

AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION

THE SOCIALIST LEFT IN AUSTRALIA  
1949 - 1959

by  
ALAN BARGAN

Second Edition

PUBLIC LIBRARY OF VICTORIA

Editor: Henry Mayer, Department of Government,  
University of Sydney,  
Sydney.

Occasional Monographs, No.2  
Sydney, 1960.

PRICE 4/- (POST PAID)

5330 4  
P759  
(2255)

39

39

38

p66488

Text may be reproduced, provided acknowledgement is made to Australian  
Political Studies Association.

CONTENTS

First edition April, 1960  
Second edition August, 1960

1. The Emergence of a New Left.
2. The Communist Party, 1949-1955.
3. The Labour Party Left.
4. The Dissident Left.
5. The 1956 Crisis.
6. The Socialist Forums.
7. The Socialism of Magazines.
8. The New Trotskyism.
9. A Mild Left Revival in the A.L.P.
10. Evaluation and Conclusion.

Appendices: A. Short Bibliography.

- B. Estimated Membership of the Communist Party.
- C. Outlook Discussion Pamphlets.
- D. N.S.W. Fabian Society Pamphlets, 1947-1953.
- E. Chifley Memorial Lectures, 1954 on.
- F. Meetings Organized by the Melbourne Outlook Committee, 1958-1959.

Addenda: A: More Data on the Decline of Radicalism.

B: More Data on the New Left.

C: Some Comments on Criticisms.

THIS MONOGRAPH attempts within the limits of 12,000 words to describe the decline of the socialist movement in Australia over the last ten years. This 'socialist left' I take to include the left wing of the Australian Labour Party (particularly the Fabians), the Communists, and various dissident left groups. I accept John Burton's opinion in the 1958 Chifley Memorial Lecture that the Labour Party as a whole is not a socialist party.

The survey considers the ideas, numerical strength, and influence of those groups and individuals in Australia who were consciously socialist during the 1950s. It suggests that between 1956 and 1958 there was an acceleration in the decline of communist strength, a mild socialist revival within the left wing of the Labour Party, and the emergence of a 'new left' based on magazines and discussion groups. The crisis of socialism during the 1950s was a crisis of the Labour Party which had seen the welfare state established, largely through its efforts, and widely accepted, and now faced the problem of a policy. It was also a crisis of communism which in addition to the problem of a new policy under welfare capitalism also had a clearer vision of developments in the U.S.S.R. and other communist regimes. One reaction by socialists to the crisis of policy has been to urge the Labour Party to lay less stress on socialism and more on specific reforms (Crossland in England, Krut and Burton in Australia). Another has been to reinterpret socialism along lines similar to G.D.H. Cole's 'guild socialism' and pre-1914 concepts of socialism. (Ross in Australia, the 'new left' in England and Australia.) A third tendency has been to deny that there has been any major change in capitalism and to reiterate the traditional Labour objective of nationalization.

Up to 1956 the Australian Communist Party was a force in both middle class intellectual circles and in trade unions. Since this date its importance lies mainly in its trade union influence. Similarly, what little importance the trotskysts have had largely comes from their trade union influence, together with their rather more realistic interpretation of the nature of the Soviet Union. The growth of a white collar working class, which may soon outnumber the manual workers, provides the social basis for the new left.

The main sources for this survey are indicated in the footnotes and the bibliography. I have also benefited from comments and criticisms from a number of people, particularly I.A.H. Turner, R.D. Walshe, J. Steples, S. Murray-Smith, Helen Palmer, and Henry Mayer.

The first edition consisted of 500 copies. This second edition is limited to 200. It has been enlarged by three addenda. The first gives further material on the decline of radicalism between 1949 and 1956 (including some notes on communist influence in trade unions, something neglected in the first edition). The second addendum briefly augments the material on the new left, and the third indicates the main criticisms of the original monograph and makes a few comments. As some of the pages are reprints of original diplomas the quality of reproduction may not be quite as good as in the first edition.

The author commenced an Arts course at Sydney University in 1939. After a period of war service he graduated in 1946. He was at various times secretary of the University Labour Club, co-editor of the student paper *Honi Solt*, and general secretary of the National Union of Australian University Students. He graduated M.A. in history in 1954 and M.Ed. in 1958.

July, 1960.

A. B.

## THE SOCIALIST LEFT IN AUSTRALIA, 1949-1959

### 1. The Emergence of a New Left

People were learning that class-war was horrible, said Mr. Menzies in 1953. Over the preceding three years industrial peace had spread in Australia.<sup>1</sup> The opinion that the class struggle is dying or out-moded has been one of the more trite concepts of bourgeois politicians for many decades. And yet, as it happened, this time Mr. Menzies was right.

The long period of near-full employment and prosperity which commenced in Australia about 1941 did not at first undermine political and industrial militancy. The great economic, social, political, and ideological disturbance of World War II prevented that. But after Labour lost office in the federal sphere in 1949 political conformity and conservatism gained strength. The process was aided by the intense phase of the 'cold war' (1947-54). Occasional periods of increased unemployment or intensified inflation did not shake the political stability of welfare state capitalism.

How was it that this balmy climate witnessed a resurgence of left-wing socialism in 1956, small indeed, yet with some significance? The cracking of the 'monolithic' Communist Party was unexpected; but was it as sudden as it appeared to be? Why was it that the 'new left' was able to sustain a magazine and discussion groups when earlier attempts at this sort of thing had failed? Were the principles and theories of the new socialists sufficiently different from those of both the Labour Party and the Communist Party to justify separate identity and to guarantee continued survival?

The 'new left' is a slightly embarrassing title, for twentieth century history is studded with movements bearing such eponyms, promising much but often ending in hackwaters. Bernstein celebrated the new middle class; after World War I there came the new education; left wing magazines (from America's *New Masses* and *New Internationalist* to Russia's *New Times* and England's *New Reasoner*) frequently adopt this adjective. However, the title 'new left' has been widely used and we may as well adhere to it, for it does refer to a movement which can be identified by a number of distinctive features:

1. It is part of a general 'new left' revolt, to be seen particularly in England, France, Italy, Scandinavia, and the United States. The Australian movement originated independently, but draws moral sustenance from overseas.
2. It has reactivated numbers of people who had become disillusioned with the communist movement in particular, and with the Labour Party left in some cases, and who had become politically passive since 1947 or so.
3. It is a movement largely of intellectuals, with a slight influence in student circles and little influence in working class circles. The main support comes not from youth, nor yet from senior veterans of socialism, but from those in their thirties or forties.
4. As one might expect from such social support, it is largely a movement of magazines and discussion groups, forms of expression suitable to middle class socialists and small groups.
5. The 'new left' appears to be developing the marxian ideology, though modified and non-dogmatic. But its programme and policy, as distinct from its world-outlook, is emerging more slowly. The main themes are those likely to

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Singleton, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 Oct. 1953.

appeal to intellectuals, such as rejection of dogmatism and the party line, humanism, concern with the 'alienation of man', concern for political liberty. Its theory of political economy leans towards concepts such as control from below, decentralization, producers' self-management. These are hardly new ideas, but a rediscovery of concepts fostered in nineteenth century socialist movements existing in liberal, democratic regimes.

6. It is interested in developments in Poland and Yugoslavia, but has not lost its critical faculty. It is non-communist rather than anti-communist, and is mainly pro-Labour Party. It is sympathetic to some aspects of Soviet and Chinese society, but acutely critical of others.

7. The 'new left' is not a unified political movement, and there is considerable suspicion of the 'monolithic', vanguard political party. As yet it has failed to develop independent political initiative.

8. Alongside the discussion group 'new left' there is the embryonic form of a more politically-organized 'new left', the neo-trotskyists.

The apparent suddenness of the 1956 upsurge of radicalism which has been given the name of 'new left' was in actual fact based on a rather lengthy period of incubation. A number of rivalries contributed to the small stream which emerged from the rather sterile ground of left-wing politics in the 1950s.

The most important source was the revolt of intellectuals within the Communist Party. Without this breakaway the 'new left' could not have emerged. So we must start with some consideration of developments within the communist movement; and at the outset it is desirable to stress two general points. The first is that up to 1956 the Communist Party was able to include the great majority of socialists in Australia who were concerned with theory and marxism. This meant that when dissidence arose in 1956 there was a great lack of theoretical help from outside the party; above all, there was no non-communist socialist journal in existence, earlier attempts to establish such having failed.

The second general point is that the Communist Party provided a strong ideology that explained everything to its members, its strength resting on its subordination to the authority of the Soviet party and theoreticians. It was a temporary rupture in the Russian monolith which threw the Australian party into crisis and exposed the bankruptcy of its leaders to many intelligent communists. In the end, the crisis was resolved by a heavy-handed reassertion of the authority of the Soviet - at the expense of a breakaway that led to the formation of the 'new left'.

## 2. The Communist Party, 1949-1955

In the post-war years shock after shock was administered to the socialist tradition by the U.S.S.R. without producing more than a small number of individual defections by party members and fellow travellers. It seemed reasonable to assume that no major revolt would ever occur. The Lysenko nonsense (1948), the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform (1948), the treason trials in eastern Europe (1949-52), the growth of anti-semitism, anti-westernism and national chauvinism in the U.S.S.R., the 1953 Berlin uprising and the Moscow 'doctors' plot' in the same year - each of these episodes contributed a small quota of disillusioned members who quietly slipped out of the communist movement. But there was no serious challenge to communism's claim to a monopoly of marxist orthodoxy and socialist militancy.

After a period of moderate, right-wing policy in the later war and immediate post-war years Communist Party policy swung to the left in 1947 following the outbreak of the 'cold war' and the establishment of the Cominform. The importance of factory branches was again stressed; the attitude to the Australian Labour Party became more antagonistic; the party began to talk socialism again. The disastrous coal strike of June-August 1949 provided the climax of this period.<sup>2</sup> Sharkey's statement, "If Soviet forces in pursuit of aggressors entered

<sup>2</sup> cf. Webb, *Communism and Democracy in Australia* (1954), p. 13-14.

