

International Socialist 8

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The Post War Boom
in Australia

A POOR START TO PROSPERITY



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THE COMMUNIST PARTY
A history of decline

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CRISIS IN THE
BUILDING INDUSTRY

The cover is a graphic depicting the launching of the first Holden car in 1948 by Ben Chifley. This was a significant moment in the development of Australia's post-war boom.

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Contributions are welcome from all and sundry. These should be sent to the editors by the beginning of the month preceding publication. The next issue will appear in August 1979.

A Word of Explanation...

The introduction of yet another journal on the Australian left may well be greeted with signs of despair – “There’s so much to read already!”

But it isn’t as bad as all that. This is indeed the first edition of this journal to bear the title *International Socialist*. But, of course, there have been previous issues of the journal – 7 in all – which bore the old name *Frontline*.

Nonetheless, this *is* a new journal. Our change of name is related to our change of purpose. We published a great deal of very good material in *Frontline*. But the journal was never quite as good as the individual articles contained in it. It lacked a clear sense of purpose and direction.

That was why publication of this eighth issue of the journal was delayed for so long (apologies to our subscribers!) – while we took stock and had a long, hard think about what we were really up to.

But now we feel we’ve clarified what the aims of the journal should be.

To begin with, we want to give readers a deeper insight into our politics – the politics of the International Socialists. In its three years of existence, the IS has grown into a national organisation, with branches in most state capitals. So the resources we have for a new, attractive, and hopefully popular journal – *International Socialist* – are greater than before.

We hope to cover and analyse current struggles. In this issue, Carole Ferrier and John Minns look at the major point of confrontation in the Australian class struggle – Queensland.

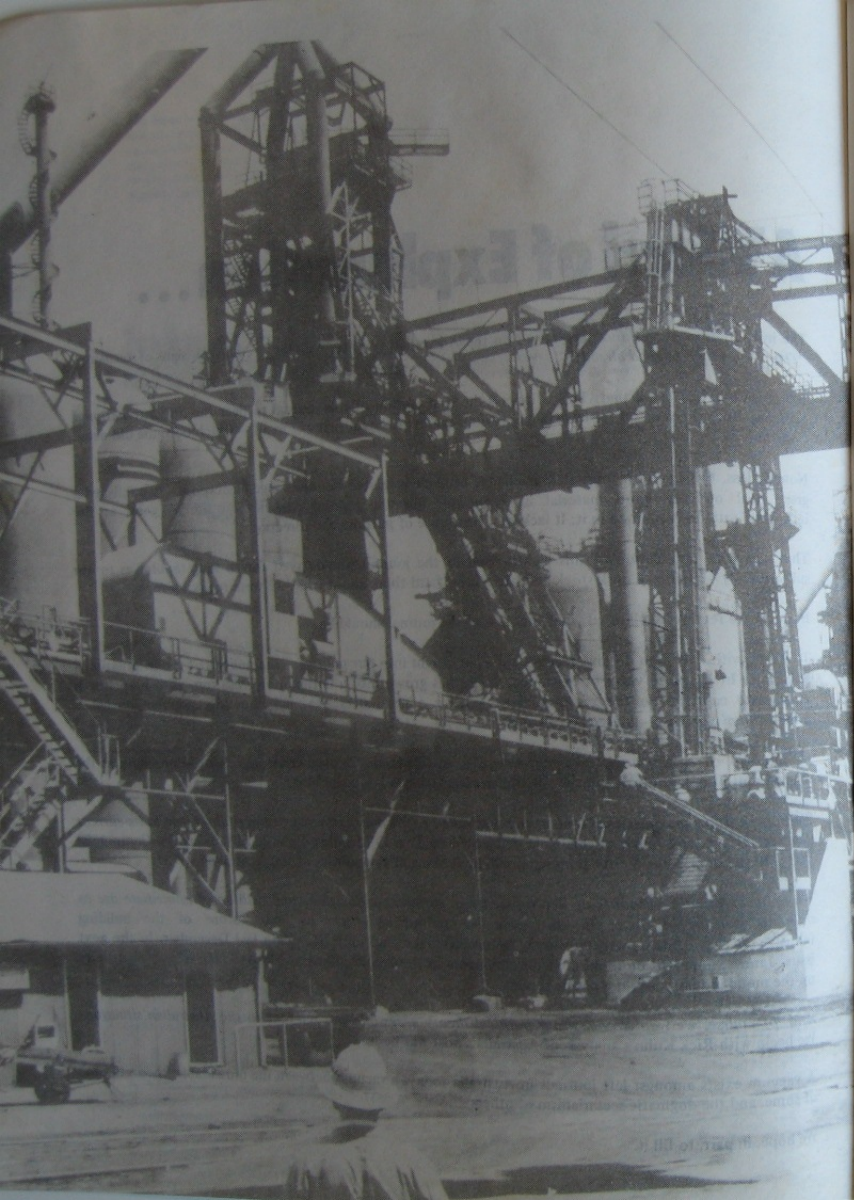
We hope both to take a critical look at the Australian Left’s political heritage and to intervene in its current debates. That’s why much of this issue is devoted to Tom O’Lincoln’s long, hard look at the Communist Party. In the next issue, Verity Burgmann will be looking at the politics of the Australian I.W.W.

We hope to publish accounts of developments in different industries which will be of immediate use to militants working in them. In this issue we publish an article on the future of the building industry by David Shaw, written shortly before his tragic and untimely death last December. In the next issue, Janey Stone will be looking at developments in the health industry. We also plan to publish articles on the metal industry and the public service.

And, of course, we want to make our political theory accessible and relevant to the Australian situation. We begin with Rick Kuhn’s analysis of Australia’s post-war boom.

A vacuum exists amongst left journals in Australia today; a vacuum between the unreadable ‘theoreticism’ of some, and the dogmatic sectarianism of others.

We hope, in part, to fill it.



The Origins of the Post-War Boom in
Australia

A POOR START TO PROSPERITY

by Rick Kuhn

Since 1975 the Australian ruling class has mounted the most sustained offensive against workers for more than twenty years. The sacking of the Whitlam government has probably been the most spectacular episode in the offensive so far, but it was not the starting point.

In industrial relations policies (the introduction of wage indexation) and budgetary strategy (the 'Hayden Budget' cuts), the Labor government had laid the groundwork for Fraser's attacks on the working class. However, the conservative government is able to undertake its onslaughts in a much less inhibited way than the ALP.

Fraser turned the staff ceilings, introduced by

Whitlam, into public service cutbacks; he has introduced savage anti-union legislation — the Industrial Relations Bureau, amendments to the Trade Practices Act — where the Labor Party only helped cut wages by introducing wage indexation. Where Hayden was only game to trim the welfare state in 1975, Fraser has shown a willingness to dismantle it.

At first glance it seems that the ruling class hasn't been this tough since the depression. In terms of the extent of the economic slump this is true. Not since the 1930's has there been a global economic downturn as deep or prolonged as the present one. Nevertheless, we can find an intense ruling class offensive in a more recent period — from 1945 to about 1954. Between those dates, the ruling class established the local preconditions for Australian participation in the long post-war

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boom, by attacking and disrupting working class organisation.

The post-war ruling class offensive and the present one share a number of features. In both cases a Labor government did the spade work for a subsequent, tougher, conservative one. Many of the particular strategies are similar – budgetary policy used to exacerbate unemployment, attacks on militant workers, media campaigns, stiff ceilings. After the war employers found willing allies in the working class, the “Movement” and groupers – today people like Kratulis, Biggs and Latham as well as the groupers (now organised in the National Civic Council) are doing the same job.

I will attempt to outline some significant features of the post-war ruling class offensive in order to highlight the similarities and differences when compared to the current offensive. Most importantly, I will seek to show that the earlier episode could be an economic ‘success’, because it coincided with a global boom, while the present one cannot hope to pluck Australian capitalists out of the cesspool of a world-wide slump.

The Long Global Boom

In order to understand how a ruling class offensive could initiate a period of prosperity for Australian capitalism, we have to consider its context – the global boom which began after World War II. Given the dependence of the Australian economy (during the 1945-1955 period exports were about 20% of GNP), the existence of a world boom was a prerequisite for an Australian boom. But there were other necessary conditions. Profit levels had to be competitive by world standards for overseas investment to occur. Further, for a boom in the export sector, generated overseas, to be generalised to the rest of the economy, investment had to be made attractive; in practice this meant an increase in the rate of surplus value and state intervention to insure a transfer of surplus value from the export to the manufacturing

sector. Here I intend to concentrate on the former¹ – the way in which changes in the relation of class forces facilitated the participation of the Australian economy in the world boom.

It will not be possible to analyse the development of the world boom here, but a number of its most crucial underpinnings can be identified:

- 1) US economic and military hegemony. Not only did the US emerge from the war as the strongest military power, its role as an overseas combatant had also allowed it to build up its economic stature. The post-war settlement put the US into a position to dictate the ground rules for international economic intercourse. The institutional form of US dominance took the form of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), both of which came out

of the 1944 Bretton Woods agreement, and Marshall aid to Europe from June 1947.

- 2) the effects of fascism and the war on working class organisation. In the defeated countries, the working class had experienced massive defeats before the war. Communist and social-democratic parties had been banned and the union movements smashed. The occupations of Japan and Germany saw a continuation of close state supervision of the work force. In nonfascist, combatant countries the war had led to a dampening of the class struggle as working class organisations succumbed to nationalism. There was a consequent lowering of strike levels and, perhaps more significant in the long run, a ‘dilution’ of the skill of workers and the relatively unimpeded introduction of new technology and changes to the labour process



Given that the boom already started during the war in the US, the wartime introduction of technological change was particularly important there.

From Orthodox Economics to Marxist Analysis

So the post-war period saw the start of a global boom – but what were the particular conditions for Australian participation? In order to answer this question we have to take note of existing, non-marxist treatments of the boom.

Thus far, marxist accounts of the boom, while recognising that it had an internal dynamic, have tended to look at it as a single episode, with no more structure than a beginning, middle and end.² In other countries, marxists have considered short run economic fluctuations.³ However, the late arrival of non-stalinist marxist political economy in Australia, since 1970, and a justifiable concern with contemporary events, has meant that more attention has been paid to the boom's demise than its origins or course.

Thus there have been no marxist treatments of the economic downturns of 1951 or 1961. Yet both events have some significance for Australian class relations – a significance which transcends ‘economics’. The following account draws on orthodox economists’ descriptions of economic developments, assessing them in the light of marxist concepts.

The task of understanding the political and ideological developments which characterised the ruling class offensive and start of the boom is more straight-forward than that of understanding economic developments. Bob Connell and Terry Irving have paid some attention to the political and ideological features of the period in their article “The making of the Australian Bourgeoisie”, in *Intervention* No 10/11. Their account, which is couched in terms of a class analysis can easily be employed here.

Connell and Irving focus on the

reorganisation of conservative politics in the Liberal Party and its mobilisation of diverse social groups, ‘white collar’ workers and the middle class, as well as the ruling class, against the Labor Party and the Communist Party. Their analysis certainly cannot be accused of neglecting class struggles like those of bourgeois economists. But it is not linked to their subsequent discussion of the “Second Long Boom”.⁴ The latter is an interesting description of economic developments.

The only explanation of the boom in Australia which emerges is that it occurred because “Australia became integrated into the new world economic order”.⁵ The way in which the ruling class mobilisation (or “offensive”⁶) may have changed the conditions for accumulation or altered the relation of class forces on the shop floor is not considered. Australia's relation to the world economy is only presented in terms of the inflow of capital and migrants; market relations are absent.

Economic Developments

Immediately after World War II the Australian economy experienced quite rapid growth rates. During the war investment in ‘non-essential’ industries had been restricted and consumption goods rationed. The return to civilian production entailed dramatic expansion in these sectors. It was argued at the time that the economic growth was largely superficial:

“The immediate post-war situation was somewhat ragged, deserving the appellation ‘milk-bar economy’.”⁷

That is, there was an imbalance between ‘essential’ and ‘inessential’ production; investment in new areas of production and in basic and capital goods producing sectors was sluggish. While the economy was growing, it was not doing so in a way which would sustain further rapid growth.

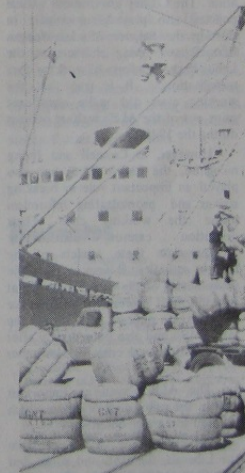
“Apart from the setting up of plant to manufacture Australian cars for the first time, there was

little to distinguish expansion from what had gone previously (ie during the interwar period.”⁸

This pattern has been attributed to difficulties in obtaining capital goods from overseas (shortages in Europe and restrictions on US dollar exchanges) and “discontent and inefficiency arising from ‘working conditions’ and from more deep-seated social causes”⁹, on the part of the workforce. Difficulties in obtaining capital goods from overseas had not prevented expansion of capacity during the war.

However, during the 1940's unions put up considerably more resistance to the reorganisation of the labour process than they had during the war – there was opposition to the introduction of piece rates and “mechanisation”.¹⁰ Until about 1953 productivity growth was slow.¹¹

Australia's export income during the period under consideration was heavily reliant on wool sales.¹² Despite the boost to the Australian economy produced by the boom in wool prices as a result of the Korean



In the early 1950's, Australia's exports were heavily reliant on wool sales.

war, the rate of growth of GNP slowed down between 1948/9 and 1952/3.

The recession of 1952 and 1953 (which was the most severe between the end of the war and the close of the boom) seems to have marked a turning point in Australia's post-war development. The diversification of manufacturing investment after 1953 was much more rapid than during the 1940's with innovations in the rubber goods, oil, chemicals and electrical goods industries.¹³ "From 1953 the growth of productivity picked up significantly."¹⁴ Both ALP and Liberal Party policies before the recession and the Menzies government's handling of the down-turn (which was precipitated by the collapse of wool prices during the second half of 1951) help to explain Australia's participation in the world boom.

