

# **THE COMMUNIST PARTY**

History, thoughts  
and questions.

**John Sendy**

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## THE COMMUNIST PARTY

## HISTORY, THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

by

JOHN SENDY

John Sendy has been an active Communist for most of his life. For 26 years he worked as a functionary of the Communist Party of Australia in South Australia and Victoria and was National President, 1972-74. John left full-time work for the CPA in 1974. Since that time he has devoted himself to writing. His book, **Comrades Come Rally! Recollections of an Australian Communist**, was published by Thomas Nelson, Australia, in 1978. He has written several other books, as yet unpublished, relating to aspects of CPA history.

John Sendy gave a lecture entitled "Aspects of the History of the CPA" in September, 1978, for the Hawthorn (Vic) Branch of the CPA. Following a number of requests for the lecture to be made more widely available this booklet has been published. It is based on the original lecture notes.

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This booklet has been produced by a group of members of the Communist Party in Victoria who are interested in collecting visual, written and oral materials on CPA history. The group is interested in collecting any materials — long or short, gigantic in significance or minor examples of communist work. Such materials will be reproduced or located in our library for use of the labor movement.

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## THE COMMUNIST PARTY HISTORY, THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

The vicissitudes of the Communist Party of Australia, since its formation in October, 1920, provide innumerable examples of courage, struggle, sacrifice and romance.

The story of the CPA is a story of just fights well fought and of bold and imaginative ideas; it is sometimes, too, a story of unthinking stupidity and blind faith.

Doubtless there may be some things about which Communists could feel shame, but generally speaking our history should fill us with pride and from it we can seek inspiration and food for thought.

No one seriously challenges the drastic decline in CPA membership and influence, although some Communists still dislike attention being focussed in that direction. For many years our Federal and State election voters have been very small, but the Communist candidate in the Sherwood by-election in Queensland in November, 1978, for whatever reason, could poll only an incredible 73 votes — surely close to an all-time record low. The historian, Frank Farrell, may not be right in alleging that CPA strength is back where it started in 1920, but he should be forgiven small error. (*Labour History*, No. 32, 1977.) The fact is that CPA membership and influence has declined to approximately the level reached well over forty years ago. This is a stark reminder of the need to set about learning the lessons of the past, the reasons for that decline.

By 1945 the CPA had acquired a membership approaching 25,000, an extremely large influence in the industrial and trade union movement, a substantial press circulation, important parliamentary and local government voting support and a significant following in literature, art, science and education. It then proceeded to lose most of this membership, support and influence. This whole development cries out for analysis. Why did it happen? Any serious political party must attempt to answer such a question. Apparently little effort is extended by Communists to probe our rich history and extrapolate lessons which may be useful in ensuring a meaningful future for the CPA, or its descendants. Probably the frightful neglect of our history is a major reason for the decline over the years.

In the following pages facts illustrating some past strengths and weaknesses of the CPA, are very briefly presented. Also raised are queries on aspects of our history and tentative thoughts about points which possibly could be useful in the quest for a productive Communist future in Australia.



'Could you oblige me with a match'

## EARLY DAYS

In July, 1920, the Second Congress of the Communist International noted that Communist organisation and parties were being established in nearly every country where there existed a serious working class movement. Three months later the Communist Party of Australia was formed. Indigenous Australian socialist groupings, parties and journals had propagandised and organised for some years, often finding themselves in jealous, sectarian and savage competition. Sometimes the loudness, vehemence and optimism of these sects was in inverse proportion to their size and influence. But the arguments and animosity reflected a grappling with significant problems as Ian Turner outlined: "The most important of these were the proper attitudes of revolutionaries to the mass labour party and the existing trade unions, the rival merits of political and industrial action, the perennial argument between the advocates of physical force and moral force, and, in the trade union field, the fundamental tactical difference between 'dual unionism' and 'boring from within'. (**Industrial Labour and Politics, The Labour Movement in Eastern Australia, 1900-1921**, p233.) The similarity with the situation over 50 years later is rather staggering!

It is not surprising, therefore, that the impact of the 1917 Bolshevik victory in Russia, proved considerable, although it took some time to sink in. It loomed large in the thinking and arguments of the following years and stoked the revolutionary ardour existing in the various socialist, labour and syndicalist movements. Robert Ross, the leader of the Victorian Socialist Party, one of the most significant socialist organisations, outlined this impact in July, 1920, in an important polemical booklet in which he significantly rejected the Soviet method as being appropriate for Australia.

*"No thinking man of the Labor movement but who must admire – and tremendously admire – the greatness of the Soviet idea, and more especially its invention, its use and its application in Russia. All of it partakes of the nature of genius. It touches the heights. It is extraordinary and epochally colossal. If you can imagine such a phenomenon, it is like an immense lighthouse set on the highest mountain peak in the world, with inspiring rays sweeping all continents. The coming into action of the Soviet idea, I would ask leave to deliberately and reverently say, is in its outstanding character and everlastingness like the coming of Jesus. What I mean is that it is one of the world's few towering advents whose influence strides across gulfs of time. (RS Ross, Revolution in Russia and Australia (Ross's Book Service, Melbourne, 1920, p6).*

The establishment in 1919 of the Third International, the Communist International, and the formation of Communist Parties in many countries further demonstrated strength, success and potential, and naturally led to similar moves in Australia.

On October 30, 1920, over thirty people assembled at the headquarters of the Australian Socialist Party in Sydney and founded the Communist Party. Only NSW and Victorian delegates attended. (Shortly afterwards small groups were established in West Australia and Queensland led by Katherine Susannah Prichard and J.B. Miles

respectively, but these initial groups were initially shortlived.) The delegates comprised members of the ASP, trade union officials, remnants of the IWW and one member of the Socialist Labor Party. They were nearly all workers. The trade union officials included Jock Garden (Secretary of the NSW Trades and Labour Council), Tom Walsh (Seamen's Union), Arthur Thomas (Australian Railways Union) and Jack Howie (an official of the T & LC). Peter Larkin, a waterfront worker, and Thomas Glynn, a blacksmith, were former leaders of the IWW and two of the IWW Twelve who had been charged with arson and treason in 1916. They had just served four years in gaol. Larkin was the brother of the Irish revolutionary James Larkin. Glynn had been editor of the IWW newspaper, **Direct Action**. He became the first editor of the Communist Party paper, **Australian Communist**. Several of the delegates were intellectuals, notably Christian Jollie-Smith, a lawyer, and Guido Baracchi, from Melbourne. Many were widely read and well acquainted with the socialist literature then available.

The conference elected Bill Earsman as Secretary of the new Party. Earsman defeated Arthur Riordan, the leader of the ASP. Scottish born and a fitter and turner, Earsman was a former member of the Victorian Socialist Party. He was one of the chief founders of the Victorian Labor College in 1917 and of the NSW Labor College in 1919, and the author of a booklet, **The Proletariat and Education, The Necessity for Labor Colleges**, published by Andrade's Bookshop in Melbourne early in 1920.

The first Executive elected was comprised of Earsman, Garden, Arthur Riordan, Everett, Glynn, A. Brodney, Arthur Thomas, Christian Jollie-Smith, Tom Walsh, Adela Pankhurst Walsh, Chris Hook and C.W. Baker.

