasement had encouraged Hitler's ambitions. Only the non-aggression pact had

¹⁹³ Untitled circular, 4 September 1939, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 5), p. 3.

prevented Hitler from extending his war to Russia. But for the war to be entirely just, continued the manifesto, it had to be fought without annexations and indemnities. Another Versailles was out of the question. Equally important was the observation that the war against fascism would be compromised if democracy at home were dismantled. For this reason, the CPA demanded a check be placed on the war-time powers bestowed upon the federal government and that civil liberties and living standards be ensured at all costs. As for the Menzies government, its record of appeasement meant it could not be trusted with conducting an anti-fascist war. The Menzies government needed to be removed if the fight was to assume truly anti-fascist dimensions, signifying the party's de facto decision for a 'war on two fronts,' against Hitler and Menzies. Unity of the labour movement was essential to achieve victory on both fronts. Therefore, the CPA reiterated its determination to seek a formal united front with the ALP.¹⁹⁴ The manifesto was effectively a continuation of the popular front from the 1930s.

With the federal government's decision to form a volunteer expeditionary force, the party advised all fit and available members to make themselves available for service.¹⁹⁵ This, however, should not be seen as denoting enthusiasm for the war. Rather, it was done in line with the party's long established principle of discouraging what were thought to be futile acts of individual resistance. Lenin had similarly frowned upon such behaviour, preferring energies be directed to mass work. It was for this reason that Eric Aarons decided to enlist, even after the party had switched to its anti-war position.¹⁹⁶

Thus, by mid-September all the elements of proletarian internationalism were met by the CPA. Confusion on the war's character notwithstanding, the party was within bounds to support a war it believed to be for the defence of a smaller nation against the aggression of a larger power while maintaining the struggle against the reactionary government at home, or to put it succinctly, a war on two fronts. Thus, support for the Poles was also a sign of international solidarity. The party continued to back India's right to independence, meaning it was not prepared to compromise on colonial policy even at a time of war.¹⁹⁷ However, the organisational element of proletarian internationalism, largely dormant since 1935, had not spoken. When it did, it turned everything on its head. It is to the Comintern and its war policy that we next shift our focus.

¹⁹⁴ For the CPA's policy at the commencement of World War II see *Tribune*, 5 September 1939, pp. 1 and 3. See also *Communist Review*, vol. 6, no. 10, October 1939, pp. 577-579 and 633-640.

¹⁹⁵ *Tribune*, 19 September 1939, p. 1.

¹⁹⁶ Eric Aarons, *What's Left?*, p. 41.

¹⁹⁷ For the party's continued support for the Indian struggle see *Tribune*, 15 September 1939, p. 2.

Like the CPA, the war left the Comintern confused. After two days of discussion, which in itself is a sign of division, the ECCI secretariat entrusted Dimitrov, Manuilsky and Kuusinen with drafting a document stating the Comintern's war policy. In the meantime, Dimitrov instructed Thorez not to announce the French party's 'unqualified support' for the Daladier-Bonnet government. Instead, Dimitrov hinted that the French assume a position analogous to the British party (which was advocating a war on two fronts, against Hitler and Chamberlain) and asked Thorez to relay to Pollitt the ECCI's approval.¹⁹⁸

Dimitrov's seeming preference for the war on two fronts was not the end of the matter. The ECCI continued to encounter 'exceptional difficulties' (which again indicates division) in setting out the tasks of its sections. On 5 September, Dimitrov succumbed to his impulsive deference and sought instructions from Stalin. He wrote to the CC CPSU secretary, Andrei Zhdanov, requesting Stalin's direct intervention. On 7 September, at a meeting attended by Dimitrov, Zhdanov and Molotov, Stalin clarified matters. He characterised the conflict as an imperialist war between two groups of capitalist states for a re-carving of the world, in which 'we see nothing wrong in their having a good hard fight and weakening each other.' According to Dimitrov, Stalin added, '[i]t would be fine if at the hands of Germany the position of the richest capitalist countries (especially England) were shaken.' Stalin also conceded that the non-aggression pact was aiding Germany, but that 'next time, we'll urge on the other side.' In the meantime, 'communists in the capitalist countries should be speaking out boldly against their governments and against the war.' Thus the hitherto distinction between democratic and fascist states had lost its previous meaning. Both capitalist camps were fighting for imperialist ends, invalidating the popular front tactic, which was to be discontinued. Stalin cynically dismissed the Polish fight, saying 'the annihilation of that state under current conditions would mean one fewer bourgeois fascist state to contend with.' He then alluded to the possibility of socialism spreading to Poland and suggested the ECCI publish a manifesto denouncing the war.¹⁹⁹

This the ECCI did with the publication of its 'short thesis' on 9 September. It enjoined all communist parties to oppose the war, exposing its unjust, imperialist character. It also instructed the parties to launch an offensive against social democracy and named the

¹⁹⁸ Banac (ed.), *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, pp. 114-115.

¹⁹⁹ The 7 September meeting from McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, p. 193 and *ibid.*, p. 115.

communist parties of France, Britain, Belgium and the United States as having embarked on a line at odds with the Comintern.²⁰⁰ The thesis was sent to the communist parties, though significant delays were experienced in its delivery due to the disruption of communications engendered by war. The CPGB only received it on 25 September, after the return of the British representative to the Comintern, David Springhall.²⁰¹ The means by which the Australian party was supposed to come in possession of the 'short thesis' is unclear. If the British timeframe is any guide, then it is likely that the CPA had not received the 'short thesis' until sometime between late September and mid-October.

Clearly the concept of proletarian internationalism could not have been further from Stalin's mind. Here is the ultimate example of the Comintern meekly taking instructions from Stalin, irrespective of whether they were in the interests of the Comintern and its national sections. That the Comintern subverted all else in the interests of the Soviet Union and its non-aggression pact with Hitler is beyond doubt. However, this was not necessarily the case for individual communist parties. An emphasis on obedience to the Comintern and Soviet foreign policy tends to neglect the importance of other factors and, indeed, the pre-existing disposition of communist parties towards the war. Not all parties were enthusiastic supporters. We have already seen the ambivalence of the Australian party reflected in its 4 September characterisation of the war as imperialist, before any pronouncement from Moscow. The ambivalence of the Australian party was such that a switch to opposition to the war seemed possible at some point. Certainly the news of the Comintern's anti-war stand hastened this movement.

By late September the CPA stood in opposition to the 'imperialist war.' Various developments, including, though by no means limited to, the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland and the joint German-Soviet peace proposal, brought about the party's opposition. As shall be discussed shortly, principle was equally, if not more, significant in actuating the party's position. The proposition that the CPA succumbed to 'orders from Moscow' commanding it to oppose the war is overly simplistic. Moscow's information on the situation in the Australian party was sketchy; it was in no position to issue the Australians with 'orders.' What was belatedly made clear in Comintern headquarters was that the Australians, like other parties, were, or had been, incorrectly supporting the war. It was not until 3 November that the Comintern first attempted to correct the CPA's error when an unknown official composed a document establishing the correct line for the

²⁰⁰ McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, pp. 193-194.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

Australians.²⁰² By this time the CPA had already been opposing the war for about a month. Moscow's intervention in this instance was belated, did not change the CPA's line but tailed behind it and at most only elicited self-criticism. This is not to minimise the significance of the Comintern or the Soviet Union. Solidarity with the first workers' state was unquestionably important, especially in a time of war. The news that Moscow sanctioned communist opposition to the war provided the CPA with the opportunity to confidently proclaim its opposition, without fear of rebuke or ostracism in the international communist movement.

But deep convictions held by Australian Communists were highly significant in arriving at the decision to oppose the war. None was more important than the principle of opposition to wars between capitalist states, a notion drilled into communists for twenty years at countless congresses, speeches and publications. A repeat of 1914 had to be avoided at all costs. Serious questions, significant in the context of the day and without the benefit of hindsight, made the Allied claim to be fighting an anti-fascist war questionable and continued communist support for the war untenable. For instance, how was it possible for this to be an anti-fascist war when the governments prosecuting it had been willing accomplices in Hitler's rearmament drive during the 1930s?²⁰³ Why had the Allies not lifted a finger to aid Poland? Why were the Allied armies inactive on the Western front? Were the Allies serious about an anti-fascist war, or just waiting to turn their sights on Russia? If so, why had the PCF been proscribed and its democratically elected deputies arrested?²⁰⁴ And if Britain were sincere about the rights of small nations, why had it not promised to grant independence to at least one of its Empire's constituent nationalities? When these awkward questions are taken in conjunction with the party's cool reaction to the war and understandable distrust of conservative governments, it is not surprising the party had independently determined to oppose the war prior to the Comintern's attempted November intervention. Russian foreign policy only added momentum to this tendency. As far as the party was concerned, there was an unbridgeable credibility gap between the stated war aims of the Allies, their track records and their activities on the battlefield. Indeed much of the criticism levelled at Allied governments was a continuation of popular front period criticism. That the CPA initially

²⁰² For the unknown Comintern official's attempt to set the Australians on the correct path see 'Proposals for the CPA,' 3 November 1939 (RC 495/14/308).

²⁰³ This was an important point in the Victorian comrades self-criticism for the 'mistake' of supporting the war in its opening weeks. See 'Minutes State Committee meeting, Sunday, 17th December 1939,' CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 4).

²⁰⁴ For the events concerning the PCF see Adereth, *The French Communist Party*, p. 93.

supported the war could be ascribed to the anti-fascist exuberance of the pre-war years and the failure of its leading officials to practice sober Marxist-Leninist reasoning on the aims of belligerent governments.²⁰⁵ If the Allies bourgeois governments were not serious about prosecuting an anti-fascist war, so went the logic, then the conflict could only have as its aim the preservation of the status quo. That the anti-war line was accepted with minimal dissent is indicative of the membership's support for that policy; it is clear the anti-war line was not foisted onto a party rent down the middle on the war question. Thus, for many, it seemed that the Allies, content with the division of the world's colonies and markets after the First World War, were fighting to protect the gains of 1918 from the upstarts Hitler and Mussolini.

This policy received its first official public endorsement from the Comintern in its November manifesto on the 22nd anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution. It labelled the war an 'unjust, reactionary imperialist war' for a redivision of the world, a war which 'the communists have always fought against.' As far as who was to blame for the war, all belligerents were equally culpable. There was no longer any distinction between fascist and democratic states. All were equally imperialist and must be opposed equally. Only working class unity from below could bring about the speedy termination of hostilities. The leaders of social democracy were bankrupt through their support for the war and could not be trusted. Thus any dealings with social democratic politicians, whether of left or right factions, were forbidden. The broad-based popular front tactic was also no longer permissible. The communists had to do all in their power to stop the war.²⁰⁶ The party, which had called on its fit and available men to join the army, now condemned compulsory military training (though in accordance with Leninist thinking did not urge individuals to refuse military training) and Australian involvement in overseas battlefields.²⁰⁷ The CPA confessed to its mistake in November 1939, perhaps the only meaningful consequence from the Comintern's document of 3 November. A failure to sufficiently comprehend the implications of the failed Anglo-Franco-Soviet negotiations

²⁰⁵ This was also the stated view of the CPA. See Sharkey, *An Outline History of the Australian Communist Party*, p. 36; Campbell, *History of the Australian Labour Movement*, pp. 153-154.

²⁰⁶ *Tribune*, 7 November 1939, pp. 1-2. The line of the November manifesto was later elaborated at length by Dimitrov, though with no alterations to Comintern policy. See Georgi Dimitrov, *The War and the Working Class* (Sydney: Central Committee, Communist Party of Australia, 1940).

²⁰⁷ *Tribune*, 27 October 1939, p. 1. The *Tribune* advised young men in November 1940 not to boycott military training, a policy in place since the 7th Comintern congress. See *Tribune*, 7 November 1940, p. 7.

and an underestimation of the significance of the Hitler-Stalin pact were the underlying causes of the party's error.²⁰⁸

The political gymnastics performed during the war's early months provoked only minor repercussions among the membership. Only a handful left. The most notable departures during the twenty months the CPA opposed the war were Rawling, Lloyd Ross and Guido Baracchi.²⁰⁹ Miles scornfully dismissed these apostates' worth to communism, writing that their absence could only strengthen the party.²¹⁰ Perhaps Len Fox best summed up the emotions of the rank and file:

We had lost, we were left floundering in a dilemma. Because we were anti-fascist, we wanted to support the war against Hitler. Because it was led by men like Chamberlain who might turn the war against the Soviet Union...we felt we could not support the war.²¹¹

In a time of war international solidarity with, and defence of, the first socialist state was a concern above all else. It overrode all other aspects of proletarian internationalism.

The relative peace in the Australian party is contrasted by the situation in the CPGB. There the turmoil reached the party's upper echelons. Unlike the Australian party, most of the British leadership, led by the popular Harry Pollitt, were enthusiastic supporters of the war from the outset. But a more sober grouping, centred around orthodox Stalinists R. Palme Dutt and William Rust, received the war with much more circumspection. When British representative at the Comintern, David Springhall, returned from Moscow on 25 September bearing news of the Comintern's war policy – news Pollitt was attempting to suppress – a majority of the leadership swung behind Dutt, Rust and Springhall. Pollitt resisted; his position became untenable and he was duly removed from the general

²⁰⁸ *Tribune*, 8 December 1939, p. 3. See also 'Minutes State Committee meeting, Sunday, 17th December 1939,' CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 4) and CC CPA to all state/district committees and branches, 29 November 1939, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 5). The latter source disproves Curthoys' assertion, based on problematic Comintern documents that were ill informed on the situation in Australia, that self-criticism was conducted as late as 8 December 1939. See Curthoys, 'The Comintern, the CPA and the Non-Aggression Pact,' p. 10.