The Chifley Government

The most important direct effects of Labor Party policy were on the effectiveness of working class organisation. The Chifley government's fiscal policies also played some part in shifting the balance of class forces. Connell and Irving characterise the Labor Party as a form of working class mobilisation.¹⁵ It is true that the working class did make significant gains out of the ALP's welfare policies during the 1940's.

However, as Connell and Irving recognise, the Labor Party has also played an important role in breaking strikes and promulgating reformism inside the working class. Their definition cannot comfortably accommodate these aspects of the Party's activities. It was in fact, the demobilising of the working class that was the most prominent consequence of the ALP's policies, both during the late 1940's and also immediately after the constitutional crisis of November 1975.

The ALP played an important part in the ruling class offensive which Connell and Irving describe.¹⁶

Attacks on the CPA came from the Liberals, the RSL and so on, but also from inside the Labor Party. The ALP launched the industrial groups which made the extent of disorganisa-



1949: Miners' wives demonstrate in support of coal strikes.

tion and disruption in the unions possible during the early 1950's. The defeat of the 1949 coal miners' strike was not only a set-back for the CPA, but also for the working class. The CPA's sectarian turn from 1948 and the ALP's identification with the interests of capital thus combined, with detrimental consequences for the working class.

The decline in industrial militancy between the late forties and the fifties cannot only be attributed to the policies of the incoming conservative government.¹⁷

In addition to the divisions created by the policy of the industrial groups and the demoralisation following the defeat of the miners, the Labor Party introduced changes to the arbitration system which helped alter the balance of forces between employers and workers.

The Chifley government raised the status of the Arbitration Court to that of a Court of Superior Record, with the same powers to punish for contempt as the High Court. Section 29 of the Conciliation and Arbitration Act gave the Court power to impose penalties on individuals or organisations failing to comply with its orders or contravening the Act. The Court could now punish for contempt of its orders as well as contempt in the face of the Court.¹⁸

In 1949 the government passed the Coal Strike Act. Under this legislation a number of unions were

financed and some union officials were goaled for contempt. Once this precedent had been set, employers began to take similar action in dealing with trade unions under the Arbitration Acts.¹⁹ If only for obvious financial reasons, this was found to be much more effective than applying for deregistration of unions, the employers' previous practice.

The Chifley government also amended the Conciliation and Arbitration Act in 1949 to allow appeal to the Court over trade union elections. The amendment gave the Court the power to conduct new elections or to replace union officials (without any election).²⁰

The groupers used this legislation to gain control of the FIA, where the CPA had preferred to rig the 1949 ballot for NSW State Secretary rather than build its support amongst the rank and file. Both groupers and Communists were quite happy to avoid involving the mass of the membership in their struggle for control of the union.

Chifley's fiscal policy up to 1948/9 bore some resemblance to recent budgetary practices with its emphasis on anti-inflationary measures. The combination of relative public sector restraint (given the backlog in government capital expenditure caused by the war) and tax cuts, now being applied by the Fraser government, was characteristic of the ALP's economic policy from the end of the war to 1948.

1949 saw a dramatic increase in public capital expenditure which was continued by the new government. The ALP encouraged the introduction of 'Taylorism', in the form of organisation and methods, into the public service. In his 1947 budget speech Chifley announced that:

"The government is determined that the expenditure in all fields shall be kept under the closest scrutiny to ensure that the community obtains full value and efficient service."²¹

Pig Iron Prime Minister

Although the Labor Party initiated measures which improved the conditions for Australian participation in the world boom, it was not an

adequate vehicle for such a policy. The Liberal Party could carry out the task more effectively. It was not subject to working class pressure as was the ALP and could be relied upon not to upset 'business confidence' through excesses such as bank nationalisation. The fall of the Labor government was thus a setback for the working class.

The Liberal Party found considerable ruling class support as well as aid from groups such as the British Medical Association and bank employees, in its campaigns against the Labor government.²² The Menzies government continued and extended a number of its predecessor's policies. When the new provisions of the Conciliation and Arbitration Act were successfully challenged in 1951, the government introduced new amendments "to restore the Court's powers of enforcement of awards and clarify and establish its powers to punish for contempt of its power and authority."²³

The campaign against the CPA was escalated, with legislation and then a referendum to ban it. Menzies saw the suppression of communism as a means of increasing productivity.²⁴ CPA unionists were constrained to divert energy away from industrial concerns to the defence of their Party, while the industrial groups were more successful under the Liberal than the Labor government.²⁵

Where fiscal policy under Labor had been 'restrained', under the Liberals, after 1951, it was draconian. The government took advantage of the recession of 1952 to further weaken the union movement, by exacerbating its effects. 1952-3 saw "the largest cut

(both in absolute and percentage terms) that has been made in public expenditure in the post-war period"²⁶ to 1975.

1952/3 was also the only year, before the end of the boom, when real GNP declined. The 1951 'Horror' budget was the first post-war attempt to repress economic activity through fiscal measures and included increases in taxation, especially sales tax, and the discouragement of investment. The 1952 budget, though less drastic continued policies of restraint.

In 1953 income tax concessions were made, another step in the increasing emphasis on sales rather than income tax begun under Labor in 1948.²⁷ The significance of Menzies' fiscal policy lies not in its effects on demand, but rather on its impact on the level of unemployment, which increased dramatically during the recession.

The government also contributed to unemployment by cutting back the public service and imposing staff ceilings. Overall employment fell by over 4% between 1951 and 1953, and employment under the Public Service Act fell by over 8%.²⁸ The government's handling of the recession, the worst downturn before the end of the boom, was another aspect of the ruling class offensive.

The success and significance of the ruling class offensive can be seen by the changes in labour's share of national product between 1948/9 and 1970/1. It fell dramatically during 1952 and stabilised at a level about 4% lower than before the recession. Subsequently there was a slow upward trend which accelerated at the end of the 1960's. It seems reasonable to use labour's share of national product as an indicator of the rate of surplus value.

The increases in productivity after 1953, decline in industrial militancy after 1950 and fall in labour's share in national product suggest that the working class suffered a substantial defeat between 1949 and 1953. By increasing the rate of surplus value and making the introduction of new technology easier, this defeat opened up opportunities for Australia's more effective participation in the world boom, entailing a diversification in investment in manufacturing and a

sustained growth in GNP.

And Now

The ruling class offensive after the war marked the start of the post-war boom in Australia. The present offensive will not lead to such attractive consequences for capitalists.

Australia's articulation to the world economy means that an increase in the local rate of exploitation will not be sufficient to return the economy to 'prosperity'. However, this does not mean that the ruling class will be any less intent on placing the burden of the slump, as far as possible, on the working class. Where the world boom meant that the welfare policies introduced by the Chifley government largely survived intact through the earlier offensive, the present one entails a dismantling of the welfare state.

At the same time, the experience of the earlier episode and the more desperate situation of many capitalists today suggests that attacks on working class organisation will be intensified during the next few years.

Unless a fight-back is effectively organised around rank and file workers, and not just through union and ALP leaders, these attacks are likely to have some success in further cutting working class living standards and undermining the effectiveness of workers' class organisations.

Footnotes

1. See T. O'Shaughnessy, "Some Recent Divisions in the Ruling Class", *Intervention*, 10/11, 1978, for an account of the redistribution of surplus value within the ruling class.
2. For example, K. Rowley, "The Political Economy of Australia since the war" in *Playford and Kirmser, Australian Capitalism*, Penguin 1972, and M. Breznjak and J. Collins, "The Australian Crisis: from Boom to Bust", *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, 1977. C. Silver, "The Economic Cycle in Post-War Australia", *Arena*, 49, 1977, gives a statistical outline of post-war Australian cycles, but draws no conclusions.
3. For example, P. Baran and P. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, Penguin, 1973 (first published 1966)
4. R. Connell and T. Irving, "The Making



of the Australian Bourgeois", *Intervention*, 10/11, 1978, p.23.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, p. 22

7. D. Copeland, "The Australian Economy: a new book", *Economic Record*, 33 (65), August 1957.

8. W. Sinclair, "Capital Formation", in C. Forster (ed), *Australian Economic Development in the Twentieth Century*, Australasian Publishers, 1970, p.41.

9. A. Waterman, *Economic Fluctuations in Australia 1948 to 1964*, A.N.U.P. 1972, p. 67-8.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 6

9. A. Waterman, *Economic Fluctuations in Australia 1948 to 1964*, A.N.U.P. 1972, p. 67-8.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 69

11. *Ibid.*, p. 68

12. In between 1945/6 and 1949/50 the proceeds of wool export were 43.4% of total export income, the figure for 1950/1 1954) was 51.9%. J. E. Becham, *Twentieth Century Economic Development in Australia*, Longmans, 1972, p. 68). Demand for wool was strong from the end of the war, but the Korean War led to a spectacular boom in wool prices during 1950 and 1951 (the wool price index went from 890 in September 1950 to 1437 in May 1951).

13. Sinclair, *op. cit.*, p. 42

14. Waterman, *op. cit.*, p. 98

15. Connell and Irving, *op. cit.*, p. 13

16. *Ibid.*, p. 17

17. This decline shows up very clearly in the figures for days lost through industrial disputes: *Days lost through industrial disputes per male worker, per annum* Years 1946-50 1951-60 285 days lost per worker p.a. 0.654 0.285 (Source: Waterman, *op. cit.*, p. 67)

18. This account is based on D. Fieldes, "Pains and Penalties," *History Honours Thesis* ANU 1976.

19. J. Portus, *Australian Conciliation Arbitration*, Law Bush Co., 1970, p. 90.

20. D. Rawson, "The ALP Industrial Groups - An Assessment", *Australian Quarterly* 26 (4) December 1954.

21. Quoted in G. Caiden, *Career Service*, Melbourne University Press, 1966, p. 318.

22. See R. Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists*, ANU Press, 1975, for the role of the British Medical Association in attaching the Labor Government.

23. R. O'Dea, *Industrial Relations in Australia*, 1975, p. 42.

24. Waterman, *op. cit.*, p. 76

25. See Rawson, *op. cit.*

26. M. Artis and R. Wallace, "A Historical Survey of Australian Fiscal Policy: 1945-66", in N. Raunich (ed), *Australian Monetary and Fiscal Policy*, University of London Press, 1971, p. 419.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 414-16

28. N. Butlin, A. Bamard and J. Pincus, "Public and Private Sector Employment in Australia 1901-1974", *Australian Economic Review*, 1st quarter 1977, p. 51.

Review article

FEMININITY AS ALIENATION?

by Mick Armstrong and Diane Fieldes

Anne Foreman's book is an attempt to elaborate a theory of women's oppression distinct both from the patriarchal analyses popular with much of the women's movement and what may be described as the central marxist/functionalist approach, which sees the family form as it exists as central to capitalism as a system.

She rejects an analysis of patriarchy as being an autonomous phenomenon not historically specific to particular societies. Her initial starting point lies within a marxist framework.

It is in her particular analysis of women's oppression under capitalism that she parts company with marxism.

In the early chapters of her book, Foreman provides a justifiably critical analysis of Freudian psychoanalytical theory and of the attempts by theorists as diverse as Juliet Mitchell, Reich & Marcuse to integrate Freudianism and marxism.

All these theorists came to grief in attempting to reconcile the Freudian theory of the libido and sexual instincts (which are in Freud's view outside the conscious control of individuals) and Marx's view that to achieve socialism the working class had to be

"Femininity as Alienation" by Ann Foreman is published by Pluto Press. Price \$6.00 from I.S. Books

conscious both of its oppression under capitalism and of its own interests as a class.

As Foreman says to a pessimistic liberal like Freud, the possibility of revolutionary change is easily dismissed but it must create a major philosophical contradiction for any marxist who utilises psychoanalysis.

There is no mechanism in Freud's theory to explain major changes in social, sexual and moral behaviour. Yet profound changes in sexual morality, behaviour etc. accompanied the change from feudalism to capitalism. This empirical evidence alone seems to undermine the basis of Freud's psychoanalytical determinism.

Unfortunately Foreman's attack on Freud is overly reliant on "liberal humanist" versions of marxism. The liberal humanists (typified by the idealist Georg Lukacs, the only 'marxist' Foreman views in any way favourably) attempt to turn marxism into a revolutionary ideal, overemphasising the importance of ideas and human will, and separating it from material reality.

Foreman constantly harps on about the supposed domination of economic determinist ideas within marxism. She characterises economic determinism as the view "that assumes

each individual idea can be traced back on a one-to-one basis to the economic reality which caused it". In fact no marxist has ever put forward such a view. What underlies Foreman's hostility to "economic determinism" is her own moving away from the materialist basis of marxism.

This idealist tendency in Foreman means that while criticising Freud, her own analysis ends up sharing many of the very weaknesses she has identified in him. What she has in common with Freud is some notion of the importance of the "unconscious".

Her ideas here are influenced by the existentialist analysis of Satre and de Beauvoir. What she means by the "unconscious" is somewhat unclear but she states that "a level of reality is excluded from conscious thought in capitalist society". Thus in her view: "The full experience of femininity prevents women developing a consciousness of their oppression."

Although her definition of the unconscious is not the same as Freud's, it still leaves certain difficulties unresolved. How can people change? How can women fight an oppression of which they are not conscious?

The reason women are oppressed according to Foreman is that: "Men's objectification within industry, through the expropriation of the product of their labour, takes the form of alienation. But the effect of alienation on the lives and consciousness of women takes an even more oppressive form. Men seek relief from their alienation through their relations with women; for women there is no relief. For these intimate relations are the very ones that are the essential structures of her oppression."

In other words the oppression of women comes about by men off loading some of the alienation they get at work onto women when they come home.

Foreman's use of the term alienation bears little relation to the marxist concept. She agrees that the fact that workers' labour power is used to produce surplus value for capitalists means their labour is objectified and alienated. The problem is, how is this alienation relieved by going home to a relationship with a woman?

Foreman does not explain the mechanism by which men can off-load their alienation onto women. Also she treats women primarily as wives and therefore ignores the alienation of women workers.