Australia, Australian workers would welcome them (for which he was imprisoned, October 1949 to November 1950) was another product of this 'radical' policy. Then in 1950 the party line swung to the right again. A feature of this more moderate period was the promotion of the Peace Movement.

In January 1949 Cecil Sharkey, a member of the Victorian Executive of the C.P., defected, and his revelations concerning ballot-rigging caused some uneasiness among sincere party members.<sup>3</sup> But the subsequent Low Royal Commission in Victoria (June 1949 - April 1950) and the 1951 referendum on banning the Communist Party were just as prone to stimulate party solidarity, because they could easily be represented as attacks of the 'ruling class' on the 'party of the working class'. The Petrov Royal Commission, May 1954 to March 1955, served to consolidate rather than divide the party.

There has always been an incipient contradiction within the Communist Party between the tendency to follow the Soviet line and the tendency to determine policy with reference to local conditions. Between 1950 and 1954 Blake and Henry, within the Central Committee, tended to resist the current official line. During 1950 they attempted to continue the radical policy with which they had been identified in 1947-50. In July 1950 Blake was eventually forced to indulge in self-criticism. In February 1954 both of them were removed from membership of the five-man Central Committee Secretariat. Though the issue was in reality one of incipient national communism, Blake and Henry were criticised in terms of anarcho-syndicalism (Henry) and right-deviationism (Blake), with a suggestion of state-rightism and personal ambition thrown in for good measure. These phrases were used as a convenient smokescreen to explain something which could not really be honestly explained to the rank-and-file party membership. Party ideology was so utterly Soviet-centred that it was sufficient to establish that there had been a deviation from the current Moscow line.

As early as 1954 unorthodox ideas began to be discussed within the party itself. The increasing evidence of anti-semitic practices in the U.S.S.R. caused some dissatisfaction within the left wing of the Jewish community in Melbourne, which had for long contributed some support to the Communist Party, in both as sympathisers and as actual members.

The moderate phase of party policy encouraged the development of attitudes and ideas which were of some importance when the crisis came in 1956. The argument was advanced at official levels (Stalin himself had expressed this view) that in some countries it might be possible for the communists to achieve power by parliamentary means. The idea appealed to some members in the Australian party, including Central Committee members. One of the leading spokesmen of this view was R.D. Walshe,<sup>4</sup> through articles in the *Communist Review* and in two pamphlets published in 1954, *Australia's Struggle for Independence and Parliamentary Democracy* and *The Eureka Stockade, 1854-1954*.

In the post-war period party membership declined steadily. In 1945 it was 23,000; by 1949 it had shrunk to 12,500. The obvious loss was in a failure to recruit young members. The Eureka Youth League, the party youth movement, was becoming smaller. The Melbourne University Party Branch had reached a peak of about 120 in 1946; by 1956 it had dropped to some 40. (The post-war University Labour Club, which on the whole was led by the C.P. branch, had a membership of 400.)

The intellectuals who remained within the A.C.P. turned more and more to cultural rather than directly political activity, encouraged by the leadership for whom party cultural work was as political as any other. At the most, they were active in the Peace Movement or in societies promoting friendship with China or the U.S.S.R. In the literary field there were the Australian Book

<sup>3</sup> Sharkey's insane comment at the 1949 Brisbane District Conference, "They've got Sharkey, but we've got Shengshai" is on a level with the remark, in the same year, of an American communist leader (who then conceded its stupidity), "I would rather be a lamp post in Moscow than President of the United States". cf. Gates, *Evolution of an American Communist* (1958), p. 15-16.

<sup>4</sup> Not, however, a member of the C.C. He is now a member of the Editorial Board of *Outlook*.

Society, the Realist Writers' Groups, and to some extent the magazine *Overland*, to absorb activities. The search for an Australian national tradition fostered other relatively minor activities - Australian folk-love, cultural festivals, the recording of folk-songs.

### 3. The Labour Party Left

The Australian Labour Party first adopted socialism as its official policy at the 1921 Brisbane Federal Conference. The striking thing about this Congress<sup>4</sup> is in Yugoslav since 1950 and which has gained some support in left wing circles since the 'new left' started to form after 1956. Alongside nationalisation of the principal industries came the advocacy of at least partial control on a local (municipal) level, such as we find in the Yugoslav communes. The idea of workers' participation in the management of the nationalised factories is stressed. Consumers and producers were to be represented on the boards of nationalised industries. A Supreme Economic Council was envisaged, which would apparently replace parliament. Scullin expressed the view that 'nationalisation is really state capitalism', while R.S. Ross went on to argue that 'the socialisation of industry implied the absolute ownership of industry by the labour engaged therein'.<sup>5</sup> This approach, however, was not prescience of later developments; it was the culmination of the British tradition of 'guild socialism' and of socialism was considerably modified at the 1927 Conference and thereafter socialism became more and more equated with nationalisation.

From 1941 to 1949 the Labour Party held the reins of government in the federal sphere and during this period the construction of the welfare state proceeded, involving an extension of nationalisation and government regulation. More and more, socialism was taken to mean nationalisation, and little more. For most of this period, from 1942 to 1947, the moderation of Communist Party policy fitted in with the restrained policies of the Labour Party Left, and this helped to sustain a moderate left current within A.L.P. branches. But thereafter Communist policy became more militant and antagonistic to 'social democracy', while the opening of the 'cold war' made the A.L.P. leadership more intolerant of communist and even left socialist elements within the Party. Communists were expelled or resigned, left socialists lost their enthusiasm, and the party started to drift to the right. During 1948 industrial groups were formed, in Victoria, first of all, to fight communist influence in the trade unions. Thus the A.L.P. structure appeared to be moving towards the typically communist one of industrial branches as well as locality ones. However, these industrial groups came under the influence of the Catholic-inspired 'Movement', and this new influence began to strengthen its grip on the party organization proper.

From 1952 to 1955 the Labour Party went through a right wing phase. The process was fairly slow from 1949 on because Communist Party policy became more conciliatory to the Labour Party, while the fact that the A.L.P. was now in opposition in the federal sphere and in a growing number of the states encouraged a more radical line than might have been expected were Labour still politically successful. The death of J.B. Chifley, federal leader since 1945, doubtless facilitated a reorientation of policy in a right wing direction; in 1951, the year of his death, the Federal Conference wrote an 'interpretation' of the objective into the party constitution which considerably modified the official radicalism of the A.L.P.

The intellectual wing of the party had formed Fabian Societies in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane (which soon lapsed), and Adelaide after the war which carried on propaganda for socialism conceived essentially in terms of nationalisation and the welfare state. The Sydney group produced a series of useful pamphlets and the Melbourne society a book of essays, *Policies for Progress* (1954). At

the seventh Annual Meeting of the N.S.W. Fabian Society in August 1954 the Chairman, George Godfrey, delivered an address which proved to be a swan-song.

We have held monthly meetings, and the quality of the addresses has been high - but the Fabian impact upon the political and industrial life of the community in which we live has been of small consequence.

It is, of course, a Fabian principle that progress toward democratic socialism should be gradual.... But this does not justify us in accepting a pace of advance so gradual that it is indistinguishable from marking time.

From October 1955 the Fabian Society of N.S.W. suspended monthly meetings.

The Fabian societies contributed most of the A.L.P.'s intellectual, socialist wing. Apart from these, there were only a few isolated individuals, such as Dr John Burton of Canberra whose articles, public addresses and pamphlets were regarded by many, probably erroneously, as the extreme left voice in the Labour Party. A few leading A.L.P. politicians, such as E.J. Ward and C.E. Martin, also continued to talk socialism. During the 1950s A.L.P. clubs were formed at Sydney and Melbourne universities, in opposition to the Labour clubs; they withered when the Labour Party itself came under right wing influence, though they revived a little when the official party shifted a little to the left.

From 1951 to 1956 *Voice* was published in Sydney, a monthly magazine edited by H. Levien and following a pro-labour policy, but essentially the organ of an individual. This magazine had an interesting genesis as well as career. Originally it was to have been called 'Aim' (Australian Independent Monthly). Before the first number appeared the editorial committee had a dispute with the editor over the date of publication. The editorial committee proceeded to bring out the first number, but Levien, who had resigned, also produced a first number. Two *Aims* appeared simultaneously, both published in Sydney, both inscribed Vol. I, No. 1, both carrying an article by Charlie Martin on 'The Constitution as a Barrier to Democratic Socialism'. The editorial committee initiated court action, and obtained an interim injunction. In due course the case was heard before Justice Roper.<sup>6</sup> Legal precedent for the situation was discovered in early nineteenth century British journalism. But quarrels over the ownership of magazines and titles are fairly common phenomena in left circles. Deutschler gives an interesting account of Trotsky's high indignation when the bolsheviks appropriated the name *Pravda* which he had been using for his own journal. The 1959 dispute over *Overland* is another example of the struggle for a magazine and its title.

However, the success of a magazine comes not from a legal judgement but from its ability to survive, and here Levien's *Aim* was successful. It achieved a circulation of 3,000-4,000. The editorial committee *Aim* died after its second number (May 1952). Levien changed his journal's name to *Voice* to avoid confusion. *Voice* followed a fairly right wing Labour line and its life coincided pretty closely with the right wing phase in A.L.P. politics. The unsuccessful *Aim* was more to the left, though not as close to the communist position as Fitzpatrick's *Australian News Review*, published in Melbourne.

### 4. The Disillusion Left

From January 1951 to October 1953 Brian Fitzpatrick struggled to bring out the *Australian News Review*, financed and partly written by himself. While it followed a line fairly close to the communist one he rejected their views on

<sup>6</sup> Barcan and Ors v. Levien. The editorial committee consisted of A. Barcan, H. Beauchamp, R. Gooding, and G. Shapp.

<sup>7</sup> *The Prophet Armed*, p. 198-9.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Critch, *The Australian Federal Labour Party, 1901-1951* (1955), p. 278-9.

Yugoslavia, on occasion printing articles which were fair to Tito and accepting developments in Titoist documents.