²⁰⁹ For Ross see Holt, *A Veritable Dynamo*, ch. 6; For Rawling see Stephen Holt, 'The Case of James Rawling, Ex-Communist,' *Quadrant*, vol. 33, no. 12 (December 1989), pp. 60-64 and John Pomeroy, 'The Apostasy of James Normington Rawling,' *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 37, no. 1, (1991), pp. 21-38; for Baracchi see Sparrow, *Communism: A Love Story*, pp. 238-258. Bill Orr and Charlie Nelson also left the party around this time but not for political reasons. See generally Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 386-389.

²¹⁰ *Communist Review*, vol. 6, no. 12, December 1939, p. 714.

²¹¹ Fox (ed), *Depression Down Under*, p. 129.

secretaryship.²¹² Nothing of this sort took place in the Australian party. Here there were very few comrades who at the war's outset displayed the sort of enthusiasm shown by Pollitt. This raises a question relevant to this thesis: was the CPA's opposition to the war congruent with the model of proletarian internationalism developed in chapter two?

The CPA's war policy was congruent with proletarian internationalism. Sharkey proudly asserted at the CPA's 13th National Congress in 1943 that the CPA had 'demonstrated its adherence to the Leninist line in a reactionary war.'²¹³ After the collapse of Poland, the only belligerents left were the bourgeois 'imperialist' governments of Britain and its Empire, France and Germany. As shown in chapter two, Lenin emphasised that a war's character be judged by the class prosecuting it; that bourgeois governments were prosecuting this war, made it a bourgeois conflict where the working class had no interest in the outcome. Moreover, communists believed all were fighting for the preservation or extension of spheres of interest or empire. None could reasonably claim to be fighting for the rights of small nations while possessing extensive colonial possessions. Bearing this in mind, communists were merely upholding Lenin's stipulate described in chapter two: that it was impossible to support the right of independence for small nations when the oppressor was not one's 'own' government, while turning a blind eye to the imperialist possessions held by one's 'own' government. Thus, pursuing this logic led one to the inescapable conclusion that the war was an unjust imperialist conflict where working class involvement was not justified.

Leninist ideology may have coloured the CPA's war policy. The same, however, could not be said about strategies employed by the party for the termination of the war. In the First World War, Lenin did not differentiate between the capitalist government of the Tsar, the Kaiser or the King. He deprecated the 'lesser evil' theory and raised revolutionary defeatist slogans. In 1915, Lenin also wrote: 'A revolutionary class in a reactionary war cannot but "wish the defeat of its Government."²¹⁴ However the CPA did not wish its government defeat on the battlefield. It did not raise revolutionary defeatist slogans. Even at its most bitter, when discussing the prospect of a Pacific war involving Australia, the CPA asserted there would be no 'capitulation to the foreign

²¹² For the turmoil in the CPGB see Attfield and Williams (eds.), *1939: The Communist Party of Great Britain and The War*; King and Matthews (eds.), *About Turn: The British Communist Party and the Second World War*; Beckett, *Enemy Within*, ch. 6; Morgan, *Against Fascism and War*, ch. 5; Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt*, ch. 6; Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, pp. 108-109; Johnstone, 'The CPGB, the Comintern and the War, 1939-1941: Filling in the Blank Spots,' pp. 27-33.

²¹³ Sharkey, *An Outline History of the Australian Communist Party*, p. 37.

²¹⁴ *Communist Review*, vol. 2, no. 8, August 1935, p. 16.

imperialists.²¹⁵ It contented itself with calls for a peace conference to end the war. It then changed tack, after the invasion of France and the Low Countries, and agitated for the accession of a People's Government, which would prosecute a people's war if further peace proposals were refused. The circumstances were not the same as those that prevailed during the First World War. Dixon's reasoning for rejecting revolutionary defeatism at the war's outset was valid for the duration of the conflict:

The slogan 'transform the imperialist war into civil war' which had such revolutionary content during the imperialist war of 1914-1918, if raised in the circumstances of today, would prove reactionary, as it would serve the ends of German fascism.²¹⁶

In other words, Dixon feared the possibility of a fascist victory. While some of the Bolsheviks' strategies of 1914-1917 were deemed inappropriate in 1939, some of their other strategies were adopted by the CPA. One example, also established at the party's 1935 Congress and consistent with Leninist ideology, was the party's refusal to take sides. The party discerned no difference between the capitalist governments of Hitler or Menzies or Churchill. The peace-time distinction between 'good' and 'bad' imperialist governments was engulfed by the flames of war. With all belligerents believed to pursue imperialist objectives, the line articulated at the 11th CPA congress, which held that communists would oppose *any* imperialist war (i.e. war between two major capitalist powers), now came into force. The party's opposition to this type of war had been stated continuously throughout the 1930s. Thus the decision to oppose this war was not so drastic a rupture with the pre-existing policy. Now, as in 1914, all capitalist governments were equally instruments of class rule, all were simply imperialist and all would be swept away by the tides of history. But unlike 1914-1918, the prospect of a Nazi victory was too frightening.

Communists were not alone in advocating peace. Unions under communist leadership followed the party's lead and called for peace.²¹⁷ So too did the NSW Labour Council.²¹⁸ Labor parliamentarians E. J. Holloway, William Maloney, Frank Brennan and E. J. Ward

²¹⁵ Mason [Miles] and McShane [Sharkey], *The Coming War in the Pacific* (Sydney: Communist Party of Australia, 1940), p. 12.

²¹⁶ *Communist Review*, vol. 6, no. 10, October 1939, p. 636.

²¹⁷ For example see the ARU and WWF declaration in *Tribune*, 10 October 1939, p. 1 and 24 October 1939, p. 1 respectively.

²¹⁸ *Tribune*, 5 December 1939, p. 3.

also lent their voices for a cessation to hostilities.²¹⁹ The CPA gleefully welcomed the anti-war utterances of these Labor members. But in doing so it was at variance with the Comintern line expressed in its aforementioned November manifesto. During this phase of the war, the Comintern forbade any association with the politicians of social democracy, irrespective of whether they hailed from its left or right wings. That the CPA continued to cooperate with the Labor left suggests that it was not prepared to embrace the sectarianism the Comintern appeared to be heading towards.²²⁰

The clearest indication of broader anti-war sentiment came at the 1940 Easter conference of the NSW ALP. With thunderous speeches from secret members of the CPA, especially ALP state secretary Jack Hughes and NSW ARU secretary Lloyd Ross, the conference adopted a 'Hands off Russia' resolution by a two to one majority. The resolution stated conference's objection to any attempt to 'change the direction of the present war by an aggressive act against any other country with which we are not at war, including the Soviet Union.'²²¹ Through imposing on the ALP one of communism's most integral policies, the CPA's 'entrists'²²² had embarrassed Labor politicians in an election year. The communist success was short lived. Within weeks the resolution was expunged from the conference minutes.²²³ Within months, the ALP federal executive removed the communist dominated executive of NSW.²²⁴ The removed executive reformed itself into the Australian Labor Party (State of NSW), also known as the Hughes-Evans ALP after its best known members.²²⁵ It was replaced with a right-wing group that managed to entrench its power to such an extent that its legatees still hold sway today.

²¹⁹ For Holloway and Maloney see *Tribune*, 13-17 October 1939. For Brennan see *Tribune*, 14 November 1939, p. 1. For Ward see *Tribune*, 24 November 1939, p. 3. That the anti-war utterances of Holloway and Maloney received coverage in the communist press in October is further evidence the party already opposed the war by that month in advance of the Comintern's 3 November corrective.

²²⁰ See Dimitrov's articles and the Comintern's 1940 May Day appeal in *World News and Views*, vol. 19, no. 53, 11 November 1939, pp. 1079-1083 and vol. 20, no. 18, 4 May 1940, pp. 261-265, for examples of the resurgent sectarianism emanating from the Comintern.

²²¹ For the resolution and an account of the conference see *Tribune*, 26 March 1940, pp. 1 and 3.

²²² Entrism is a tactic used largely by Marxist groups to infiltrate other associations with the objective of seizing control. David McKnight provides a detailed analysis of the CPA's pursuit of entrism policies directed towards the ALP throughout the popular front era. Its success is proved by the fact that the ALP executive, and indeed state conference, was dominated by secret members of the CPA. See McKnight, 'The Comintern's Seventh Congress and the Australian Labor Party,' pp. 395-407, who also discusses the events leading to the 'hands off Russia' resolution. See also Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia*, pp. 75-78.

²²³ For the CPA's angry reaction see *Tribune*, 19 April 1940, p. 2.

²²⁴ For the CPA's reaction see *Tribune*, 27 August 1940, p. 1.

²²⁵ For some histories of the Hughes-Evans ALP see Lloyd Churchward, 'An Early Alliance of the Left,' *Australian Left Review*, no. 27 (October-November 1970), pp. 32-38; Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists*, pp. 91-93.

While communists were clamouring for the war to be stopped, the Russians extended it to Finland. The ‘socialist fatherland,’ which had attempted to nurture a reputation as an uncompromising force for peace, had invaded a small country. It again must be stated that it is not the purpose of this thesis to recount the events on the freezing battlefields of Finland. It is the purpose of this thesis to assess the response of the CPA to this conflict as a measure of its fidelity to proletarian internationalism.

The justification for this war was that the security of Leningrad was threatened by the proximity of the Finnish border.²²⁶ Hence, Soviet propaganda depicted the invasion as a defensive measure, thus notionally making the war just. This explanation was accepted without question by the leadership of the Communist Party, though not by every individual party member. Yet, in doing this, the party surrendered any pretence to proletarian internationalism. This was purely a case of defending Soviet foreign policy. The CPA threw its support behind the Red Army and the bogus Finnish Democratic Republic, a government in name only under the leadership of Finnish exile, and Comintern notable, Otto Kuusinen.²²⁷ A meeting to galvanise solidarity was held in the Sydney Trades Hall on 12 December. Here Sharkey explained that Finland was being prepared as a base for an invasion of the Soviet Union, that it was acting appropriately and that solidarity with the Soviet was justified.²²⁸ Sharkey’s attempt to explain the war and drum up international solidarity may also have sought to ease simmering disquiet among rank and file comrades. No doubt some would have found it difficult to accept that, within the space of months, the Soviet had invaded two nations after spending years trumpeting peaceful intentions. These months were, in Ralph Gibson’s words, a ‘difficult and nerve-testing period.’²²⁹ Even those who accepted the ‘Russia needs to protect itself’ argument were deeply troubled by events. Proletarian internationalism had undoubtedly been breached by the invasion of a sovereign state. Even the defensive war argument was no justification. Expedient solidarity with the first workers’ state, especially at a time of increasing anti-Soviet hostility, helped those comrades harbouring doubt to neutralise

²²⁶ For Molotov’s explanation of the events precipitating the Russo-Finnish war see *Tribune*, 1 December 1939, p. 1.

²²⁷ For the declaration of Kuusinen’s government and its ‘treaty’ with the USSR see *Declaration of the People’s Government of Finland* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1939) and *Tribune*, 5 December 1939, pp. 1 and 3. See also the defence of the Russian invasion in *The Truth About Finland: With Sensational Extracts on Finland from Frank Anstey’s ‘Red Europe’* (Sydney: Central Committee, Communist Party of Australia, 1940).

²²⁸ *Tribune*, 15 December 1939, p. 3.

²²⁹ Gibson, *My Years in the Communist Party*, p. 80.

their concerns.²³⁰ The sudden turn of events caught everyone by surprise. Miles saw the need to rebuke L. H. Gould for writing that the party had ‘forecast’ the tactical manoeuvres of the Soviet Union. ‘We are not prophets,’ wrote Miles. ‘We cannot anticipate always and exactly the developments in the capitalist world in relation to wich [sic] the Soviet Union must determine its tactics.’²³¹ That much was certain and became more so as the war progressed.

The Russo-Finnish war did not result in the easy victory Stalin had anticipated. As it dragged on, anti-communist hostility, already high after the Nazi-Soviet pact, soared. Days after the outbreak of hostilities, reports of assaults, disruption of meetings (sometimes involving uniformed soldiers) and arrests of communists appeared in *Tribune*.²³² Newspapers and certain public figures did little to quell tensions. Communists desperately attempted to answer the barrage of anti-Soviet propaganda, but to little avail.²³³

Such was the depth of anti-Soviet feeling that communists feared the Allies intended to switch the war against the Soviet Union. This apprehension must be placed within the context of the ‘Phoney war’ phase of World War II, where belligerents were content to stand and stare at one another rather than fight. Furthermore, the expulsion of the USSR from the League of Nations, reports of Western military aid being sent to Finland and the build-up of Allied forces in the Middle East in preparation for a suspected attack on the Caucasian oilfields deepened concerns. With neither side engaged in hostilities and the Winter War serving as an ostensible *casus belli*, suspicions that warring sides would put aside their differences and jointly turn their sights on the common Bolshevik enemy gained currency. In such a situation, international solidarity with Russia was of primary importance. An early hint of ‘a switch’ came with a speech given by Senator Major-General Brand.²³⁴ Days later Sharkey raised the possibility of the war spreading

²³⁰ For example see Taft, *Crossing the Party Line*, p. 38. On the other hand, Edgar Ross was not troubled by Soviet involvement in Finland, believing it necessary for Soviet security. Ross, *Of Storm and Struggle*, p. 75.

²³¹ *Communist Review*, vol. 6, no. 12, December 1939, p. 714.

