

BINDING

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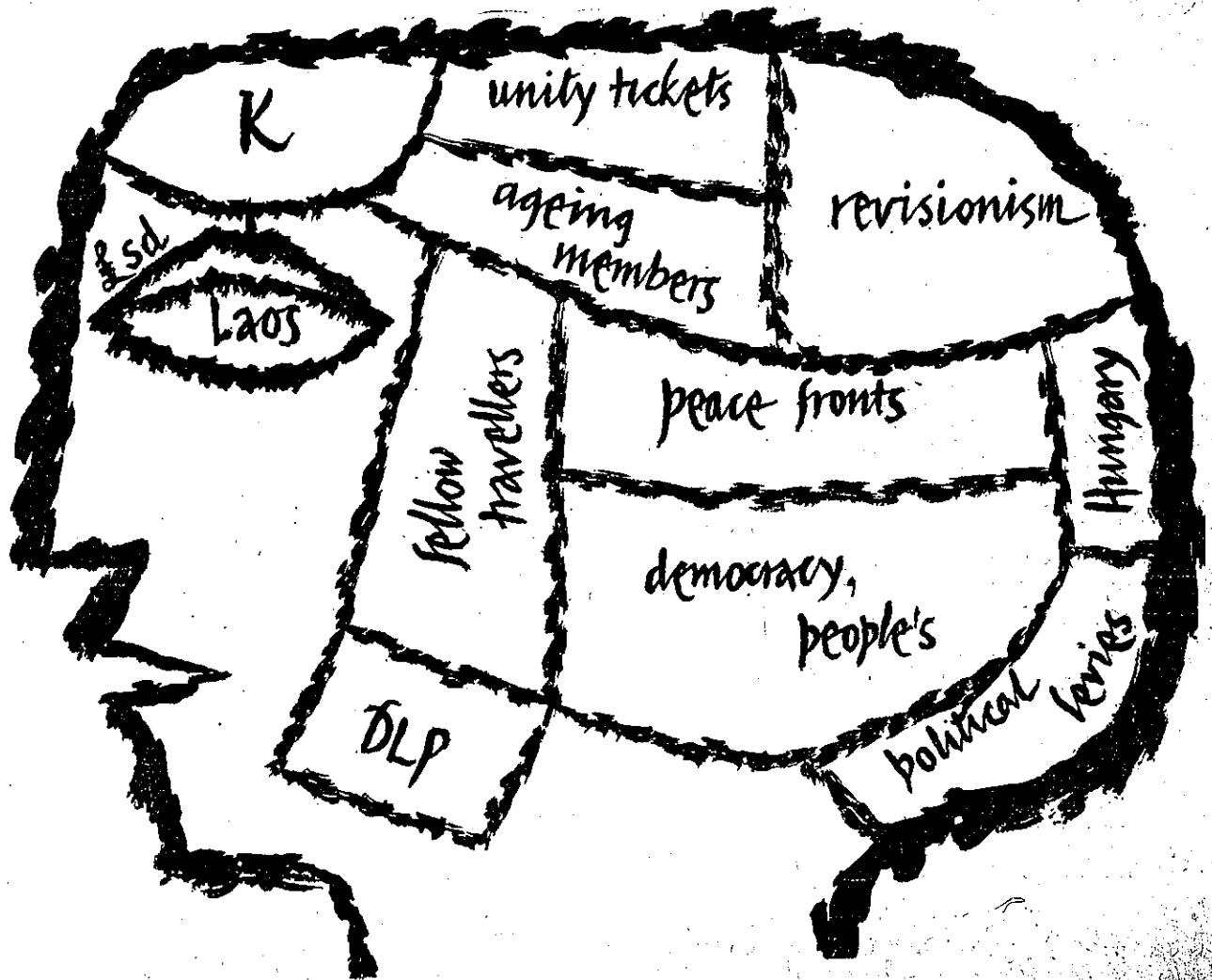
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COMMUNISM



IN AUSTRALIA

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COMMUNISM

THE Australian Communist Party has lost so much of its power and prestige in the years since the war that both Communists and extreme anti-Communists have become something of a joke in liberal circles, if they are not completely ignored. Without now going into the question how reasonable or stupid such attitudes are, one of their results is a widespread ignorance of what the Communist Party is doing or trying to do today, what its real strength is, what its plans are. The following report sets out some of the facts.

Membership

The Communist Party now has 5000 members (compared with 25,000 just after the war). But many of these have lost all enthusiasm for the Party since Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and remain members only because they are too timid to resign. New recruits are rare, and the Party is becoming increasingly a party for old people. "Comrade" J. R. Hughes said at the 18th Congress in 1958: "Our Party is not maintaining the youthful quality that it should. The Party is ageing."