Within a short time a split developed with the ASP members withdrawing and proclaiming their organisation as the Communist Party. Disputes over the leading positions and about property seem to have sparked the row which continued with two organisations claiming to be the Communist Party, each publishing papers and each seeking the recognition of the Communist International. By 1922 the Earsman-Garden Communist Party emerged victorious when a large section of the ASP organisation, led by Tom Payne and Lionel Leece came over to it and recognition was obtained from the Communist International.

The new Party set about winning support; branches and union groups were established, lectures and meetings were organised and a drive for sales of the **Australian Communist** (later the **Communist**) was undertaken. Regular Sunday afternoon meetings were held in the Sydney Domain.

A campaign for affiliation of the CPA to the ALP was successful. When affiliation was won in NSW in 1923 and Communists were elected to the ALP Executive, many Communists joined the ALP. However when the decision respecting affiliation was reversed after a few months Communists were banned from ALP membership; many were expelled or withdrew but others either retained dual membership for some years with their CPA membership often a fairly open secret; others temporarily relinquished CPA membership in order to work in the ALP

Despite considerable trade union connections in NSW the Party remained quite small. Esmonde Higgins, brother of the writer Nettie Palmer, who had gained worthwhile Communist experience in England where he wrote for the *British Workers Weekly* and *Labour Monthly* gave his estimate of the CPA in 1924:

*"The CP finds itself after four years a weak little crowd forced to admit its effective inferiority to other Labour forces."* (Note: quoted in J.N. Rawling's *Work in Progress paper*, ANU, 1962.)

By 1925 some members became disillusioned and proposed liquidation. Guido Baracchi resigned when that course was rejected. Garden had virtually left the Party by the time he was expelled in 1926.

Rawling places the Party membership at 249 in 1928 with more than half being resident in NSW and less than fifty in both Melbourne and Brisbane.

### DEPRESSION, STRUGGLE AND GROWTH

On the eve of the economic crisis, and in its early stages, there occurred three major, prolonged and bitter strikes and lock-outs. These were in the Waterside, timber and coal-mining industries and were all caused by the attempts of employers or Arbitration Courts to lower the wages and living conditions of the workers. The widespread use of scabs, violence, and wounding and killing of unionists by police marked these disputes. The Communists were prominent in them all, particularly on the coalfields.

In September, 1928, a new Arbitration award required waterside workers to attend two pick-ups a day instead of the customary one. This meant that men could wait around all day and go home without having got work. A fierce confrontation followed. The introduction of scab labour in some ports provoked considerable violence and many demonstrations. In Melbourne police fired upon union demonstrators wounding several and union militant, Alexander McIvor, was sentenced to fifteen years gaol for allegedly bombing a Greek club. (Some legal opinion maintained that he was innocent on the evidence and after ten years imprisonment he was released without public explanation after union intercession.) The union was defeated.

At the end of 1928 the Arbitration Court decided that timberworkers hours should be increased from forty-four to forty-eight weekly and early in 1929 wages were reduced despite the increase in the cost of living. In NSW and Victoria the struggle was particularly severe and lasted for practically the whole year with violence, arrests Court cases, gaolings and fines.

*The Commonwealth Government attempted to put into operation the provision of the Arbitration Act requiring a secret ballot of the union members - in this case on the question, "Are you prepared to work under the existing award of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, dated 23rd January, 1929?" 15000 ballot papers were issued, but only 6000 were returned, including 5318 on which NO was written. In Sydney timberworkers burned their ballot papers outside the Trades Hall . . . (Brian Fitzpatrick, A Short History*

*of the Australian Labour Movement, Rawson's Bookshop, Melbourne, 1940, p160.)*

Australian unionists subscribed over £120000 (pounds) to the NSW timberworkers strike funds. Again the union was defeated.

Early in 1929 the coalowners on the northern NSW coalfields cut the wages of the miners. The union refused to accept this and a lock-out followed. Again the dispute dragged out for a year. On December 16, 1929, the NSW Nationalist Government sent scabs, protected by police armed with rifles, to open the Rothbury mine. Police fired on picketing miners killing Norman Brown and wounding many others. A huge rally of protest was held on the Sydney Domain, variously estimated at between 30000 and 70000, out of which the Workers Defence Corps was formed. However the miners also had to capitulate and return to work early in 1930.

Meanwhile new elements were influencing the development of the labour movement. At the height of the economic crisis a third of the workforce was unemployed. Poverty, starvation and bitterness was the lot of huge sections of the community. Fascism was gaining strength in Germany and Italy and via the New Guard and other organisations in Australia. The Soviet Union had become stronger and provided a contrast to the staggering capitalist system. In contradistinction to many of the leaders of the ALP, both federal and state, who appeared to acquiesce to wage cuts, evictions and dole queues and who showed but little fight all too frequently, the tiny Communist Party displayed a fighting capacity and ability far beyond its apparent strength.

A leading CPA activist of that period, Jack Blake, has indicated that the Party gave new hope to the workers, bringing determination, anger, dignity and a spirit of struggle and self-confidence to replace the hopelessness, humiliation and feelings of inferiority which abounded. The Communists, he claimed, helped to create a new sense of class pride among the workers and developed organisational abilities and skills despite the fact that often they had insufficient to eat. (Jack Blake, Talk given at CPA Seminar, Sydney University, January, 1978.)

The Party thereby claimed the attention of many militant workers and unemployed, gaining public prominence for courage and combativeness. Though small in numbers the Communists were dedicated, determined and well-organised idealists with international connections and backing. Such a force can usually make its mark. Therefore the CPA commenced to grow. However while numbers and influence increased during the worst depression years super-leftism inhibited the development of support for socialist ideas on a broad scale in a period when capitalism's credibility had tumbled.

Much of the growth was associated with the mass work of the Communists in four organisations which were established largely at their initiative and under their leadership. These were the Unemployed Workers Movement, the Militant Minority Movement, the Friends of the Soviet Union and the Movement Against War and Fascism.

The Unemployed Workers Movement was initiated in 1930 and by 1934 claimed a membership of 68000 in the eastern states. Its chief activities were centred around the demands for increased dole allowances, a rent allowance and no evictions. It organised frequent meetings and demonstrations, produced and distributed leaflets,

established camps of unemployed and organised deputations. Its marches and demonstrations were frequently broken up by the police and arrests and gaoling of unemployed leaders and activists was widespread. Much effort was expended in the anti-eviction struggles. Landlord and police action to evict unemployed workers and their families for non-payment of rent occurred on a large scale under both Nationalist and ALP Governments. These often proved violent and bloody affairs. The *Sydney Morning Herald* described one such incident as follows:

*"The most sensational eviction battle Sydney has ever known was fought between 40 policemen and 18 Communists at 143 Union Street, Newtown, yesterday morning. All the defenders were injured, some seriously, and at least 15 of the police were treated by ambulance officials.*

*Only one man was hit by bullets fired at the walls of the house by police, and it is not known how the injury was inflicted. Probably the wounded man was struck by a bullet which had been deflected in its path.*

*Entrenched behind barbed wire and sandbags, the defenders rained stones weighing several pounds from the top floor of the building on to the heads of the attacking police, who were attempting to execute an eviction order.*

*After a desperate battle, in which iron bars, piping, rude bludgeons and chairs were used by the defenders, and batons by the police, the defenders were dragged, almost insensible, to the waiting patrol wagons. . . .*

*A crowd hostile to the police, numbering many thousands, gathered in Union Street. They filled the street for a quarter of a mile on each side of the building until squads of police drove them back about 200 yards, and police cordons were thrown across the roadway.*

*At times the huge crowd threatened to become out of hand. It was definitely antagonistic to the police. When constables emerged from the back of the building with their faces covered in blood, the crowd hooted and shouted insulting remarks. When one patrol wagon containing prisoners was being driven away, people standing well back in the crowd hurled stones at the police driver.*

(*Sydney Morning Herald, June 20, 1931.*)

Six days later the Newcastle *Sun* devoted the whole of its front page to a description of the battle of Tighe's Hill.