Developments in Yugoslavia had some mild reflection in the socialist wing of the Australian left. In November 1949 an Australian-Yugoslav Cultural Association was established in Sydney. This was a non-political organization, but provided a meeting place for a number of people interested in Titoist Yugoslavia. Its first secretary was A. Barcan, and its first president Dora Birtles. It met every month or so for about five years, and less frequently thereafter. At its best it held a membership of 30 or 40.

Yugoslavia also had its impact on the small League for Democracy in Greece. In December 1947 a Provisional Democratic Government was established in northern Greece. In July 1949 Yugoslavia closed its frontier with Greece. Quite a few members of the Australian-Yugoslav Cultural Association were also members of the League for Democracy in Greece, which supported the communist regime in north Greece. Early in 1950 a split occurred in the League, when communist elements led by Norman Jeffrey caused the expulsion of the president, Col A.W. Sheppard, (whom they regarded as a Titoist agent), and W. Fisher. A number of other members withdrew in sympathy. According to *The Socialist*<sup>8</sup> Sheppard protested that he 'has never denied the fact that the attitude of Yugoslavia was a contributing factor to the defeat of the Democratic Army of Greece'. What he opposed in the League was making an opinion on Tito a pre-requisite for membership, believing that this would split the League.

The Socialist was a single sheet monthly newspaper published in Sydney by the small Trotskyist group around N. O'Grass. This group had some working class influence, but eventually it had to give up printing its paper, which started about 1945 and closed down about 1952. Thereafter the Trotskyists produced an infrequent roneoed sheet headed 'About Labour's Problems' (note the initials).

In the mid-1950s a small Socialist Party of Australia, affiliated to the Socialist Party of Great Britain, raised its standard in the Demian on Sundays and held occasional discussion group meetings. It was led by a few English and Scottish migrants, and had a membership of about 20. The S.P.A. maintained a Marxist position, but trenchantly criticized the Soviet Union as a state capitalist society.

It is worth noting that English immigrants were quite a significant element in socialist opinion in post-war Australia, and could be found in the Fabian societies, among Communist Party intellectuals, and in the more sectarian groups to the left. The influx of immigrants from Britain strengthened socialist ideas a little; migrants from the continent tended to be right wing. Before the war the latter, at least, were usually left wing. Part of the post-war exhilaration of socialist thought which characterized England was transmitted a little artificially to Australia.

In chronicling the details of the left wing dissidents one is reminded of Dwight Macdonald's comments on the passionate earnestness of small splinter groups, whose seriousness increases as their members drop away. 'The smaller the sect, the more grandiosely optimistic it usually is.'<sup>9</sup> This was said in July 1944; by the 1950s optimism had declined, but seriousness remained. It might be more accurate to suggest that under the conditions of the time converts to socialism were driven by intellectual conviction, not economic pressures. As the socialist groups declined the members who remained active were those with a deeper theoretical and ideological grounding.

The preceding survey of developments between 1949 and 1955 suggests that in Sydney, as opposed to Melbourne, the dissident left was more developed. More intellectuals had drifted out of the Communist Party in Sydney than in Melbourne. On the other hand, the bulk of communist intellectuals had always been in Melbourne; and there was more discontent and doubt within the party there than in Sydney. Of the other capital cities there is little that can be said.

<sup>8</sup> Sydney, March 1950. Sheppard was vice-president of the A.Y.C.A. and president of the L.D.G. Fisher was a committee member of both organizations.

<sup>9</sup> *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (1957), p. 284.

5. The 1956 Crisis

It had to be an act of the Soviet Union itself - or rather several acts - which shook the Communist Party sufficiently to precipitate out of it some of its best members, who in turn provided the catalyst for the 'new left'. These events were Mikoyan's open but cautious criticism of Stalinism made at the twentieth Congress of the Soviet C.P. in February 1956, Khrushchev's more thorough criticism in his speech on 'The Cult of the Individual' on the same occasion - a secret speech which became public in June 1956 - and the Soviet expression of the Hungarian Revolution in November.

The reconciliation of the Soviet with Yugoslavia in 1955 had produced uncertainty and cynicism among sincere party members. The consequent rehabilitation of the victims of the treason trials in eastern Europe added to this uneasiness. The outspokenness at the twentieth Congress of the C.P.S.U. in February 1956, part of a discussion necessary for internal Soviet reasons, had an even stronger impact abroad. Then, on June 4 1956, the U.S. Department of State released the text of Khrushchev's secret speech, and this became available shortly afterwards in Australia through the international edition of the *New York Times*.<sup>10</sup> This particular number of the *N.Y. Times* was probably the most successful ever produced in Australia. It rapidly sold out, and when eventually the Central Committee of the C.P.A. sent an urgent request to Victorian headquarters for twenty copies there were none left.

During 1956 the Communist Party of Australia<sup>11</sup> permitted almost no open discussion of the issues arising out of the Khrushchev report and the Hungarian Revolution in its press. It never officially accepted the authenticity of the secret report, though *Tribune* published statements by British and American communists accepting the document as valid.<sup>12</sup> and lawyer Ted Hill, secretary of the Victorian State Committee of the C.P., who had been a delegate to the twentieth Congress, did eventually concede to a closed meeting of cadres in Melbourne that the published report was 'basically correct'.

In Sydney J. Staples, a law graduate, issued a 7,000 word roneoed document, dated 12 July, alleging that while the leadership had called for a discussion within the party of the twentieth Congress it had decided against an open discussion in the press.<sup>13</sup> He called for a public discussion of the relevance of the Khrushchev document and other material to the problem of inner-party democracy and to the problem of the exercise of power by a 'People's Government'.<sup>14</sup> This document touched on the old contradiction between loyalty to the Soviet Union and concern for local needs:

<sup>10</sup> dated 10 June 1956. It was the *New York Times* also which first published the full text of Lenin's Testament (18 Oct. 1926), reference to which was made in Khrushchev's report.

<sup>11</sup> The original name was Communist Party of Australia, suggesting the party's role as a unit of an international movement. Following the dissolution of the Comintern and on the occasion of the union with the State Labour Party of N.S.W. the name was changed to the more nationalistic Australian Communist Party. Times changed: after the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform national communism was suspect, and the name again became C.P.A.

<sup>12</sup> 4 July 1956 and 1 Aug. 1956.

<sup>13</sup> The document was titled 'Statement on the Attitude of the Central Committee, Communist Party of Australia, to the Stalin Issue' and included the text of a letter written to *Tribune* on 22 June, and not published criticising the statement of 10 June of the Political Committee, C.P.A.

<sup>14</sup> Staples quoted rule 4(a). 'It is the right of a Party member to participate in free and full discussion at Party meetings or in Party publications on questions of Party policy', and commented: 'Now, putting the matter baldly, either this rule means what it says or it does not. The right is not reserved for leading Committees, and concedes to exercise a discretion in these matters.'

Putting the matter briefly, it seems that certain members of the Central Committee have, after a long period of active and prolonged defence of the Soviet Union against the attacks of the reactionaries, lost their bearings. They have become bureaucrats, blessed with a sturdy conviction of their own wisdom.

They have forgotten that their first loyalty must be to the Australian working class in every sense of the phrase, that nothing must be said or done which conflicts with the interests of the workers of this country, that everything must be done to raise the level of the workers' political consciousness, to defend ideas of principle and to propagate them among the workers.

The Staples document circulated principally amongst officebearers of the party and individual dissentients. It met with some hostility, particularly from the full-time officials, and Staples was persuaded to withdraw it from circulation and surrender the stencils as a demonstration of good faith to the leadership. The uncertainty of many of the dissentients encouraged this withdrawal. An undertaking was given that a special meeting of Sydney communists would be called to hear the case orally, but this was not honoured. Staples was expelled from the party hastily and without warning a week after the Hungarian uprising started.

Developments overseas served to keep the ferment going. In Poland there came the Poznan riots of July 1956 which were described in Moscow as the work of imperialist agents, but acknowledged in Warsaw to be the legitimate product of internal policies. Then came the controlled revolution in Poland in October, rapidly followed by the uncontrolled one in Hungary. The brutal and prolonged suppression of the latter provided internal party discontent to its climax. The reluctance of the party leadership to concede that they had made any serious mistakes and their attempt to dampen down discussion accentuated the crisis.

Eventually a little open criticism did appear, but before being printed was subjected to negotiation and modification. The September 1956 *Communist Review* carried a number of articles which contained implicit or even some open criticism of party behaviour, expressed in terms of Soviet criticism of the 'cult of the individual'. A.W.R. ('Lysenko Controversy') complained of authoritarianism in the C.P. 'Party leaders can thus rely on a large bloc of yes-men for any proposal they make, and so tend to become narrow and dictatorial; the spirit of Party democracy is lost even if its form remains.' A longer article by W.J. Brown, formerly editor of *Tribune*, used the theme of 'Twentieth Congress Lessons on Criticism' to complain of restrictions on criticism within the Party as 'an old, authoritarian approach that is alien to the new period'. In particular, he criticised the failure in Sydney to provide opportunities for discussion, and to provide the rank and file with 'the latest informed reports'. 'It is not enough to tell the Party membership that they have the right to criticism and self-criticism, but it is vital that actual conditions be created so that this right can be adequately exercised.'

A forthcoming state conference, normally preceded by discussion of draft resolutions, also offered a chance for criticism. A.W.R. returned to the question of the 'Cult of the Individual'.<sup>15</sup>

*Tribune* published statements by Khrushchov, Togliatti, and other internationally prominent Communist leaders on this question, but nothing to indicate that any member or supporter of the C.P.A. had attempted any original contribution to this discussion.

*Tribune* published the resolutions of the twentieth Congress of the C.P.S.U.(B), and a resolution by the Political Committee of the C.P.A.

'completely endorsing' these, and one by the Sydney Committee 'completely endorsing' the Political Committee's attitude, but nothing to indicate that any Australian Communist sees anything wrong in having 'completely endorsed' everything Stalin ever said or did until Khrushchov pointed out his errors.