Finance

The Party is poor, and the salaries of its officials and 40-odd full-time organisers is little over the basic wage. Its main official sources of income are membership fees and union levies. The fees are higher than the A.L.P.'s and average 4s 4d. a month per person, but even if the 5000 members pay up the Party would receive only £13,000 per year (which does little more than cover the loss on *Tribune*). As for levies, the Communist unions, such as the Waterside Workers' Federation, the Building Workers' Industrial Union, or the Seamen's Union, impose political levies for "the two working-class parties" at election time, which they split 60 per cent. to the A.L.P., 40 per cent. to the Communist Party (although Communists in the Union might be less than 10 per cent.). Since most unions keep no public records of these levies, it is hard to be precise about how much the Communists receive in this way, but Australian unionists are cautious with money, and the amount given is unlikely to be more than £3000 at any one time.

On the other hand, the Party owns buildings and printing presses in Sydney and Melbourne worth about £250,000, and it may still have some capital from earlier campaigns: for example, in 1947-1948 it had a campaign to raise £100,000 to bring out a daily *Tribune*. The campaign was a success; more than

£100,000 was raised, but no daily paper appeared.

It is still true that the Party has to supplement its ordinary income by subsidies from Peking and, to a lesser extent, from Moscow. Russia supplies books and periodicals to the Party, and, although the sales are commercially invoiced, the profits never go to Moscow. More significant are the commissions granted by Peking on trade deals. Individuals masquerade as businessmen and form dummy companies to trade with China. The commissions are small—1/8th of 1 per cent.—but the deals are often big ones.

They would be in a better position if they were better businessmen. For example, they bought the Soviet-Australian Friendship Society building in Flinders Lane, Melbourne, for £50,000 and, although now it might fetch £300,000, they sold it for £80,000. The



men, with business acumen are found only on the periphery of the Party or in the Front organisations, and are not admitted to the inner circles where basic decisions are made.

The Press

Last year Mr. E. Campbell, a leading Communist, announced that the sales of *Tribune*, which sells in all States, had fallen to about 16,500 per issue (a drop of 6000 compared with the 1954 figure) and that the magazine was losing more than £200 per issue, or over £10,000 a year.

Campbell gave these figures of the decline in sales between the 17th Congress (1954) and the 18th Congress (1958):

N.S.W.	12116	9112	(A drop of 25 per cent. or 3004)
Queensland	4754	3018	(A drop of 37 per cent. or 1736)
W.A.	1764	1400	(A drop of 20 per cent. or 364)
Victoria	1476	1426	(A drop of 3 per cent. or 50—Victoria also has its separate Communist paper, <i>Guardian</i>)
S.A.	1670	1000	(A drop of 40 per cent. or 670)
Tasmania	540	566	(A rise of 26)
Darwin	108	96	(A drop of 12)

Of these sales at least 1000 are made

to enemies of the Communist Party who want to know the Communist line—for example, the union leaders, business men, the Security Service. A large number of the remaining sales are made by intimidation or by some persistent bore in the workshop who so often urges a man to buy "the workers' paper" that he finally gives him 6d. to shut him up.

The *Communist Review* sells less than 3000 copies. A far higher percentage of these sales go to enemies of the Communist Party than is the case with *Tribune*. It is too turgid even for most Party members, though each is supposed to buy one. It is always written with the intention of gaining a favourable reception in Peking and Moscow, both of which receive six copies. It is also a vehicle for Party careerism and the more ambitious write articles in it to establish reputations as commissars in particular fields—anything from politics to philosophy and literature. It publishes the degrading confessions of men who have momentarily broken from the Party line—for example, the various articles by Mr. W. Brown, who once led an unsuccessful revolt against Mr. Sharkey. It is difficult for people outside the top 40 to know the exact significance of particular articles since a man who has bitterly opposed a certain policy on the Central Committee is often forced to write an enthusiastic article in support of it in order to humiliate him.

Unions

The Communist Party now controls the coal mining unions, most metal unions, sections of the transport unions, and a number of building unions. It has three members on the executive of the A.C.T.U. It has a cell in almost every major workshop in Australia and nearly all unions are subject in some degree to Communist pressure. However, although the Party has office in these unions it does not have complete power. It is not able to pull the unions out on strike for absurd reasons as it could after the war and until the 1949 coal strike. The main value of possession of unions for the Communists lies in the jobs and facilities they provide for Party members. They have far bigger staffs than necessary and the superfluous positions are filled by Communist Party members either as organisers or as clerks and office girls. When Mr. Ernie Thornton, for example, ran the Ironworkers' Association the union had 30,000 members, and now although the membership has increased by over 50 per cent. to 46,000 the staff is still smaller than it

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was under Thornton's control. As well as providing jobs the Communist unions help the Party in many small ways: they put cars at the Party's disposal; they provide newsprint or gestetner paper, stationery, and ink to the Party; they send Communists to Party training schools at union expense; they provide organisers, sign-writers, and materials, floats for May Day processions. The Waterside Workers' Federation runs a film unit to make Communist propaganda documentaries for use in Australia, Russia, or China.