*"Clare Street, Tighe's Hill was the scene of one of the worst and most sanguinary conflicts this afternoon, that has ever taken place in this district. At one time over 60 police and about 200 men, picketing a house in the street, were engaged in a hand to hand battle, from which many emerged covered with blood." Batons fell like hail as the police moved forward to break down resistance, and the pickets wielded palings torn from fences, and wooden batons, and one man even had a sledge hammer.*

*In the height of the conflict, as the police were smashing their way into the house, four shots rang out. To many it seemed as if they were revolver shots, but this turned out to be wrong. The*



The Great  
Depression.

509. A Protest in Lincolns by The Workers Artists, 1933

*excitement in the great crowd that had assembled then grew to fever pitch.*

*Frightful blows were exchanged, and some of the combatants looked as if their faces were covered with red paint, so grievous were their wounds. Foot by foot they struggled to the roadway, or collapsed to the footpath.*  
(Newcastle Sun June 14, 1932.)

Photos, casualty lists and other information filled the page.

Dole strikes of the unemployed sustenance workers demanding increases were organised. In Victoria in 1933 such an eight week strike succeeded in raising the allowances from twelve shillings weekly to twenty shillings for a married man and doubled the allowance for children from one to two shillings weekly. Further increases were won by another Victorian strike in 1935. (Note: These events are described by Ralph Gibson, *My Years in the Communist Party*, International Bookshop, Melbourne, 1966, pp30-32; and Alf Watt, *The Victorian Dole Workers Strike*, Communist Review, May, 1935.)

Yet such advanced vanguard actions as illustrated above usually appealed only to the hungry, the homeless and frustrated and sometimes received scant support.

At this time most of the Communists were unemployed and therefore active in the UWM, most often as leaders and inspirers. Men like Ernie Thornton and Jim Munro in Melbourne, Alex McDonald and Mick Healy in Brisbane, Jim Oliver in Newcastle and Jack Morrison in Geelong were but a few of the many who played big roles. Numerous unemployed activists later became important trade union officials and leading personnel in the ALP and the CPA. The UWM taught thousands the rudiments of organisation and propaganda.

The Militant Minority Movement, as the name suggests, was an organisation of unionists within the trade unions. It was proposed by the Red International of Labour Unions, which arose out of the activities of the Comintern, and promoted in Australia by the CPA. The Minority Movement, as it later became known, aimed to radicalise the unions. It opposed and exposed right-wing reformist inaction and dilatoriness, which was quite marked, organised classes on the jobs, distributed leaflets and produced a weekly newspaper, the *Red Leader*, which was selling over 9000 copies by 1934.

The MM was particularly strong on the coalfields of NSW and at Wonthaggi in Victoria, and on the waterfront and in the railways. Discussing the work of the MM during the prolonged miners strike at Wonthaggi in 1934 Communist Party official, R. Dixon wrote that 400 of the local miners were members of the MM, nearly one third of the workforce in the mines. (Note: R. Dixon, *Problems of Militant Unionism*, Communist Review, August, 1934.) A retired miner, who participated in the events, has claimed that 700 Wonthaggi miners eventually belonged to the MM, largely determining the attitudes of the union there. Communists won the leading national positions in the Miners Federation in 1933-34, the first significant communist union victory, as a direct result of the strength of the MM on the coalfields.

In 1933 the Movement Against War and Fascism was established to campaign against the twin menaces threatening the world at that

time. A journal *War What For* was produced. Meetings, conferences, demonstrations were the chief activities of the movement which reached its high point during the hectic visit of the anti-fascist Czech writer, Egon Kisch, in 1934. Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia and the Spanish civil war claimed the attention of the MAW and F which took the initiative in the founding of the Spanish Relief Committees around Australia and involved large numbers of people from unions, churches, universities and elsewhere.

The Friends of the Soviet Union emerged in Sydney in 1930. It attempted, with considerable success, to popularise the Soviet Union and its achievements in a situation in which the economic crisis of capitalism engendered some interest, among the thinking people who suffered as a result, in what appeared may provide a viable alternative to capitalism. By 1935 the FOSU had a national membership of 7500 and its journal, *Soviets Today*, enjoyed a circulation of 20000. (Note: Alastair Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia*, Hoover Institution Press, 1969, p61.) The FOSU arranged delegations of workers and others to the Soviet Union, organised speaking tours and large public meetings. Its first National Secretary was Jack Morrison; Ted Tripp and Sam Aarons were notables who followed him in that position.

However it was in the trade union movement where the Communists gained and consolidated widespread support. The chief founders of the Party had been active unionists and the first manifesto of the CPA, published on Christmas eve 1920 in the *Australian Communist* called on members "to take an active part, and wherever possible a leading part, in every craft or industrial union . . ." This the Party members took to heart and for the next twenty five years slowly but surely acquired an influence in the unions and industries which greatly exceeded its general political strength. Strike actions received energetic support from the CPA whose leading committees constantly devoted long hours to analysing union and industrial developments and struggles and to creating organisation among many sections of workers. By the end of 1934 an active forty one percent of the CPA membership of nearly 3000 worked in industry and over ninety factory and workplace branches operated. (Note: L. Donald, *Forward to a Mass Bolshevik Party*, Communist Review, April, 1935.)

The election of Bill Orr and Charlie Nelson in 1933 and 1934 to the positions of Federal Secretary and President of the Miners Federation was followed by Tom Wright winning the NSW Secretaryship of the Sheetmetal Workers Union in 1935. Wright had been CPA General Secretary from 1924 to 1930. Ernie Thornton became the Federal Secretary of the Federated Ironworkers Association in 1936 and Jim Healy and Ted Roach were elected to the posts of Federal Secretary and Assistant Federal Secretary of the Waterside Workers in 1937. In Victoria Jean Young (now Jean Morant) was appointed an organiser in the Liquor Trades Union.

Between 1928 and 1934 the Party membership increased more than ten times - from 250 to nearly 3000. Press circulation of the *Workers Weekly* (National), *Workers Voice* (Victorian), and *Red Star* (West Australia), rose to many thousands weekly.