*Tribune* published a resume of a speech by a C.C. member J.D. Blake to a meeting of progressive scientists, and a letter from someone who attended the meeting 'completely endorsing' Comrade Blake's attitude, but no excerpts from any other speech at the meeting, and nothing to indicate that progressive scientists did anything but 'completely endorse' everything Comrade Blake told them.

But the criticism which appeared was the work of a minority. After his expulsion Staples produced a roneed booklet containing the *New York Times* report of Khrushchov's speech and, apart from a brief note on the authenticity of the text, involving no comment. At least one party member in Sydney was expelled for circulating this booklet, and two in Brisbane were reprimanded. But, despite an interstate circulation, there was little interest in it; very few copies found their way into the hands of non-intellectual elements within the C.P.A., and the edition of 500 was not sold out.

Sharkey's return from Peking<sup>16</sup> and the N.S.W. state conference in October marked the end of discussion. Some criticism was voiced at the state conference, but the leadership then closed down on controversy. W.J. Brown's criticisms in various articles in the *Communist Review* were answered by the leaders of the party who defended 'democratic centralism' in the theoretical journal (November and December 1956). Brown was taken to task by E.F. Hill in the December *Review* and this led to a thorough recantation by Brown in the May 1957 number, under the title 'For Party Unity and Against Revisionism'. Brown stated that following a self-critical analysis of his articles in the light of Hill's criticism he thoroughly agreed with Hill. He had made a partial retraction in *Tribune* (October 24 1956), but found that party members tended to quote his *Review* articles to justify greater freedom within the party. He now thoroughly criticised himself and ended with a promise 'to carry on with what I have already started - the deepening of my as yet very inadequate grasp of Marxism-Leninism'. The dissenters were treated individually and were expelled or resigned, usually with no great publicity. The disintegration started in Sydney, for the top leadership of the party was in N.S.W., and was more crudely intolerant than the Victorian state leadership. Accordingly, it was in Sydney that the first Socialist Forum was established.

#### 6. The Socialist Forums

The Socialist Forum movement paralleled a similar one in England, but it arose independently, without any knowledge of what was going on in England. A little later, however, the name was borrowed from England. The Socialist Forum arose because of the impossibility of continuing discussion, or gaining reliable information, through Communist Party sources. One of the questions requiring discussion was the nature of Yugoslavia. Tito had made the comment that the cult of the individual was the product of a social system;<sup>17</sup> Togliatti made much the same comment. The Chinese communists and *Pravda* had replied to Tito, and

<sup>16</sup> Cf. his report to the C.C., November 1956. (*Communist Review*, Dec. 1956.)

<sup>17</sup> From the very beginning we have been saying that here it was not a question of the cult of personality alone, but of a system which had made possible the creation of that cult, that therein lay the roots, that this is what should be struck at incessantly and tenaciously.... Speech at Pula, 11 Nov. 1956 (cf. Zimmer, ed., *National Communism and Popular Revolt in Eastern Europe*, 1956, p. 519).

thus the argument had gained some publicity in Australia. But there was a surprising lack of information, or at least knowledge, about developments in Yugoslavia and about the socialist theories of dissident groups abroad. So out-of-date Yugoslav pamphlets, back numbers of the *Belgrade Review of International Affairs*, Trotskyist literature, and English socialist publications had to be hunted up.

The Sydney Socialist Forum was formed in February 1957. The topics discussed at the first few meetings reveal the direction of interest - 'The Yugoslav Political System', 'Yugoslavia's Foreign Policy', 'Democratic Socialism', 'Socialism and Liberty', 'The Press and Freedom of Expression'.... Some good summaries of the two talks on Yugoslavia were made; 160 copies of 'The Yugoslav Political System' were distributed in Sydney and 400 in Melbourne.

Attendance at meetings of the Socialist Forum varied between 25 and 55. The participants rapidly resolved themselves into groups - ex-communists, Trotskyists, Labour Party socialists, the Socialist Party of Australia, and an anarchist group. No orthodox C.P. members participated except at the second meeting, when two party observers sat in to check up on proceedings, their report leading to at least one expulsion from the C.P.A. The only definition of purpose for the Socialist Forum was that drawn up by its committee of five: 'To provide a platform to bring together those organizations and individuals who are interested in the achievement of socialism'.

Meanwhile, in July 1957, vol.1 no.1 of *Outlook* appeared. It described itself as an Australian Socialist Review, was edited by Helen Palmer, and was produced in multilith. The first number was very cautious in tone - its main article was the major portion of Gomulka's speech of October 22 1956. The other articles were by persons whose identities were effectively concealed by misleading initials. They included a review of Burton's pamphlet 'Labour in Transition', an article on 'Socialism and Civil Liberties', and another on 'Worker's Self-Management' (with particular reference to the forthcoming first Congress of Workers' Councils in Yugoslavia).

The circulation of speeches by Khrushchev or Gomulka may not appear to be very extreme steps. Yet, in view of the isolation of Australia from European developments and the Communist Party leadership's anxiety to suppress information and discussion, they were. The Khrushchev report provided the facts; the Gomulka speech (which the C.C. had refused to reprint) the beginnings of an analysis.

In August 1957 a Socialist Forum was established in Melbourne. The open break was slower to come here, but when it did it was stronger than in Sydney. The Melbourne Socialist Forum was less a regrouping of organizations than the Sydney one, and more a united body of individuals. The initial topics discussed were 'Socialism and the U.S.S.R.' (3 speakers), 'Socialism and Peace' (2 speakers), and 'The Crisis in the Socialist Movement'. A statement at the second public meeting said that:

The Melbourne Socialist Forum aims to promote discussion on questions concerning the socialist movement. The Forum is an arena of free discussion; it is not a 'united front' or an action group of any kind.... Nobody shall be excluded as long as he is willing to adhere to the spirit of free discussion.... Anyone attending the Forum is free to sell or distribute literature. 18

The exchange of ideas orally or in printed form was the main function of the Socialist Forums.

By now the Communist Party realised that the forum movement was more than the revolt of a few discontented individuals. Participation in the forums, and writing or subscribing to *Outlook* was officially prohibited for C.P. members.

18 Quoted from an article in *Boomerang*, March 1958, a renegade magazine produced in Melbourne by the Australian Student Labour Federation.

Commenting on the continued danger of revisionism E.F. Hill stated at a Central Committee meeting in December 1957:

There is a certain regrouping, a certain activity outside our Party. There is a motley collection of people with anti-Soviet, anti-Party views. Certainly some people may be misled, but the core of these people will necessarily, in the logic of history, get more anti-Party, more anti-Soviet. Life and history show that.

The publications and discussion groups they have established have been born of the failure to win the battle within our Party for anti-Soviet, anti-Party ideas, born of the failure of these people to secure for themselves leading positions in the Party, for they saw themselves as leaders of the Party. 19

If in its original sense 'ideology' meant a distorted view of reality, a false reality, then this is a prime example of ideology. 'Motley collection' is a form of abuse, and yet it has the shadow of substance, for the supporters of the Socialist Forums were indeed of various origins. It is quite untrue that the most prominent dissentients were aiming at party leadership; yet it is true that they were often people of higher calibre, morally and intellectually, than the tired bureaucratic leadership. Moreover a radical change of policy might well have led to some change in the personnel of the leadership. The claim that the dissenters must, of logic, become anti-party and anti-Soviet was also untrue; it is more accurate to describe the 'new left' as non-communist, with an objective attitude to the U.S.S.R. But an objective, critical attitude is extremely offensive to the Communist Party.

Four months later the party leadership was adopting an equally distorted, but rather more conciliatory, attitude to the secessionists:

We lost a handful of people (sic!) who went out of the Party because they succumbed to revisionist ideology. In the light of the growing crisis of capitalism (sic!) we can only hope they will realise the erroneous character of their views and, they need not fear, they will be welcomed back into the ranks of the Party. 20

What was the true nature of the losses suffered by the Communist Party between 1956 and 1958? The crisis was far more than the loss of 'a handful of people'. Party membership dropped by about a quarter, many of them working class supporters who left quietly without formulating their reasons and objections. But in addition, the party lost most of its remaining intellectual wing, people fairly well-known and widely respected in rank-and-file party circles, and an important element in maintaining the party's morale and its pretensions to a principled, theoretical policy. Finally, a body of non-party sympathisers was alienated, people who, though at times dubious of party policy, had supported it in its public activities and who had contributed to its funds. The experience of a Sydney branch in April 1957 highlights the crisis. When a fairly prominent intellectual in the West Corso branch was expelled the branch of about 16 collapsed, only two members remaining in the party, and one of these was a full-time union organiser. (Professional party and trade union functionaries provide an important framework to the party structure.) Two of the expelled members of this branch wrote 'An Open Letter to Members of the Communist Party' challenging the tendency to dismiss these losses as the desertion of intellectuals.

19 *Communist Review*, February 1958.

20 Report of L.L. Sharkey, eighteenth Congress, April 1958 (Sydney, May 1958), p. 40.



In fact, W. Como branch was made up mostly of industrial workers (with a few exceptions) in a primarily working class area, in which the C.P. had a strong mass basis, and from election figures, enjoyed more than average support. West Como branch is now almost non-existent, with a total of two members (the Stalinist minority). A branch destroyed, and the C.C. can boast of another complete victory! These men, who are so prepared to label other people 'splitters', have shown themselves quite prepared to destroy the party itself to save themselves, no matter how mild the challenge. These men, who are so ready to form United Fronts with right-wing opportunists, professional pacifists, demagogues and even Cahill and Menzies themselves (if they were to say 'We're for Peace' for every ten strikes they sell out), seem to have a mortal fear of worker-critics, non-stalinist communists, and trotskyists, in short anyone to the left of them.<sup>21</sup>

The West Como episode was not, however, typical. In most cases disillusioned members just dropped out. For long Communist Party membership had been declining, and the average age of party members rising. Moreover, the party had always possessed a high turnover rate. Between 1940 and 1956 some 30,000 people had passed through the party. In 1944 membership reached its peak of about 24,000. By 1958 there were at best 5,500 members left, about half of these in Sydney.<sup>22</sup> In these fourteen years membership had fallen by three-quarters while Australia's population had risen by a third. The second and final number of *Forum*, a journal supporting the Socialist Forum movement in England, claimed in late 1957 that the Australian communists had lost 25 per cent of their membership. This implies a drop from 8,000 in 1955 to 6,000 in 1957, not unlikely figures. (Between March 1955 and February 1958 the membership of the British party fell by 24.5 per cent.) In Australia the party's press circulation dropped by 15 per cent between October 1955 and February 1957.<sup>23</sup> Between 1954 and 1958 sales of *Tribune* fell from 22,500 to 16,500, the major slump coming after Hungary.<sup>24</sup> The party was led by ageing men, many of them physically sick from overwork and mentally tired from years of dogmatism. The remaining membership, concentrated in the trade unions, was occupied with industrial problems and little interested in marxism.