²³² For some of these reports see *Tribune*, 5-19 December 1939. See also Gibson, *My Years in the Communist Party*, pp. 81-83; Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 389-391.

²³³ For examples of efforts to answer the barrage of anti-Soviet ‘lies’ see L. L. Sharkey, *Democracy for Whom? A Striking Contrast! Democracy in Australia and the Soviet Union* (Sydney: Central Committee, Communist Party of Australia, 1940), which sets out to debunk the charge that there were no freedoms or democracy in Soviet Russia. See also Mason [Miles] and McShane [Sharkey], *Soviet Russia and the War* (Sydney: Communist Party of Australia, 1941), which defends Soviet foreign policy during the war, casting it as principled and serving the interests of peace.

²³⁴ *Tribune*, 5 December 1939, p. 1.

eastwards.²³⁵ Then in January 1940, revelations of increased German-Soviet cooperation added to concerns the Allies would utilise that unholy alliance to precipitate a war on Russia.²³⁶ In early 1940, the fear of ‘a switch’ was such that Dixon warned in his pamphlet *No War on Soviet Russia!* that the Allies and Hitler would ‘patch up’ their differences for a common crusade against socialism.²³⁷ By March misgivings had reached the point where the NSW state conference of the ALP, as we have just seen, adopted its ‘Hands off Russia’ resolution on the motion of secret members of the CPA. Throughout this period, communist publications were littered with discussion on the possibilities of ‘a switch’. The ‘switch the war’ contingency was of serious concern to comrades well beyond the conclusion of the Russo-Finnish war in March 1940. It lingered all the way until Hitler’s invasion of Russia. Communists were operating in a hostile environment, one that only became exacerbated.

On 15 June 1940, the Menzies government, through the use of its wartime national security powers, proscribed the CPA. This time the party did not find salvation through legal avenues. Police raided homes in search of literature, often taking anything with a red cover, and in one case a stapler, though failing to seize portraits of Marx or copies of *The Short History of the CPSU*. Party notables ‘went into smoke.’ The proscription was not vigorously enforced – the CPA continued to function. Some members continued to speak publicly but as independents or socialists or simply in their own name.²³⁸ Front groups, like the FOSU, were used to expound CPA policy and propaganda. But it was through the communist dominated Legal Rights Committee and the Hughes-Evans ALP that most party policy was transmitted.

A number of factors underpinned the government’s reasons for proscribing the party. Foremost among these were concerns about its defeatist propaganda exerting a detrimental impact on public morale. The ten week coal strike, for which communists

²³⁵ *Tribune*, 8 December 1939, p. 3.

²³⁶ *Tribune*, 30 January 1940, p. 1. Brown and MacDonald discuss Nazi-Soviet economic cooperation and Allied plans to strike at Soviet oilfields, which was sustaining the Nazi war machine. Brown and MacDonald, *On A Field of Red*, ch. 62.

²³⁷ Richard Dixon, *No War on Soviet Russia!* (Sydney: Central Committee, Communist Party of Australia, 1940), p. 2.

²³⁸ For accounts of the police raids and the period of illegality see Les Barnes, ‘June 15, 1940,’ *Recorder*, no. 163 (July 1990), pp. 11-13; Moran, *Reminiscences of a Rebel*, pp. 19-22; Aarons, *What’s Left?*, pp. 42-43; Fox, *Broad Left, Narrow Left*, pp. 63-68; Cook, *Red Barrister*, pp. 52-53; Gibson, *My Years in the Communist Party*, pp. 85-87; Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia*, pp. 79-81; Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 393-403.

were blamed,²³⁹ and the imminent fall of France and Italy's entry into the war were other factors leading to proscription. However, the event sealing the party's fate was the entry of the 'Junkers and bureaucrats' of the Country Party into the federal cabinet.²⁴⁰ The CPA expected to be suppressed. Censorship of its publications, frequent incidents of violence at public meetings and the ban on the PCF were all signs of looming illegality.

The CPA's response to proscription was to unsheathe its arsenal of vitriol. It goes without saying that ferocious abuse was directed at Prime Minister Menzies and other conservative figures. Attacks on Labor politicians also became common, though were certainly not comparable, as some have contended,²⁴¹ to those seen during the Third Period. The most trenchant abuse was found in Miles's and Sharkey's *What is this Labor Party?* The authors exhume Lenin's 1913 article on the ALP to prove that it was not a socialist party, that it really was a racist 'liberal party of expanding capital.'²⁴² But even here there was no revival of 'social-fascism' or a return to the invective that characterised the Third Period. Indeed, left-wing Labor politicians were spared abuse as prospective partners in a People's Government.²⁴³ The party's ire was reserved for moderate or right-wing Labor leaders such as Curtin and Forgan-Smith, whom it attempted to portray as servants of the class enemy. Nevertheless, this did not prevent *Tribune* begrudgingly asking voters to elect a Labor government at the 1940 federal election, something it did not do in the Third Period.²⁴⁴ This was deviation from the Comintern line, which had expressly forbidden contact with Labor politicians, calling instead for their complete exposure as traitors to the working class. The CPA, to this extent, opted for a more moderate policy than that pursued by the Comintern.

The CPA's vitriol saw it make ludicrous attacks on various individuals and groups. An egregious example was the following passage regarding Europeans groaning under Nazi occupation.

²³⁹ For the 1940 coal strike see Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists*, pp. 93-94.

²⁴⁰ *Tribune*, 19 March 1940, p. 2.

²⁴¹ For instance see Craig Johnston, 'The Communist Party and Labour Unity, 1939-1945,' *Labour History*, no. 40 (May 1981), p. 86; Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 393 and 407.

²⁴² Mason [Miles] and McShane [Sharkey], *What is this Labor Party?* (Sydney: Communist Party of Australia, 1940?), pp. 3-4.

²⁴³ *Tribune*, 29 July 1940, p. 1.

²⁴⁴ See *Tribune*, 27 August – 17 September 1940.

...hundreds of millions of Europeans are capable of beating Hitler without our butting-in. If these Europeans couldn't, *they would not be worth saving anyway*.²⁴⁵

Another example, concerning the Nazi blitz over London reminded readers that '[t]he bombing of London is terrible but it is a mistake to concentrate hatred on Hitler alone.'²⁴⁶ This comes close to impugning others, beyond Hitler, with responsibility for the blitz. Such insensitivity was greatly at odds with international solidarity. Nor was such rhetoric consistent with notions of aiding oppressed people shake off the yoke of foreign oppression, which Western Europe was certainly subject to by mid-1940. Even though the CPA downgraded its anti-Nazi propaganda, it would be wrong to suggest the party ever adopted a pro-Nazi stance. But there were ambiguities. It is impossible to be both opposed to Hitler, his regime and his occupation of Europe while at the same time callously dismissing any assistance to populations subjected to Nazi tyranny.

As the European war embroiled more and more nations, it became increasingly obvious the Soviet Union would be the next target of Hitler's megalomania. With the fall of Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium and France in quick succession, Stalin utilised the opportunity to expand his own borders. The Soviet Union annexed the Baltic states, Bukovina and Bessarabia by August 1940, much to the delight of the beleaguered *Tribune*.²⁴⁷ In April 1941, Hitler invaded Yugoslavia and Greece; the war edged closer to the Soviet Union. The party leadership, ensconced in secret safe houses around the country, was beginning to get nervous about German intentions vis-à-vis Russia. *Tribune* responded suspiciously to Churchill's April 1941 warning to Stalin that Hitler was preparing to attack the Soviet Union. It thought that Churchill was preparing for 'a switch,' and wanted Hitler to attack Russia first to make it possible.²⁴⁸ Even here, however, the unnamed author doesn't seem to believe what he/she is writing. At any rate 'a switch' did occur and Russia was brought into the conflagration, as Togliatti predicted at the 7th Comintern Congress. But it was at the instigation of Hitler, not Churchill, and the dictator would fight the Soviets alone. Despite the paranoia reflected in 'switch the war' fears, Churchill stood shoulder to shoulder with Stalin up until the war's conclusion.

²⁴⁵ *Tribune*, 6 August 1940, p. 2. Emphasis added.

²⁴⁶ *Tribune*, 7 October 1940, p. 4.

²⁴⁷ *Tribune*, 6 August 1940, p. 1.

²⁴⁸ *Tribune*, 26 April 1941, p. 6.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the complexity of the CPA's practice of proletarian internationalism. There was an uneven application of the elements of proletarian internationalism – some, like international solidarity, were more significant during these years than others, such as the connection with the Comintern. Like other periods in the party's history, at no point were policies disagreeable to the CPA foisted onto it. Every political twist and turn had some grounding in the party.

As far as the organisational element of proletarian internationalism was concerned, the party accepted the line emanating from Moscow only when it intersected with the party's interests. This was the case with the ready acceptance of the line arising from the 7th Comintern Congress, a line (as discussed in the previous chapter) that had already been accepted in all but name almost a year earlier. The Comintern's decisions to characterise World War II as imperialist and therefore oppose it also reflected a pre-existing disposition in the party. The CPA had on its own volition recognised the war's imperialist character as early as the 4th of September and was on track to oppose it without any intervention from Moscow. That the CPA-Comintern relationship was not a simple matter of the Comintern dictating policy is shown during the party's wartime relationship with the ALP. In November 1939, the Comintern had prohibited any relations between communists and Labor party politicians. Yet the CPA advised workers to vote Labor at the 1940 federal election and welcomed the many left-wing Labor MPs who lent their voices to those opposing the war. It was more than content to popularise their views, sparing them the attacks it heaped on Menzies and some right-wing Labor MPs.

International solidarity backed with deed was the most conspicuous element of proletarian internationalism during this period. It was what motivated communists to volunteer to fight in Spain, to boycott Japanese trade and engage in various other activities. Herein lies the difference between international solidarity in 1935-41 and other periods: now comrades buttressed their sentiments with action. The emergence of opportunities and availability of resources made this possible for the first time. This accorded fully with the stipulates on international solidarity described in chapter two – one of the few occasions in the party's history in which it did.

The national and colonial questions dimension of proletarian internationalism was also significant during these years. The clearest expression was found in the CPA's

endorsement of boycotts of Japanese trade and shipping. Advocating such activity also meant tangible adherence to the principles necessary to provide real assistance to colonial struggles.

Proletarian internationalism and its attitude to war was also significant during the timeframe of this chapter. The party's war policies were visibly influenced by the principles explained in chapter two. Thus, the CPA supported the struggle for independence of Abyssinia; the right of the Spaniards to choose their own government free of foreign intervention; and the right of the Chinese to unfettered sovereignty of their own country. The instigators of all those conflicts were consistently assailed by the CPA, usually through the employment of propaganda though also through demonstrations and boycotts. With the commencement of the Second World War, the CPA belatedly, but correctly, as far as proletarian internationalism was concerned, utilised a class analysis to discern the imperialist character of the war. Accordingly, it was never an enthusiastic supporter. However, it failed to state publicly the war's imperialist character and failed to oppose the war from the outset – failures that have their origins in the fervent anti-fascism of the preceding years. It did not take long for these errors to be rectified. But even after its corrected policy, the party avoided the adoption of Leninist strategies for the war's termination, expediently opting to call for a peace conference rather than the transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war. Moreover, in the case of the Winter War, solidarity with the Soviet Union was found to be of greater importance than the rights of a small nation. Both the refusal to resort to revolutionary defeatism and the defence of Russia in the Winter War (which was justified as a defensive engagement from the Soviet perspective) was predicated on expediency. In these instances, fear of the consequences a strict adherence to principle may exert on the war's outcome sealed the triumph of pragmatism. As we will see next, this trend continued until 1945.

Chapter Six: The People's War and Proletarian Internationalism

On the morning of 22 June 1941, Hitler's armies crossed into Soviet territory. The war communists feared for decades had arrived. The Russians were immediately on the defensive. Hundreds of miles of Soviet soil was lost in quick succession. In the occupied territories, the Nazis unleashed an unprecedented reign of terror, surpassing even Stalin's 'Great Terror' of the 1930s. Millions of lives were to be lost. The horror of the fighting on the Eastern Front, coupled with the importance of Soviet success for the overall Allied war effort, won the Russians tremendous global sympathy and a remarkable outpour of solidarity from most sections of Western society. In the vanguard were communist parties. The Communist Party of Australia was no exception. It is the CPA's practice of proletarian internationalism during this new phase of World War II that forms the sole focus of this chapter. What will be made obvious by the chapter's conclusion was the war's moderating influence on some aspects of proletarian internationalism, while the party bravely stood by some of its more unpopular, namely anti-racist, principles.

As soon as confirmed reports of the German attack reached the CPA, it adopted, as it had throughout the years under review in this thesis, a policy of unwavering solidarity with the Soviet Union. Communists believed that Stalin's war was defensive, a just war for national independence.¹ And as discussed in chapter two, communists were expected to support the defensive wars of nations in which the proletariat possessed power. Thus, the CPA's decision to support the defensive war of the socialist fatherland was in complete harmony with the requirements of proletarian internationalism. However, it must be stated from the outset that it is not the purpose here to provide a blow by blow recitation of the CPA's glowing coverage of Soviet activity in the field. It suffices to say that for the duration of the war, the CPA assiduously pursued the exploits of the Red Army, never uttered a word of criticism, never acknowledged set backs and always expressed optimism that Stalin would ultimately prevail over Hitler.