## MISTAKES

Much of this increase in strength was attained during a period when the CPA, influenced by natural inclinations, and by the Comintern, was pursuing an ultra-left line. The growth and influence achieved was very small compared to the existing possibilities and those Communists who consider that super-militant vanguardist actions and "exposure" of ALP reformism is the main way to rebuild Communist influence and strength in the 1970's and 1980's should think again. Despite its growth in the early 1930's the CPA at that time repelled large sections of the Australian political left and socialists and assisted to create a substantial division among them. Socialist ideas were widespread within the ALP and the trade unions. Thoughts of a new society occurred among many people. But the CPA directed its main attack against the ALP. It branded ALP activists, including the left-wing, as "social fascists". It displayed an intolerant, abusive attitude to political personalities and organisations of the labor movement not sharing its views. It called for a Soviet Australia, for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and condemned as traitors to the working class those in the labor movement who opposed violent revolution and advocated peaceful transition to socialism. It tried to impose a policy of "revolution now" upon the ALP. Even the active Socialisation Units of the ALP were regarded with scepticism and hostility.

By these tactics the CPA alienated a great many people in the labor movement and permanently damaged relations with important organisations. While it attracted small numbers of those frustrated and impatient with the ALP it created in the minds of much larger numbers of leftists, and those inclined towards socialism, a lasting impression of a violent, foreign, un-Australian structure which was to be feared.

How much stronger the CPA could have become in this period had policies been pursued which were more in keeping with the Australian political realities, is a matter for conjecture. The CPA did not appreciate that the Australian working people possessed few revolutionary traditions, nor that the great majority, despite the bitterness and hardships of the depression, owed their allegiance to democratic parliamentary political methods, notwithstanding the disillusionment engendered by the actions or inaction of many ALP politicians, the Premier's Plan, the wage and social service cuts supported by Labor Governments, the Demagogy of J.T. Lang and so on. Hence the ultra-left line prevented the CPA from becoming a better force during and after the depression years.

Furthermore growth and maturity in the Party is usually associated with the defeat of the so-called right-wing leadership of the CPA at the January, 1930, Congress. There Jack Kavanagh, Tom Wright, Jack Ryan and others were removed from their leading positions to be replaced by Lance Sharkey, Herbert Moxon, and later, J.B. Miles. This is often presented as a victory for revolutionism over right-wing reformist policies. As R. Dixon posed the question:

*"... were we to be a Communist Party organisationally and ideologically independent of the ALP and reformism? A party whose policy and tactics were revolutionary and designed to win*

*support of the masses of the working people, a party which could play an active and leading part in the class struggles against capitalism, and which set out to win over and prepare the working class for the fight for socialism?" (R. Dixon, Early Years in the Party, Australian Left Review, September, 1975.)*

Sharkey and E.W. Campbell present this view in their earlier writings on CPA history — that the Party was strengthened by purging itself of opportunist elements. Whatever the truth of the matter about the 1929-30 inner-Party struggle there does appear to be involved the factors of unhealthy factionalism, the expulsion of those who challenged Comintern instructions and the jettisoning of cooperation with left-wing ALP forces such as the leadership of the NSW Trades and Labour Council.

Another interesting and perhaps crucial point arises: if the policy of the Comintern and the CPA was often wrong in this period, did not such errors sometimes lead to exaggeration of the weaknesses of the ALP and its cadres, and to ignoring the positive qualities they possessed?

Also it is noteworthy that the so-called right-wing, J. Kavanagh, J. Ryan, T. Tripp and others who were expelled in this period, in one way or another, queried the line of the Comintern relating to opposing the ALP in elections, the standing of a huge number of Communist candidates, the use of the term "social fascist", and themselves cooperated with left ALP activists. One of the charges laid against Kavanagh was of "cowardice" displayed during the Timberworkers strike. Yet leading activists in the events afterwards claimed that the strike should have been terminated earlier!


Indeed it seems that most of those expelled or demoted over the past fifty years for right-wing proclivities, revisionism, cowardice and the like, and the numbers have been considerable, were merely opting for policies more in tune with Australian political realities, vainly endeavouring to stem ultra-leftist tides in the Party, or trying to urge necessary humanitarian political and personal attitudes.

While increased activity and energy led to the growth of the Party in the depression years there is little doubt that the ultra-left line severely damaged its future possibilities. This double-sided result appears to have been a world-wide phenomenon, particularly evident in Britain, the USA and Australia. It arose from the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928 which gave a correct estimate about the oncoming economic crisis and the need for the working class to combat it but also advocated a political line of confrontation of the capitalist system and the reformist Parties. This misqueued badly and left a huge aftermath, to put it mildly.

Is it possible that the Australian "victory" of 1930 may have laid the foundations for later defeats and the post-war decline? Were the Party's "swaddling clothes" replaced by a dogmatic and doctrinaire jacket that was to mould many Party attitudes for generations ahead?




# THE CALAMITOUS CAREER OF DICTATOR BOB



**LOOK AT THE RECORD**



UNCONTROLLED INFLATION




NO BUTTLE  
NO POWER  
NO HOSPITAL  
NO HOMES  
NO ONIONS  
NO GAS  
NO SCHOOLS  
NO OTC

SHORTAGES

**CONSCRIPTION**



ARMAMENT OF JAPAN

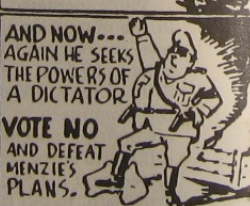


AND NAZI GERMANY



AND NOW... AGAIN HE SEEKS THE POWERS OF A DICTATOR

**VOTE NO AND DEFEAT MENZIE'S PLANS.**



# WANTED

## FOR ATTEMPTED MURDER OF AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY



### RECORD:

- 1914 Resigned his Commission.
- 1938 Forced export of pig-iron to Japan.
- 1939 Cut Burma Road life-line to China.
- 1941 Infamous Brisbane Line Scandal.
- 1950 Conscripted Australian youth. Jailed Australian workers.
- 1951 Agreed to Japanese re-armament.

**REWARD**  
**FREEDOM and PEACE**  
**Vote:  "NO"**  
**on SEPTEMBER 22nd**

Authorised by J. J. Brown, 636 Bourke St., Melbourne.

## AGAINST WAR AND FASCISM

Many aspects of the 1928-1934 ultra-left positions were gradually overcome following the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935. Calling for a united front to defeat the menace of fascism and war, Georgi Dimitrov, hero of the Reichstag Fire Trial, outlined methods of struggle and campaigning which sought the unity of Communist and Social Democratic or Labour Parties and members throughout the world. Communist historian E.W. Campbell saw the following period in this way:

*"Unity Against Fascism and War became the main slogan of the Communist Parties, including the Communist Party of Australia, after the Seventh World Congress. From its inception the Communist Party had persistently warned the workers that so long as capitalism lasted there would be the ever constant danger of new world wars. From its inception it had sought to organise and prepare the workers to meet such danger. Now, however, it was no longer a question of pointing out the danger of imperialist war in general, but one of struggle against a concrete and immediate threat arising from fascist aggression. The Party fought for an alliance with the Soviet Union as the most consistent peace-loving nation, it advocated international collective security in the Pacific for the maintenance of peace and the security of this country. It fought relentlessly against reactionary legislation and all fascist tendencies in Australia.*