Under capitalism all social relations are turned money relations

(all that was sacred is profaned to use Marx's words), they are objectified and alienated. The family and sexual relations are a prime example of this. So, surely a male worker's alienation is not relieved by entering into another alienated relationship in the family.

Of course it is true that male workers do try to gain some emotional release from their work experiences in their relationships with women. And men do gain a series of material advantages from having their wives cook their meals, do the washing and a hundred other things. Revolutionaries have always recognised this. As James Connolly said 70 odd years ago "The worker is the slave of capitalist society, the female worker is the slave of the slave". But it is not these concrete advantages that Foreman is talking about.

The political conclusions which flow from Foreman's theory of oppression are very pessimistic. If male workers do have their alienation relieved by their relationships with women, why should they ever support women's liberation? They would have to be mad to do so. The struggle for women's liberation would then be completely utopian as women would have to take on the capitalists and the whole male working class.

We would be faced with the bleak prospect (if we followed Foreman's analysis) of having to forget about women's liberation till socialism had been achieved, because under socialism men would no longer be alienated at work and they would not have to rid themselves of their alienation at home.

The logical extension of Foreman's theory of women's oppression is that the maintenance of the family results not from the objective needs of capital but from the needs of the male working class. She states: "Given the nature of alienation there were two factors to consider, not only the concern of the individual capitalist over cost but also, and more importantly, the resistance of the working class which would only allow its [the family's] socialisation up to certain limits".

She backs this up by pointing to the resistance of the trade union movement in Britain to attacks on the family in the 19th century.

However the post-war boom witnessed a massive influx of women into the workforce, which undermined the nuclear family to some extent. Capital was able to meet its needs for an expanded labor force in the 60's

and early 70's without the massive opposition from the male working class, which would have been predicted by Foreman's theory. This is not to deny the widespread ideological resistance to this trend particularly in the early stages.

Foreman's position is essentially a voluntarist one which gives to the working class the power to determine the social relations of society independent of the material and objective conditions, independent of the interests of capital and of even the level of organisation and combativity of the class itself.

How was the working class in Germany in the 1930's still able to hang onto the family even after being smashed by fascism? Does Foreman really believe that it was working class resistance which maintained the family? It would be more realistic to say that the maintenance of the family in Hitler's Germany (or at other times when the workers movement has been destroyed eg Stalin's Russia, Italy under fascism) had more to do with the objective interests of the ruling class than the 'resistance' of a defeated working class.

Conclusion

The weaknesses in Foreman's analysis inevitably lead to weaknesses in her strategy for women's liberation. In largely ignoring the role of women as workers she underestimates the importance of class distinctions inside the women's movement. Thus she states: "Self organisation, then, enables working class and middle class women to come together in the women's movement on a political basis, each from their own sense of strength". But this would mean a women's movement dominated by middle class women and unable to take a clear stand on the need to overthrow capitalism.

Foreman's stress on the importance of the 'unconscious' and ideological aspects of women's oppression leaves her open to 'solutions' on an individual level. The practical dangers of this are obvious in that it can lead to revolutionaries into reforming personal relationships in the here and now, rather than building organisations which can smash the system that underlies all social relations.

This strategy, which is both idealist and utopian, usually spells disaster for both individuals and organisations which take it up.

1974, 1975, why then, BWU/BTG,
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CRISIS IN THE CONCRETE JUNGLE

by David Shaw

The rank and file movement within the New South Wales building and construction industry has suffered a series of defeats in recent years.

In 1975, the employers and the federal leadership of the union linked up to knock off the elected officials in the N.S.W. branch of the Builders Labourers Federation. The B.W.I.U. - B.L.F. amalgamation struggle was defeated in 1976 1, and in 1978, all Builders Labourers for Democratic Control candidates were beaten in the N.S.W. elections.

In all areas of the industry the employers have gone all out to smash any militant rank and file group that develops. Two recent examples are the

DAVID SHAW was a rigger in Sydney. He was, at various times, a delegate in the BLF, the FIA and the AWU. He was killed at work, due to breaches in safety regulations, December 1978.

arrest and sacking of Max Callaghan, A.W.U. delegate for P.T.C. construction workers, and the successful sacking of the whole site at Johns and Waygood, I.C.I.

Militant activity in the past has been ad hoc. Our strategy has been confined to one union or one job. We will continue to be beaten unless we develop an analysis of the whole industry and of where it is going. This article will offer a few ideas to kick things off.

Four main features of the construction industry can be picked out today:

- a) a massive slump with high unemployment - most major work is in the energy and mining sector of the industry
- b) technological change
- c) changes in the composition of the workforce
- d) changes in the management techniques.

THE SLUMP

This is the most obvious feature of the industry. In nearly all sectors, activity is at its lowest for many years. 57,000 or 30% of Australian building workers have lost their jobs since 1973, and 18,000 in the last 12 months. There are now fewer building workers than at any time in the last 15 years.

In the public sector the cuts have been severe. Commonwealth expenditure on construction has fallen 30.3% in real terms since 1975. State expenditures have gone the same way. In the September quarter of 1978, the value of public sector commencements in Sydney fell by 42%.

Commercial construction is in a worse slump. The major cities have a massive surplus of office space. In

Sydney, about 18% of office space is empty, mostly in recently constructed buildings. With new office technology and computers, the demand for office space in the future will be even less. Now there is very little construction in the city centres. Hundreds of workers who developed special skills for high-rise construction are out of work. Also, the thousands of workers who worked together in the cities are now dispersed. That makes it harder for workers to organise.

In the next year or so there will be some work on regional office blocks and shopping centres. But this won't last. The bosses' own consultants, John Jackson and Associates, say: "The industry has gone as far as it can with regional shopping centres"?

Contractors and sub-contractors that specialised in high-rise construction may go to the wall. In N.S.W. Eastments already have. Others, like T.C. Whittle and Max Cooper, have no work on their books. The housing industry is in the worst state of all. Commencements are at their lowest for 12 years.

Nearly all major construction work in the next few years will be major infrastructure work for the mining industry and energy supplies. These projects will be some of the biggest Australia has ever seen. They will employ thousands of workers, often in remote areas (see table 1).

Some of these projects have started. Most are certain to go ahead. The slump is not being felt evenly throughout the industry. Whilst some conventional contractors in building construction may go broke, many contractors specialising in this type of work are in for a boom period. Most of these companies are large multinationals like Fluor, Dillingham, Parsons, Braun and Bechtel, but local capitalists will cop their share too eg. Transfield, E.P.T. and John Hollands.

Korean companies with Korean workers are gaining increasing numbers of contracts overseas, especially in the middle east. There is no doubt that Korean companies, like Hyundai Heavy Industries, have their eye on these projects also.

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

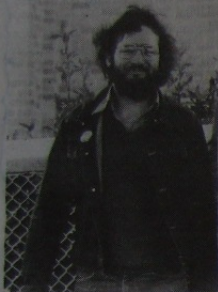
New technology has reduced the



QANTAS workers picketing their site. But in NSW, the BLF stands to lose most of its militant base.

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Max Callaghan, AWU delegate sacked by the PTC

Construction workforce drastically. Twenty years ago, hundreds of labourers worked on the excavation of the old A.M.P. site at Circular Quay in Sydney. Nowadays half a dozen hydraulic excavators do the same job in less time. Pre-cast constructions changed high-rise erection in the city. A crew of riggers and a crane driver has replaced dozens of on-site carpenters, bricklayers, concretors and steel fixers.

Every year, technology eliminates on-site labour. For example, forklifts were previously unsuitable for building sites because of rough conditions — but newly designed rough terrain forklifts, in the words of the manufacturer, "reduce the amount of unskilled labour on-site".

CHANGES IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE WORKFORCE

Technological change and the new types of projects now under construction have changed the whole structure of the industry. Not only are some trades becoming obsolete, but the lines of demarcation are being broken down. As the industry changes, some unions might not even remain viable.

The new projects coming up are mainly mechanical erection projects covered by the metal trades. They will employ large numbers of boilermakers, fitters, electricians, riggers and ironworkers, but lesser numbers of carpenters, bricklayers, concretors, steel fixers and general labourers.

Some building unions won't have many members on site at all. The N.S.W. B.L.F. for example, has coverage for various classifications on building construction. It does not have coverage for projects like power stations and coal loaders. Riggers at the Eraring Power Station and I.C.I. sites are not in the B.L.F. but the Federated Ironworkers Association (F.I.A.)

As the industry changes increasing numbers of riggers and scaffolders are leaving the B.L.F. for the metal trades. In fact, the N.S.W. B.L.F. stands to lose most of its militant base to other unions.

The B.W.I.U. is also in a bad position. Carpenters and bricklayers are being forced out of the industry by lack of work. These huge new projects coming up simply do not have that much work for B.W.I.U. members on site.³

On the other side of the coin the metal trades unions will gain members in the construction area. Some will

come from other unions, and other like fitters will come out of the manufacturing industry. Recognising this, the Metal Trades Federation of unions is now negotiating a construction on-site award. This will bring metal trades rates up to the rates of other construction workers. The metal unions will also be in a stronger position to claim further classifications in future demarcation disputes.

At present, there is a rash of demarcation disputes in the industry. They mainly involve the B.L.F., the union most threatened by the changing industry. (see table 2).

These disputes have occurred, not because the B.L.F. leadership are 'body-snatchers', but rather, because they are losing large numbers of members as the construction industry changes. They see this as the way of stopping the rot. Likewise, the Master Builders Association is losing member companies to the Metal Trades Industry Association.

Table 1

NSW	Eraring Power Station	\$ 200m
	Port Kembla Coal Loader	\$ 90m
	I.C.I. Expansion	\$ 90m
	Aluminium Smelter, Newcastle	\$ 200m
Victoria	Loy Yang Power Station	\$1000m
	I.C.I. Expansion (possible)	\$ 710m
	Newport Power Station	\$ 200m
	(under construction with scab labour)	
	World Trade Centre	\$ 56m
Queensland	Norwich Park Coal Mine	\$ 200m
	Hay Point Coal Wharf	\$ 75m
	Wivenhoe Dam	\$ 60m
	Power Stations	\$ 130m
W.A.	Dampier—Perth Pipeline	\$ 416m
	Pilbara Power Stations	\$ 11m
	Alwest Alumina Project	\$ 41m
	North West Shelf Gas	\$3000m
S.A.	Dow Chemicals, Redcliffe	\$1000m

Table 2

Unions	Type of Work
B.L.F. v. F.I.A.	Steel erection at Kurri
B.L.F. v. A.M.W.S.U.	Dogmen on mobile cranes
B.L.F. v. A.W.U.	Scaffolding in lift wells
	Concrete Batching Plants
	Railway Station Construction
	Roof Pitching
B.L.F. v. B.W.I.U.	Laying of Bondeck on high-rise formwork
B.L.F. v. Plumbers	Waterproofing roofs

CHANGES IN MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

The days of the conventional building contract with tenders and rise and fall clauses are numbered. Most large projects nowadays are run on the 'project management' system.

Under this system, the firm is paid a fixed fee to run the job. The construction is done by sub-contractors who have particular tasks on the site. There may be several sub-contractors doing the same kind of work. Project management sites are very difficult to organise because of the sub-contracting and the resulting divisions among the workers.

Project management completes jobs on time with little industrial unrest. Under the 'fast track' planning system, where planning decisions are still being made while construction continues, records are being set. The new Westmead Hospital in Sydney is one example. The \$40 million Belconnen Retail Mall in Canberra was finished in record time under the project management system. The bosses, O'Connor-Costain, reaped the profits and the workers paid the penalty — 2 dead and 4 seriously injured in the job's 18 month life.

'Body-hire' has reached plague proportions in the industry. Body-hire merchants like Comrega and Skilled Engineering hire out labour to contractors. Body-hire workers work on a day to day basis, often hired on the phone or from the street. They get no compensation, sick pay, or wet time. Body-hire sites are difficult to organise. Body-hire workers are on site one day and gone the next when the contractor doesn't need them.

solutions to the industry crisis. One thing is clear though. It's not enough just to be more militant and hit the bosses harder. The disastrous defeat at Johns and Waygood in Sydney showed this.⁴ Militant groups of workers will continue to be isolated and smashed unless we develop a strategy for organising in the industry.

Any new rank and file group in the industry must push for industrial unionism. In some ways the time has never been better. Demarcation is becoming hazy, existing unions less viable, and workers are increasingly moving from union to union. Rather than body snatching and hanging on to official positions, union officials should now be discussing principled amalgamations.⁵ More importantly, industrial unionism must be pushed on the job level by setting up site committees. The site committee is the only way to beat the divisions caused by sub-contracting and body-hire. From this, it's obvious that a rank and file group that develops in the future will have to involve workers from all unions in the industry, not just the B.L.F.

The major projects which are about to commence in Australia will bring hundreds of workers together. These are some of the most militant workers in the country. Our task is to link at the political level the strikes and advanced actions that will inevitably occur.

SOLUTIONS

This article cannot offer all the



Due to the slump, major cities have a massive surplus of office space

Footnotes

- 1 In early 1976 a strong rank and file movement of B.L.F. members in N.S.W. tried to stage a principled amalgamation with the B.W.I.U. under strict conditions. This was legally possible as the B.L.F. was deregistered at the time. The faint-hearted B.W.I.U. officials sabotaged the amalgamation at the last minute.
- 2 Financial Review 15/8/78
- 3 See Hughie Hamilton's report to the 1978 Queensland state conference of the B.W.I.U.
- 4 In the Johns and Waygood dispute the company sacked the whole workforce. The J. & W. workers had fought the boss from the start of the job and won significant gains. But in the process were isolated and were defeated.
- 5 The F.F.D.F.A. and A.M.W.S.U. leaders to their credit are moving to an amalgamation in 1981.

FLYING BACKWARDS TO QUEENSLAND

by Carole Ferrier and John Minns

Since the early 1970's, the class antagonisms of Australian society have found a more pronounced expression in Queensland than in other Australian states.

From 1971-74, the Labor Party held about thirty of the eight-two seats in State Parliament. In 1974, after a protracted campaign by Premier Bjelke-Petersen aimed mainly at the Whitlam Federal Labor government, ALP representation in Brisbane was slashed to 11 seats.