Despite nearly a decade of predictions that such a war would occur, disbelief and inconsistency characterised the CPA's initial response to the opening of hostilities. Miles, writing under the pseudonym 'Mason,' typified both. Palpable disbelief that Hitler had

¹ See *Communist Review*, no. 6, September 1941, p. 14; J. C. Henry, *Build a National Anti-Fascist Front! Demand Legality for the Communist Party!* (Brisbane: Queensland Political Rights Committee, 1941?), pp. 1-2; 'Yelnia,' *Destroy Hitlerism!* (Sydney: Spartacus Press, 1941), pp. 2-3.

betrayed the non-aggression pact and really was at war with Stalin was evident when he wrote:

Without making representations, without any kind of warning, and despite a non-aggression pact strictly adhered to by the Soviet the clique of bloodthirsty fascist leaders, headed by the megalomaniac Hitler, launched the Nazi hordes against the peaceful Soviet socialist people.²

Inconsistency regarding the Western Allies' war was also visible, contradicting Sharkey's later statement that 'the CC at once decided for the fullest support for the war.'³ The scenario never thought possible previously, where Russia fought alongside imperialist powers for its mere survival, had come into being. This unique position confounded party leaders. Miles characterised the Russian war as 'the most just of all wars' making the preservation of the Soviet state the 'first duty of communists, today as in 1917.' Yet 'THE CHARACTER OF THE BRITISH-GERMAN WAR IS NOT ALTERED BY HITLER'S NEW WAR' and it remained the duty of Australian communists to struggle against their 'own' ruling class and 'labour imperialists.' Miles rejected swinging behind the Allies, differentiating between the just Russian war and the imperialist Allied effort. Any blows struck at Hitler by the British did not alter the fundamentally imperialist character of Allied involvement. For communists to support the West's war, Miles continued, a change would first have to be made in the internal and external policies of the Australian government.⁴ The conservatives' record of appeasement and draconian domestic policies (such as proscription of the CPA) made any suggestion from Menzies and his colleagues that they were supportive of the Russian war unbelievable.

This inconsistency did not last long. With the commencement of British bombing of Germany days after the start of Barbarossa, suspicion of Churchill keeping his word and providing Russian aid quickly dissipated, softening the party's objections to the British war.⁵ Then, with the signing of the Anglo-Soviet pact in July 1941, a more significant

² *Tribune*, 30 June 1941, p. 1.

³ L. L. Sharkey, *Congress Report on the Work of the CC from the 12th to the 13th Party Congress* (Sydney: Communist Party of Australia, 1943), p. 8.

⁴ *Tribune*, 30 June 1941, pp. 1-2. Emphasis in original. In contrast to Miles' opinion, and revelatory of the transformation in the party's war policy, J. D. Blake, in a speech in October 1941, admonished as 'childish and dangerous' proponents of the view that support for the Soviet war effort was justified, but that the Allied war was not. See J. D. Blake, *For Political Liberty and the Defeat of Hitlerism* (Melbourne: International Bookshop, 1941), p. 1.

⁵ *Tribune*, 16 July 1941, p. 1.

turning-point occurred, after which the CPA fell in behind the British war effort and Churchill.⁶ This agreement, along with the Atlantic Charter and subsequent agreements (particularly the decisions arrived at the Teheran Conference) were perceived to represent a statement of Allied war aims. These were deemed by the CPA to be progressive and meriting full support. Thus, with the Western Allies committed by treaty to a better world after the war, the West's war assumed a predominantly (though not totally) just character. The ambiguity of the days following Russian entry into the war had evaporated by late July 1941. Communist support for the fight of both Eastern and Western Allies was now fully justified.

However, the party's position on the conservative Menzies, then Fadden, governments remained one of hostility. Enmity was understandable given Menzies's proscription of the party and, so communists believed, his sympathy for the Nazis. Consequently, for months after the start of operation Barbarossa, the CPA was loath to subordinate any of its principles for the sake of the Australian war effort. The party did not offer so much as an iota of cooperation to the Menzies and Fadden governments. By contrast, the CPGB placed itself behind the Churchill government after the Comintern approved the cooperative line advanced by the rehabilitated Pollitt.⁷ There is little evidence to suggest any comparable involvement from Moscow in the affairs of the Australia party over this issue. Thus the CPA continued its pre-Barbarossa domestic policies, shown in its disdain for both Menzies and Curtin and its agitation for the accession of a 'People's Government.'⁸ It seemed that Australian comrades, while approving the Western Allies' war, and by implication the Australian war, were not prepared to supplement word with deed. Yet circumstances dictated that all possible assistance be rendered to Russia's allies, including Australia, for the sake of Soviet survival. This, as seen in chapter five, was encouraged by Togliatti at the 7th Comintern Congress. Moreover, solidarity with Russia during this war – a significant part of proletarian internationalism during these years – by necessity entailed a degree of cooperation with its capitalist allies, notwithstanding how repellent those allies were to communist sensitivities.

Attitudes to the Australian government changed only after Curtin assumed office in October 1941. Upon Curtin's accession, the *Tribune* fervently endorsed the new

⁶ For the CPA's statement on the Anglo-Soviet Pact see *Tribune*, 27 July 1941, p. 3.

⁷ Johnstone, 'The CPGB, the Comintern and the War,' pp. 42-43; Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, p. 130. Pollitt was restored to the CPGB general secretaryship after the Russian entry into the war.

⁸ For example see *Tribune*, 16 July – 7 September 1941, *passim*; 'Yelnia,' *Destroy Hitlerism!*, p. 6.

government and urged the prosecution of a more effective war effort.⁹ This was the tenor of communist policy until the war's completion. Political sectarianism, so destructive in the past, was strongly repudiated. The CPA ceaselessly called for working-class unity (from above and below) and communist affiliation to the ALP,¹⁰ making any meaningful criticism of the Labor government impolitic. Real working-class unity, at any rate, was impossible; the frenzied efforts of right-wing forces in the Labor party ensured that.¹¹ Yet even the Labor right's outright hostility could not diminish the Communist Party's enthusiasm for the Curtin government.

Alongside this was a discernable shift in the party's tone regarding the Australian war effort. It is no exaggeration to state that, for the Communist Party, the character of the Australian war acquired a more favourable complexion after Curtin became Prime Minister. It could now set aside sacred principles in order to win the war. Indeed, such was the party's enthusiasm that in October 1941, it even urged the still neutral United States to join hostilities. It also reclassified the Australian war effort as a just war for national survival.¹² The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 secured American involvement and consolidated the CPA's trajectory towards becoming the 'leading war party.'¹³

⁹ *Tribune*, 17 October 1941, pp. 1-8.

¹⁰ For an example of the CPA's unity proposals, which revolved around boosting production, reducing industrial disputation, establishing diplomatic representation with the Soviet Union and other conditions thought conducive to winning the war see *Communist Review*, no. 7, November 1941, pp. 7-8; *A United Working Class and a National Front for Victory: Resolution, 13th Congress, Communist Party of Australia, March 1943* (Sydney: Communist Party of Australia, 1943), pp. 7-8. See also Johnston, 'The Communist Party and Labour Unity, 1939-1945,' pp. 86-88.

¹¹ There was greater success in forging 'unity' with the communist controlled Hughes-Evans ALP, culminating in amalgamation with the CPA in January 1944. The move was, in fact, a communist takeover. Little attempt was made to disguise this: the new party was called the Australian Communist Party. (The party went by this name from 1944 until 1948. For the sake of consistency I will retain the use of the acronym CPA. It was a minor variation on the previous Communist Party of Australia, the intention being to provide communism with an Australian garb.) For the Hughes-Evans ALP and CPA amalgamation see *Tribune*, 20 January 1944, p. 1; Johnston, 'The Communist Party and Labour Unity, 1939-1945,' pp. 88-91; Churchward, 'An Early Alliance of the Left,' pp. 35-37.

¹² For the CPA's call for American involvement in the war see *Tribune*, 27 October 1941, p. 1 and for the reappraisal of the war as a just war for national survival see *Tribune*, 21 November 1941, p. 2.

¹³ For the CPA's transformation into the 'leading war party' see Craig Johnston, 'The "Leading War Party": Communists and World War Two,' *Labour History*, no. 39 (November 1980), pp. 62-77. For the CPA's response to the Japanese entry into the war see *Tribune*, 12 December 1941, p. 1.

With the dual events of Curtin becoming Prime Minister and Japan and the United States joining hostilities, winning the war became paramount. A measure of how far the party had travelled since Miles's aforementioned comments can be located in a speech from Jack Blake in Melbourne in January 1942, where he explained that the European and Pacific wars were merely different theatres in one world war that required a single attitude.¹⁴ Blake's approach accorded with proletarian internationalism. According to the model of proletarian internationalism outlined in chapter two, the Australian war of defence was justified as it was a smaller nation threatened by a larger and aggressive Japanese imperialism. Thus, two aspects of proletarian internationalism were significant in securing the CPA's support for the war: international solidarity with the Soviet Union and the just war of defence of Australia.

The importance of victory led communists to discourage any easing of effort until the Allies had prevailed. At any favourable development, such as the Japanese defeat at the battle of the Coral Sea in 1942, the party both welcomed the change in fortune and admonished nascent complacency.¹⁵ Further enthusiasm was found in the swelling number of communists joining the armed forces, demonstrating that they were prepared to risk and, as was the case during the Spanish Civil War, sacrifice their lives for the cause.¹⁶ To fight was to aid Russian and Australian independence. By backing word with deed, communists were giving real meaning to sentiments inseparable from proletarian internationalism. Communists also encouraged domestic sacrifices: they discouraged strike action¹⁷; encouraged workers to increase productivity to 'produce for victory'¹⁸; and endeavoured to minimise absenteeism.¹⁹ Emblematic of this new approach was the following quotation from the *Tribune*:

...while trying to limit profit making from the war, production must go on. The immediate issue is not to abolish profit making which means to abolish capitalism. The issue today is to defeat Hitler, save

¹⁴ J. D. Blake, *A People's Defence of Australia: Speech in the Princess Theatre, Melbourne on January 25, 1942* (Melbourne: The Political Rights Committee, 1942), p. 2.

¹⁵ *Tribune*, 27 May 1942, p. 1.

¹⁶ For communist soldiers in the Australian army see Beverley Symons, 'All-Out for the People's War: Communist Soldiers in the Australian Army in the Second World War,' *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 26, no. 105 (October 1995), pp. 596-615.

¹⁷ For example, see *Tribune*, 14 January 1942, p. 1.

¹⁸ For example, see *Tribune*, 14 November 1941, p. 1.

¹⁹ For example, see *Tribune*, 23 December 1942, p. 1. For the arguments pursued by communists and communist trade union officials encouraging greater industrial discipline see E. Thornton, *Trade Unions and the War* (Sydney: Federated Ironworkers' Association of Australia, 1942); Len Fox, *Coal for the Engines of War* (Sydney: The Worker Trustees, 1942).

the Soviet Union, free the enslaved countries and make certain that Hitler will enslave no more people.²⁰

Exertions and exhortations such as these, combined with promises to play an even more constructive wartime role, prompted federal Attorney-General H. V. Evatt to restore the party's legality in December 1942.²¹ The exigencies of war completely enveloped deeply ingrained militant principle. And a factor underpinning this sort of pragmatism was international solidarity with the first socialist state, an integral aspect of proletarian internationalism.

The justice of the war, and the Japanese threat to the nation, impelled the party to adopt serious measures for the defence of Australia. These were especially important when viewed in the context of the seeming inevitability of a Japanese invasion in the first half of 1942. Some of the CPA's defence proposals, such as that for a civilian Australian People's Defence Auxiliary to prepare the population for guerrilla warfare and supplement the army, drew on international experience.²² Other plans for the defence of capitalist Australia, such as relocating war industries inland and out of reach of Japanese bombers, or the adoption of a 'scorched earth' policy in the event of invasion, drew heavily on the Soviet experience.²³ Another illustration of the extent to which the party was prepared to defend capitalist Australia was its vocal support for Prime Minister Curtin's plan to use Australian conscripts in the South-Western Pacific theatre. Hitherto, the CPA had never condoned compulsorily military training, let alone conscription for overseas service. But, as an unnamed writer in *Tribune* explained,

The struggle we are now engaged in...is a people's war against fascism, a war vital to the cause of the working class. There must be no limitations on working class support for this war.²⁴

²⁰ *Tribune*, 14 November 1941, p. 4.

²¹ *Tribune*, 23 December 1942, p. 1. The CPA conducted a long campaign for the restoration of its legality. For some of the publications pertaining to this campaign see L. L. Sharkey, *For National Unity and Victory Over Fascists, Lift Communist Party Ban* (Sydney: Legal Rights Committee, 1942); Ken Miller, *Lift the Ban from the LYD: To Help Smash Hitler Fascism* (Elwood: K. C. Miller, 1941). For the statement of the Victorian branch of the CPA upon the restoration of the party's legality see *A Great Day for the Australian Labor Movement* (Melbourne: Victorian State Committee CPA, 1943).

²² The experience pointed to in this instance was Chinese, Spanish and Soviet. *Tribune*, 4-11 February and 25 March 1942; Richard Dixon, *Knock Out Japan!* (Melbourne: Political Rights Committee, 1942), pp. 6-8; Rupert Lockwood, *Guerilla!* (Sydney: N.S.W. Aid Russia Committee, 1942); *They Shall Not Pass: A Preliminary Plan for a People's Defence* (Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1942).

²³ See *Communist Review*, no. 9, April 1942, pp. 18-19; Rupert Lockwood, *Scorched Earth!* (Sydney: NSW Aid Russia Committee, 1941).

²⁴ *Tribune*, 25 November 1942, p. 1.