*The Party initiated a boycott of Japanese goods and organised strikes against the sending of war materials to Japan. It came out strongly in support of Abyssinia, demanding full economic sanctions and the closing of the Suez Canal. It called for full support for the Republican Government of Spain in its struggle against counter-revolution and fascist intervention. Throughout this entire period the Party combated the treacherous policy of the Australian ruling class the policy of "appeasement" and "non-intervention" and the equally treacherous policy of the labor reformists - "isolation". It exposed Chamberlain and Munich and showed how the British imperialists were planning to strengthen Hitlerism and promote a Soviet-German war. Considerable success marked these mass political campaigns of the Party. Through the Movement Against War and Fascism, the Hands Off China movement, the Spanish Aid movement and similar united front bodies large numbers of workers, farmers and intellectuals were drawn into activity side by side with the Communists (E.W. Campbell, *History of the Australian Labor Movement, Current Book Distributors, Sydney, 1945* p147-148.)*

As indicated by Campbell the CPA campaigned well for its size from 1935 to the outbreak of war in 1939 but grew only slowly in membership. Nonetheless it gained more influence in the trade unions as outlined above, built and consolidated organisation in all states, extended press sales and publicity and developed some much-needed stability and sophistication.

Some spectacular work was done in north Queensland under the leadership of Jack Henry, a cane-cutter who had joined the Party in 1931. Henry was in many respects a remarkable man. He was a gun cane-cutter and an expert timber-getter, a magnificent figure of a man, a fighter, a gambler, a drinker, a good mate and an outstanding organiser. He gathered around himself capable working class activists, throughout north Queensland, Jim Healy in Mackay, Albert Robinson in Townsville, Jim Henderson in Collinsville, Les Sullivan in Bowen, Doug Olive in Ayr, Albert Tucker in Cairns, and many others who played important parts in the CPA. In 1934 there were only 150 Communists in north Queensland, but by 1936 there were 500 members organised in branches throughout the sugar, meat, timber and coal districts. Great prestige was won during the sugar strike of 1935 in which Jack Henry played an outstanding part. Support was not only won by the espousal of militant industrial policy but by the anti-racial attitudes of the Communists among the large Italian population on the cane-fields.

Indication of the growing strength of the CPA in northern Queensland was the establishment of a printery in Townsville in 1937 and the publication of a weekly paper, the **North Queensland Guardian**. With lawyer, Fred Paterson as editor, a circulation of 5000 was reached and maintained for the three years the paper lived before being banned along with all other CPA publications by the Menzies Government in 1940.

Generally press and literature sales increased in the anti-fascist pre-war years. For example, the Victorian **Workers Voice** sales of 2000 weekly in 1933 rose to 10000 for the **Guardian** by 1938; the **Guardian** was produced twice weekly at this time and this was the sale of the weekend edition. Sales of the national theoretical monthly, **Communist Review** nearly tripled in a year to be 5616 by October, 1937, with NSW selling 2264, Queensland 1672 and Victoria 1120.

## THE EARLY WAR YEARS

The outbreak of World War Two in September 1939 brought difficult times for the CPA. Initially the leadership supported the war as E.W. Campbell explained:

*"At the outbreak of war the Central Committee, for a brief moment, made an incorrect appraisal of its character. The Party had developed such an intense campaign of hatred for fascism and had agitated so long for decisive measures to restrain fascist aggression that it failed to note the imperialist motives which led to the Anglo-French declarations of war against Nazi Germany. At the same time there was a failure to understand fully the significance of the Soviet-German Pact of Non-Aggression. The Party statement called for support for the war against fascist Germany by the British and Australian Governments, while at the same time calling for a struggle against the appeaser Menzies and Chamberlain governments. However, this error was short-lived and the Party quickly orientated itself on a correct Leninist estimation and policy. (E.W. Campbell, *ibid.*)*

However, the Comintern branded the war as an imperialist war and all the Communist Parties quickly followed suit. Ralph Gibson described CPA policy:

*"... at this first stage there was no fight against fascism at all, but continued counting on the fascist powers to attack the Soviet Union. War had been declared by the Chamberlain Government as a warning to Hitler against trying to gain an empire for Germany at Britain's expense and as a continued incitement to turn his attack the other way. It soon became clear to us that this was essentially an imperialist war like the war of 1914-18. We therefore called, not for support of the war, but for the establishment of people's governments free from imperialist influence that would either make peace or wage the war on a genuine anti-fascist basis. The month or more that the Communist Party took to find its way to this position caused some confusion among genuine anti-fascists and peace lovers but the error was perhaps less important in practice than in theory because the main emphasis in our papers and our meetings all through was on criticism of the Chamberlain and Menzies policies." (Ralph Gibson, *ibid.* p.81.)*

Robin Gollan outlined his appreciation of the problems the Communists faced:

*"The volte-face of the communist parties in the first two months of the war was a direct response to Stalin's deal with Hitler, but not a simple response. During the five years in which communists had been the most urgent advocates of collective security they had always assumed that this was the only way to contain German aggression. They believed also that the prime objective of Hitler's aggressive intentions was the Soviet Union, in which he might easily have either the tacit or active support of the western powers. Collective security could prevent war but, if it failed to do so, it would ensure that in any war fought the Soviet Union would be in alliance with the western powers against Hitler and his potential fascist allies. The very presence of the Soviet Union in the alliance would mean that it was not simply a war amongst capitalist powers for the re-division of the world, however much the motives of the British and French governments might be suspect. The German-Soviet non-aggression pact, followed by the treaty of friendship, destroyed this whole pattern at a blow. Some explanation of the entirely new alignment had to be found. It was not found, as it could have been, in a judgment that Stalin was trading moral authority for time. . . . In practice it meant the continued advocacy of improved working conditions, opposition to any diminution of civil liberties, and a call for peace negotiations. The call for peace was the somersault. From being the sternest advocates of one world, the communists became the isolationists, even though the isolationism was dressed in the clothes of a resurrected collective security: negotiations which would bring the Soviet Union back into Europe. The difficulties of the communists became greater with the invasion of Finland, but that too could be explained, as*

*could the occupation of eastern Poland, as a necessary move to secure the Russian frontier and strengthen its bargaining position in future attempts to resurrect collective security. (Robin Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1975, p.85.)*

The war situation confronted the CPA with a wave of anti-Communism and anti-Sovietism. Attacks on CPA meetings and premises were frequent. Censorship of CPA and union journals was followed by a total ban on all CPA publications. On June 15, 1940, the CPA itself was declared an illegal organisation. This ban heralded widespread raids upon Communist offices, printeries and homes and the confiscation of property and books. A number of Communists were gaoled for various activities.

### THE WARTIME GROWTH

On June 22, 1941, Hitler invaded the USSR. In September the Curtin Labour Government came to office. Japan attacked Pearl Harbour and entered the war in December. These events greatly changed the course of the war and changed the CPA attitude to it. Following the invasion of the USSR the CPA supported the war effort and the Anglo-Soviet alliance and sought a change of Government in Australia. The defeat of the Menzies Government and the Japanese threat to Australia brought full-scale mobilisation of the CPA to prosecute the war against fascism. Despite the fact that it was still illegal CPA size increased spectacularly. At the time of the imposition of the ban in June 1940 membership was 4000; when the ban was lifted in December 1942 over 16000 were claimed. The changed policy towards the war and the advent of the ALP Government had allowed the Party to function fairly openly. The Soviet Union deservedly won tremendous admiration for its war victories and sympathy for the incredible destruction wrought upon it. The Australia-Soviet Friendship League blossomed into a popular, large body gaining support from diverse sections of the community and of important public figures.