National Party propaganda during the period of the Whitlam government brought together anti-Canberra, anti-Labor and anti-union sentiment. This coincided with general trends in countries

with which Australia had economic ties. And it coincided with an increasing quiescence on the part of both former radical activists and the organised working class.

There had been a decline in movement politics after the Vietnam and Springbok campaigns, during which period Brisbane had been in the forefront of militant activity. Despite some exceptions, notably the women's movement and struggles around black rights, Chile and Timor, the dominant trend was a general decline in activism.

It was only in September 1977, with the legislation that effectively banned street marches, that a broad movement of opposition re-emerged. The ban was part of a pattern of mounting attacks on working class living standards and organisation, on both the State and Federal level, which made resistance increasingly imperative.

ILLEGAL PROTEST MARCH

Mr. HARTWIG: I ask the Premier: Has his attention been drawn to statements in today's "Courier-Mail" that students and some unions are planning a march on Thursday to protest against the ban on street demonstrations? Is he aware that the spokesman for the Civil Liberties Co-ordinating Group is quoted as a Ms Carol Ferrier? Is this the Carol Ferrier who is a well-known member of the International Socialists—an extremist revolutionary organisation that preaches violence? Will the Premier again warn the naive, the gullible and the Council of Churches whom they are associating with and being manipulated by?

Mr. BJELKE-PETERSEN: Yes, Ms Ferrier is very well known as an extremist, revolutionary type of individual, and a well-known member of the International Socialists. For the benefit of the House, let me read the aims of the International Socialists as published in their newspaper "The Battler" on 23 July this year—

"Revolution not Reformism—we believe in overthrowing the capitalist system, not patching it up or trying gradually to change it. The State—Parliament, Courts, the Law, police and army—is a weapon of capitalist class rule and can never be used to serve the interests of the working class. There is no Parliamentary road to socialism."

That is the philosophy of these people and that particular person who belong to the International Socialists. That is the sort of person and organisation that will be marching on Thursday, and is heavily involved in the anti-uranium issue, East Timor, Peace and all the other Marxist-front organisations. This is why I keep saying that the protest movement is led by the Communist Party and others, not by genuine people.

The students who took part in the march a fortnight ago numbered 300 out of a total of 16,000 at Queensland University. Who was in the front rank of that march, just as they will be on Thursday? The same old faces, including that of Mr. Derek Fielding of the Council for Civil Liberties. Doesn't the council have some strange friends in people such as Ms Ferrier who preach violence and the violent overthrow of our society? Then there was Mr. Grassie of the International Socialists, Mr. Bradley Bowden of the Communist Party of Australia, Jim Alexander of the Communist League, Peter

From Queensland Hansard, 20 September 1977

Why Queensland?

Why did both the attacks and the resistance develop so sharply and so rapidly in Queensland? Certain social and demographic factors had led to a weakness of the organised working class.

With the mechanisation of industry and farming (especially cane-cutting and shearing), concentrations of

workers in the State — the north of which was once known as the "Red North" — were broken down. The main powerhouses, still centres of great militancy, are well away from urban centres. Workers in manufacturing industry do not make up a large percentage of the population of the bigger cities.

The earlier predominance of rural workers within the labor movement had found its reflection in a markedly right-wing leadership of the ALP. Significantly, the last Labor Premier of Queensland was the DLP's Vince Gair.

Robbers and Cops

The composition of the ruling class in Queensland differs from that in the southern states. Predominant capital interests are much more mining and rural. They are capital intensive and thus more efficient, and more export-oriented than the urban manufacturing which is more predominant in the south.

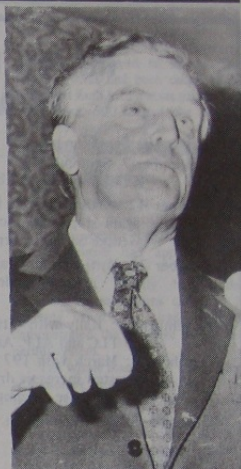
Massive mining profits are the order of the day, while the liberal bourgeoisie based on manufacturing capital is small and politically weak. Manufacturing is scattered throughout the state, so that large-scale concentrations of workers do not occur.

The small farmer population, economically uncertain and culturally backward, are open to the "strong government" law-and-order appeal of Petersen.

Increasing control of the police force and its use for political purposes by the State government has become apparent. After the bashing of a woman demonstrator in 1976, the quashing of the inquiry by Bjelke-Petersen led to the resignation of the Police Commissioner Ray Whitrod, and his replacement by a government stooge, Terry Lewis.

In late 1976, the police and army attack on a commune at Cedar Bay showed the license allowed by the State government. The police were also used in an offensive against the women's movement; false complaint legislation was used against a rape victim in an attempt to establish a test case, and an anti-rape rally earlier in the year had been harassed by police.

From August, anti-uranium



Bjelke-Petersen: his "law and order" appeals to the small farmer population

groups had held small pickets at the wharves during uranium shipments. One picket of about 200 people was violently dispersed by police.

Petersen, who was determined to get uranium exported through Queensland ports, justified the ban on marches on the grounds that it would prevent "violence" of the sort that had occurred in uranium protests "down south". (Actually the Queensland Campaign Against Nuclear Power had been refused permits to march for three years anyway.) About the same time, trade unionist Ted Zaphir was being prosecuted for attempting to enforce union membership, and more prosecutions were threatened.

From a Student Campaign...

In the initial stages the campaign for civil liberties was built primarily in the universities. The first three rallies in September and October 1977 were all preceded by marches from the University of Queensland. It was

CAROLE FERRIER is editor of the feminist journal HECATE and a prominent activist in the Brisbane Civil Liberties Campaign.

JOHN MINNS is on the National Committee of the International Socialists.

MAJOR EVENTS TO DATE

- September 7, September 22: Two marches from Queensland University blocked by hundreds of police.
- October 12: a third march from Queensland University is again stopped; proceeds on the pavement to King George Square, 3 arrests
- October 22: Anti uranium rally with official TLC support. 418 arrests made considerable impact with workers.
- November 11: Rally with Citizens for Democracy. Opposed by TLC and ALP. Arrests.
- October 30: March with 197 arrests. Proportion of workers arrested increases dramatically, showing shift from student base of campaign.
- December 3: Rally and march. 210 arrests.

1978

- March 5: Rally with march, 50 arrests.
- March 12: IWD rally, 49 arrests.
- April 1: Anti uranium rally. No march. Pouring rain an important factor.
- April 21: First march on Queensland.
- May 1: May Day rally
- July 22: Women's liberation rally, 42 arrests.
- August 21: Anti-State Government rally combined with anti-budget rally subsequently called by the TLC. Some unions stopped work, but 4 hours of speeches depleted the numbers marching. 129 arrests.
- October 30: ALP Senator Georges organised march to State Parliament to present petition on right to march.
- December 7: TLC-sponsored rally further to Oct 30. 346 arrests.
- December : Sporadic pickets supported by maritime unions outside Boggo Road over goaling of union members.

1979

- January 29: second march on Queensland.
- March 15: Public Meeting to plan further rally in April.

possible to hold forums of 400 students at Queensland University and up to 200 at Griffith. The activists and the rank and file of the movement were predominantly students.

The unions at first refused to take up the issue. When a general stoppage and a 5,000-strong rally were held in defence of Ted Zaphir, no attempt was made to link it up with the issue of the right to march. It may have been difficult to organise simultaneous marches from workplaces to the rally (though wharries did march to the rally on the pavement). But officials actively discouraged the obvious opportunity of holding a protest march from the rally to challenge the ban.

They also expressed little solidarity with a student march which, setting off from Queensland University in an attempt to join up with the union rally, was stopped and dispersed by police. While these student actions were dramatising the issue, the major working class organisations were anxious to avoid "confrontation".

The predominantly student composition of the movement began to change with the October 22 uranium rally, which had official union support. Uranium was a widely understood issue in some sections of the working class, particularly the Maritime Unions. The huge tally of 418 arrests on that day created a sensational impact amongst many workers.

Another factor was the approaching State election on November 12. The election atmosphere brought out into the open all the stored-up resentment workers felt toward Petersen and the Coalition government. A rally and march on November 11 was strongly opposed by the Trades and Labor Council (TLC) bureaucracy and the ALP. Nevertheless it became the biggest rally we were able to produce from the beginning of the campaign to the rally on October 30 1978.

Moreover, of the 197 arrested, most gave blue-collar jobs as their occupation.

The third and final factor producing this influx of workers into the campaign was the active orientation toward the working class pursued by some of the socialist activists in the

Civil Liberties Co-ordinating Committee (CLCC). From early October 1977 to the following March alone over 100 job and union meetings were addressed by civil liberties speakers.

The November 11 rally was successful enough to embarrass the TLC. They had issued strongly worded press statements attacking us for going ahead with the action and possibly damaging the ALP's chances the following day. Not only were they ignored by several thousand of their members but their fears proved groundless. There was a ten per cent swing to the ALP in the Brisbane area and overall a 17 per cent swing against the Coalition.¹

The TLC now felt forced to deal with us. From this point meetings between the CLCC and the TLC became more frequent.

Finally the TLC Executive agreed to co-sponsor a civil liberties rally on December 3, 1977.

DECEMBER 3

Left union officials were to continue to allege that there was "not a whisper of union support" for marches. But the rank and file gave an impressive demonstration of their support at a TLC - called delegates' meeting.

The TLC had put forward a motion designed to block either a march or an open platform. This was defeated despite an attempt by TLC President Hauenschild to mis-call the vote.

The TLC official support for the campaign remained on paper only. No work for the rally was done by organisers on the job. The rally on December 3 turned out smaller than the previous one. But a good direction had been set. Civil liberties, the march ban in particular, had become established as an issue in many sections of the working class.

The period from September to early December 1977 was the first successful phase of the attempt to win mass working class involvement in the campaign.

While the campaign ran down over the holiday period, speaking tours built up intra - and inter-state support that was to lead to marches with centres in many other Queensland centres early the next year. Initiatives

were also taken by other TLCs, though frequently they were stifled by the intervention of the Brisbane TLC. A good example is the New South Wales Jubilee Union's plan to stop the Jubilee train.

MAY DAY

A great deal of effort was put into building a civil liberties contingent in the May Day procession.

Several years previously the TLC had tried to reject an application by the Communist Party for an official place in the march and this had led to the tradition of the 'red contingent' - a group of left and far left parties and movement activists which marched behind the official section. The result of civil liberties involvement was the biggest May Day for years.

Over ten thousand marched, about half under civil liberties and anti-uranium banners. After the march, the platform was rigidly controlled with only Hayden, Burns and the mayor being allowed to address the crowd. A leading Chilean trade union official was refused permission to speak, and a rhetorical invocation from Burns for women to come onto the platform revealed itself as hollow when a few did.²

May day did little to build the movement. The August 21 rally was boosted by popular outrage at the August Federal budget. The TLC decided to combine their action against the budget with the civil liberties rally.



International Women's Day: Brisbane, 1978.

Most of the 4-5,000 who attended came because of the budget. But, to the relief of the TLC, after 4 hours of speeches few stayed to march. The stopwork that had been called could have been built into a mass march, but only about 500 stayed the course.

Flying Backwards to the Moon

After August 21 a third very important and potentially huge phase of the movement began. The ALP inner executive had applied for a march permit for July 7. The permit was granted. Shortly before the scheduled march Burns cancelled it claiming that he had thereby demonstrated the selective use of the permit system.

The whole manoeuvre was greeted with horror by many members of the ALP. The press had a field day claiming that Burns had again been out-manoeuvred by Petersen. The ALP which had refused to act and had even consciously obstructed the movement from the beginning was now backing down even from a legal march.³

Now dissatisfaction with Burns over his handling of the civil liberties issue reached its high point. The Reform Group, a loose caucus within the party whose aim was to democratise its structure and weaken Trades Hall control, had already created public cracks in the ALP

machine. This together with the long-term rightward shift of Queensland ALP policies and the ALP's cowardly stance in relation to the civil liberties campaign led to the formation of a small Socialist Left about the middle of the year with Senator George Georges as its most prominent leader.

At about the same time as the Socialist Left was being formed the work of civil liberties activists in the three main maritime unions began to have a real effect. Maritime unionists had always been more prominent and numerous in the campaign than any other section of workers. There also was considerable disenchantment with Burns' weak-kneed and ineffectual stance.

After August 21 Georges helped to initiate a new series of meetings — the Civil Liberties Campaign Group (CLCG). The CLCG began to organise another march, this time on State parliament to present a petition demanding the right to march and other democratic rights.

Petersen announced that they would "no more get to state parliament than fly backwards to the moon." The maritime unions enthusiastically supported the initiative and called their members out on strike for the next march date — October 30.

The new CLCG was able to organise meetings of up to two hundred people. On October 30 was the first time in the campaign when a section of the working class moved into full-blooded support as an organised force. The TLC, by contrast, did nothing.

Maritime workers, after October 30, had become sufficiently involved in the campaign to want to put real pressure on the TLC. They had made up a large part of the October 30 march and rank and file feeling on the issue was intense. A few days after the march a joint maritime group mass meeting of six hundred workers demanded that the TLC call another march and organise it through the union movement.

The tempo of other workers' struggles was also increasing during October and November. The picket by meatworkers against the export of live cattle at the wharves led to a violent clash, between almost a thousand

meatworkers and large numbers of police against the export of live animals for the occasion. Forty-five meatworkers were arrested and Petersen intervened personally to ensure that the trucking companies carrying the beef would not back down.

Also, the eleven week brewery strike was at its height and was still being supported by near-unanimous votes of the six hundred brewery workers.

The upsurge in militancy put the TLC under pressure from many different sides. It was forced to agree to organise a march for December 7. An amendment to the official motion calling for the TLC to advise affiliates to call a stopwork for the rally was also carried.

News of the march produced several weeks of extreme political tension. The major papers carried front page reports on the approaching confrontation and Liberal Party organisational director, Yvonne McComb called on Liberal parliamentarians to amend the Traffic Act.