That this war was a ‘just’ people’s war required different tactics to the previous imperialist war of 1914-1918. This key difference made conscription acceptable in 1942 where it was not in 1916.²⁵ Such was the war’s transformative effect that the objections of certain left-wing Labor identities to Curtin’s proposal drew heavy scorn from *Tribune*. Powerhouses of the left, such as ‘the hopelessly befogged’ Blackburn, Holloway, Cameron and Crofts, were dismissed as

So blinded by this one outstanding event [the anti-conscription campaign of the First World War] in their lives that they are unable to understand that to-day [sic] the main progressive task is the defeat of fascism...²⁶

Winning the war meant everything, especially when the existence of the Soviet Union was at stake. The defence of Soviet Russia and solidarity with its plight had always been, but particularly so during the war, a key tenet of proletarian internationalism. The policies expounded above, and those to which we will turn to next, reflected the overenthusiastic application of proletarian internationalism by the Communist Party of Australia during a crucial period in the history of international communism.

Wartime solidarity with the Soviet Union took many shapes. Most expressions of solidarity came in the form of propaganda, intended to repudiate anti-Soviet ‘lies’ and raise the prestige of the Soviet Union.²⁷ Others were more practical, providing material assistance to the Russians. One example of solidarity that took into account the tremendous strains placed on the Red Army was the demand for the opening of a second front in Western Europe. So too, indeed, was the CPA’s emphasis on the European theatre ahead of that in the Pacific.²⁸ Yet it was the second front the party pursued with tireless vigour. Agitation for the second front can be considered an act of international solidarity on the simple logic that Hitler would have to split his forces between Eastern and Western fronts, thereby alleviating pressure on the Russian front. Agitation for a second front commenced almost as soon as Hitler’s forces had crossed the Soviet frontier and were repeated *ad infinitum* until the Allied invasion of Normandy. The CPA’s activity consisted, by and large, of exhortations in the party press and pamphlets,

²⁵ See argument expounded in *Communist Review*, no. 17, December 1942, pp. 1-3.

²⁶ *Tribune*, 9 December 1942, p. 1. A similar quotation to this one and to Maurice Blackburn as ‘hopelessly befogged’ can be found in *ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁷ See *Tribune*, June 1941 – September 1945, *passim*, for examples of both of these.

²⁸ For example see Blake, *A People’s Defence of Australia*, pp. 2-7.

attempting to galvanise public pressure and direct it towards compelling the Western Allies into action. The party's appeals, at least until 1944, were often impervious to the practical impossibility of merely landing a sizable Allied force in Europe. It is not the intention here to recount communists' repetitive arguments for a second front. But in short, the logic for a second front was this: the speedy defeat of Hitler would save the Soviet Union and enable an earlier relocation of Allied and Soviet forces to the Pacific, which in turn would enhance Australian security.²⁹

Another expression of material solidarity with the Soviet was the CPA's support for various 'Aid Russia Committees.'³⁰ These committees assumed various roles and operated alongside the Australia-Soviet Friendship League.³¹ The Russian Aid Committees' responsibilities were usually found in their titles: the Medical Aid to Soviet Russia Fund was tasked with collecting and distributing medical assistance to Soviet Russia; the Sheepskins for Russia campaign sought to raise money for the purchase and dispatch of Australian sheepskins. These were broad associations; communists, although active, did not dominate. This was evident in the proceedings of the two day Congress of National Unity for Allied Unity organised by the NSW Aid Russia Committee between 28 February and 1 March 1942. A diverse range of individuals participated: from Curtin government Ministers and union officials, to churchmen and liberals. All came together with the dual purpose of galvanising national unity for a more effective war effort and solidarity with Soviet Russia.³² Aid Russia Committees were based on the united front, yet all were banned by the ALP. Some prominent Labor figures, such as Queensland Premier Forgan-Smith, did much to frustrate any nascent collaboration.³³ Despite that, the CPA's involvement with the Aid Russia Committees was another case (as those made during the Spanish Civil War and the Sino-Japanese war) where the party's actions were inspired by proletarian internationalism.

²⁹ For example, see *Communist Review*, no. 9, April 1942, p. 3; *Second Front* (Melbourne: Australia-Soviet Friendship League, 1941); *Attack Now! Australia Needs a Second Front in Europe* (Melbourne: Australia-Soviet Friendship League, 1942); Edgar Ross, *The Key to Victory: Anglo-Soviet Treaty in Perspective* (Sydney: Australian Labor Party, State of New South Wales, 1942).

³⁰ Sharkey stated the party's support for these bodies at the CPA's 13th National Congress in 1943. See Sharkey, *Congress Report on the Work of the CC from the 12th to the 13th Party Congress*, p. 8.

³¹ The Australia-Soviet Friendship League was the successor to the FOSU and engaged in near identical work, though on a much larger scale.

³² For the proceedings of the Congress see *National Unity for an Allied Victory, Report of Congress, Sydney Town Hall, February 28th – March 1st 1942* (Sydney: NSW Aid Russia Committee, 1942).

³³ For Forgan-Smith's successful efforts to ban the Medical Aid to Soviet Russia see *Tribune*, 14 January 1942, p. 4.

None of the party's activities described above required any direction from Moscow. The CPA had independently determined its policies for winning the war. Indeed, as the war progressed, the Comintern was of diminishing significance for the Australian party. Next to urging greater efforts for defending the Soviet Union and winning the war, there was little leadership on offer from Moscow. Sharkey admitted in June 1943 that the CPA had 'not had direct representation or communication with the Communist International's Executive since the beginning of the war.'³⁴ Therefore, it is arguable that the moribund organisational component of proletarian internationalism wielded little practical influence on the CPA throughout the course of the war.

It is thus unsurprising that the Comintern was dissolved in 1943. Its inactivity was not the cause of its dissolution. A more important reason, which originated with Stalin (whose role cannot be underestimated), was that the Comintern's mere existence was a barrier to greater cooperation between Russia and its Allies.³⁵ Therefore, it was in the interests of Soviet foreign policy that the Comintern formally cease to exist. This course had already been decided by Stalin, foreshadowed as early as 1940.³⁶ All that was required was the sanction of a handful of communist parties to provide this cynical move an appearance of legitimacy. The process commenced with the ECCI Presidium when it issued a statement calling for the Comintern's dissolution. The communist parties, it stressed, were mature enough to function without the aid of the International. It added, on a more expedient note, that dissolution would also deprive Goebbels's propaganda machine of its old 'communists controlled from Moscow' bogey. The Presidium then 'recommended' that the parties endorse the decision to abolish the Comintern. This unheralded edict came as a surprise, but the CPA was willing to play its part. Sharkey welcomed the Presidium's 'recommendation,' claiming it would strengthen Allied and working-class unity. Party branches were then asked to vote on the Presidium's 'recommendation'; the response was in the affirmative.³⁷ With no party voicing dissent, the Comintern formally passed into history. Proletarian internationalism would never be the same again. The Australian party would never again command the same level of attention from Moscow as it had received during the life of the Comintern. While Russian theoretical and political developments continued to sway the CPA, there would never be another Comintern nor another

³⁴ *Tribune*, 3 June 1943, p. 1.

³⁵ This clearly emerges in McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, pp. 206-208; Banac (ed.), *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, pp. 270-280.

³⁶ For the motivations behind the dissolution of the Comintern see McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, pp. 204-211; Dallin and Firsov (eds.), *Dimitrov and Stalin*, ch. 8.

³⁷ For the dissolution of the Comintern see *Tribune*, 3 June 1943, pp. 1 and 4.

international centre acting as the general staff of the world revolution. The protracted death, long in the making and at the hands of Stalin, of the organisational aspect of proletarian internationalism was final.

By contrast, another component of proletarian internationalism, the national and colonial questions, was the subject of growing interest from the CPA. The character of the war made that unavoidable. Focus coalesced around the Atlantic Charter, which promised self-determination for the people of occupied Europe. For communists, the Atlantic Charter was a clear statement of Allied objectives and something worth fighting for; its promise of national freedom gave the war its progressive character. Communists, however, argued for a broader application, one that would include India, Indonesia and other colonial possessions outside Europe. For the duration of the war, the CPA invoked the Atlantic Charter whenever it issued a statement on the mistreatment of a colonial population or made demands for colonial self-government. Whether agitating for the rights of Australian Aborigines or colonial India, the CPA attempted to ensure that Allied governments never lost sight of the Charter's principles.

However, the CPA acknowledged that a full application of the Atlantic Charter would have to wait until the war's conclusion. This demonstrates the war's tempering effect on the party's colonial policies, symptomatic of its general wartime pragmatism. Up until Operation Barbarossa, the CPA continuously advocated for the full and immediate independence of colonial nations. Now there was deep concern over the likely disruption to the prosecution of the war created by colonies gaining independence. Hence, the CPA withdrew its demands for full colonial independence until the war was won. The anti-colonial segment of proletarian internationalism was, for the time-being, subordinated to international solidarity with Russia. Colonial policy was instead restricted to advocacy for an extension of democracy, release of political prisoners and the mobilisation of colonial resources for the war.

This approach was reflected in the CPA's Indian policy. The restive situation in that country was a major problem for the Allies. Communists kept a close watch on how the British handled the situation. India was a litmus test for British sincerity to the cause of freedom and democracy, the principles providing the war its just character. As an anonymous author wrote in the *Tribune*,

There is a skeleton in the Allied cupboard. It is the Indian policy. Tojo blows through the keyhole to rattle the bones. With other Cliveden skeletons, it dances a merry saraband upon the world stage.³⁸

Therefore interest in British moves to reach an agreement with the independence movement was strong. At the same time the CPA acknowledged that civil disobedience connected with the Indian National Congress sponsored 'Quit India' movement was harmful to the Allied war effort. *Tribune* regularly apportioned blame for this parlous state to both Britain and Gandhi.³⁹ A solution, even if it were temporary, needed to be found. Moreover, the repeated failure of the British to reach any viable agreement with the independence movement called into question British adherence to the Atlantic Charter.

The CPA believed it had a solution, balancing the colonial question principles of proletarian internationalism with the need to pursue realistic policies during war. It advocated a measure of self-government, in the shape of an elected provisional government, in exchange for greater mobilisation of Indian resources (including soldiers), culminating in full independence after the war's conclusion. With the promise of independence after the war, and a provisional government in the meantime, the trust of the Indian masses could be won, fostering enthusiasm for the war. It would then be possible to redeploy British colonial troops to combat roles. Under this solution, Indian independence was directly connected with Allied fortunes; a victory over the Axis was therefore as much in the Indians' interest as it was to the English. All this, it was claimed, would secure 'incalculable strength to the cause of freedom, and spell early victory over the Japanese in the Pacific war.'⁴⁰ Again the CPA's solution demonstrated that, under the exigencies of war, it was prepared to prioritise some aspects of proletarian internationalism (such as solidarity with Russia) over others (colonial liberation) and adjust its policies accordingly. As Sharkey wrote, 'national revolutionary struggle are subordinate, for the moment, to the main struggle against Hitlerism and its Japanese assistant.'⁴¹

³⁸ *Tribune*, 7 October 1942, p. 3.

³⁹ For example, see *Tribune*, 19 August 1942, p. 1.

⁴⁰ *Tribune*, 22 April 1942, p. 2. For a more detailed elaboration of the arguments advanced by the CPA see *Communist Review*, no. 9, April 1942, pp. 19-20 and 22-23; Gerald Peel, *India and Australia: There is a Solution!* (Sydney: Legal Rights Committee, 1942?); Sharkey, *Congress Report on the Work of the CC from the 12th to the 13th Party Congress*, pp. 10-11.

⁴¹ *Communist Review*, no. 10, May 1942, p. 2. Pollitt shared similar views, see Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, pp. 130-131.

The war also provoked interest in other colonised lands. Indonesia, Ceylon and others in the region received some form of attention in the communist press. In fact, for years after the war, the boycott of Dutch shipping, spearheaded by Australian trade unions under communist leadership, provided the Indonesians significant assistance on the basis of international solidarity.⁴² However, limitations of space preclude a detailed account of the CPA's work for Asian colonial liberation movements. Instead, I intend to narrow the focus and briefly discuss the CPA's New Guinea policy.

New Guinea had been largely overlooked by communists until the Japanese threatened to seize it from Australian control. Owing to New Guinea's underdevelopment, independence was not an immediate issue. Rather, for the largely undeveloped New Guinea, comrades such as Steve Purdy suggested Australians

Lend brotherly assistance, including economic, administrative and cultural aid, to those less advanced, assistance freely given and free of any selfish intention.⁴³

Invoking the example of the Soviet Union, Purdy claimed that such assistance could elevate the Papuans out of a state of 'backwardness' within twenty years, but added that it was only possible under a socialist system. Only after a Papuan national independence movement came into existence could New Guinea realistically expect to be granted independence. The assistance of the Australian labour movement fighting the imperialism of its 'own' country would also be necessary; indeed, it was an inseparable part of proletarian internationalism. Ted Laurie subsequently expanded on Purdy's contribution. He outlined policies in the spheres of industrial relations, education, health and land rights intended to improve the lives of the people of New Guinea, leading ultimately to self-government.⁴⁴ He also underscored the ideological importance of fighting the imperialism of one's 'own' capitalist class.⁴⁵ In doing so Laurie, like Purdy, linked both the struggle for New Guinea independence and the struggle against one's 'own' imperialists to the duties of Australian workers, pursuant with the model of proletarian internationalism described in chapter two.

⁴² The Dutch shipping boycott and the relationship between Australian and Indonesian communists has been covered elsewhere. See Rupert Lockwood, *Black Armada: Australia and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence 1942-49* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1982).

