

He would rise at dawn and get on his way before we woke up. He had a cure for indigestion which he claimed to be infallible—a completely black mug of very hot tea filled with loads of salt and pepper. This man would wander miles from farmhouse to farmhouse around Wonthaggi in the cold, rain and biting winds of that bleak area distributing Party leaflets, saying: "Each leaflet I drop is a bullet in the class war." He caught pneumonia and nearly died. He caught it a second time while I was down at Wonthaggi. Wondering how to make Bill stay in bed I not very wisely advised the Section Committee to give him a definite instruction that he was not to work during his attack of pneumonia. I got the instruction sent round immediately and next morning arrived at his house on the outskirts of Wonthaggi to find him literally quivering with rage. He knew why the Section Committee had told him to lay off work, he said. It was because the work he did helped to expose the idleness of others. And so on. I was never really able to restore smooth relations with Old Bill after that episode. Finally he caught pneumonia a third time and died. He had one of the biggest funerals ever known in Wonthaggi. However trying some had found him while he lived, Wonthaggi turned out in force on his death to lay the lonely voyager with full honours in his final resting place.

R Gibson, My Years in the CP

CHAPTER 2

Struggle Against Fascism and War 1933-1939

In March, 1933, Hitler came to power in Germany. German capitalism, stripped of much of its wealth by the Versailles Treaty, but more modern and efficient than British capitalism, was getting ready for its next great challenge to the British Empire. It faced five million unemployed and a strong Communist Party and Labor Movement.

The Social Democratic Party, which held the main sway in the Labor Movement, refused to join in common action with the Communist Party against capitalism and fascism, and this gave Hitler his opportunity to strike. He had the great monopolies behind him (Thyssen, Krupp, Siemens, Bosch and others) and he had also a large mass following, especially among the middle class and among the youth. His aims were nothing less than the crushing out of all opposition and dissent inside Germany and the conquest of the whole world by German arms.

A GREAT CALL FOR UNITY

Hitler's aims, and the whole character of fascism, were vividly exposed by the Bulgarian Communist leader, Dimitrov, who had been arrested by Hitler with others on a trumped up charge of setting fire to the German house of parliament, the Reichstag.

This working class hero turned Hitler's own court into a world forum and called on the people of the world to sink their differences in a common struggle against fascist barbarism and world war. His call rang out far and wide. It had a tremendous effect in rallying democrats throughout the world into their first great display of anti-fascist initiative. By their great meetings and demonstrations and their thousands of cablegrams, they forced his release from the clutches of Hitler's hangmen.

What was Dimitrov's message? He spelt it out at the Congress of the Communist International in 1935: "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." This, he said, would inspire also the wavering middle sections of society with faith in the workers' strength.

Events were proving this true. In France, in February, 1934, the fascists were out on the streets and squares of Paris, and a weak government was preparing to surrender to them, but Communist and Socialist workers acted together and defeated the fascist threat in a few days of united strikes and demonstrations. Later an official united front was formed between the French Communist and Socialist Parties, merging into a broader "Peoples' Front" with the Radical Party which represented the middle classes of France.

ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT LAUNCHED

As part of the world-wide movement for people's unity the National and State Councils against War and Fascism were formed in 1933. They were formed at the call of a World anti-war Congress held in Amsterdam in August, 1932, under the leadership of the famous French writers Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland. The world committee which arose from this Congress included men of the stature of Albert Einstein, Maxim Gorki, Bernard Shaw, Upton Sinclair, Lord Marley and Madame Sun Yat Sen of China.

The Victorian Council Against War and Fascism left its mark on Victorian history. It was quite a wide fellowship of Communists, Labor Party and middle class people who worked together freely and enthusiastically. Labor M.H.Rs. like Maurice Blackburn, Frank Brennan (then still a radical) and the aged Dr. Maloney along with other Labor Party men like Captain Jacka (brother of Australia's first V.C. winner in the Great War), Cr. Laurie Marshall of Collingwood, Tom Gleeson and E. J. Brady belonged to the movement in Victoria, and among its national councillors was that splendid fighting Labor Movement pioneer Senator Arthur Rae. Such

well-known churchmen as Bishop Burgmann of Goulburn, N.S.W., and Melbourne's Rev. John Lawton supported the movement. Nattie Seeligson, later of the Guardian staff, was first Victorian secretary, and I had the honor to be a Council member and spoke jointly with others at many of its public meetings.

One such meeting was a debate in the Bijou Theatre. (Debates were popular in those days—I remember debating, on various subjects, Maurice Blackburn, Macmahon Ball, Hollins of the Douglas Credit Movement, Langley of the Rationalists, the former M.L.A., F. L. Edmonds and others.) The particular debate in the Bijou Theatre was on the Lyons Government's re-armament policy. There was a full house. A team of the Young Nationalists (as usual, not young) were defending the policy which was being condemned by an anti-war movement team composed of Frank Brennan, the old Socialist Party orator Scott Bennett and myself. I was the last to speak on our side and was followed by the last of the "Young Nationalists"—none other than the now famous Liquor Royal Commissioner, P. D. Phillips, Q.C. Mr. Phillips has a very capable mind, but on this occasion lacked any popular touch. Speaking to an audience of which the majority was clearly opposed to him he tackled my arguments in a personal manner which led to an increasing uproar. I saw Frank Brennan hurriedly pocketing a very fine-looking watch which he had laid on the table (as if anxious to avoid losing it in a melee). Percy Laidler came to the front intending to appeal to the crowd for silence but finished by appealing to Mr. Phillips to change his tone; and finally, to the crowd's intense disappointment the Chairman, Maurice Blackburn, closed the debate. The last thing I remember was Percy telling me he would have to see that Mr. Phillips got out safely by the back entrance.

THE KISCH EPISODE

Next came the Kisch episode. The Czech writer Egon Irwin Kisch was sent out by the World Committee to the Second National Congress Against War and Fascism held in the Port Melbourne Town Hall in