Some 4000 Communists served in the armed forces where Party organisation developed and flourished.

The trade union strength of the CPA extended further during the war years. In 1941 E.V. Elliott won the position of Federal Secretary of the Seamens Union; Tom Nelson, Stan Moran, and other communists were elected to posts in the Sydney branch of the Waterside Workers Federation; J.J. Brown became State Secretary of the Australian Railways Union in Victoria in 1942. By the end of the war hundreds of Communists held full-time union posts and probably thousands served as delegates, shop stewards and executive members. The Ironworkers, Miners, Seamen, Waterside Workers, Clerks, Boilermakers, Sheetmetal Workers, AEU, Moulders, Railways, Painters and Dockers, Tramways, most building unions and a number of others, operated under Communist leadership or influence, both nationally and in the states. Extensive Communist organisation existed in the workplace and factories. Jack Blake was able to report to the Victorian CPA Conference in February 1943 that 160 factory and workplace branches operated in the state and 232 Communist Party members had been

lected to leading positions in over fifty unions in Victoria; this figure excluded those holding Shop Committee and Labour Council posts.

These Communist trade union officials wielded enormous influence. In modern times radicals sometimes assert that they were in reality reformists and bureaucrats and in no way revolutionary. Perhaps this accusation was apt in some cases but generally it was wide of the mark. The Communist trade union officials came from a hard school; they were products of the depression, the unemployed movements, the eviction struggles; they were tough and many could fight physically. In the main they were self-made and CPA-made, with little formal education. They were often under attack from employers, newspapers, politicians, courts and, frequently, from within their own unions; they had to fight tooth and nail to hold support and win through. Under their leadership considerable gains in wages, conditions and union organisation were recorded. Even today, for example, the name of Jim Healy is still revered in the Waterside Workers Federation — with good reason. They received great publicity. Nearly all were excellent public speakers; some, like Bill Parkinson and Ernie Thornton were magnificent. They gained widespread praise and even adulation, developed too much ego and were often authoritarian and intolerant of criticism. As a whole they were quite outstanding. Most were Communists before they became union officials — Wright, Thornton, Healy, Elliott, McPhillips, Rowe, Buckley, Idris Williams, Alex McDonald, Paddy Troy were all in this category. They were not narrowly trade union but political creatures first and foremost.

During the war the CPA reached its highest point in electioneering. While never a big electoral success the Party polled substantially for a period in certain areas, principally and for the longest time in north Queensland. In June, 1943, Jack Blake was narrowly defeated in a State election for the seat of Port Melbourne where he polled forty per cent of the votes cast. In the same election Bertha Laidler amassed a thirty per cent vote in Richmond. Fred Paterson, in the Federal elections of August, 1943, received 23000 votes for the seat of Herbert, narrowly missing election. In the April, 1944, Queensland State polls Paterson became the first and only Communist to be elected to any parliament in Australia when he won the seat of Bowen. Les Sullivan, in the same election, polled 3000 votes to his ALP opponents' 4000 and several other CPA candidates recorded very high percentages.

Late in 1944 sixteen out of seventy Communist candidates were elected to NSW Municipal and Shire Councils, mainly on the coalfields districts. In Kearsley Shire a Communist majority was elected including Nellie Simm who was claimed as the first woman ever elected to a Shire Council in Australia. (Note: H.B. Chandler, **Communist Victories In Local Government**, Communist Review, January, 1945.) Lake Macquarie Shire returned three Communists and Cessnock two, while North Illawarra, Bulli and Coonabarabran Shires each elected one Communist.

By the end of the war the CPA had grown to be a political force in Australia, possessing a large membership, claimed to be 25000, a press circulation which probably exceeded 60000 and a considerable industrial influence.

## AFTER THE WAR

The defeat of fascism brought the momentary disarray of conservatism. Labour Governments reigned in Britain and Australia, the Soviet Union had acquired remarkable strength and support, the Communists around the world appeared to go from strength to strength. Socialist Governments were installed in many European countries such as Yugoslavia, Romania and Poland. The Italian and French Communists constituted huge forces in their countries. The Chinese Communists under Mao Tse-tung appeared certain of victory over Chiang Kai-shek and his US supporters. Colonialism was being challenged throughout the world. India attained independence from British imperialism. Everywhere an atmosphere of change prevailed. New and more devastating economic crises were expected to envelop the capitalist world, thus propelling people onto the revolutionary path. Expectancy was high on the part of the Communists and many others on the left.

The Australian workforce desired higher living standards and the Communist-led unions exhibited a combativeness which alarmed employers and ALP Governments alike. They soon overreached themselves in a series of strike struggles, culminating in the fateful miners strike of 1949, in an atmosphere of anti-Communist cold war hysteria. Resultant union defeats, constant sensationalist newspaper attacks, the cold war atmosphere with its vilification of the USSR in contradistinction to the wartime friendliness, all took their toll on the CPA. Membership evaporated, union positions were lost and the Party was quickly placed on the defensive. All this was assisted by the mistakes of the Party itself; injudicious strikes and calamitous direction, a la Stalin, of main blows at the reformist ALP Government. It was helped also by advocacy of Russian-style revolution, coupled with blind support for each and every Soviet political move. These mistakes and the anti-Communist attacks robbed the Party of much of the goodwill acquired during the war.

## 1949 AND ANTI-COMMUNISM

It is difficult for those who did not experience Party work in 1949 and the following years to appreciate the extent and fury of the attacks upon the CPA, the constant barrage in the daily papers and in Parliaments, the violence at Party public meetings. Some brief sketch of the events of 1949 may assist those who did not live through them.

The year opened in tense international situation, the cold war was at its height. Menzies advocated using the atomic bomb to solve the Berlin crisis. The CPA was extremely critical of the Chifley ALP Government, and considered that a showdown with reformism was required. In February Sharkey said: "We are not fooling around with milk and water sentimental reformists, but people who today are the definite allies of warmongers and imperialist aggressors, who are just as anti labour as Hitler and Mussolini and the Japanese imperialists were." While the inflammatory nature of this statement is obvious, there was, in fact, a strong anti-Communist right wing operating in the ALP. Anti-Communism was increasing rapidly in the community

whipped up by the Menzies Opposition in Parliament, the RSL, the Industrial Group elements in the ALP and the trade unions.

The CPA was involved in a gigantic free speech fight being denied halls throughout the country. This was not an academic question as the Party was still attracting large audiences to hall meetings – thousands in Victoria and hundreds even in SA where the Party organisation was relatively weak. Large numbers of hall, street and factory gate meetings were being held in this period, but attacks on many Communist and other left-wing meetings occurred. John Rodgers in Shepparton, Max Julius in Rockhampton, Dr. H. McMeekin in Bourke, Ralph Gibson in Perth, and many others, were subjected to the treatment of violent, howling mobs hurling vegetables and in one case over-turning a car. These events received nation-wide press coverage, which helped organise more such disruption.