⁴³ *Communist Review*, no. 26, October 1943, p. 139.

⁴⁴ *Communist Review*, no. 28, December 1943, p. 166.

⁴⁵ E. A. H. Laurie, *Australia in New Guinea* (Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1944), p. 19.

The war also brought to the fore the issue of racism. Despite public opinion, the CPA loyally observed the anti-racist principles of proletarian internationalism. The aptly named Second World War was fought on both sides by various peoples of different races. The fact that wartime allies of Australia (and soon to be independent neighbours with vast, untapped markets inaccessible without cordial bi-lateral relations)⁴⁶ included Chinese, Indians and Papuans among others, provided the CPA with fresh arguments to ‘drop the insult’ that was the White Australia policy:

Must we offer gratuitous low-brow insult to our Allies as reward? Is pigmentation of skin, rather than devotion to freedom’s cause, to culture and humanity, to be the test of worth? Australians worthy of their heritage of democracy and tolerance will repudiate the insult, the more so because even the paper on which the insults were printed was an ancient Chinese invention.⁴⁷

In pre-multicultural Australia, racism was rife. During the war, even Allies fell victim to appalling racism. This was particularly so with African-American servicemen. The CPA welcomed the arrival of General Douglas MacArthur and American forces on Australian soil in 1942. Yet it was soon forced to rebuke racism towards men on whose shoulders rested the defence of Australia.⁴⁸ The party also objected to certain public places prohibiting the entry of African-American servicemen at the behest of their white American colleagues, bluntly stating ‘we don’t like “Jim Crow.”’ The Central Committee then demanded that party members immediately initiate a campaign against Jim Crow style segregation.⁴⁹ In mid-1942, an author in the *Communist Review* writing under the pseudonym ‘Dublin’ responded to a precipitate spike in racism. ‘Dublin’ urged comrades to object to white American prejudice towards African-Americans (though cautioned against offending white soldiers) and unambiguously stated communist policy: ‘We stand inflexibly for the unity and comradeship of all peoples and races...Marx said: “Labour in a white skin will never be free while in a black skin it is branded.”’⁵⁰

⁴⁶ This was an observation made in R. Dixon, *Immigration and the ‘White Australia’ Policy* (Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1945), pp. 5-6.

⁴⁷ *Tribune*, 19 June 1945, p. 1.

⁴⁸ For the communist statement on the arrival of American forces see *Tribune*, 25 March 1942, p. 1. For the rebuke of racism see *Tribune*, 15 April 1942, p. 4.

⁴⁹ *Tribune*, 13 May 1942, p. 2 and Circular, CC CPA to all states, ‘Re Negro Soldiers and White Chauvinism,’ 28 April 1942, CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 5).

⁵⁰ *Communist Review*, no. 11, June 1942, p. 7.

It comes as no surprise that the CPA chided racial prejudice directed at Allies. A little more surprising, and indicative of the influence of proletarian internationalism, was the party's courageous (under the circumstances) condemnation of racist abuse directed at the Japanese. That the party swam against the stream of public opinion on an issue connected to race was not unprecedented; as was seen in chapter four, the disdain for mainstream sensitivities induced by Third Period communism liberated comrades from the confines of popular opinion and enabled them to vocally oppose racism. This was one feature of Third Period communism that was never discarded.

The big test for the party's anti-racist credentials arrived when Australia faced its darkest hour in early 1942. Fear of defeat at the hands of the Japanese saw the resort of some sections of the Australian community to racism. Much discussion focused on the racial differences between white Australians and Japanese. But the CPA, officially at least, did not succumb to racist temptation. A case in point was the *Tribune's* strong admonishment of racist talk, seeking instead to divert anger towards the direction of fascism:

We do not fight the Japanese because their skins are yellow, if we do, why do we fight the white skinned Nazis?
Any Australian who talks about 'Yellow Peril' insults our fighting allies and friends, the Chinese people.
Indian troops, whose skin is black fight side by side with the AIF.
The issue never was, and is not now, yellow or white, it is fascist or anti-fascist.⁵¹

Exhortations like these went unheeded, particularly when Australian security was threatened by an Asian power. As the war dragged on, and public frustration translated into racism, and even anti-Semitism, the CPA drew even greater attention to the issue of racism as evidenced in countless *Tribune* and *Communist Review* articles.⁵² In light of the heterogeneous origins of personnel serving alongside Australian servicemen, the CPA was awake to the distinct possibility of racism fracturing Allied unity. It is therefore arguable that its wartime emphasis on rebuking racism was as much a consequence of the

⁵¹ *Tribune*, 25 February 1942, p. 2. Similar admonishments can be found in Blake, *A People's Defence of Australia*, p. 10.

⁵² The CPA was also involved in the publication of various pamphlets seeking to debunk race theories and counter racism itself. For example, see Ralph Gibson, *Stop This Fascist Propaganda* (Melbourne: Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, 1941); Len Fox, *Australia and the Jews: The Facts About Jewish Influence, the Facts About the Refugees* (Melbourne: International Book Shop, 1943); William Gallacher and Earl Browder, *Jew-Baiting is Cannibalism* (Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1944); R. Page Arnot, *There Are No Aryans* (Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1944).

party's bid to maintain Allied harmony, integral to its win the war strategy, as it was of adherence to proletarian internationalism.

Immigration was another issue brought to centre stage by the war. In early 1944, the CPA was grappling with the problems posed by a shortage of manpower, the same issue that prompted Arthur Calwell to famously proclaim that Australia had to 'populate or perish.' As the war neared its conclusion, immigration occupied an increasing amount of space in the communist press. One of the inevitable solutions, advanced by the CPA as well as others, was a sizable increase in immigration. Three elements underpinned the CPA's immigration policy. First, the Communist Party maintained a position of unqualified opposition to the White Australia policy. The party had always argued that the right to migrate should not be dictated by race. Second, any increase in the population could not come at the cost of an exacerbation of pre-existing social ills, such as slums and poverty or result in wage reduction. Migrants had to receive Australian rates of pay and conditions, which also meant the unrestricted right to join a trade union. Third, immigration should not be of such quantity as would reduce the standard of living of both new migrants and Australians or increase unemployment. As a *Tribune* editorial stated, 'immigration would have to be regulated in accordance with our absorptive capacity.'⁵³ The Communist Party was not prepared to fling open the gates of Australia to all comers. It never had. Dixon offered a solution that promised to uphold these three conditions: a quota based, non-discriminatory immigration system. As he explained, the number of immigrants permitted from each country would 'be worked out in accordance with the state of employment and with the plans of the Government and private enterprise for expanding employment.'⁵⁴ This was an earnest proposal built on the CPA's optimism for a better post-war Australia. In previous years the party was often vexatious; unwilling to engage in cooperation with government or mainstream politics. Now its policies were realistic, meant as constructive criticism and, in this instance at least, in harmony with the national question dimension of proletarian internationalism.

The CPA's optimism for the post-war world was, by 1943, shared with most Allied governments. War's end was near: Hitler had just lost hundreds of thousands of men and valuable material at Stalingrad; the Russians were commencing a counter-attack that propelled them ultimately to Berlin; the Japanese were on the defensive; and Allied unity

⁵³ For the quotation and the three elements underpinning the CPA's immigration policy see *Tribune*, 6 January 1944, p. 1. See also *Communist Review*, no. 35, July 1944, pp. 278-281.

⁵⁴ *Communist Review*, no. 35, July 1944, p. 278. For a detailed explanation of the CPA's immigration policy see Dixon, *Immigration and the 'White Australia' Policy*.

was stronger than ever. The favourable turn of events on the battlefield allowed governments and communists alike to commence planning for the peace. This was the backdrop for the famous 'Big Three' conference at Teheran in December 1943, where Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill consolidated Allied cooperation for the duration of the war and solemnly pledged to continue in like manner in its aftermath.

The Teheran decisions exerted a profound and unexpected impact on international communism. There was palpable euphoria in its afterglow. Communist parties, including the CPA, were enticed by its promise of a better world.⁵⁵ The apex of Allied unity had been reached. That three leaders representing divergent political philosophies could come to such agreement gave hope for a better and peaceful post-war world. That Stalin, ostensibly representing the working-class, could agree with an unbending imperialist like Churchill on the shape of the post-war world meant that, for the first time, there was hope that socialism and capitalism could coexist in peace.

This realisation led the general secretary of the CPUSA, Earl Browder, to begin in January 1944 to question some of the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism, giving rise to what was termed 'Browderism.'⁵⁶ The post-Teheran world was without precedent, one which Marxism-Leninism never envisaged. The prospective new world order required new policies, ones that were not restrained in an ideological straightjacket. Browder intended to unfasten the straightjacket. The most notable shibboleth challenged by Browderism was that of the antagonism between labour and capital. If the spirit of Teheran could reconcile intractable political rivals like Churchill and Stalin, why could it not do the same domestically? Browder believed it could. Teheran assured victory over the Axis and promised a long period of domestic and international peace for several generations. As a consequence, social peace made the class struggle superfluous. Additionally, socialism, at least in the American context, was not possible in the foreseeable future. Browder recognised that the overwhelming majority of the American public was content with capitalism. To unrealistically raise the issue of post-war socialism would harm national unity, particularly between capitalist identities (Browder

⁵⁵ For the CPA's response to the Teheran conference see *Tribune*, 9 December 1943, p. 1 and *Communist Review*, no. 28, December 1943, p. 161. See also *Teheran: The Key to Victory, Worldwide Democracy and Enduring Peace* (Melbourne: Australia – Soviet Friendship League, 1944).

⁵⁶ Unless indicated otherwise, the following discussion on Browderism is from *Tribune*, 20 January 1944, p. 3; *Communist Review*, no. 29, January 1944, pp. 182-183; Manuel Caballero, *Latin America and the Comintern, 1919-1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 137-142.

named industrialist J. P. Morgan) and organised labour, and upset the prospect of peace and prosperity. As *Tribune*, citing CPUSA officials, wrote:

The Communist Party does not believe that it would be to the benefit of our national unity to make any proposals of a specific Communistic or Socialistic nature at this time or in the immediate post-war period.⁵⁷

In arriving at this conclusion, the American party found little alternative but to take the socialist objective off the agenda. Instead, American communists would seek some form of cooperative capitalism within the existing political and economic system. Browder did not think this a negative outcome. He had been impressed with the cooperation between labour and capital since the Soviet entry into the war. Social peace and cooperation at the workplace had unleashed tremendous productive forces that, argued Browder, had benefited the Allies as well as workers, farmers and capital. For Browder, the next logical step, in light of the prospect of a prolonged era of peace and the unlikelihood of socialism, was to maintain this mutually beneficial collaboration into the peace. If this were done, a long era of peaceful construction, economic cooperation and social reform would ensue.

American comrades pledged to work towards these goals. To do so they required a new *modus operandi*; the CPUSA was not suitable for class collaborationist work. Browder had already accepted the reality of the American two-party system, which he thought provided a sufficient outlet to solve the issues of the day. Henceforth, communists would support the progressive candidates of mainstream parties. With the acceptance of the political status quo and the disavowal of socialism and class warfare, the *raison d'être* of the CPUSA ceased to exist. Communists were to instead operate under the aegis of a new group: the Communist Political Association. The ostensible reason for this decision was to facilitate the ability of its adherents to function as a small section of a united front and not, as hitherto, an independent party. Indeed, even the word 'Party' was offensive, presenting communists 'as a sect which had withdrawn itself from the practical political life of the nation.'⁵⁸ These were radical changes, unthinkable a decade earlier. They were enthusiastically embraced by most (though by no means all) American comrades. But reactions in other countries were far less enthusiastic.

⁵⁷ *Tribune*, 20 January 1944, p. 3.

⁵⁸ *Tribune*, 24 February 1944, p. 3. For a report on the CPUSA convention where the name change took place see *Tribune*, 25 May 1944, p. 2.

The CPA cautiously received Browderism. Contrary to Johnston's assertion that Browderism wielded extensive influence on sections of the leadership,⁵⁹ Miles, Sharkey and Dixon – the troika who as champions of class against class attained the leadership of the party – were always sceptical. Most of the party faithful fell in behind the three. Only a few, such as Federated Ironworkers' Association secretary, Ernie Thornton, exhibited any sympathy for Browderism.⁶⁰ Orthodoxy came naturally to the leaders of the Australian party; Browderism confounded orthodoxy. The exchange of ideas of international origin, as has been covered throughout this thesis, was, for communists, standard practice and formed part of the links associated with proletarian internationalism. But there was something different with Browderism: it came directly from America, bypassing Moscow. The leadership was faced with a conundrum: what to do? The seniority and prestige of the CPUSA meant its views could not be dismissed lightly. But the natural inclination of leaders suspicious of change and comfortable with Stalinist dogma made Browderism unpalatable, even heretical. Moreover the rest of the international communist fraternity was strangely quiet on the matter. The Comintern was no longer available to provide leadership.⁶¹ The CPA, like most other parties, was on its own. Hence, over February and March 1944, Sharkey, palpably unconvinced by Browderism, summoned his full powers of sophistry to deflect the issue. Browder, he said, was speaking only for the American, not Australian, party. Conditions, Sharkey went on, were different in America from those in Australia: thus Browder's formula did not apply here.⁶² He maintained that socialism was possible in post-war Australia, though (in a seeming concession to Browder) not in America.⁶³ Browderism, he stressed, might be acceptable for America, but had no place in Australian communism. Australian comrades, Sharkey insisted, could best safeguard the Teheran decisions not through liquidating, but by striving for unity with the ALP.⁶⁴ One gets the impression that Sharkey would have preferred to launch a withering polemic against Browder, but was reluctant to do so lest the American enjoyed the imprimatur of comrades in higher places.