The Socialist Forums, which had so suddenly sprung into existence, just as suddenly evaporated. The same phenomenon marked the British Socialist Forums, a period of intense activity and then, their educational and emotional functions being fulfilled, they disappeared or radically changed their nature. Some of the ex-communists turned to the Labour Party or became non-political. The trotskyists withdrew. The smaller sects were frozen out, or else the forums simply disbanded. The outcome of the Socialist Forum movement in both Britain and Australia was discussion groups or clubs, associated with a magazine.

In Sydney attendance at the monthly Socialist Forum meetings had steadied at 35 or so. Early in 1958 the trotskyists withdrew having picked up a few recruits, finding enough, and perhaps more fruitful, work for their small forces within the A.L.P. - a more working class milieu than the forum. The small but able group from the Socialist Party of Australia held the arena. Late in 1958 the Socialist Forum ceased to meet. In Melbourne the Socialist Forum was always more homogeneous than in Sydney, but a similar process occurred. Too much attention was being devoted to criticism of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party, too little to activity and organised study. The last speaker in both

<sup>21</sup> In *Living Marxism*, No. 9, a trotskyistfordisgraced magazine, described as the 'Organ of the Sydney Section of the Committee of the Fourth International'.

<sup>22</sup> This figure may be derived from an article on the communist press in *Communist Review*, May 1958. But perhaps 4,500 might be a truer figure.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *The Free Spirit* (Sydney), Dec. 1957-Jan. 1958, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in *The Observer* (Sydney), Oct. 17, 1959, p. 646.

Sydney and Melbourne appears to have been Tibor Meray, a Hungarian writer who was visiting Australia at the invitation of the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom.<sup>25</sup> Thus in a sense Hungary, both opened and closed the Socialist Forums.

The Hungarians contributed in yet another way to the development of the socialist left in Australia. The execution of Nagy, Maléter, and two others in June 1958 led to the loss to the Communist Party of Ian Turner and Stephen Murray-Smith in Melbourne, and a few academics in Canberra and Sydney. Turner and Murray-Smith had been prominent student leaders at Melbourne University after World War II. Turner was secretary of the Australasian Book Society and Murray-Smith editor of *Overland* and National and State secretary of the Peace Council. Turner was expelled and Murray-Smith, long his close associate, immediately resigned. They had both been long suspected of 'revisionism'; and their loss was the end of the possibility of any change from within.

7. The Socialism of Magazines

The new socialism, in Australia as in England and the United States, was characteristically a socialism of magazines.

*Outlook* first appeared in July 1957, edited by Helen Palmer, daughter of Vance Palmer and prominent in the Australia-China Society. During its first two years it was a multifold production, appearing bi-monthly (6 issues per year). From the beginning of 1959 it appeared in printed format, and an editorial board was named. By mid-1959 its circulation was nearly 1,000. The gradual appearance of new names among its contributors provides an interesting record of the growth of the 'new left'. A useful service undertaken by *Outlook* was the production of a number of discussion pamphlets (8 by the end of 1959). Most of these were reprints of overseas material, but a few were written in Australia.<sup>26</sup> Associated with *Outlook* were a number of discussion groups - the successors of the Socialist Forums. They appeared first in Sydney and Melbourne; later in Brisbane and Canberra. The Melbourne discussion group was the best organized, with a committee of about 13, and holding monthly public functions at which an attendance of 70 or so became normal; it was somewhat like the Universities and Left Review Club in London. In Sydney a number of small discussion groups existed intermittently, meeting in suburban homes. In Brisbane a fairly stable *Outlook* group was meeting at about two-monthly intervals. And in Canberra a small discussion and research group started to function in 1959. In Adelaide, Perth, and Hobart no organized discussion groups existed.

In late December 1958 a two-day conference of 15 people from Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth was held in Melbourne, giving itself the rather flamboyant title of the 'First Annual Conference of the 'New Left' in Australia'. It seems likely that such gatherings will continue.

The English *Universities and Left Review* and *The New Reasoner* also had some circulation in Australia and helped the reassessment of socialism here.<sup>27</sup> The U.L.R. in particular had a growing influence. The U.L.R. and the N.R. carried both political and literary material. *Outlook* was a purely political magazine.

One of the reasons for this was doubtless the existence in Melbourne of the left wing literary magazine *Overland*, which first appeared in printed format in the spring of 1954, edited by Stephen Murray-Smith. This quarterly had a circulation in 1959 of 3,500, the largest of any literary magazine in Australia. In July 1958 Murray-Smith resigned from the Communist Party; but backed by the

<sup>25</sup> Meray's impressions are contained in an article, 'From My Australian Diary' in *Quadrant* (published by the A.A. for C.F.), winter 1959. Meray spoke to the Melbourne Socialist Forum in Sept. 1958. He also participated in the Melbourne Peace Congress of November 1959.

<sup>26</sup> A list of these discussion pamphlets is given in Appendix C.

<sup>27</sup> These magazines merged in 1960 as the *New Left Review*.

majority of his editorial board he continued to produce *Overland*, which was registered in his name. The second number to appear after his secession was attacked in the party's weekly paper, *Tribune* (May 13, 1959). *Overland*, said Rex Cliphin, has become 'a shackle on the Labor Movement, by its veering from Left, through Centre, and away to the Right, where, if editor Murray-Smith is allowed to have final say, it will remain'. As Helen Palmer commented:<sup>28</sup>

The average reader, unfamiliar with Communist hagiology perusing the 14th issue of *Overland* that called forth these remarks would be, to say the least, perplexed. On the face of it, it is an average issue. There have been better; there may have been worse.

But *Overland* had published an advertisement for *Outlook*; and it had presented two contrasting views on Pasternak's *Dr Zhivago*. It had recognised the existence of a non-communist socialist current of opinion, and that was sufficient to bring condemnation.

However, a complete excommunication of *Overland* did not eventuate. In *Tribune* a number of writers protested at the extremism of Cliphin's criticisms. The editor and his editorial board maintained their position, but brought out a number of *Overland* which, while it continued to carry an advertisement for party leadership changed its mind. Some reconciliation with the dissatisfied members of the editorial board eventuated. Even if not fully part of the 'new left', *Overland* recognised its existence; something which *Tribune* found difficult to do.

This problem of 'recognition' arose again in November 1959 at the Australian and New Zealand Congress for International Co-operation and Disarmament inbourne. The *Outlook* editorial board had two delegates at this gathering, but other supporters of the 'new left' participated in various capacities. The significant thing about this Congress was that, although the initiative for meeting arose from the Communist Party, there was genuine discussion and controversy at its sessions, something which previous 'peace' assemblies had lacked. This step forward owes something to the influence of the 'new left'.

8. The New Trotskyism.

Further to the left the trotskyists were also troubled by revisionism. A new trend, led in France by Pablo, appeared about 1951, as a result of a consideration of developments in Russia, Yugoslavia, and elsewhere. The Pablo revisionists criticised the orthodox trotskyists for living in the past; the orthodox wing (strongest in the United States) said that the revisionists were carrying out a left wing defence of stalinism and were echoing the views of Isaac Deutscher.<sup>30</sup>

When the exodus from the Communist Party occurred in 1956-7 the N.S.W. trotskyists grouped themselves into two factions, still loosely co-operating. Both groups gained a little support; in 1959 both groups were able to present themselves in print. In July 1959 the neo-trotskyists started *The Socialist*, which introduced itself as 'a monthly paper advocating a Socialist Australia' and appealed for support 'to rank and file members of the Australian Labor Party'.

28 *Outlook*, August 1959.

29 In *The Socialist*, Aug. 1959, Murray-Smith commented that to discuss the Tribune attacks in *Overland* would have been to agree with the implication that the magazine was a C.P. organ. He also said he had received a 'flood of messages of support both from within and without C.P. ranks'.

30 Cf. *Against Pablo Revisionism* (London, 1957), a 43 page pamphlet.

and the Communist Party of Australia and to the overwhelming majority of militant workers and socialist intellectuals who belong to no party at all'. It followed the neo-trotskyism of the English Newsletter group, characterised by a greater stress on workers' control, qualified support for peace movements, and in general a disposition to carry their thought beyond the limits set by Trotsky's death in 1940.<sup>31</sup>

Orthodox trotskyism was represented by 'Labor Forward', a monthly paper which was the successor to a renamed bulletin of the same title. It states as its aim to help 'counteract the ever-active right wing tendencies within the Labor Party and to propound Socialist solutions to the workers' problems'. Led by N. Orgrass, the orthodox wing had some industrial contacts and paid more attention to overseas developments in its paper. In N.S.W. the neo-trotskyists appeared to have a more youthful composition. But both groups were very small - about half-a-dozen neo-trotskyists and less than a score of the orthodox variety.<sup>32</sup>

9. A Mild Left Revival in the A.L.P.

As from December 31, 1954 the Federal Executive of the Labour Party withdrew the A.L.P. charter of the industrial groups, who were largely under the control of 'The Movement'. In the following February a special conference elected a new Victorian A.L.P. executive. The Hobart Federal Conference of March 1955 completed the leftward shift in party policy. Quite a few of the spokesmen of the left revival within the A.L.P. could be considered 'intellectuals'. Indeed, in some states, such as West Australia, few trade union officials were prepared to lead the struggle against the influence of the right wing Catholic 'Movement' and the Industrial Groups.