Cultural Agencies

Most of these—the New Theatres, the Australasian Book Society, the Realist Film Society, the Realist Writers, and the odd dancing or art groups—have suffered badly from the decline of Communist influence, since they are self-financing, depend on the support of fellow-travellers and sympathisers, and receive no direct backing from the Party. The Party's grip is weakest on the New Theatre movement, especially in Melbourne: it is impossible to keep all independence of spirit or bohemianism out of theatrical groups, even Communist ones, and recently there have been productions of Brendan Behan's plays, despite bitter Party opposition on the ground that Behan's blasphemy would offend the Peace parsons it is now wooing. The Australasian Book Society, which was founded in 1952 in order to stem the Party's decline among intellectuals, has suffered from the recent rise of "revisionism" but is now firmly under Party control again. It has about 3000 subscribers, has published several Communist novels and books, and is losing money. The Party's Society of Dancers and the Studio of Realist Art are now defunct, though they could if necessary be easily resurrected. The Realist Writers are only useful to the Party as a vehicle to attack literary deviationists such as those writers who are associated with magazines like *Overland*. Its membership is about four people in each city.

Fellow-travellers

One of the Party's urgent needs at the moment is to rebuild the ranks of its fellow-travellers, which have almost disappeared in the last few years. The main hope is the Melbourne Peace Congress in November. As far as basic organisation is concerned this Congress is Communist from top to bottom, but it has succeeded in enlisting a following among scientists, parsons, and artists, and from the A.L.P. and the A.C.T.U.

It is probable, however, that many of these supporters will withdraw before the Congress starts in November.

As part of the same policy of winning back its fellow-travellers, the Party must discredit the "revisionists," the people who left the Party or began actively opposing it after Khrushchev's attack on Stalin and the suppression of the Hungarian revolution, and who are associated with the magazines *Outlook* and *Overland*. Since it usually takes four years for an ex-Communist to feel mentally liberated enough to attack or expose the Party, the Communists have not yet begun to feel the full propaganda effect of the desertions since 1956. The knowledge that their exposures will be welcomed by "reactionaries" often still silences the "revisionists," but more will be heard from them in the next two or three years. Since they still think in Marxist terms they have a great appeal to wavering Communists and fellow-



travellers, and the Communist Party has begun systematically attacking and smearing them. In the *Communist Review* they are described as "the main danger to the workers' movement."

Programme

In its attitude to the A.L.P. the Communists are currently divided by the traditional disagreement between the industrial and political wings of the Party. In the light of the general isolation of the Communist Party and the attacks by the A.L.P. on unity tickets, the Party's political functionaries are intensifying their attacks on Dr. Evatt, Mr. Chamberlain, and Mr. Ward, and on the A.L.P. as a whole. Writing in the October 1959 *Communist Review*, Mr. J. R. Gandini says: "In recent years too many illusions have grown about changes in the A.L.P. into a genuine workers' party, particularly as a result of the progressive foreign policy and the emergence of a new left-wing. We know that these illusions have affected some members of our Party." He and people like him advocate that the Party take an independent revolutionary line.

On the other hand Healy at the recent A.C.T.U. Congress spoke of the need to preserve the unity of the A.C.T.U. and implied that Communists

should avoid open policies that would widen the gulf between the Communist Party and the A.L.P. or split the A.C.T.U. He wants his Party to continue the policy of seeking its ends by influencing the A.L.P.

The main industrial issues it is currently exploiting are margins and the penal clauses in the Arbitration Acts. As far as margins are concerned, the Courts and the A.L.P. will leave them little of practical value to exploit. As for penal clauses, since throughout the last 10 years there have been at least 10,000 strikes among Federal unions with membership in at least two States (and at any given time there are between 10 and 50 strikes going on in Australia) and yet only 11 unions have been fined by the Commonwealth Industrial Court, it is clearly not a very good issue to raise. Fines under State Acts are no more significant. There are, however, no other issues to raise.

As far as extending its control over unions is concerned, its two main immediate goals are to get dominance over the Amalgamated Engineers' Union, where it is already strong, to exploit the movement established by Mr. Clyde Cameron in Brisbane to overthrow the right-wing leadership of the Australian Workers' Union, which is the largest in Australia and has assets worth millions of pounds.

The Future

Though weak the Communist Party is stronger in Australia than in America, Britain, or even India. It is surprising, however, that it has not been reduced to American status or even knocked out. A.L.P. critics commonly blame the D.L.P. for recent Communist successes in union elections especially in Victoria, where the D.L.P. is strong. There, unlike in N.S.W., the Communists control the Tramways Union, the Australian Railways Union, the Plumbers, the Builders' Labourers, and the Meat Employees. Whenever a D.L.P. candidate stands the Communist or Unity Ticket candidate is likely to get the Protestant vote. There is some truth in this, although the fact remains that it was the Industrial Groups who led the successful attack on the Communists after the war when they controlled nearly all major unions. The Communists have never recovered from this attack. Besides, although the Communists are weak in unions in N.S.W. where the D.L.P. is also weak, they have more effective political influence there through the Labour Government. The basic reason for the survival of the Communist Party is not the D.L.P. but the mediocrity and gutlessness of the A.L.P.