⁵⁹ Johnston, 'The Communist Party and Labour Unity, 1939-1945,' pp. 91-92.

⁶⁰ For example, see Thornton's sympathetic description of the work of American communists in *Tribune*, 28 September 1944, p. 3.

⁶¹ However, Dimitrov, now working for the CC CPSU Department of International Information and who continued to exert influence in the American party, was deeply concerned at Browder's theoretical, political and tactical positions. See Banac (ed.), *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov*, pp. 305-307.

⁶² This challenges Johnston's claim (pp. 91-92) that Sharkey thought applicable to Australia Browder's ideas.

⁶³ Johnston suggests (p. 92) that Sharkey's subsequent advocacy of a peaceful transition to socialism was evidence of his Browderist deviation. However, by merely raising the prospect of socialism for post-war Australia, Sharkey provided evidence to the contrary, as Browder had rejected *any* possibility of socialism after the war, peaceful or otherwise.

⁶⁴ *Tribune*, 9 March 1944, p. 3 and *Communist Review*, no. 30, February 1944, pp. 197-198.

By May 1944, it was clear that influential British comrades shared misgivings about Browderism, adopting similar arguments to those utilised by Sharkey.⁶⁵ However, a more significant opinion decisively dispelled any uncertainty.

This arrived in the middle of 1945 in the form of an article ostensibly by a leader of the French Party, Jacques Duclos. Although it carried Duclos's name, it was correctly believed at the time to carry the imprimatur of senior European (i.e. Russian) Marxists.⁶⁶ Thus it commanded the attention of all communists. Duclos's lengthy article, after making an extensive survey of events in the American party, revolved around four points. First, Browder's leadership had led to the liquidation of the independent political party of the working-class in the United States. Nothing, Duclos argued, justified this move, an unconscionable deviation from Leninism. Second, Browderism represented heretical revisionism of Marxist fundamentals. Particularly offensive was the belief in sustained class peace in the post-war era at the cost of class struggle, agitation for socialism and conflict between labour and capital. Third, by transforming a diplomatic agreement into a domestic political platform of class peace, the Americans had 'deformed' the meaning of the Teheran agreement, 'sowing dangerous opportunist illusions' requiring immediate rectification. Fourth, Duclos observed that Browderism did not command much sympathy among the communist global fraternity, implying that Browder was isolated internationally because his ideas had already been rejected.⁶⁷ Indeed, Duclos singled out the Australian party for praise. He wrote that it, along with the South African party, were among the first to publicly reject Browderism and called on French comrades to follow the Australian example. With the exception of Browder, the majority of American comrades accepted the criticism of the Duclos article and, within weeks, were on the path back to orthodoxy.⁶⁸

The Duclos article vindicated the CPA's reticence. It boosted the party's prestige in the region; communist parties from Ceylon to Indonesia would seek the advice of the Australian party for the rest of the 1940s. In August 1945, the CPA Political Committee endorsed Duclos's article and claimed vindication in avoiding any serious Australian expression of Browderism. It chastised the 'liquidationist tendencies' of Browderism and

⁶⁵ For example, see Bill Rust's article in *Communist Review*, no. 33, May 1944, pp. 254-255.

⁶⁶ Browder himself acknowledged this. See *Tribune*, 12 June 1945, p. 7. See also Dallin and Firsov (eds.), *Dimitrov and Stalin*, p. 258, for a description of Russian involvement in the drafting of the Duclos article.

⁶⁷ For the Duclos article see *Communist Review*, no. 47, July 1945, pp. 541-548.

⁶⁸ For the American's rejection of Browderism see *Tribune*, 21 June 1945, p. 3.

reprimanded his few Australian followers.⁶⁹ As if to further dissociate itself from Browder's sacrilege, *Tribune*, announcing the CPA's forthcoming 14th National Congress in August 1945, was emblazoned with the heading 'Congress Sets Post-War Goal: Call to Fight Class Enemy.'⁷⁰ The CPA, while speaking of national unity, was preparing itself for post-war confrontation, placing itself as Browder's diametric opposite.⁷¹ The party had been an orthodox Stalinist party since 1930. As demonstrated in previous chapters, it was reluctant to embrace change; it only did so when domestic conditions necessitated it. Browderism again provoked the CPA's natural suspicion of change. In the past it ultimately succumbed to the Comintern line as it intersected with domestic necessity; now its refusal to adopt policies of international origin, where there seemed little domestic reason to do so, earned the party high praise and significantly boosted its prestige.

The repudiation of Browderism was, perhaps, one of the first chilly breezes of the Cold War. Stripped of its ideological trappings, the basic message to emerge from the Duclos article was that communists were discouraged from cooperating with capitalism in the coming post-war period. But comrades (with the possible exception of Jack Blake) failed to recognise the implications of this message during the heady days of Allied success. The revelation of its full meaning had to wait until the peace. Yet throughout 1944-5, more ominous events exposing the ephemeral character of wartime unity had already taken place. There are numerous examples: the establishment of the Polish 'Lublin Committee,' a Soviet backed government for Poland; wrangling between the Allied powers over borders and influence in Eastern Europe; the emergence of budding 'People's Democracies,' which were short on democracy and input from the people; and the opening shots of a civil war in Greece. It was this last event that most alarmed the CPA and to which we will now turn.

The Greek Civil War was the nascent Cold War's first physical confrontation between communists and the West. After years of seeming harmony, it came as a shock to many. The CPA, in the spirit of international solidarity, positioned itself firmly behind the communist dominated Greek National Liberation Front (EAM) and the National People's

⁶⁹ For the Political Committee's resolution see *Tribune*, 28 June 1945, p. 3. See also 'Report by the Political Committee, ACP to the CC Plenum, August 10th, 1945, on the significance of the opening paras. [sic] of the PC resolution on revisionism in the United States; i.e. on the views and proposals of Comrade Thornton, the PC discussions and handling of the issue,' CPA records (ML MS 5021, add-on 1936, box 5).

⁷⁰ *Tribune*, 3 July 1945, p. 3.

⁷¹ See argument pursued by Sharkey in *Communist Review*, no. 48, August 1945, pp. 567-570.

Liberation Army (ELAS). Deciding who was friend was easy; greater difficulty was encountered in identifying the British government as foe. The Greek conflict had its origins in the aftermath of the Nazi withdrawal. This left the EAM/ELAS in near complete control of Greece. The Papandreou government, recently returned from exile, was backed by the British who were sent to fill the power vacuum. It demanded that the EAM/ELAS disarm, which the EAM/ELAS refused. Tension simmered until early December 1944, when police fired on a left-wing demonstration in Athens. Conflict then erupted between EAM/ELAS and British backed Greek government forces. These events shocked communists. *Tribune* condemned the violence: ‘The massacre of unarmed women and children, who were exercising their democratic right to demonstrate their views, by Papandreou’s police has sent a thrill of horror through the nation.’⁷² The British commander, General Scobie, was also condemned, though *Tribune*, at least during this early stage, was careful not to point any accusatory finger at the British government. Papandreou and Scobie were, for the moment, convenient scapegoats. A week later, ‘British Tories’ joined Scobie in sharing the blame.⁷³ Then the voices of Australians who had served in Greece joined those condemning Papandreou, Scobie and ‘British Tories.’⁷⁴ Then came the inevitable deluge of protest resolutions from CPA branches and meetings and, as one of its first acts and highly indicative of proletarian internationalism, the communist majority on the Kearsley Shire Council passed a resolution protesting the British government’s Greek policy.⁷⁵ By late December, *Tribune* was openly implicating Churchill; in early 1945, it condemned the diversion of British forces to prop up the ‘fascist’ Papandreou when troops could be better used against Hitler.⁷⁶ In January 1945, the protagonists struck a shaky peace deal; yet throughout 1945, it steadily unravelled. Communist condemnation of Churchill became sharper. The battlelines were drawn, and the CPA was already openly on the side of EAM/ELAS. Past determination to maintain inter-Allied unity was forgotten. A plethora of articles objecting to British ‘lies’ about events in Greece appeared. From returned servicemen to communists, there was palpable

⁷² *Tribune*, 7 December 1944, p. 1.

⁷³ *Tribune*, 14 December 1944, p. 1.

⁷⁴ For example, see *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷⁵ *Tribune*, 21 December 1944, p. 8. For a history of the Kearsley Shire Council under communist leadership, see Martin Mowbray, ‘The Red Shire of Kearsley, 1944-1947: Communists in Local Government,’ *Labour History*, no. 51 (November 1986), pp. 83-94. The communist dominated Democritus League, an association whose membership was largely Greek-Australian, was also highly sympathetic to EAM/ELAS. See Allimonos, ‘Greek Communist Activity in Melbourne,’ pp. 144-147.

⁷⁶ *Tribune*, 28 December 1944, p. 2 and 11 January 1945, p. 2. See also *Communist Review*, no. 41, January 1945, p. 395.

incredulity that the Greek allies of only weeks earlier were now the West's enemy, and astonishment at how swiftly the halo of Allied unity had disappeared. To be sure, proletarian internationalism was of such importance to communists that they chose solidarity with EAM/ELAS ahead of Allied unity. With the war almost over, principle could again triumph over pragmatism. But events did not augur well for post-war harmony; this was one of the first exchanges of the coming Cold War.

But it was another year before the freezing wind of the Cold War swept the world. While the fighting with Hitler had not concluded, the CPA was not prepared to deviate from the path it had followed since 1941. Hopes for post-war Allied cooperation were not dashed by British involvement in Greece; the CPA's response to the Yalta conference confirmed that.⁷⁷ There was also hope that the newly founded United Nations could avoid another world war. There was encouragement, too, that Hitler's and Mussolini's defeat, coupled with the exposure of their crimes, discredited fascism beyond redemption. Sharkey triumphantly exclaimed that 'thorns and thistles grow on the dishonoured graves of the fascist chieftains, but the sun of progress and civilisation shines more brightly.'⁷⁸ The Japanese shared a similar fate. At the war's conclusion, Australian communism reached its zenith, basking in the reflected glory of the Red Army's success. Many comrades thought socialism was around the corner; the tides of history, at long last, had turned in their favour.⁷⁹ At the party's 1945 National Congress, simultaneous with the detonation of the atomic bomb, delegates were optimistic that the peace would herald stability and prosperity. But it was the instrument that hastened Japan's surrender, the atom bomb, and that signalled the dawn of a new atomic age, which was to cast a long pall over the peace. Its destructive power and the fact that only one state was in possession of its awesome strength tipped the balance of power into America's favour. Tensions beset international relations, shattering hopes for a durable peace based on global cooperation. The legacy of these events was a precarious peace. For the next forty-five years, the world was shadowed by the possibility of nuclear catastrophe.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the CPA's application of proletarian internationalism during the 'People's War' phase of World War II. In this period, the organisational dimension of

⁷⁷ *Communist Review*, no. 44, April 1945, pp. 468-469.

⁷⁸ *Communist Review*, no. 46, June 1945, p. 515.

⁷⁹ These sentiments are recalled in Fox, *Broad Left, Narrow Left*, p. 108.

proletarian internationalism wielded no influence. With the Comintern's dissolution in 1943, the organisational aspect of proletarian internationalism ceased to exist. However, the exchange of ideas across boundaries, as occurred with Browderism, continued. While such exchanges fell well short of meeting the relevant conditions for proletarian internationalism outlined in chapter two, the events surrounding 'Browderism' in particular, are instructive of the CPA's continued adherence to the practice of drawing policy inspiration from international sources.

In contrast, international solidarity was the most significant dimension of proletarian internationalism during these years. This was by virtue of the CPA's unyielding solidarity with the USSR. Its publications were bursting with exhortations urging greater exertions for Soviet aid. Crucially, these words were complemented with action in the form of 'Aid Russia' committees. All else was subordinated for the defence of Russia, including criticism of its Allies. But as the war was drawing to a close, the CPA returned to a more principled stance, evident in its unquestioned support for the EAM/ELAS in the opening exchanges of the Greek Civil War.

For most of this chapter, the exigencies of war prevented a full application of the stipulates involved in the national and colonial questions. An example of this was the CPA counsel that colonial independence be deferred until the war's completion. But its colonial policies were still influenced by proletarian internationalism. In the Atlantic Charter, the party saw a close approximation of the principles inherent in proletarian internationalism. Moreover, it utilised the Charter and proletarian internationalism to articulate policies that would grant greater freedom to colonies, culminating in post-war independence. On the national question, the CPA was uncompromising. It always rejected racism, even when directed against Australia's enemies. Additionally, the national question also left a notable imprint on the CPA's non-discriminatory, quota based, immigration policy. Thus, while the exigencies of war tempered colonial policy, the CPA's application of the national question was fully congruent with proletarian internationalism as set out in chapter two.

The party's war policy was in harmony with proletarian internationalism. It supported the defensive war of the Soviet Union as was required by proletarian internationalism. But it was not until Russia's Allies were committed by treaty to progressive war aims that it decided to support the broader Allied war effort. In the Australian context, even treaties were not enough; the CPA only backed the Australian war after the 'reactionary' Menzies

government was replaced with the more progressive Curtin government. Once Curtin assumed office, and the Allies as a whole were committed to fighting for progressive objectives, the party wholeheartedly swung behind the entire war effort. This was further consolidated after the larger and reactionary Japanese imperialism entered the war, threatening the independence of the smaller Australia, which as an ally of the Soviet and on account of its progressive war aims, merited defence. Hence, the party's war policy was also fully congruent with proletarian internationalism.