At the same time there came a renewed activity by fabian socialists. In Brisbane the Fabian Society staged a revival, and in Perth one was established for the first time in August 1955, the majority of its supporters being active members of the A.L.P. (By 1959 it had 60 members and 80 subscribers to its paper, *The Fabian Monthly*.)

Within the universities there was a similar revival of Labour Party socialism. After the war university Labour and Radical Clubs had been 'united front' societies, often dominated by communists though with some Labour Party members in them. By the 1950s the latter were less disposed to join such clubs. An A.L.P. Club was formed in Melbourne in 1949. In 1955 a similar club was formed in Sydney, about 1956 in the universities of Adelaide and West Australia, and in 1957 at Canberra University College. Such clubs excluded stalinists, though not trotskyists. They were fairly small clubs, but even so were larger than the 'united front' clubs. In 1956 the A.L.P. Clubs entered the Australian Student Labor Federation and took over the Executive, though Labour Clubs continued to be members.

A number of pamphlets on Labour Party policy also appeared. Two by Dr John Burton, a member of the A.L.P. in Canberra, appeared in 1956: *The Light Grows Brighter and Labour in Transition*. We have already mentioned these. In *Labour in Transition* Burton expressed something of the reaction against the older fabian stress on nationalisation and planning. 'Democratic socialism does not rest on centralisation, economic planning, conformity to a pattern in industrial organisation or in economic life'.

From 1954 on the Melbourne University A.L.P. Club sponsored an annual Chiffley Memorial Lecture, and reprinted these as pamphlets. Those by Professor Arndt in 1956 (*Labour and Economic Policy*) and E.G. Whittam, federal member for Werriwa, in 1957 (*The Constitution versus Labor*) dealt with problems of basic Labour

31 For the trotskyist attitude to peace congresses see a letter in *Outlook*, Dec. 1959, the main argument of which is that the peace struggle should not be separated from the general working class struggle.

32 The orthodox trotskyist number about 15 in Melbourne, 12 in Sydney, and 2 in Brisbane. There is also a neo-trotskyist group of 7 in Sydney, established in 1957.

Party aims. Amode criticised the objective of widespread public ownership and central planning. Whitem pointed to the constitutional obstacles to the federal Labour Party carrying through its objective of socialisation of industry and which also prevented the implementation of more modest reforms. In 1958 J.W. Burton gave the Memorial Lecture, speaking on 'The Nature and Significance of Labor'. He argued that as the economic demands of the workers became less urgent the non-economic objectives of labor - freedom social equality, social justice - assume a greater importance. The A.L.P.'s objectives have to be retested not in terms of socialism but of social equality, etc. Dr Lloyd Ross continued this 'socialist re-thinking' in 1959 with his lecture on 'Workers' Participation in the Ownership and Control of Industry', mainly a history of this concept but also an assertion of the need for democratic rights in industry.

Official A.L.P. policy has lagged behind the ideas of theorists. In 1957, however, the objective was modified by the insertion of the word 'Democratic' - 'The Democratic socialisation of industry'; 'Democratic socialisation is the utilization of the economic assets of the state in the interests of citizens', etc. This is some evidence of changing views on nationalisation and socialism. But the development of Labour policy, which the establishment of a federal secretariat might have speeded up, was delayed when the 1959 proposal to establish such a secretariat was abortive.

Worthy of mention, too, is the Catholic group centred on Melbourne and publishing *Prospect* (1958 on). A Catholic intelligentsia has made its presence felt in the 1950s and its left wing has made some effort to examine the ideological and cultural crisis, in *Prospect* and through discussion groups. Supporters of this group participated in the 1959 Peace Congress. The ideas of this left Catholic section, in so far as they relate to political life, seem to include such principles as workers' control of industry, decentralisation, opposition to bureaucracy, aid to Asia, and other themes to be found in the 'new left' generally. *Prospect* had a circulation of about 1,500 in 1959.

10. Evaluation and Conclusion

The Labour Party in Australia has shared many of the changes which have taken place in similar parties in Western Europe, in particular a growth of uncertainty about traditional objectives. In England the organ of the Labour Party left, *Tribune*, has recently shown some interest in the alternative concept of socialism involved in the theory of workers' participation in the management of industry (cf. a series of articles on this theme, *Tribune*, November 1959). There has been some slight interest in this approach in Australia too, as evidenced by Ross' 1959 lecture.

One of the interesting features of the crisis in the Communist Party has been the attitude of the leadership to the lost 'revisionists'. The initial reaction was along traditional lines - the loss was small, the dissentients were activated by unworthy, personal, motives, they were politically worthless. But at the eighteenth Congress Sharkey adopted an unexpectedly conciliatory attitude, and this was confirmed (after some hesitation) in the *Overland* affair and at the Melbourne Peace Congress. The loss, qualitatively and quantitatively, was too great for the party bureaucracy to be able to deceive its members, let alone itself. The confidence of the communist movement in itself and its infallibility has been shaken, both in Australia and on a world scale; one turns for comparison to the impact of the sixteenth century reformation on the Catholic hierarchy.

A new political spectrum has emerged in many of the western political democracies. The communist parties have been transformed into narrow sects (though not, of course, in France or Italy). A new democratic left has arisen. The trotskysts, too, have been transformed - the process of re-valuation which they started about 1951 has been strengthened by the recruitment of 1956-7 and

by developments in eastern Europe. A new period in the history of western capitalism, a period of state capitalism, has been accompanied by the development of appropriate changes in the socialist movement.

A characteristic of the 'new left' in Australia is the uneven degree of support and the varying nature of the groups in different centres. In Melbourne, where the strength lies, a well-organized Melbourne Outlook Committee holds regular public functions. A so-called 'New Reasoner' group emerged in late 1958, overlapping in some respects the 'Outlook' group. The university A.L.P. Sydney the 'new left' lacks a central meeting place as in Melbourne, and sustains merely the editorial board of *Outlook* and discussion groups of uncertain life in the suburbs. In Brisbane an *Outlook* discussion group meets regularly, while a local Fabian Society is also of some importance. In Canberra a small research group operates. In Adelaide, Perth, Hobart, and the Australian countryside generally there is almost no evidence of a 'new left'. Centralisation and uniform development is not characteristic of the 'new left'.

The development of a 'new left' ideology has been slow. This may be due in part to a traditional aversion to theory in Australia. The non-ex-communist 'new left' has a dislike of theory. The ex-communist 'new left' needs time to think afresh; and being accustomed to a mixture of discussion and activity, has a certain uneasiness about discussion alone. The process of working out a specific policy is stimulated mainly by immediate practical problems and reflects the uneven rate of development mentioned above. The Kemshead pamphlet, *Nationalisation... the Road to Socialism*, represents a very tentative advance only in theory; its most significant contribution is to stress the importance of workers' control in industry. This booklet is a contribution from Brisbane, where Kemshead is President of the Fabian Society. In Melbourne the activities and statements of various 'new left' supporters made it necessary to define positions and policy. Both the 'New Reasoner' group (mainly ex-communists) and the Melbourne Outlook Committee split, basically over attitudes towards the Communist Party. The October 1959 *Outlook* printed a statement by four Melbourne socialists dealing with unity tickets and the A.L.P., attitude to Communists and the Communist Party, and attitude to the Peace Movement. This was replied to by three socialists from N.S.W. in the following number. *Outlook* itself made it clear that it was a socialist journal independent of any political party, a forum of socialist thinking, and that opinions expressed at discussion groups and forums were not necessarily those of *Outlook*.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile a second 'new left' conference was announced, for the end of January 1960, at which policy could be discussed.

It might well be asked, 'how viable is the 'new left'? Is it merely a local response to overseas stimuli; or has it sufficient of a social basis in Australia to ensure survival?

In the first place, it is not impossible that further overseas developments might lead to a few more breakthroughs from the Communist Party and a slight strengthening of the 'new left' from that source. An open break between the U.S.S.R. and China, for instance, might provoke such a development. But in any case, there seems to be a limited but real basis for the existence of a democratic 'new left' in Australia, even if conditions at home and abroad remain unchanged for the next decade or so.

The fair level of prosperity and the increased population in Australia seem to make it economically feasible to sustain a socialist magazine like *Outlook*. The appearance of new political magazines like *Nation* and *The Observer* would strengthen the view that the chances of survival for a left wing, independent magazine are greater now than in the past. Indeed, *Outlook's* strength is likely to be greater than that of the 'new left', generally, for many socialists now limit their political activity to subscribing to this magazine. In the decade of the 'great apathy' personal problems - family, career, material comfort - have assumed considerable importance in the lives of many formerly politically

<sup>53</sup> *Outlook*, Oct. 1959, p. 12; Dec. 1959, p. 2.

conscious people. However, the reading of intelligent magazines and books concerned with social problems is not incompatible with this sort of existence. There is a real market for a socialist magazine.

The labour movement seems to have entered on a long period of quiescence. This is not without precedence in the history of an intellectual working class. But at the same time there has been a new growth of an intellectual-professional middle class. Sections of this class are disturbed by the low pitch of 'mass culture', by the decline in education and standards. They look for some alternative to 'admass civilization'. They are alarmed by the dangers of a third world war and interested in the problems of world peace. The Communist Party, now mainly a party of industrial militants and union bureaucrats, is incapable of enlisting the sympathy of this element in the community. The Labour Party lacks a clear policy, an able leadership, and an enthusiastic rank-and-file. The 'new left' can probably meet the needs of some of these worried citizens. This need not mean that it must remain a movement of 'intellectuals' alone. In Australia the gap between the intelligentsia and the mass of the population has always been less than in Britain or France, and this should work as a local factor to extend the influence of the 'new left'.

The prosperity and stability of present-day society has brought with it the growth of state intervention, a decline in 'active' democracy, a growth of centralisation, bureaucracy, corruption, and impersonality. If the 'new left' continues its evolution towards a philosophy of democratic socialism based on control from below, decentralisation, the withering away of the state, and local participation and initiative in economic and political life it will be in a good position to offer an alternative to present trends.