In the last week before the march Casey, the new parliamentary leader of the ALP who strongly opposed the march, tried to take the wind out of the movement's sails by seeking leave to introduce an amendment to the Traffic Act. The amendment was to secure a return to the original system of granting march permits.⁸ Liberal members blocked with the Nationals to prevent him moving the amendment. The Liberal Party did not have the independence of action from Bjelke-Petersen that many of its supporters liked to believe.

The TLC had not applied for a permit to march. A permit was offered by the police for a Saturday afternoon when the city would be empty and a small crowd a certainty. The CLCG opposed the TLC applying for or accepting a permit because although the police were prepared to give the TLC a permit under certain circumstances, permits had been consistently refused to other groups — the anti-uranium movement, the women's movement, the Black organisations and, of course, the civil liberties campaign in the early period.

We feared that if the TLC accepted the permit they would be



Some of the 700 police who prevented the demonstrators proceeding to Parliament House.

leaving these other groups without support. Under pressure from the Maritime group, Georges and the CLCG they declined.

December 7 was the biggest and most working class mobilisation the campaign had been able to produce. Over four and a half thousand took part. Tom Uren, Clyde Holding and even John Ducker and other southern politicians and union officials took part. The Queensland parliamentary caucus of the ALP had decided that none of its members would take part. But many workers showed their independence of the Labor leadership — over 70% of the 383 arrested were blue-collar unionists.⁹

The Queensland media could no longer afford to give any form of sympathetic coverage. The mobilisation had become too much of a threat not only to the march ban, but to the whole ruling class offensive. As such it threatened not only Bjelke-Petersen but also the class interests of the liberal bourgeoisie whom the media tend to represent.

Since December 7 the campaign has been kept alive over the Christmas period by the actions of politicians, seamen, wharfies and others who have refused to pay fines resulting from the December 7 march and have gone to jail instead. Each of the Maritime unions has stated that they will strike for as long as any of their members are in jail. A seamen's strike for two days forced the payment of the fines of two seamen and a two day maritime strike also probably freed Georges.¹⁰

A public meeting on March 15 will be a lead up to the next rally in April.

The Tactical Debate

Within the Civil Liberties Coordinating Committee initially, two main positions could be distinguished which had implications for the future of the campaign.

The position of the International Socialists was that the ban was one aspect of the assault on the democratic rights of those groups which most needed the streets to express solidarity and protest: women's liberation,

blacks, anti-uranium activists and the organisations of the working class.

We emphasised the central importance of the working class to the campaign and allocated peripheral importance to approaching the Young Liberals and the Churches. We were and are not opposed to the entry of these groups into the campaign. We are opposed to a strategy which subordinates the demands, strategies and tactics of the campaign to them.

In order to satisfy these groups we would certainly have had to drop our tactics of marching against the ban, the strategy of a broad orientation to the union movement and other progressive campaigns and our opposition to the 'right-to-work' legislation.¹¹ We and others in the campaign argued for the organisation of large, determined marches.

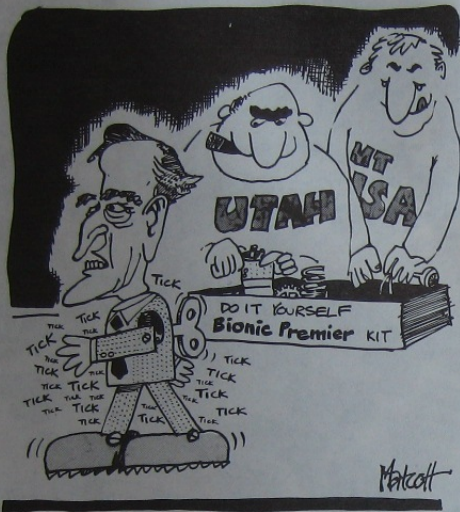
At the point when the debate on marching was at its height (late September to late October, 1977) the ban on marches had already become an important issue in Queensland. Opinion polls showed that a majority of Queenslanders opposed the ban. We argued that by pursuing a militant course — marching and if necessary getting arrested — the issue could become a focal point for anti-State government sympathies.

Many of the hundreds of thousands of workers who have very strong feelings about the Queensland government are politically inactive simply because they do not have a focus for activity or the organisational forms to promote it. The marches did provide a very public focus and politicized much of the opposition.

The militant tactics, we argued, would challenge the ban on the most obvious level — open defiance—and keep the issues alive. The survival and growth of the campaign has demonstrated the validity of this approach.

In the first three months of the campaign the opposition to this line concentrated on arguing for a broad-based, single issue approach. For them the key to building the movement was to strike a level of demands and tactics that would be acceptable to all the anti-Petersen forces.

The bankruptcy of this position lay in its lack of any alternative tactical proposal beyond letters to



concerned groups, "maybe a conference" and a few rallies — preferably indoors so that there would be no atmosphere of potential confrontation.¹² The two large indoor rallies that were held both drew fewer than one thousand people — far less than came to even the smallest civil liberties rally.

Debates on this question (of whether or not to march) preceded every rally until March 4 1978. The resistance to the march tactic lost strength because it was continually defeated by votes at the public civil liberties meetings and at the rallies. And after thousands of people at the October 22 rally voted to march (and 418 were arrested) there was such an enormous impact throughout the state that most of the anti-march lobby in the campaign either changed their position or (in a few cases) left the campaign.

After the marches in October and November there was very little serious opposition in the CLCC to the tactic. Increasing opposition to the ban began

to make the task clear — not to seek more support on a passive basis but to activate the mass support that already existed.

Throughout this early period the ALP refused in a justification for their refusal to act by claiming that the ban was really only an electoral ploy by the Petersen government. Tom Burns warned us publicly not to "take Bjelke's bait."

The Queensland civil liberties movement is the first mass campaign directed against the Bjelke-Petersen government. As such it has given thousands an education in radical politics. The campaign has developed a strong orientation to the working class, its needs and its organisations — not only through negotiations with officials but through direct approaches to rank and file militants.

The campaign has also shown up the limitations of parliamentarism. Petersen's contempt for the norms of liberal democracy and the ALP leadership's unwillingness to take up the fight has lessened the faith of many in

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parliamentary solutions and in the ALP's ability to represent them.

The role of the official trade union leadership has also been highlighted. From outright opposition to sluggishness to grudging formal support, their activities have been a serious disappointment to countless rank and file worker militants.

It has not just been a campaign for the right to march. What has developed is a movement of opposition to the State government. Petersen's virulent attacks on meat-workers, his intervention in the brewery strike, the seamen's strike and many other disputes, his attempts to hobble unions by law and outlaw compulsory unionism, his blatant use of the police, his attacks on the women's movement — all have combined to drive thousands into an opposition for which the march issue is only the most obvious focal point.

The intervention of Senator Georges and a small section of the union officialdom was very important. It gave some workers a confidence they might not otherwise have had to march against the ban.

But first and foremost the campaign has been built from the bottom up. It is the students and rank and file workers who have been the key to building it. It is they who must keep up the pressure. And that means rank and file organisation independent of the ALP leadership and union officials.

Footnotes

- The swing against the coalition amounted to over 17% the vote obtained by the Nationals in the seats previously uncontested by them is taken subtracted from the total vote for the coalition.
- Marshals, after leading the march twice around the square quickly directed it to an exist we had never used before and into a narrow street. It took some time for enough police to get into a narrow street. It took some time for enough police to get to the march to bring the situation under their control.
- The Miss May Day contest has at least been cancelled after several years of protest by the women's movement. A

couple of days after May Day, TLC Secretary Whitty was reported in the press as having said that due to Women's Liberation Movement militancy it would be discussed in the May Day committee whether women would be allowed to march in future!

- The TLC had constructed a list of thirteen speakers, plus a period of open platform and a debate on the motion to march.
- Burns' explanation, that the whole operation was designed to prove that although the ALP could get permits other groups could not, was not very widely accepted. Two explanations were current: Burns was afraid of lack of support from ALP members and/or he was afraid of too much support from the left and civil liberties activists — which would mean that the ALP would lose control of the march.
- The old CLCC was at this time unable to attract more than a dozen people to its weekly meetings.
- The CLCC executive, although it advised affiliates of the stopwork, was insistent that it had no power to order affiliates to hold the strike. The Maritime group was the only section to order a complete stoppage. Many other jobs voted to stop but in almost every case this was because the job delegate had read about the stoppage and the rally in the paper.
- The ALP, TLC, and the Civil Liberties groups all have policies of opposition to the permit system as a whole. All support the introduction of the South Australian system.
- Over one hundred maritime unionists were arrested.
- Although the fines have been paid anonymously there is little doubt that the shipping and the dockers companies have chosen to pay the hundreds of dollars for fines rather than the tens of thousands lost to them through the strikes.
- The 'right-to-work' bill was proposed by Charles Porter, a Liberal MP strongly supported by Petersen. Its main features are a prohibition of compulsory unionism and heavy penalties for unions which try to enforce it. So far, the bill has not passed through parliament and it appears that Petersen has failed to achieve consensus in the ruling class on it.
- The adherents of this position for the first three months of the campaign included Hugh Hamilton, State Secretary of the B.W.I.U. and State President of the Communist Party, all the union officials who attended civil liberties meetings, most ALP members and the Socialist Workers Party. There was considerable dissatisfaction in the CPA with this line and a number of young activists left the party. Now the CPA supports the marches. Only the SWP maintains an oppositional position and has expelled members who participated in marches. It ceased to play any part in the work of the campaign from October 1977.

A Monolith Crumbles

THE COMMUNIST PARTY SINCE THE WAR

by Tom O'Lincoln

In 1949, the Communist Party of Australia had 12,500 members¹ and represented a significant section of militant workers. Today the party has about 2000 members of whom at most 400 are active. In Brisbane, once a major stronghold, it is on the point of organisational collapse. In Sydney, Eric Aarons conceded in 1977 that only about 60 people were selling Tribune.²

What recruitment occurs is largely in the middle class. Where workers are recruited, it is seldom in the context of militant struggle. And while a number of trade union positions are still held by CPA members, these officials are largely beyond the control of the party.

The history of the Communist Party since

TOM O'LINCOLN is a high school teacher in Melbourne and a militant in the VSTA.

1949 is one of almost continual decline. Yet for a time in the early 1970's, things seemed rather brighter. The departure of the Russian-line stalinists, and a number of dramatic policy changes raised hopes that the party might be regenerated. A number of young radicals joined the CPA.

One of the young recruits, Winton Higgins, wrote in an article entitled "Reconstructing Australian Communism" that "the CPA is now demonstrating the potential to lead a viable communist movement in Australia."³

The promise has not been fulfilled. A tentative leftward lurch by sections of the party after 1972 has been reversed. Left Tendency leader Rob Durbidge recently warned that the CPA was being pulled to the right.⁴

The rot in the organisation has not been stopped. Membership is at an all-time low, and most of the activists are disoriented and working at cross purposes to each other.



Only about 60 people were selling Tribune

The changes of 1967-72 were real and important. But they did not lead either to a revival in the party's fortunes or to a more revolutionary course. What were those changes really about, and where is the CPA really headed?

I think it can be shown that the changes since 1967 are just another stage in the decline of the party. Certainly there were positive elements. The CPA faced up to some political realities. It also put an end to the old authoritarian internal regime though mostly to replace it with a disorganised mess.

But in the realm of theory, the party replaced old stalinist notions with the most unoriginal left-liberal and social democratic ideas. That was hardly an advance.

And in some areas, notably the unions, many of the worst aspects of party work went unchanged.

These are large assertions, but I think they can be proved. Unfortunately, I don't have space to deal with every aspect of party work. Some very important areas have been omitted.⁵ I have confined myself to four: historical background, party theory, party organisation and the unions.

Historical Background

Both foreign and domestic events shaped the development of the CPA.

The Stalin revelations, unrest in Eastern Europe and changes in the worldwide balance of power encouraged a trend away from support for Russia. Cold war isolation and persecution wrought havoc on the morale of party members, leading first to a siege mentality and later to a powerful desire to move back toward the mainstream of the labour movement: social democracy.

THE EVOLUTION OF WORLD COMMUNISM

In 1953 the USSR exploded its first hydrogen bomb. From that time, Russia was in a position to hold its own in world affairs.

In the previous period, the Soviet leadership had encouraged militancy among the CPs. The parties were used to pressure the western ruling classes and blunt their cold war offensive against the USSR. But by the mid-fifties, Moscow was on a new tack. The Russians were now in a position to force the west to the negotiating table. The CPs were asked to adopt a more conciliatory approach to their local ruling classes.

Most CPs accepted this right turn happily, and attempted to re-enter the political mainstream. But they faced suspicion and hostility, not only from the right wing but also from social democratic parties. Yesterday's "Russian agents" were not automatically going to be accepted as today's loyal citizens; the apologists for totalitarian Russia were not going to find it easy wooing public opinion.

The CPs were forced to adopt a long-term campaign to overcome their image as foreign, unreliable parties. This task was not made easier by events in Eastern Europe.

In 1956 Khrushchev, in a "secret" speech which soon became public, revealed the truth about the repression of the Stalin period. The revelations were a blow to the morale of Communists. But what was even worse was the way the facts emerged.

The Kremlin did not give the parties the slightest hint of the coming revelations. Communists were left to learn the news in the gloating capitalist press.

It was galling indeed for the CPs, especially those in Europe who

commanded millions of votes, to be treated in such a fashion.

Injury was added to insult later in the year, when Soviet tanks were used to crush an insurrection in Hungary. The Russian connection now became a massive liability for most CPs, in the middle and working classes alike.

It was gradually becoming clear that if they were to have a future, the Communist Parties would need to develop their own independent course. Today, in the refurbished social-democratic theory called "Eurocommunism", many of the CPs have found such a course. In Australia, the break from Russia and stalinism was more dramatic, but the direction of the CPA's development has proved to be essentially the same.

THE AUSTRALIAN PARTY AND THE COLD WAR

The Australian party leadership, which was more leftist than many, responded avidly to the militant policy called for by Moscow after 1947. The CPA launched a major offensive which culminated in the great coal strike of 1949.