In April, Cecil Sharpley, a member of the CPA Victorian State Executive, sold out to the Herald. Seven huge articles appeared in the press in all states under blazing headlines alleging, orders from Moscow, plans for revolution, manipulation, domination, ballot-rigging, skullduggery. Sharpley and his "revelations" received enormous publicity.

Then a leading Communist, Jack McPhillips, Assistant Federal Secretary of the Federated Ironworkers Association, was gaoled for one month for contempt of the Arbitration Court. Geordie Burns from Queensland was sent to gaol for six months on sedition charges. It was announced that Lance Sharkey was to be tried for sedition. Kevin Healy, an official of the CPA in WA was also charged with a similar offence. Sharkey was later sentenced to three years gaol and served eighteen months.

In May a Victorian Party leader, Ken Miller, was framed on a sex charge relating to a little girl. He was acquitted and released, but this dreadful episode added to the anti-Communist furore of the times.

The national coalminers strike commenced in June. This strike lasted seven weeks. By comparison, the Victorian SEC power strike of 1977, or any other of the past twenty years, has looked like a pleasant Sunday School picnic. The miners were strong and militant and federally under the leadership of Communist officials. Hundreds of thousands of workers were thrown out of work as coal became short, union funds were frozen by the ALP Government, troops were used on the coalfields, eight union officials were gaoled (six of them Communists). Party speakers in all states were howled down at factory gate meetings when supporting the strike.

Ralph Gibson summed it up well:

*"It was a battle for a just cause and it was fought heroically. But it was fought under conditions in which the militant forces were largely isolated, and in which their defeat became inevitable. They were fighting a Labour Government as well as the mineowners, and were opposed by the ACTU, by all Trades and Labour Councils and all State Labour Party Executives." (Ralph Gibson, My Years in the Communist Party, p148.)*

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On July 8, Marx house the CPA headquarters in George Street Sydney, was raided. Hundreds of police were involved; a three hour search resulted in truck loads of documents and literature being taken away. On July 12 the Newsletter Printery was raided too. These raids, which were trying to establish a Communist conspiracy, added to the public conviction that the Communists were the cause of the unemployment, the blackouts and the hardship.

The Party fought back hard against all the attacks, through leaflets, bulletins, factory gate, hall, house and street meetings and with its newspapers nationally and in the states. In the Sydney area alone the CPA held 517 meetings between June 30 and August 9.

After seven weeks the miners voted against their own leadership and returned to work defeated. The Party claimed it as a victory. In a booklet about the strike Jack Blake wrote that through the strike the working class had learned invaluable lessons on the true role of the ALP, about arbitration and saw the Communist Party as the "only genuine working class party". R. Dixon observed in the **Communist Review** that the strike had helped big sections of the workers to show their reformist illusions and start moving to new left-progressive positions under CPA leadership. But the real political benefit was derived by the conservatives of all kinds — Menzies, the anti-Communists, the Industrial Groupers. However the CPA possessed still not inconsiderable support (J. Tapp, a Communist candidate, polled a 20% vote in a NSW coalfields seat shortly after the strike). Yet the miners demands were unsatisfied and divisions and bitterness beset the union movement. In the following two years the Communists lost a large number of positions in the unions and influence in the community diminished.

Meanwhile, a Royal Commission into Communism in Victoria had got under way to investigate Cecil Sharpley's allegations. It extended from June 1949 into 1950, hearing evidence from many sources hostile to the CPA. Again the Party fought back strongly. The Victorian **Guardian** was published three times weekly and meetings were organised on a wide scale. Many Communists were called before the Commission; Ralph Gibson gave evidence for three days and was then cross-examined for four and a half days. But the Royal Commission and the coal strike provided the press with a field day for many months.

The year ended with a Federal election, which was fought by Menzies from Opposition, on the basis of anti-Communism. He won and his Party remained in office from 1949 until 1972! The coal strike and the Royal Commission had played into the hands of the conservatives and did much to defeat the ALP.

Nevertheless, the onslaught of the Industrial Groups in the unions and of the Menzies Government to ban the Party in 1950-51, were eventually thwarted by the combined efforts of Communist and ALP forces in a series of sensible and exciting campaigns, pregnant with future possibilities for left-wing political advance. The Groupers were largely defeated: The Referendum to outlaw the Communist Party was rejected in a magnificent campaign which initially looked certain to be lost. However, further hammer blows to the Communists occurred in 1954 via the Petrov conspiracy, the subsequent Royal Commission into

espionage with its unfounded allegations of Communist spies, the Soviet revelations respecting the crimes of Joseph Stalin and the 1956 Hungarian events.

The Party leadership was unsympathetic to those Communists, mainly intellectuals in Melbourne and Sydney, who desired open discussion of the implications of Stalinism and the Hungarian affair. Subsequently many intellectuals left the Party; a few were expelled. With the hard times politically many more workers drifted out too.

### MORE ATTACKS AND SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS

The 20th Congress of the CPSU, Khrushchov's thaw, Soviet efforts to continue hegemony in the Communist camp in the new world situation, together with China's intransigent hard line, led to the Sino-Soviet breach. The CPA leaders supported China initially, but in 1961, became critical of Chinese policies and of their main supporters in Australia, Ted Hill and the majority of the Victorian leadership of the CPA.

The Party split with the Hill forces in 1963. While virtually confined to Victoria, this split had serious adverse public consequences. The much vaunted Communist unity, both feared and respected here and overseas, had been broken. As could be expected, the Sino-Soviet conflict, and the split with Hill, saw loyalties and support divided and disillusionment weakening still further the already-weakened Party.

Following retirement of L.L. Sharkey as the leading figure of the CPA, the new National Secretary, Laurie Aarons, and the group of younger leaders around him, developed new attitudes and policies. Criticisms of the Soviet Union were voiced and the Russian and Chinese models of socialist transformation in Australia were challenged, at least superficially. Uneasiness among some influential, and in the main, older members gave way to open revolt, following the new leadership's condemnation of the occupation of Dubcek's Czechoslovakia in 1968. Another split followed in 1970-71, with a large minority section of the CPA breaking away to form the Socialist Party of Australia.

Re-examination of the causes of these splits, the methods employed, and the aims of the Party leadership in them, would be worthwhile. Naturally, the main architects stoutly defend all their major actions and attitudes but their effect has been disastrous. Whether either or both could have been avoided or not, the Party and the Communist cause was terribly weakened as a result and there are no sure signs of recovery. Furthermore, the Party leadership's claims, in both instances, that the purging of the Party would result in its strengthening, proved to be completely wrong. Additionally, the split with the SPA accelerated yet another ultra-left development in the Party which further increased the amount of damage.

The sad efforts of the Party leadership to demonstrate how revolutionary it was, can be illustrated by the following small documentary examples. In the 1970 Statement of Aims the CPA was described as an **independent Australian socialist party**. The political document adopted at the 1972 Party Congress spoke of the CPA as being an **independent revolutionary party of the Australian working class**. But the political document of the 1974 Congress described the

CPA as an independent revolutionary party working for socialist revolution!! Furthermore the 1974 document used the words revolution and revolutionary (in the singular and plural) 54 times in nine pages! What were we setting out to prove and to whom were we addressing ourselves?