Socialists have always been few in Australia; this position has not changed, and is not likely to change markedly in the immediate future. But the 'new left' is significant in its potential, influencing as it does most of the Australian socialist intellectuals. Important initiatives are likely to come from it in the future.

## Appendix A

### SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Pelling, *The British Communist Party* (London, 1958).
2. Corbett, 'Britain's New Left', in *Meanjin*, Melbourne, Summer 1958.
3. Thompson, 'The New Left', in *The New Reasoner*, Summer 1959 (a shortened version in *Outlook*, Dec. 1959).
4. A.B. (arcan), 'The Taheran Period' in *Arna*, Sydney, 1948.
5. Crisp, *The Australian Federal Labour Party, 1901-1954*. (London, 1955).
6. Webb, *Communism and Democracy in Australia*. (Melbourne, 1954).
7. Sharpley, *The Great Delusion* (London, 1952).
8. Fitzpatrick, *The Royal Commission on Espionage* (Melbourne, 1954).
9. Jupp, 'Socialist "Rethinking" in Britain and Australia' in *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Brisbane, Nov. 1958.
10. 'Communism in Australia', art. in *The Observer*, Sydney, Oct. 17, 1959.
11. Articles in *The Free Spirit* (Sydney, Dec. 1957-Jan. 1958, Aug. 1959, Nov. 1959).
12. Articles on the 1959 Peace Congress in *Nation*, Sydney, 7 Nov. 1959, 21 Nov. 1959.
13. Ross, 'Communism in Australia', in *Far Eastern Survey*, New York, Dec. 26, 1951.
14. Mayer, 'Life on the Fringe', in *The Observer*, Sydney, Jan. 23, 1960.

Some of the above, especially Nos. 1 to 5, are listed as useful background material. Only printed, as distinct from mimeoed, sources have been included.

## Appendix B

### ESTIMATE OF COMMUNIST PARTY MEMBERSHIP FIGURES

1928	500	1947	13,000
1935	3,000	1948	12,000
1940	4,000	1949	12,500
1942	16,000	1955	8,000 (?)
1945	23,000	1958	5,500

In *Communism and Democracy in Australia*, p. 22, Webb gives a table of figures for membership at various dates between 1920 and 1949. Figures of party member-

ship usually come from the C.P. itself and are likely to be optimistic. That for 1958 might well be 4,500 rather than 5,500. In addition, the significance of membership figures varies from period to period. In some periods, as in the latter part of World War II, recruitment proceeded rather freely, and the duties of membership were not very onerous. At other times members might be fewer in number, but greater activity might be demanded.

### Appendix C

#### LIST OF OUTLOOK DISCUSSION PAMPHLETS

1957

- No. 1. Socialist Humanism (E.P. Thompson).
- No. 2. Russia in Transition (Isaac Deutscher).
- No. 3. Problems of Socialism (G.D.H. Cole and H. Apteker).

1958

- No. 4. Documents on Jewish Culture in the U.S.S.R.
- No. 5. The Summit Letters (Russell, Eisenhower, Khrushchev).
- No. 6. Crisis in Meritism? (Sweezy and Baran).

1959

- No. 7. Nationalisation...the Road to Socialism (R. Kemshead).
- No. 8. The Chinese Communes (Sweezy and Haberman, Bettelheim, Cochran).

This list is given to indicate something of the direction of interest in the 'new left'. All pamphlets except no. 7 were reprints of overseas material. All, again except no. 7, were reissued, not printed.

### Appendix D

#### N. S. W. FABIAN SOCIETY PAMPHLETS

1. The Case for Bank Nationalisation.
2. Towards a Socialist Australia (March, 1949).
3. Towards a Free Press (August, 1949).
4. Secret Ballots in Trade Unions (October, 1949).
5. Fighting Inflation, 1945-1949 (October, 1949).
6. Workers' Control.
7. Labour and the Constitution (September, 1950).
8. Fighting Communism - The Democratic Way (August, 1951).
9. What do you know about Democratic Socialism? (June, 1953).

### Appendix E

#### CHITLEY MEMORIAL LECTURES

- 1954 H.V. Evatt, 'The Bases of Democracy'.
- 1955 Lord Lindsay of Birker, 'The Formation of Foreign Policy in Democracies'.
- 1956 H.W. Arndt, 'Labour and Economic Policy'.
- 1957 E.G. Whitlam, 'The Constitution versus Labour'.
- 1958 J.W. Burton, 'The Nature and Significance of Labour'.
- 1959 L. Ross, 'Workers' Participation in the Ownership and Control of Industry'.

## Appendix F

## MEETINGS ORGANIZED BY MELBOURNE OUTLOOK COMMITTEE

1. October, 1958 - 'Socialism and the A.L.P.' (Brian Fitzpatrick, R.W. Holt, Ian Turner).
2. November, 1958 - 'Why We Lost, or Socialists, the A.L.P. and the 1961 Elections' (Jim Jupp, Stephen Murray-Smith, Gordon Bryant).
3. February, 1959 - 'Doctor Zhivago and Commitment in Literature' (Mina Christesen, David Martin).
4. March, 1959 - 'The Film Industry in Australia' (Tim Bursall, Gil. Breeley, Vic. Arnold).
5. April, 1959 - 'Thirty Tickets' (Gordon Bryant, David Bearlin, Brian Fitzpatrick).
6. May, 1959 - 'India Today' (H.A. Wolfsohn).
7. July, 1959 - 'Policies for an Australian Peace Movement' (Jim Jupp, Stephen Murray-Smith).
8. August, 1959 - 'A Blueprint for a Better A.L.P.' (Bob Balcombe, Jim Jupp, Ian Wilson).
9. September, 1959 - 'Policies for Peace' (Vicente Buckley, Creighton Burns).
10. October, 1959 - 'Labor's Foreign Policy' (J.F. Cairns).

## MAGAZINE REFERENCES

- 'The New Left Review'. Subscription £1 sterling for 6 bi-monthly issues. Business Manager: Janet Hase, New Left Review, 7 Carlisle Street, London W.1.
- 'Outlook'. Subscription 15/- for 6 bi-monthly issues. The Editor, Box 358, Post Office, Haymarket, Sydney.
- 'Overland'. Subscription 10/- for four issues. The Editor, G.P.O. Box 98A, Melbourne, C.1.
- 'Prospect'. Subscription 10/- for four issues. The Editor, 34 Rowland Street, Kew, Victoria.

Have you seen the quarterly bulletin of the Australian Political Studies Association - A.P.S.A. News?

10/6 yearly.

Specimen copy free from:

H. Mayer, Department of Government,  
University of Sydney, Sydney.

## Addendum A: More Data on the Decline of Radicalism

## 1. The Welfare State and Radicalism

The long-term developments underlying the decline of socialist radicalism after 1947. The first was the apparent success, in material terms, of the welfare state, of state capitalism. The second was the impact of the Cold War. One might be tempted to say that the main impact of prosperity as a quibus was on the working class, and the main impact of the cold war was on middle class socialists. But a moment's consideration must modify this conclusion. Middle class Australians responded to economic stimuli of a negative sort - inflation, the drop in margins over working class incomes. Working class militancy was maintained for a while by conditions of work. The Cold War was somewhat qualified as an anti-radical influence because of a general lack of interest in foreign policy among Australians; however, it soon became clear that the Cold War was something more than a question of foreign policy, while its advent encouraged renewed enthusiasm for anti-communism among many Catholic workers.

The growth of prosperity has been mentioned in Section 1 of this monograph. It can be illustrated statistically:

Working Days Lost by Strikes (in millions)					
1945	2.1	1949	1.3	1953	1.1
1946	2.0	1950	2.1	1954	.9
1947	1.3	1951	.9	1955	1.0
1948	1.7	1952	1.2	1956	1.1

Thus from 1951 onwards the loss of working days due to strikes at no time reached the 1945-50 level, despite the fact that the number of unionists increased (in 1945, 2,213,000 or 54% of the wage and salary earners; its lowest point was in 1952 at 1,638,000 or 60% of wage and salary earners; its lowestists totalled 1,802,000 or 61% of wage and salary workers).

Unemployment also fell, from 83,500 in 1947 (3.2% of wage and salary earners) to 55,000 in 1954 (1.8%). Real wages rose, from 1,318 (1911=1,000) in 1947 to 1,438 in 1952 and 1,454 in 1955 (1957 Commonwealth Yearbook, p.201).

A rough index of inflation comes from figures for the Commonwealth basic wage for adult males, in six capital cities, which was 96/- in September 1945, 162/- in December 1950, 231/- in February 1953, and 246/- in June 1956 (*ibid.*, p.177). Similarly, nominal wages (1911=1,000) rose from 2,598 in 1947 to 5,241 in 1952 and 5,773 in 1955 (*ibid.*, p.200).

## 2. The Cold War and Radicalism

The 'deep freeze' period of the Cold War lasted from 1947 to 1954, and marks a transitional phase from a period when political consciousness and interest among Australians was high to one when apoliticism and apathy was more prevalent.

A new attitude to radical extremists developed in the last year of the federal Labour Government. In March 1949 the re-establishment of a Security Service was announced (the wartime organization had been discontinued after the war). Its purpose was to keep 'a closer check on the movements, associations and activities of persons with subversive tendencies' (Chifley). Security action against the Communist Party was quite frequent. In July 1949, during the communist-led Coal Strike for improved wages and conditions, police and security

officers raided Marx House in Sydney. During 1953, following the accession of Elizabeth II, the security police seized copies of the *Communist Review*, which contained a critical article on 'The Democratic Monarchy'. The Commonwealth launched a prosecution under the Crimes Act. The *Sydney Morning Herald* published the whole of this article and pointed out the absurdity of the prosecution, which the Court subsequently dismissed. (Cf. Pringle, in 'Liberty in Australia', p. 101.)