The strike was isolated. A united front of the Labor government, the employers and the ACTU forced the miners back to work. From that time, the party was on the defensive.

Membership fell from 12,000 to 6,000 in a year. The new Menzies government announced plans to ban the party. By 1951 the CPA had

WANTED
FOR ATTEMPTED MURDER
OF AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY



REWARD
1951 Attempted Communist
1952 Communist Party of Australia
1953 Communist Party of Australia
1954 Communist Party of Australia
1955 Communist Party of Australia
1956 Communist Party of Australia
1957 Communist Party of Australia
1958 Communist Party of Australia
1959 Communist Party of Australia
1960 Communist Party of Australia

REWARD
FREEDOM AND PEACE
Vote: "NO"
on SEPTEMBER 23rd

Menzies' attempt to ban the CPA — "No" propaganda from the 1950-51 referendum campaign

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On April 14 and 15, the IS will be holding its 1979 conference. It will be attended by IS members from all over Australia, and we will be deciding our tactics for the coming year in all the major areas of our activity — especially in the struggle against the Fraser government and in the fight on the job against the bosses.

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Workers' control over the whole of society: based on workers' control of the factories and workplaces. Only the organised working class has the power to create a society free of exploitation, oppression and want. Russia and China are not socialist because they are based on the exploitation of workers by a bureaucratic ruling class.

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The state parliament, courts, the law is a weapon of class rule and can never be used to serve the interests of the working class. There is no Parliamentary road to socialism.

Revolution, not Reformism

We believe in overthrowing the capitalist system, not patching it up or gradually trying to change it.

Internationalism

A socialist revolution cannot survive in one country. It must help build revolutions in other countries or it will be defeated like the Russian revolution of 1917. We are building an international movement, opposed to patriotism and working to overcome national divisions.

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For women, blacks, migrants

and all oppressed groups. Racism sexism and discrimination against migrant peoples are all pillars of the capitalist system. We are opposed to the social persecution of homosexuals.

Revolutionary Party

To smash the capitalist state, we need a revolutionary party, organised and built in the workplaces. Without a revolutionary party, the struggles of workers will be crushed.

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Workers need their own rank and file organisations to fight the bosses when the paid offi-

cialists are unwilling. We work to bring them under rank and file control.

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... to build a revolutionary party out of the struggles workers are waging today. We fight for a program of industrial and social demands that can strengthen the self-confidence, organisation and socialist consciousness of the working class.

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or phone 49 7939

Canberra

PO Box 1165 Canberra City ACT 2601

Brisbane

PO Box 99 St Lucia
QLD 4005 or phone 358 3978

Ipswich (Qld)

phone 281 6113

Most branches have weekly meetings — if you're interested ring them for an invitation.

Why then, CPA,
Succ/Fail/Effects

real failures
why Interv. Succ
effects on CPA

abandoned its previous militancy and was working frantically for unity with all working class parties and "progressive forces".

The unity drive was successful in immediate terms. Menzies' attempts to ban the CPA by referendum were defeated in a close vote. Membership rose by 25 percent in the next few years. But in terms of morale and self-confidence, the party never recovered. It is from the early fifties that we notice an almost pathetic desire for unity at all costs, which becomes a standard feature of much of the party's work.

The gains of 1952-55, in any case, were wiped out by the events of 1956.

The Stalin revelations aroused dissent in party ranks, and the Hungarian crisis caused an uproar. Large numbers of members left or were expelled. The leadership attempted to portray the losses as limited to a few unreliable intellectuals:

"We lost a handful of people who went out of the party because they succumbed to revisionist influences."⁶

But the truth was different. Many workers were also lost, though they resigned more quietly and were less likely to formulate their reasons clearly. The case of West Como branch in Sydney shows the nature of the process. One intellectual was expelled, and the whole branch of 16 members promptly collapsed. As two ex-members of the branch wrote:

"In fact, W.Como branch was made up mostly of industrial workers... in a primarily working class area... West Como branch is now almost non-existent, with a total of two members... A branch destroyed — and the C.C. can boast of another complete victory."⁷

PARTY LIFE DURING THE COLD WAR

As early as 1951, party leaders had noted a tendency for the membership to become ingrown, "seeking the comfort of like-minded people" and fearing to recruit.⁸ Those who remained in the party after 1956 felt even more besieged and isolated.

In the short term the result was a retreat into dogmatism, and an attempt to tighten up the organisation.

The leadership continually reaffirmed the old perspectives, and harangued the membership about the need to build the party. They referred openly and proudly to their "monolithic" organisation.

The CPA continued to engage in triumphalism; it was "the party of the working class", whether the workers thought so or not. This even extended to ballot rigging. Daphne Gollan has explained the mentality behind such unfortunate tactics, and its consequences:

"Those who argue for adjustment of union ballots, recognising it as an evil necessity of course, said that beleaguaged as we were in the unions... we could not allow the enemy into policy making bodies..."

After all, the long term objectives of the socialist movement could not be jeopardised by the errors or failures of our short term policies, or halted because the rank and file were temporarily misled by the overwhelming barrage of lies from the reactionaries... The use of dishonest expedients to gain time brought its own punishment — the time gained never was used to reassess policies..."

"Adjustment of ballots continued, with the hope that sooner or later the rank and file would catch up, come to realise the correctness of party policy. Needless to say, the perspectives of party and masses, far from converging drew further apart."⁹

Frequently "party building" amounted to counterposing the organisation to real work. A veteran Communist explained it this way:

"For a long time we had Party-building drives — in themselves narrow, inward-looking — absorbing a great deal of time of most members of local organisations in a fruitless search for a magic formula, while on the other hand, a thinning band of mass workers, who were gaining valuable experiences among real people, where becoming more and more frustrated. Nobody was interested in what they were doing; it didn't seem to have any bearing in the arid atmosphere of local discussions."¹⁰

Moreover, activists who didn't happen to be in the glamour areas,

such as the left wing industrial unions, often found their work ignored or treated as less important.

All in all, the party organisation appeared to activists too often as an obstacle to doing real work. Nor did it help that membership of the CPA carried with it a stigma in many places. As a result, some members were later to advocate dissolving the party into the ALP. And the sentiment against any kind of disciplined party organisation is very strong today.

SPLIT WITH THE MAOISTS, AND A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP

The right turn adopted by the CPs after 1953 did not please all Communists. In Australia, top party leaders such as Lance Sharkey and Ted Hill had traditionally disliked accommodation to social democracy, and were suspicious of the parliamentary road to socialism.

When China split with Russia in the late fifties and early sixties, Peking appealed to these feelings. Its position won considerable sympathy in Australia. Sharkey eventually fell into line with Moscow, but Hill led some 200 people out of the party in Victoria, including prominent union officials and functionaries.

The split had profound consequences. Sharkey, already in poor health, was politically disoriented by the



Lance Sharkey, CPA National Secretary

struggle between Peking and Moscow. The leadership of the faction fight fell to a group around Laurie Aarons.

In Victoria, there also emerged a new leadership. A group around and Bernie Taft, Rex Mortimer, Ralph Gibson and John Sendy replaced the departing Hill group.

Mortimer and Taft were profoundly influenced by the ideas of the Italian party. For some time they had followed its development, which was showing the early signs of what we now call Eurocommunism. From the PCI they got two ideas which had immediate importance for the CPA: independence from Moscow, and a loosening of party organisation.

In the period after the split, the Victorian leaders and their paper *The Guardian* became pioneers in the party. Rex Mortimer entered into a dialogue with Melbourne Jews about Soviet anti-semitism. While he still apologised for Soviet policy, he openly admitted the existence of anti-semitism in the USSR, and called for a vigorous campaign to eradicate it.

In 1966 for the first issue of *Australian Left Review*, John Sendy wrote an article attacking monolithism in the CPA.

The Aarons leadership in Sydney had a less coherent viewpoint. They and their supporters moved much more impressionistically toward a new policy. As their ideas developed, they showed a marked tendency to liberal humanism — something we'll look at below.



E.F. Hill, former CPA Victorian Secretary and leader of pro-Peking split.

Just as important as the changing ideas of the leaders was a ferment among the rank and file. The old leadership, which had possessed massive personal authority for decades, had suddenly been replaced. Neither Aarons nor Taft could assume the old role of Sharkey or Hill.

At the same time, Peking had split with Moscow. No longer was there one source of wisdom for the world movement. Communists would simply have to think for themselves. Alas, after decades of stalinist dogmatism, few of them were able to come up with more than liberal commonplaces.

CPA Theory: From Stalinism to Liberalism

In 1958, Laurie Aarons wrote a scathing indictment of liberal ideas, which he paraphrased as follows:

"There is no need for a social revolution to achieve socialism, which will come gradually. The working class does not need to set up its own political power, its own state organisation to consolidate its rule and build socialism.

"Not the class struggle but propaganda truths and moral maxims will bring about socialism. From this it follows that not the working class but intellectuals are the leaders of the socialist cause."

"These and similar ideas are called 'revisionism'..."¹¹

By the mid-sixties, the Aarons group itself was moving rapidly toward such ideas. Lacking the sophisticated camouflage which the Victorians got from the PCI, the Aaronsites began to raise blatantly liberal concepts.

Because the Aarons group are the national leadership, and because the pattern is clearest in their writings, I have concentrated on them in this section.

VALUES REVOLUTION AND COALITION OF THE LEFT

Eric Aarons, rejecting crude stalinist ideas, began to study philosophy seriously in the 1960's. He was most impressed by liberal philosophy.

He concluded.

"there was no likelihood that the burgeoning knowledge in this and other fields could be squeezed without damaging surgery into any class slipper, however elegant and that the easy divisions into 'bourgeois' and 'proletarian' ideology we were in the habit of making were a major aspect of confining thought within old pre-determined bounds and could no longer be accepted in that form."¹²

The result of his studies was a book called *Philosophy for an Exploding World*, in which he broke openly with the Marxist view of the class struggle. In its place he put a "values revolution", and in place of the Marxist philosophical method he put pluralism:

"... it is not 'the workers' or 'the intellectuals' or any other stratum as such, but the revolutionary minded elements from among them all that must make themselves into a social force."¹³

"Pluralism has come to stay in political commitment, in life style, and in philosophy and theoretical approach in general. A common core of thought and feeling which can only spring from shared values must be achieved... This process would be hampered rather than furthered by attempts to constrict it within a highly ordered edifice of thought and organisation."¹⁴

These ideas found their strategic expression in the concept of the "Coalition of the Left", adopted at the 1967 Congress. The Coalition concept derived partly from old Popular Front notions, and some members thought it was just a continuation of past practice. After all, it called for a coalition of all the traditional "progressive" forces, with a few new ones thrown in.

But there were important differences. For one thing, the new concept represented a big step toward a gradualist theory of the transition to socialism — something we'll look at below. For some of the other differences, look at this excerpt from Laurie Aarons' speech to Congress:

"New features of this concept can be seen if we consider the ideas expressed in the present Party

program:

"Such experiences, together with frank and free discussion of policy and aims by all sections of the labour movement will ultimately lead to the formation of a single mass working class Party based on the principles of scientific socialism."

and

"(transformation) . . . will be possible through the strength of the organised working class firmly united and in alliance with the small farmers, under the leadership of the marxist party and with the organised co-operation and support of the majority of the people."

"Compare this with the concept in 'Towards a Coalition of the Left': 'This co-operation in action for social change (by working class parties) would continue as the centre of different social and political groupings which would share the leadership of the new society.

"These may well include besides trade unions and other people's organisations, other political parties which formed to represent interests of classes and social groups other than the working class."¹⁵

The working class character of the strategy is diluted, and the leading role of the revolutionary party goes right

out the window. No wonder some members warned:

"... the impression given to many comrades, especially in our branch, is that the Communist Party will become submerged, and this creates a fear of loss of identity."¹⁶

SOCIALISM AND DEMOCRACY

In 1968 a wharfie told John Sendy:

"Democracy might be a class question. But when we talk of democracy, that's what we've got to mean. If an author writes a book we don't like or people refuse to toe our political line, that's too bad. When we talk about bloody democracy that's what we've got to mean — democracy — it's as simple as that."¹⁷

For decades Communists had been told that democracy was a class question, and so it is. The working class in power has the right to exercise a dictatorship over its opponents, nor will it shrink from censorship or other forms of repression. But what this means is the dictatorship of the proletariat as a class, a transitional phase to a free society.

Under stalinism the "class question" became something else: the dictatorship of the party and state bureaucracy over the working class. The atrocities and abuses which this involved were stupendous. When CPA members became aware of them they

were rightly repelled. But they could not understand the problem.

Russia is a state capitalist society. The repression carried out by the bureaucracy is a product of its role as an exploitative ruling class. The only way to end it is by smashing the bureaucracy and replacing it with the dictatorship of the proletariat. From this point of view, it is possible to oppose Soviet repression and yet retain the Marxist understanding that democracy is a class question.

CPA members could not do that. They saw Russia as a socialist society. What was needed was to somehow "add democracy". But this is essentially the position of liberal critics of stalinism. Here as in so many other areas, liberal concepts appeared as the only available alternative to stalinist concepts.

Around this time the CPA produced a Draft Charter of Democratic Rights. Here the nature of the CPA's democracy became crystal clear.

The Charter complained that in Australia "our democracy has never been fully realised." It assured the reader that "Australian Communists work in a democratic way, and regretted the "declining role of parliament". It referred to "our independent judiciary". ASIO was to be replaced by "men whose responsibilities will be strictly confined to defence and security matters under the control of a



In the 1960's, Eric Aarons broke openly with the Marxist view of class struggle.

parliamentary committee."¹⁸

Finally, the draft insisted that under socialist rule, anti-socialist parties would be guaranteed their freedom. The Stalinist minority was able to demolish this formulation. Their critique is interesting:

"Is it fair to say that the Communist party should be legal under capitalism, but the capitalist parties should not be legal under socialism? One could give a quick mechanical 'no'. But it is a dialectical answer we want and that answer is 'the working class is the rising new force, the capitalist class is the dying, old force which nevertheless will fight desperately to turn back history's clock. Therefore the fight for a legal Communist Party under capitalism serves human progress. The fight to prevent the capitalists forming parties under socialism to rally their forces and bring back capitalism also serves human progress.' Are we then for human progress, or 'nice' 'democratic' but nonsensical formulas of a fair go for all - worker and boss alike?"¹⁹

This position is theoretically superior to that of the Charter. What is wrong with it, of course, is that it equates the Soviet regime with socialism. But then so did the Aaronites.