The Whitlam Government was received rather coolly by the CPA. Its initial rash of progressive moves and legislation was greeted in *Tribune* with the assessment that these policies were not very much different from those of Nixon anyway. While sensible, progressive people were thrilled and heartened by the ALP Government actions, *Tribune* and the Party leadership appeared quite begrudging in praise and support. And later when the political cave men were battering at the door, clubs in hand, screaming for the blood of the Whitlam Government, we too were busy criticising it, on those occasions when time off was taken from arguing about what sort of socialism we were going to establish.

### STRATEGY

In a telling comment on the history and activities of the CPA, Alastair Davidson has indicated that its fortunes were "due to the fact that it thought that the Russian Revolution was entirely relevant to Australian history." "It is not" he concludes his book. Alastair Davidson, *History of the Communist Party of Australia*, p183). Today such attitudes are denied. In reviewing *Comrades Come Rally!* Eric Aarons writes that a "re-run of 1917" has little currency in our Party these days. (*Australian Left Review*, September, 1978, p49.) One hopes that this is so, yet the concept of an abrupt seizure of power has a deep-seated hold on Australian Communists. Such is only natural because our whole past approach to socialism has been based on this idea. From the days when a "Soviet" Australia was advocated until the present time, Australian Communists have usually looked upon peaceful, parliamentary, gradualist roads to socialism as being reformist and just plain impossible. Have we changed? Certainly to my knowledge leading Communists took a tongue-in-cheek attitude to our stated "preference", in various Party programmes, for a peaceful road, while others have long regarded with disdain such strategies as those of the Italian Communist Party. Following the 1956 20th Congress of the CPSU, Party leaders laughed about Spanish Communists considering a peaceful road as possible in Spain. The same leaders, and those who followed, ridiculed the possibility of structural reform in Italy.

In 1970 the Statement of Aims opined: "The Communists aim for fundamental social change without civil war. This can be realised only through overwhelming mass opinion and great mass movements embracing all major classes and groups and affecting all political institutions." However as the leftward swing of the CPA continued the main authors of that statement criticised Berlinguer's assessment subsequent to the Chilean events, that a 51% support was insufficient and that an overwhelming majority was the aim of the Italian Communist Party. "Overwhelming support is not possible, even in Italy" it was said. Apparently the 1970 statement had been forgotten! It is also interesting to recall that the Party voted in 1967 to prepare a

Charter of Democratic Rights. A draft Charter was prepared, circulated and publicised.

It read remarkably like the so-called Eurocommunist policies of today. The Charter was "forgotten" by the leaders in the rising "revolutionary tide" of the early 1970's. No doubt it embarrassed by being too liberal, "reformistic" and wishy-washy!

The CPA needs to consider whether it is still mesmerised by the strategic idea of "seizing power" one bright Sunday morning, of seeing the revolution as an act rather than as a process, of thinking that 51% of the people can impose their will on 49% or vice versa. Furthermore, it is of dubious value to claim that a "re-run of 1917" has little currency when there is a yearning for a re-enactment of Paris, 1968. Are there essential differences between the Aurora and Winter Palace syndrome and that of marching along George Street burning a few cars on the way to smashing the capitalist state machine?

We live in an advanced industrial capitalist society. Although life is hellish for some and the problems are acute and growing, there has never been a socialist revolution in such a society. In Australia there is no revolutionary tradition. With a few exceptions violence has not been a feature of our political life. Is it realistic to hold out the prospects of social change which requires a violent revolutionary upsurge?

### THE FUTURE?

Therefore, to be effectual Communist strategy should orientate to the mass industrial and political problems, movements and organisations, attempting to be part of, rather than way out, to be flesh and blood as well as a conscience. Popularisation of the socialist goal does not necessarily accrue from exhortations tacked onto the tail end of every article or speech, socialist ideas should be proposed and explained in appropriate ways and places. The target should be the mass rather than the elite. While no repression and injustice can be ignored and most experimentation with movements, life style and campaigns should be studied rather than condemned, the focus of the Communist forces should be upon the mass of unionists, ALP members, students, migrants, environmentalists and the like, rather than on small, radical-sounding fringe groups. The eventual aim of changing the social order will have to be a long march, involving struggle, persuasion, reasonableness, upheavals, alliances, compromises, all designed to gather together an overwhelming majority of Australians desiring to democratically introduce measures designed to end capitalist exploitation, profiteering and values.

To unequivocally opt for democracy rather than dictatorship, has far-reaching importance extending into the fields of tactics and goals.

It could have a salutary effect to recognise that the Communist movement has suffered much more from extremism and super-leftism (eg long periods in Russia and the USSR, China, the Communist International, Australia and elsewhere) than from right-wing or revisionist tendencies.

To take the same firm stands against extremist, ultra-leftist, anarchistic trends as have been taken against reformist, revisionist, right-wing dangers may help. Clearly eschewing, and criticising,

terroristic, urban guerrilla operations, except in the particular circumstances of the struggle for national liberation or against fascist dictatorship, may have clarifying benefits, too.

Perhaps also, Australian Communists can think more in terms of Australcommunism than of Eurocommunism, or Russian or Chinese experiences. This would seem to require a re-think and re-examination of the history of the Australian labour movement free from past and present dogma. It will be found that we will have to come to terms with the problem of the ALP. We may have to concede that the ALP, a traditional and powerful force in this country, will be in the swim of any radical change in our social order. Therefore the CPA may well have to re-examine, and revive and develop, in modern and non-sectarian ways, the affiliation ideas of the early 1920's and the middle 1940's. Many of our habitual attitudes towards the ALP may require modifying or completely altering. Such is a long-range question, a strategical concept. Like socialism itself it cannot happen tomorrow nor can it be rejected as impractical in the long term; it has a history, precedents and lessons.

Another thorny question which will have to be considered: a Communist future in Australia may require some reformation of the Communist forces, perhaps firstly of the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. Prerequisites would include a degree of tolerance, an abandonment of dogma, a downgrading of bigotry and prejudice, maybe difficult to envisage at the moment. Small though each is, the SPA and the CPA comprise the most consistently stable socialist formations in the country, and irrespective of differences they are closer together politically and tactically than any others. The long haul to regroup the fragmented socialist forces **has to start somewhere**. Who will start it? And how? Certainly Communists should be prepared to forego a little dogma and bias, and even to compromise some cherished "principles" in the interests of re-establishing a socialist organisation of significance and potential. Because of the past it would seem that focus upon local Australian politics and activity could be the only basis upon which any reformation would be feasible, at least for an initial period.

Some of the ultra-left groups claiming to be revolutionary and socialist are so remote from Australian political and industrial realities, and so intensely self-righteous and authoritarian, as to render any attempts at rapprochement with them most unwise.

However reformation of an influential socialist movement may require a **much broader** approach than provided by the CPA and the SPA. New organisation may be necessary to engender the desired potential.

This booklet does not set out to answer the problems of the Communist movement in Australia; such a task is quite beyond the author and is the province of the movement itself. One purpose has been to project a major query: have Australian Communists misread their scene in important ways?

It is hoped also the issues raised here may be of value to those interested in studying CPA history in the search for a viable socialist future in our country.