Conclusion

A brave new world emerged from the flames of war. For communism, the war wrought paradoxical consequences. On the one hand, it experienced tremendous advances: communist regimes sprouted across Eastern Europe; communist parties massively increased their membership and influence; and in the cases of the Italian and French parties, shared in the responsibilities of government. In 1949, after years of bloody civil war, Mao's Chinese Communist Party finally seized power. With the arrival of the 1950s, one-third of humanity was living under communist governments.

Yet, on the other hand, these gains obscured serious difficulties. Allied unity disintegrated, an 'iron curtain' descended over Europe, and the Cold War had well and truly commenced. It brought decisive American involvement, first in war ravaged Europe, then in other parts of the globe. American influence dealt a savage blow to Western communism; the parties that emerged stronger than ever after the war failed to sustain unprecedented levels of popular support. Massive American investment in Western Europe, intended to lift living standards and retain Western Europe for capitalism proved successful. Desperate to sustain communist ascendancy, Stalin's responses were ineffective: from the establishment of a new organisation in 1947 linking a handful of communist parties (though not the CPA), the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform), to a failed blockade of Berlin and a stalemate in Korea. Yet, the Cominform, far from being a new Comintern, exerted particularly deleterious domestic consequences for those subscribing to its proposals. It encouraged communists to pursue a belligerent domestic and international posture, crystallised Cold War divisions and further isolated embattled communists. It added grist to the anti-communist mill, contributing to communist witch hunts, discrimination and ostracism. Far from the optimism shared with many for a better post-war world, this was to be the post-war political climate experienced by international communism, including the CPA. Yet, even as the CPA was facing the most difficult circumstances imaginable during the Cold War, due in part to its membership of the international communist movement, proletarian internationalism remained a bedrock of its ideology and actions.

This thesis has contended that proletarian internationalism was one of the most influential ideas guiding the Communist Party of Australia, helping it determine policy, tactics, strategy and other dimensions of its work. The thesis has also argued that proletarian internationalism was 'more than Moscow.' It meant a range of different things that were

summarised in chapter two under four rubrics: the organisational imperative of proletarian internationalism, which demanded that a disciplined, centralised, international organisation of committed revolutionaries serve as the 'general staff' directing globally scattered adherents towards the world revolution; international proletarian solidarity, which recognised the uniformity of interests of the world's downtrodden in seeking to topple capitalism, where sentiment was backed with deed; the national and colonial questions, the stipulate that governed communist attitudes to colonial countries and domestic minorities; and proletarian internationalism and war, which set out a framework distinguishing between different sorts of conflicts and established the correct communist attitude to various sorts of war. What will follow next shall be a brief recapitulation of the CPA's work regarding each of these different elements of proletarian internationalism.

The thesis has argued that the CPA maintained an ambivalent adherence to the organisational component of proletarian internationalism. The CPA-Comintern relationship, as foreshadowed in chapter one, contained many nuances and complexities. It was not in practice what Lenin envisaged in theory; nor was it a simple case of the Comintern handing down instructions and the CPA dutifully obeying them. The CPA often ignored, adjusted to suit Australian political realities, or adopted when domestic circumstances necessitated, the directions emanating from the Comintern. There are numerous examples that illustrate the flexible character of the CPA's relationship with the Comintern. Chapter three demonstrated that the Comintern, through its espousal of class against class and the changed directions it entailed, had effectively entered the Third Period in early 1928. Yet the CPA resisted class against class; its leaders refused to adopt what they believed to be policies contrived on the other side of the globe that took little cognisance of Australian circumstances. Defying the Comintern was risky, especially with an increasing number of local communists insisting on the international line. Ultimately, at the 1929 party conference, delegates motivated with a genuine desire to see their party pursue the Comintern line and maintain harmonious relations with Moscow, unceremoniously ejected from office the culprits responsible for placing the party at variance with the International.

Despite the change of leadership, the inability of the party to completely align itself to the Comintern continued to manifest itself. In chapter four, the changing nature of the Comintern line, seen in its gradual shift away from ultra-left sectarianism initiated at the 1930 February Presidium of the ECCI, again left the CPA in a deviationist position. This, however, was not as serious as the open resistance seen in chapter three. Instead, after the

obstructionist Wicks left for the United States, the party adopted Comintern policy as domestic circumstances necessitated it. Hence, following the inception of the Lyons government and the emergence of the New Guard, both of which posed serious threats to the party's existence, it commenced the gruelling road back to collaboration with Labor in the dying weeks of 1931 and the opening days of 1932. Joint action for the defence of the labour movement was required; at this stage, however, it did not mean open embrace of the reformist leadership.

More significant changes were initiated from 1933 onwards. With Hitler's triumph in Germany, and the French success resisting fascism in February 1934, the Comintern, after much internal ruction, adopt a new strategy that extended the united front from below to those at the top. The CPA, reluctant to embrace this new direction, was ultimately won over by the efficacy of the united front shown in the French model termed the 'popular front.' Then, following the official sanction of the 7th Comintern Congress in 1935, the CPA enthusiastically intensified its efforts to realise the popular front in Australia. This ultimately unsuccessful endeavour meant, in the Australian context, total support for the Labor party as the only force capable of defeating the Lyons government.

The party continued on this trajectory until the outbreak of World War in September 1939, which provoked another change of approach in Australia and Moscow. With the war's outbreak, and after a week of indecision, the Comintern, at Stalin's direction on 7 September, decided to oppose the 'imperialist' Second World War. But prior to events in Moscow, the CPA had on 4 September already discerned the war's 'imperialist' character. However, it maintained support for the war on the ostensible grounds that the Polish cause was a just fight for national independence. With the collapse of Polish resistance in mid September, the party was already exhibiting signs that it was disposed to oppose the war in its entirety. This was before the party had even learned of the International's changed tune; by the time a Comintern document dated 3 November, that chastised the party's initial war policy was drafted, let alone in the possession of the Australian leadership, the CPA was already opposing the war for over a month. In this case, the CPA preceded the Comintern, and cannot be said to have 'taken orders' from Moscow. As this thesis has contended, the CPA's adherence to the organisational component of proletarian internationalism did not fully conform to the model outlined in chapter two, exposing the inherent complexity of that relationship.

The thesis has shown that the CPA's work relating to international solidarity, initially riddled with shortfalls, evolved into a fuller realisation of proletarian internationalism. In chapter three, the CPA's campaigns waged on the basis of international solidarity – for example the Colorado miners' strike – were limited to propaganda. Some, such as the Comintern and Profintern-sponsored two week campaign of international solidarity with the Chinese, were largely ignored. With the onset of the Third Period, the CPA improved its activities, though still lacked effective action. New organisations, such as the FOSU and LAI, helped direct energies into constructive channels, boosting solidarity work. There were greater activities for some causes: for example, the Meerut defendants in India and the Scottsboro boys. Yet it was with the Nazi accession, and the menacing fascist advances in Europe, that galvanised communists to a fuller realisation of international solidarity. This led to the efforts covered in chapter five, where international solidarity found far greater practical expression, reflecting a more complete attainment of proletarian internationalism as set out in chapter two. The most notable examples were the CPA's campaigns on behalf of the Spanish Republic (the International Brigades and the SRC) and defence of China (boycotts of Japanese goods and shipping). The party's transformation was breathtaking: in 1928 it was unable to provide any practical internationalism; by 1939, the CPA succeeded in attaining a full realisation of international solidarity, where, as outlined in chapter two, rhetoric was backed with action.

The national and colonial questions dimension of proletarian internationalism was equally significant for the party's activities. Here again, the CPA's work evolved throughout the years examined in this thesis to a greater realisation of the conditions described in chapter two. At first, the CPA, in comparison to later years, demonstrated marked reluctance to embrace fully the constituent conditions of the national and colonial questions. On the national question, it demonstrated the ability to stridently repudiate racism (including White Australia) in the *Workers' Weekly*, and urged the acceptance of Southern European migrants into the union movement. It also strongly rejected anti-Aboriginal discrimination. However, with the exception of some individuals, it showed less enthusiasm in bringing its policy into effect, for fear of alienating mainstream sensitivities, incurring a reprimand from the Comintern. On the colonial question, next to raising objections to colonial exploitation in the party press, it performed little work.

Significant changes took place during the Third Period. Third Period communism transformed the party in numerous ways. One of its transformative legacies was to impart

a more assertive opposition to the White Australia policy and racism, evidenced in particular in its work during the 1934 Kalgoorlie race riot. In 1931, it issued its first comprehensive policy for Aborigines, one that was fully congruent with Lenin's writing on the national question discussed in chapter two. Moreover, the CPA also improved activity that fell within the ambit of the colonial question: efforts for Indian independence increased with, first, the establishment of the 'Hands off India' movement and, second, the formation of the Australian branch of the LAI. Many demonstrations took place and much printed propaganda for colonial independence was issued.

By chapter five, covering the mid 1930s, the CPA was in a position of unequivocal support for colonial independence, seen again in its espousal of the Abyssinian and Chinese causes. It also began to complement opposition to Australian racism with a study of Australian history, seeking to locate the party's position in the Australian radical tradition, none of which contradicted the teachings on the national question. With the outbreak of war in September 1939, the CPA's policies influenced by the national and colonial questions remained unchanged.

However, with the involvement of the Soviet Union from 22 June 1941, the party pragmatically modified its colonial policies so as to minimise any possible disruption to the war effort. Thus, the Communist Party ceased to call for the immediate independence of India and other colonies; it instead urged colonial masters to refer greater self-government, with the promise of eventual independence upon the war's completion. While this represented a compromise of principle, it also demonstrated that the CPA gave precedence to some elements of proletarian internationalism over others, depending on the needs of the day. However, even the war was not cause enough to modify the party's policies influenced by the national question; indeed, communists commendably repudiated anti-Japanese racism and defended African-Americans in a nation facing invasion and afflicted with racism. Additionally, they offered an immigration plan, based on principles inseparable from the national question and indicative of the CPA's collaborative wartime style, which sought to address the prospective post-war manpower shortage. Therefore, as with international solidarity, the CPA's policies and practices that were influenced by the national and colonial questions component of proletarian internationalism, evolved from a dearth of activity into a closer attainment of the relevant conditions outlined in chapter two.

The final aspect of proletarian internationalism was the communist attitude towards war. During every year from 1928 to 1945, the CPA either feared the imminent outbreak of war or was faced with actual conflict. Between 1928 and 1933 (chapter three and half of chapter four), the CPA was faced with largely imaginary threats of world war. On the notable occasion where open conflict did take place, the 1931 Japanese occupation of Manchuria, the CPA was able to accomplish little more than appeal through its press for assertive working class action to repulse Japanese aggression. Few heeded this appeal.

However, mounting international tensions after 1933 provided opportunities for more robust anti-war activities. The MAWAF spearheaded the CPA's efforts to prevent Australian participation in a new world war, though its broad based membership was often divided over attitudes to pacifism and militant resistance to war, and even on the occasions where communists enthusiastically supported wars of national liberation. This last point became the scenario with Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. Here, the CPA pursued a course in harmony with Lenin's writings on war enunciated in chapter two: that the proletariat support the wars of liberation fought by a colonial or semi-colonial country (Abyssinia) against the aggression of an imperialist assailant (Italy). Similar circumstances presented themselves during the Sino-Japanese war commencing in 1937; again the CPA sided with the semi-colonial Chinese against the imperialist Japanese. The Spanish Civil War presented different conditions. This was a domestic war between – so communists believed – forces representing fascism and democracy. The class basis of and sharp differences between the fascist (reactionary) and Republican (progressive) protagonists, meant that this was also interpreted as a class war. As shown in chapter two, Lenin argued that communists judge wars on a class basis; those fought by progressives were worthy of support, those fought in the name of reactionaries were not. The CPA observed this simple logic and unflinchingly leant its support to the Spanish Republic.

Then arrived the roller-coaster of the Second World War. The CPA, in a 4 September 1939 circular, discerned the war's 'imperialist' character, yet continued to support it on the basis of the Polish struggle for independence. However, proletarian internationalism forbade the CPA from cooperating in imperialist war of any variety; hence its initial confusion contradicted the communist attitude to war articulated in chapter two. This did not last long; by the middle of September, the CPA was hurtling inexorably towards opposing the war, and by the end of that month was standing unequivocally in opposition to it. The Communist Party did not favour either side; it merely called for an end to

hostilities and the convocation of a peace conference. As far as Lenin's writings spelled out in chapter two were concerned, communists could not remain 'neutral' on the character of a war, though were permitted to remain neutral in the sense of not choosing sides. This was the principle guiding the CPA during the 'imperialist war' phase of World War II. With Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, the party again changed tune. This time it swung behind the defensive Soviet war and, after the accession of the Curtin government, the Australian and Western Allied war efforts. These were uncharted waters; communist theoreticians never dreamt of the day the Soviet Union would be fighting for its existence alongside imperialist states. Nevertheless, it was congruent with proletarian internationalism that communists' support the Soviet Union in its defensive wars, leaving it little choice but to fall in behind Russia's Allies.

Proletarian internationalism was one of the dominant ideas influencing the CPA. This thesis has attempted to show its pervasiveness. It influenced many facets of party policy: from the decision to adopt class against class to the Australian involvement in the Spanish Civil War. Previous scholarship has neglected to sufficiently address its breadth – it was more than Moscow – and extent of influence. In rectifying this oversight, this study has attempted to demonstrate that examination of CPA history through the lens of proletarian internationalism contributes to a richer, deeper and more nuanced understanding of communism in Australia.

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