The same problem arose over the invasion of Czechoslovakia. The CPA rightly opposed the invasion, at the cost of a major split in its ranks. But it did so on liberal-democratic grounds, attempting to turn Lenin himself into a liberal:

"Self-determination is one of the main principles, not something of relative importance. Lenin regarded it as the principle of democracy in relation to the national question, an essential part of the democracy he considered the key question in the struggle for socialism."²⁰

Here too the Stalinists, unfortunately, were theoretically superior. They replied with a quote from Lenin:

But no Marxist, without flying in the face of Marxism and socialism generally, can deny that the interests of socialism are higher than the interests of the right of nations to self-determination.²¹

It is true that the Soviet regime under Lenin was quite prepared to ig-

Tribune

Incorporating The Guardian (Victorie) and Old Guardian

SPECIAL

THURSDAY, AUGUST 22, 1968

Czechoslovakia: Aust. Communists protest

A special meeting of the National Executive of the Communist Party of Australia held on the evening of August 21, 1968, unanimously adopted the following:

The National Executive of the CPA strongly protests against the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the troops of several socialist countries.

We regard this as a clear violation of the socialist principle of national self-determination, of relations between socialist countries and between Communist Parties.

The military intervention came only 18 days after the Bratislava meeting which adopted a declaration which said in part: "The participants in the conference expressed their firm resolve to do everything in their power to deepening all-round co-operation of their countries on the basis of principles of equality, respect for sovereignty and national independence, territorial integrity, fraternal mutual assistance and solidarity."

Congress

It also comes only 19 days before the convocation of the Czechoslovak Communist Party Congress to discuss Party policy and elect a leadership to carry out its decisions. Further more, this Congress has been prepared by a national-wide Party and public discussion in which socialist and Communist Party officials have won wide popular support.

We call for the withdrawal of the troops of the socialist countries from the invaded territories.

Principle

We make these statements on the basis of one socialist principle. This is to contrast to the hypocritical attempt of the Communist Government, the United States and other imperialist powers to support the Vietnamese people's struggle.

Tribune denounces the invasion of Czechoslovakia - but on liberal-democratic grounds

the sovereignty of neighbouring lands - Poland for instance - in the struggle against invaders. The answer to the Stalinists was that the Soviet regime of 1968 represented state capitalism and imperialism, not socialism. But this answer the Aaronites could not give. Consequently they were reduced to liberal commonplaces.

THE STATE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

A classless conception of democracy is one of the pillars of reformism. The goal of reformists is not to smash the state, but to "democratise" it. By the gradual extension of democracy and social reform, it is argued, capitalism can grow over into socialism.



Alexander Popov, leader of the Czechoslovak Communist Party.

adversely, recognition of the elected leadership of the Czechoslovak Government and Party and respect for their liberty and persons.

In our view, the action of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries has harmed their interests and national independence and the world-wide socialist cause, detracting from their record of actions for peace and national independence, particularly of support for the Vietnamese people's struggle.

and mass murder in Vietnam - are now seeking to pose as defenders of the right of national self-determination.

The Communist Party of Australia, however, has a clear and consistent position. In May the National Committee of the CPA supported the Czechoslovak Communist Party Action Program and position of demarcation.

On July 24, the National Executive of the CPA published a statement about the serious disagreement then existing between the Communist Parties of Czechoslovakia on the one hand, and of the USSR, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and the German Democratic Republic, on the other.

The CPA National Executive, while understanding the concern of those parties for the security of all the socialist countries against possible counter-revolutionary attempts.

It is our view, the action of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries has harmed their interests and national independence and the world-wide socialist cause, detracting from their record of actions for peace and national independence, particularly of support for the Vietnamese people's struggle.

This special issue was prepared by the Australian people's movement, the Communist Party of Australia.

Which for further material in next week's national issue of Tribune, published on Wednesday.

then clearly stated its continued support of the Czechoslovak Communist Party's program and policies.

Statement

The CPA stands, based on internationally agreed principles of the communist movement, was in these terms: "Only the Czechoslovak Communist Party can decide their Party's policies, just as the Czechoslovak working class and people should be able to decide their own national and state policy. There should be no attempt to force any other party to support the CPA's program and policies."

SYDNEY PUBLIC MEETING
Sunday, August 25, 3 p.m.

Hear Communist Party speakers L. Aarons, P. Clancy, M. Salmon and others on the Czechoslovak crisis.

LOWER TOWN HALL
OTHER STATES: Contact CPA office for details of meetings being arranged.

JOIN THE COMMUNIST PARTY, the only socialist political party with a mass base, and the only party to support the Vietnamese people's struggle.

power of capital, and to assist mass mobilisations. . ."

"They also spoke (sic) of not ultimately (sic) counting on the neutrality of the army or adherence to 'the law' by the opposing classes."²²

Meanwhile Allende was inviting the generals into his cabinet!

Aarons criticised Allende's Popular Unity movement only in mild terms, referring to a "hesitation in relying sufficiently on the workers and an apparent (sic) failure of work in the armed forces."²³ And part of his criticism was from the right. There was sectarianism toward the church, he said. And while the fragmentation of the left was regrettable,

"Nor should the later consequences of such a political evolution to a single party as revealed in the Soviet Union in particular be forgotten."²⁴

Apparently Aarons was more worried about the hypothetical danger of Stalinism than about uniting the left in the face of fascist attack.

What lessons for socialist strategy can we learn from Chile? Virtually none, it seems:

"The most one can say is that a combination of all available means, with flexible shifting from one to the other as occasion demands, will probably emerge."²⁵

To draw lessons from Chile would demolish the reformist theories of the CPA.

These theories are usually kept as vague as possible, but Eric Aarons made their meaning clear enough in an article in 1978. Taking his cue from the Eurocommunists, he argued that the capitalist state had changed. Its institutions now contained large numbers of employees, who can be mobilised against the system. This makes it possible to democratise the state.

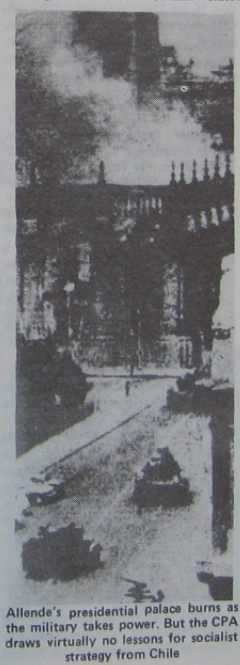
Unfortunately for Aarons, he picks an example which wrecks his own case:

"There are even examples in history of armies - the ultimate core of the state - being inflated by the prevailing social sentiment and political situation to refuse to fire on strikers."²⁶

But there is nothing new in armies behaving that way. Whole sections of the Russian army came over to the revolution in 1917. Would Aarons draw reformist conclusions for 1917? Lenin certainly did not. He saw winning over sections of the army precisely as part of the revolutionary process.

Similarly today. There are large numbers of public employees who can be organised against capitalism. The Marxist concept of smashing the state does not exclude, but indeed demands organising them. Smashing the state means, not shooting the employees, but liquidating the upper echelons and authoritarian structures. And these have by no means become more democratic. Ask any public servant.

Aarons also identifies another "change" in the capitalist state:



Allende's presidential palace burns as the military takes power. But the CPA draws virtually no lessons for socialist strategy from Chile

"The claimed 'impartiality' of the state, which is a vital ideological prop. . . has to be given some lip service. This creates avenues for ideas and actions which don't prop up the existing order."²⁷

Here again, Aarons stumbles over his own example. There is nothing new about this claimed impartiality. It has always existed, and has always opened up contradictions which revolutionaries can exploit. But it remains only a claimed impartiality which has to be exposed. It does not represent a democratisation of the state.

The most amazing part of the article concerns the transition to socialism. Aarons paraphrases Lenin's *The State and Revolution*:

"The state consists, (Lenin) pointed out, of a separate, a special body of people whose function is to rule. The aim of Marxists in respect to the state is not to make it all powerful, but to 'do away' with it. "How can this be done? By having everyone partake of the function."²⁸

Anyone who has read Lenin's pamphlet will recognise the fraudulence of this passage. The whole work was aimed against the idea of democratising the existing state. Lenin is talking about democracy in the workers' state which follows revolution.

Aarons makes it seem as if Lenin is discussing "the state" in the abstract. But in *The State and Revolution* Lenin pointedly differentiates himself from the reformists on just this point. He always asked: whose state? democracy for whom?

The Eurocommunists have begun to break openly with Lenin for precisely this reason. Aarons prefers to distort him. Fortunately he is too clumsy to get away with it.

Party Organisation: From Monolith to Swamp

Dave Davies once told how he had trouble finding the question mark on an unfamiliar typewriter. "Ah, comrade", said a young smart Alec. "It's an old typewriter - about your



Portugal 1975: troops join workers' demonstration. "Lenin... saw winning over sections of the army precisely as part of the revolutionary process." age. It dates back to when you didn't ask questions in the Party.¹²⁹

In a more serious vein, another Communist described the authoritarian style of the party in the old days:

"To oppose views from people in leadership positions... was seen incorrectly as the voice expressing views of the class enemy. This was seen as planned disruption... and was not to be tolerated by the 'party'.

"The general approach was to rally to the leadership and deal blow after blow at the malcontents."³⁰

Those days are gone, and good riddance. But what has replaced them?

The Leninist view of the party is summed up in the phrase: "full freedom in discussion, full unity in action." The membership needs the right to dissent, and to hear all sides of a question. But it also needs to make democratic decisions, then carry them out in a united and disciplined manner.

Unfortunately, no Leninist alternative presented itself to view in the late 1960's. "Leninism" was thought to mean the stalinist authoritarianism which CPA members were trying to end. The only available alternative models were the ALP and new-left ideas about loose collectives. (At the same time, as we have seen, the party was moving toward political positions associated with social democracy and liberalism.)

As a result, there was a reaction against centralism in the CPA at a point where the traditional leaders had

been replaced and new ones were still feeling their way.

So the party has moved from being a stalinist monolith to a disorganised mess, in which individuals and groups do their own thing regardless of official policy.

The most serious case is the union officials. John Halpenny doesn't even attend branch meetings. Jim Baird launched the AMWSU's notorious "Buy Australia" campaign without party authorisation — and apparently without consulting the CPA at all.

The Communist Group at Sydney Uni has held at least one forum at which its speaker denounced Australian nationalism. Yet CPA policy is quite the opposite.

At a women's liberation meeting in Sydney in 1977, at which the expulsion of the Spartacists was considered, CPA women voted three ways: for, against, and abstaining! And a statement promptly appeared in *Tribune* justifying the situation:

"If there is to be a positive resolution of the present debate in the Women's Liberation Movement this discussion must be accessible to all women in the movement and conducted in an atmosphere that encourages them to participate. We believe that firm position papers by political party groups do not aid this process.

"... the (CPA women's) collective does not tell women how they must act in the women's movement. Why? Because we believe in working creatively with other women to develop the politics of the movement itself."³¹

Membership requirements are non-existent. Selling *Tribune* once a month is the mark of a hard core activist. And according to a longtime member, recently resigned, the inflated formal membership is maintained in Brisbane by visiting members' homes to sell them party cards — so that they don't even have to attend the annual meeting of their branch.³²

As a result, the party is almost impossible to mobilise. The South Coast organiser wrote last year that, despite a claimed membership of 2,000, "We have... a street presence which only occasionally passes beyond

the subcultural ghettos."³³

Such a situation frustrates activists, but the leadership is happy. For if the members can all do their own thing without any responsibility to the party, so can the leadership. A case in point is *A New Course for Australia*, a major party document. How was it produced and authorised? Three Sydney members wrote:

"... it was written by two or three comrades and published as a CPA proposal with virtually no debate about it in the Party..."

"Confusion occurs when a document which proclaims adherence to a particular principle, i.e. democracy, casts that principle aside expeditiously."³⁴

The CPA has put aside the bureaucratic centralism of the old days. But in doing so, it has destroyed centralism altogether while allowing bureaucratism to survive in an altered form. Life in the party is much more pleasant, but no more democratic than before.

Trade Unions

I have argued that the changes in the CPA since 1967 do not represent a

TOEING THE PARTY LINE



shift to revolutionary positions. However there were areas in which a section of the party, that which fully supported the Aarons group, did move to more militant positions for a time.

As the 1972 elections approached, Aarons upset more conservative sections of the party by declaring that "The election of a Labor government cannot change anything, because the real power does not lie with the government and Parliament."³⁵ And in the unions, his supporters took radical initiatives in the early seventies, notably in the building industry.

Since 1974 the Aaronsites have retreated from these stances. During the Constitutional Crisis they reprinted Whitlam's speeches, and in recent documents they have accepted the idea of change through Parliament.

A retreat has also taken place in the unions, especially since the fall of the Munday leadership in the BLF.

In this section I'll look at union work, and try to identify the limitations of the left turn as well as the roots of the retreat which took place after 1974.

FROM THE RIGHT TO LEFT

From 1969 onward the Aarons forces had taken the offensive against conservatism in the unions. This conservatism combined a fear of confrontation with the desire for unity at any price. As Jack Munday explained:

"... when a group of workers was involved in a struggle... after a few days or a week an array of union officials ranging from extreme right to extreme left would turn up and urge them... to return to work to avoid the penal powers being slapped on... The 'left' officials usually justified this as being 'in the interests of the class as a whole'... There was too much readiness to settle rather than win disputes."³⁶

Party union officials were also attacked for economism. Richard Dixon told the 1970 Congress:

"Trade union militancy, left to itself, resulted in a strengthening of reformism: a problem which existed also in unions led by Communists.

... If the struggle is confined to

narrow trade union demands, it is easy to come to an arrangement with reformist leaders, because we would be acting on the same level and with similar methods."³⁷

The Aarons group formulated new policies for trade union work in a document called *Modern Unionism and the Workers' Movement*. It called for politicising the industrial struggle, and for workers' control actions which would "challenge capitalists' 'sacred rights' ". It was implemented, at least in part, in a series of industrial battles in New South Wales.

The party encouraged the struggles in the power industry, where conventional strikes were replaced with workers' control action on the job to limit and control the flow of power. It endorsed a rank and file insurgency in the Plumbers' union, which reached the point where militants drove the officials off the platform during a strike meeting.

Laurie Aarons took a personal interest in these struggles, and was active in the power branch at the time. He is said to have considered the power workers' actions even more significant than the events in the BLF.³⁸

But it was the Builders' Labourers led by Jack Munday who became the famous case. The "green bans" which stopped demolition and construction jobs on environmental grounds are internationally famous. Less well known but equally significant were the vigilante "desecabbing" operations and work-ins at sites like the Opera House.



NSW BLF leader, Jack Munday — a leading figure in the Party's left turn.

These actions represented a style of trade unionism well to the left of anything the party had supported for decades. Unfortunately, there were also hidden weaknesses.

The left turn was only partly a conscious political shift. Partly it was just a reflection of the general rise in militancy of those years. Strike levels had risen from 700,000 days lost in 1967 to over 6 billion in 1974.

With militancy that high, advanced actions came easily. The danger was that with a downturn in the economy, and the resulting decline in militancy, the party's union officials would shift back to the right with nothing permanent to show for their temporary left turn.

The giddy atmosphere led to a neglect of the nuts and bolts of rank and file organisation. The BLF's campaigns were run through enthusiastic mass meetings. But job organisation remained weak, as BLF activist David Shaw pointed out:

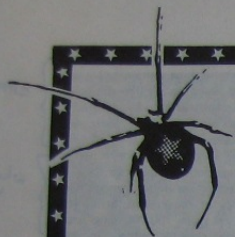
"there had... been a neglect of organisation on the job level. Only two or three jobs in Sydney had site committees, linking BLs to the other unions. If more jobs had had them, we'd have had a better show of beating Gallagher."³⁹

Equally serious was the unevenness of the party's trade union work. While some officials enthusiastically took up the new policies, the lack of party discipline left many others to go on in the old way. In the metal trades Communist officials hardly changed their habits at all.

CPA

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Laurie Carmichael — mobbed by angry Ford workers in 1973. He also clashed with CPA boilermakers in Brisbane.

Laurie Carmichael was mobbed by angry Ford workers in 1973, when he tried to justify his unwillingness to lead militant action. His plaintive comment, "But we had a plan . . ." became a national joke.

Carmichael's Ford disaster is well known. But only a short time before, in a lesser known incident, he clashed with party boilermakers in Brisbane. Three metal trades unions were being amalgamated and were to adopt the AEU branch structure, which involves locality branches. The Brisbane boilermakers, preferring the more democratic workplace branches they were used to, protested. Carmichael was sent in to lay down the law, with the result that a number of militants left the party and the Brisbane metal trades fraction was effectively wrecked.

The underlying weaknesses in CPA union work came to the forefront with the Federal intervention into the NSW BLF in 1975. The Gallagher Federal leadership collaborated with the employers to set up a rival NSW branch, and eventually destroyed the State leadership of Munday-Owens-Pringle.

One factor in the defeat was the lack of job organisation, as David Shaw indicated. But far more crucial was the unwillingness of the bulk of CPA union officials, including powerful figures like Halfpenny and Carmichael, to lift a finger to save the BLF.

The supposedly "democratic" lack of party discipline meant disaster for the real militants in the party. Munday himself confirmed this later, replying to criticism of his mistakes:

"Yes, mistakes, but always keep in mind that had other unions displayed working class solidarity with the democratically elected NSW leadership — the 'invasion' would have certainly have failed."⁴⁰

AND BACK TO THE RIGHT

In the period since the defeat of the NSW BLF the party's trade union work has been dominated by the old conservatism, the approach Munday described as "too much readiness to settle rather than win disputes". No one epitomises this pattern as much as John Halfpenny, the CPA's most prominent union official.

We will only touch lightly on the more notorious of Halfpenny's actions.

After November 11, 1975, there was a huge protest rally in Melbourne. The crowd was burning for action, but Halfpenny worked closely with the ALP leaders to try to send them home after the speeches. The IS was able to

lead a march of several thousand on to the stock exchange — one can only speculate about what a person with Halfpenny's personal standing and the CPA's resources could have accomplished.

In 1976 1500 shop stewards met to discuss Medibank. Halfpenny lined up with the right wing of Trades Hall to try to limit action to a token four-hour stoppage. An alternative motion for a 24 hour strike, moved by an IS member, was carried overwhelmingly. The CPA was forced to move smartly to the left to recover its position.

In early 1977, the stewards met again to discuss indexation. The Trades Hall proposed doing nothing. Once again, a motion moved by an IS



AMWSU leader, John Halfpenny — the CPA's most prominent union official.

member for strike action looked like getting through. But Halfpenny, after a hasty consultation outside the hall with his organizers, came up with a manoeuvre to bail the right-wing out.

He convinced the meeting to hold off a decision for two weeks, while they checked the mood of the rank-and-file. Halfpenny knew very well that the Trades Hall would not convene another meeting at the end of the fortnight, but he didn't tell the stewards this.

And even though he has enormous influence amongst the Left unions, he made no attempt to get them to call a meeting on their own.

Not long after, there was a confrontation over the Newport power station project, banned by Trades Hall. The Trades Hall right wing began to manoeuvre to dump the bans — supported by *Tribune*, which called for a "tactical reappraisal". They succeeded in getting the Trades Hall Council to submit the issues to an "independent enquiry" — a panel appointed by the Liberal State Government and made up largely of men who owed their prominent jobs to that Government.

Militant citizens in the Western Suburbs Committee Against Newport boycotted this rigged enquiry. Not so *Tribune*, which announced hopefully:

"One scientific consultant working for the panel believes it has already rejected Newport and will most likely go for a Latrobe Valley site"⁴¹

The enquiry however voted in favour of the Newport site. The THC reimposed the bans, but has done nothing about the scabs who have been working on the site ever since. Neither has Halfpenny, though there are undoubtedly many metal workers there.

All these highlight the concern for "unity in the labour movement" — a conservative unity with ALP bureaucrats at the expense of the rank and file — which has been a trademark of party union work for decades. But Halfpenny's most brilliant sell-out occurred during the Latrobe Valley strike.

Party leaders argue that he could not have sold out the strike, because it was run directly by the shop stewards

with frequent mass meetings. Well, Halfpenny's manoeuvres were indeed very subtle.

The strikers certainly were suspicious of interference by him or anyone else from "outside". The stewards were jealous of their independence. This was the strikers' great strength, but to the extent that it was tied to parochialism it also concealed weaknesses.

The power workers did not understand the state-wide and national implications of their struggle. They did not, until quite late, understand the importance of mobilising outside support. Halfpenny was able to manipulate the isolation which resulted.

At the first mass meeting he was heckled by the rank and file, and it took stewards' secretary Sam Armstrong to get them to listen to him. Halfpenny clearly concluded he would need Armstrong's co-operation to gain any influence over the strikers.

Halfpenny first raised the idea of a return to work after about seven weeks out, at a stewards' meeting. He got no support. But at the following stewards' meeting, his one supporter was Sam Armstrong — a CPA member.

It later became common knowledge in Melbourne party circles that the Taft leadership was pushing for a return to work by this time.

Having got Armstrong's support, Halfpenny went to work on the stewards. He used the strikers' isolation from the rest of Victorian workers in two ways.

One was to tie them up in arbitration. This meant repeatedly making the exhausting drive to

Melbourne, sitting through hours of tedium in the court, and listening to the brick wall of bullshit from the Electricity Commission.

The other was to create a feeling that they had no outside support. While many stewards went through the demoralising experience of long court hearings only three got involved in speaking to worker and student meetings in Melbourne. They saw the considerable public sympathy which the strike enjoyed, and opposed a return to work at all times. Two others toured Newcastle and Wollongong — including one who had previously voted to go back. The two sent a telegram to the final mass meeting saying support was fantastic, don't go back.

The rest, however, were swayed by Halfpenny's pessimistic arguments. He told them support would dry up if the strike were prolonged. He warned them they would become the centre of a political confrontation, with a Federal Election looming. And Bernie Taft wrote in *Tribune* that this would "play right into Fraser's election plans."⁴²

In reality the Greensboro by-election indicated that the strike was an electoral plus for Labor.

The union, and the CPA, did nothing to build support in Melbourne. When one trade unionist went into the Dandenong office of the AMWSU to ask for a leaflet about the strike, the embarrassed staff could only offer him one produced by the *Battler*.

Eventually, as is well known, the demoralised stewards recommended a return to work and reliance on arbitration. The ever-optimistic *Tribune* en-



Latrobe Valley power workers vote to continue their strike — but eventually Halfpenny got them back.

couraged this step, stating:

"Some commentators see the return to work in Victoria's power dispute as a total defeat for the workers. Some suggest that arbitration as the final empire is the kiss of defeat."⁴³

Tribune went on to attack such notions. But of course, the "commentators" — i.e. the revolutionary left — were proved entirely correct. Four months after the return to work, the power workers were given pitiful rises of around \$2 to \$5, when they had fought for \$40. Thirty percent got no rise at all.

The CPA: A New Course?

We could not end this article without considering *A New Course for Australia*, which the CPA sees as its major document for the late seventies. A close examination of it, supplemented with a look at the party's speakers' notes for it, reveals the same reformist and liberal concepts we have found elsewhere.

As a sort of conclusion to this article, I'll look briefly at three aspects of the *New Course*.

The *New Course* "locates basic economic power in the big corporations",⁴⁴ and identifies this power as the cause of the crisis. As an agitational point this might pass, but as a theoretical argument it has very dangerous implications.

The traditional approach of populism, and of the Labor left, is precisely to concentrate hostility only on a section of the capitalist class. Thus the attacks on finance capital made by Frank Anstey and Jack Lang.

The stalinised Communist Party made a similar distinction between the "sixty families" and the rest of the bourgeoisie. Today the Eurocommunists distinguish between reactionary and "dynamic" sections of the bourgeoisie.

The implication is that the evils of capitalism can be dealt with by attacking the "bad" employers, usually in alliance with the "good" employers.

But capitalist crises do not arise out of the evil nature of any particular grouping. They arise out of the mode of production, which gives rise both to cyclical crises of overproduction and to a longterm trend for the rate of profit to decline. Only the removal of this whole system will resolve today's crisis.

That is why Marxists see the struggle as between the working and the employing classes. By contrast, the *New Course* implies that a section of the bourgeoisie is progressive.

The practical implications of such a policy have already become clear in the metal trades. Here CPA union officials have been involved in seminars and "Buy Australian" programs which aim to unite workers and smaller manufacturers in collaboration against the multinationals, who are supposed to be "turning Australia into a quarry."⁴⁵

How does the CPA propose to "tackle corporate power"? Through the existing state machinery. Where Laurie Aarons in his left phase could say in 1972 that "the real power does not lie with the government and Parliament",⁴⁶ the speakers' notes to the *New Course* say this:

"government bureaucracies serve the corporations and . . . such personnel at the top can't serve the poor and wage earners. It says also that parliament cannot properly reflect popular needs because of all this."⁴⁷

And in the *New Course* itself we read:

"The government should use the powers it already has to secure maximum control over the mining/resources/energy sector. . ."⁴⁸

Clearly the existing Parliament is to be used, though the government bureaucracy is a problem.

Of course the document also speaks of the need for a mass movement. The model is the Coalition of the Left: an alliance of "trade unions, citizens' and consumer organisations, and the social movements". As in the original Coalition proposals, the role of a revolutionary party is submerged. We read:

"These movements . . . must artic-

ulate clear, concrete and comprehensive alternatives to the structures they are challenging."⁴⁹

Let's look at the most important of these movements, the trade unions. They are capitalist institutions with a natural tendency to reproduce existing structures and ideology — a fact noted long ago by Lenin and Gramsci.⁵⁰ To move workers beyond trade unionism to revolutionary consciousness, is the task of a marxist party.

The *New Course* goes on to say that the movements need to "link the present and the future", and "become conscious of the relationship between (themselves)".⁵¹ For Lenin, and for us, these goals cannot be achieved without building a mass workers' party, which links up the militants in each area around a revolutionary program.

But the CPA does not believe it can build such a party.

"Obviously it is not a project for the Communist Party of Australia on its own, given its small presence in Australian life. It would have to embrace a variety of political and social forces."⁵²

Because the CPA doesn't feel up to building the party anymore, it wants to hand over the struggle for revolutionary consciousness to "a variety of political and social forces".

In 1968, *Tribune* published comments from outside the party on the CPA's new policies. Dr. Graeme Duncan of Melbourne University was allowed to publish these approving remarks in the centre pages:

"Certainly the Marxist teeth have been drawn, and the new model Australian Communist Party has moved explicitly into the mainstream of Western Democratic theory. We are all bourgeois gentlemen now."⁵³

Ten years later that could still stand as the last word on the party's much-heralded "new course".

There are still excellent militants in the party, and some who are serious about socialist revolution. It is essential to convince them to get out of the CPA, and join the fight for a revolutionary alternative. It is for that reason this article was written.

**The Tombstone of the
Unknown Soldier of the Revolution**

The unknown soldier of the revolution has fallen.
I saw his tombstone in a dream.

It lay in a peat-bog, It consisted of two boulders.
It bore no inscription. But one of the two
Began to speak.

He who lies here, it said, marched
Not to conquer a foreign land, but
His own. Nobody knows
What his name is. But the history books
Give the names of those who vanquished him.

Because he wanted to live like a human being
He was slaughtered like a savage beast.

His last words were a whisper
For they came from a strangled throat, but
The cold wind carried them everywhere
To many freezing people.

— *Bertolt Brecht*