By 1950 the political atmosphere for communists was becoming very chilly. The iron and steel firm of Lysaghts (Newcastle) announced that 'the holding of Communist principles makes an applicant for employment quite unsuitable for the industry' (*S.M.H.*, 10/2/50). A senior security officer, describing Australia's intelligence system as chaotic, said that there were eight competing government security agencies in Sydney alone. Apart from the Customs intelligence service all these agencies are almost exclusively concerned with keeping an eye on Communists, reported the *Sydney Morning Herald* (12/3/50). During 1951, when it appeared possible that the Communist Party would be declared illegal, a few trial copies of an illegal *Communist Review* started to appear under the title of *Review* (No. 4 appeared in March 1951).

The atmosphere of repression spread its influence beyond the (diminishing) ranks of the Communist Party. In October 1952, the president of the Congressional Union claimed that liberty of the individual and freedom of speech were disappearing in Australia (*S.M.H.*, 30/10/52). By 1955, when the Cold War had passed out of its most intense phase, more voices were raised on the dangers to political democracy in Australia. In January 1955, the Australian Institute of Political Science's summer school discussed 'Liberty in Australia'. In February the Australian Council for the World Council of Churches stated that the two greatest threats to freedom were Communism and the forces of reaction provoked by fear of communism. Commenting on this the *Sydney Morning Herald* said (15/2/55):

It is certainly true that 'there are signs that freedom of speech and social criticism in Australia are being curtailed by a nervous public opinion and governmental fears'. . . . While there is nothing that can properly be called McCarthyism in Australia there is a discouragement of free and unpopular or politically unconventional thinking.

### 3. Intellectuals and the Left Parties

Since World War I, the A.L.P. has not been very receptive to intellectuals and Fabian Societies, mainly 'intellectual' in composition, have had their task made more difficult for this reason. 'It has spurned the support of intellectual friends so intense is its class suspicion' the editors of the Victorian Fabian Society's *Policies for Progress* wrote in 1954. However, official party policy has varied from time to time and from state to state, and if at one time the parliamentary leader states that he is not against people having a university education but that the A.L.P. is a trade union movement and would not be taken over by 'intellectuals and pseudo-intellectuals' (*S.M.H.*, 13/6/60) there have been other times when 'Labour Stands for the well-being of the People, not just sections of the People' (advertisement, *Daily Mirror*, Sydney, 7/12/48). The looser discipline of the Labour Party has allowed a greater variety of thought within it, and has permitted the existence of intellectual groups, though, like women, their influence has not always reached the official policy-determining levels. When it has, it has often been by the back-door.

For a period the Communist Party contained a number of socialist intellectuals, though they had less freedom of thought than in the A.L.P. The main importance of the 1956 crisis for the Communist Party was that henceforth middle class intellectuals were no longer a significant element in the party, which became largely orientated on the trade unions.

It is important to stress, however, that in general intellectuals have never played an important part in Australian society. This is mainly a product of the

general weakness of the middle classes in Australian society, coupled with the absence of a leisured, educated upper class. 'What Australia badly needs is not a ruling class but an educated class' (Pringle, *Australian Accent*, p. 112). Qualitatively the Australian intellectual is often not of the same standard as the English or the best Americans.

Middle class intellectuals were very important numerically in the communist parties in Britain and the United States, and the 1956 crisis was accordingly more severe for those parties. Intellectuals did play a rather more important role in the leadership and rank-and-file of the Victorian Communist Party, though even so they were suspect.

Why were communist intellectuals stronger in Melbourne? The answer is linked with that to a wider question; why have intellectuals generally been more numerous in Melbourne? It is only partly a matter of size; Sydney is larger than Melbourne, but its intellectual life is rather less striking. It is partly a matter of class structure. The urban middle classes have been somewhat stronger in Victoria than elsewhere. Sydney has many of the characteristics of a working class city; during the 19th century its middle class was a commercial one, a client of the pastoralists.

Partly because of this pattern the private schools in Victoria have been stronger than in N.S.W. Secondary schooling was longer - six years for matriculants. Thus university students at Melbourne had a different educational and social background to those at Sydney. A great deal of the intellectual leadership in Melbourne was the product of private schools. In 1946 Melbourne University had an enrolment of 7,300 and Sydney 8,500. Yet the University Labour Club in Melbourne numbered some 400 and that in Sydney only some 120. At Melbourne University the S.C.M. was stronger than in Sydney and often co-operated with the L.C. In Sydney the FreeThought Society and 'Andersonianism' provided a rival to Labour Club influence. It should be remembered, however, that the post-war period was one of heightened political interest in all universities for a number of special reasons.

Another example of the reaction of communist intellectuals to the 1956 crisis may be seen in developments in the Australia-China Society. This society was founded in 1951, and was not dominated by Stalinist communists. The communists who occupied official positions were not anxious to see their more stalinistic colleagues move into the society. Following the 1956-7 crisis both the National Secretary and the Victorian Secretary of the Australia-China Society left the C.P., the latter being expelled for attending a Socialist Forum meeting, and the former for attending an 'Outlook' Discussion Group. The result was that the C.P. had no replacements of any calibre to hand.

### 4. Communists and the Trade Unions

Communist influence in trade unions has frequently arisen more from the personal ability of communist leaders and their willingness to follow a militant policy than from any interest in communism among trade unionists. However, the link between trade unionism and politics is often close. Because most trade unions are affiliated to the Australian Labour Party communists can at times try to influence Labour Party conferences. Moreover, Leninist theory stresses the importance of raising trade union interests from purely economic matters to political ones. The desire and the ability of communists to do so, however, has varied from period to period.

The decline of communist influence in trade unions has come about not merely because of a natural decline of radicalism under conditions of full employment, higher wages, and the spread of hire-purchase (which encourages greater continuity in work) but also through the struggle of anti-communist groups (such as the Industrial Groups) and through a number of scandals involving ballot rigging in the Communist-controlled union elections.

In 1945 communist influence in the trade unions was strong. According to J.M. Riordan, involved in the anti-communist struggle and not necessarily objective, 'Communist Threat to Australian Labor' in *Free Trade Union News*, February 1960), the communists had secured a majority of the delegates at the Australian

Council of Trade Unions Conference and controlled all but one of the state branches (i.e., the trades and labour councils). Sharpley (*The Great Delusion*, p. 67) says that at this conference the C.P. just missed gaining control. At this time, however, the Communist Party was following a moderate industrial policy. About 1948 came a swing to the left, with greater emphasis on strikes and anti-governmental action. This swing, together with the onset of the Cold War, led to a campaign against communist trade union influence. In May 1949 the federal cabinet cancelled the appointments of the two communist members of the Commonwealth Stevedoring Industry Commission and asked the Waterside Workers' Federation to nominate two new members. (S.M.H., 13/5/49). On 27th June the Communist-controlled Miners' Federation called a strike which lasted till the first week in August. This strike marked the beginning of the decline of communist influence in trade unions.

In 1949 the A.C.T.U. seceded from the communist-led World Federation of Trade Unions, and at its bi-annual congress in September 1951 affiliated to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, voting being 236 for and 152 against. In June 1952 the A.C.T.U. suspended three communist-controlled unions (Waterside Workers' Federation, Australian Miners' Federation, Seamen's Union) for failure to sever their affiliation with the W.F.T.U. (shortly after, the A.M.F. did end its affiliation with the W.F.T.U.).

The ability of the communists to call political strikes slowly declined. In 1937 Australian waterside workers held up the *Dalfram*, carrying pig-iron to Japan. In 1945-7 they placed a ban on Dutch shipping, to help the Indonesians. The Waterside Workers' Federation and the Seamen's Union resolved not to assist the shipment of troops and munitions to Malaya. But in 1954 the most these unions could do was to delay the *Kudnor*, carrying supplies to Indo-China, for a short period, and this not on political grounds but because of lack of amenities for waterside workers. However, both wharf-labourers and seamen are engaged in declining industries and are also threatened by automation, and the decline in strike activity may owe something to this fact.

During 1952 and 1953 the communists suffered some spectacular defeats in large trade unions, but following the 1954-5 split in the A.L.P. and the repudiation of the industrial groups by this party, the deterioration of communist influence in trade unions stopped. The A.L.P. subsequently denounced the policy of 'unity tickets' (combined C.P.-A.L.P. tickets in union elections), but in Victoria this policy has continued.

At the 1955 A.C.T.U. Congress 2 communists were elected to the interstate executive. This rose to 4 in 1947, but dropped to 3 in 1959.

How far is communist influence a cause, and how far an effect? Don Rawson has pointed out that communist control of a union does not necessarily cause strikes (*Trade Unions in Australia*, 1959, pp. 137-8):

Nearly everyone, including the Communists themselves, has a vested interest in demonstrating that a union under Communist leadership is very different from a union under any other leadership. This has the advantage of being partly true. Communist officials have no inhibitions against fomenting strikes and it is in the interests of the Communist Party if the Australian economy is weakened as a result. However, we are sometimes unwilling to appreciate that unionists who elect Communists are probably people who would be likely to strike anyway and who are not much interested in the general health of the economy. The rapid changes back and forth in the leadership of many unions over the last few years have provided plenty of evidence that the mere substitution of Communist for non-Communist officials need not produce important changes in industrial policy.

### Appendix B: More Data on the New Left

#### 1. The Catholic New Left

The split in the Labour Party has helped to weaken the link between Catholics and political labour. The redefinition of socialism in terms of decentralisation, the withering away of the state, and control from below (workers' control) has made it easier for sincere Catholics to endorse socialism as a valid objective, something which was not so easy when socialism was taken as total nationalisation and total state control. Moreover, a Catholic intelligentsia seems to have developed in Australia since the war; Catholics are no longer mainly working class in social origin. A small section of this new intelligentsia is gravitating to socialism. Some evidence of this new stream of thought may be found in *Prospect* (founded in 1958) and *The Catholic Worker* (established in 1936). Recently *The Catholic Worker* has grown into something more like a monthly magazine than a newspaper, and is rather more intellectual in tone than its name might suggest. Vincent Buckley, who is on the editorial committee of *The Catholic Worker* and is co-editor of *Prospect*, prefers to describe this tendency as 'radical pluralism' rather than socialist. ('Is there a New Catholic left?', *The Observer*, April 16, 1960.) In June 1960 *The Catholic Worker* wrote: 'We would not accept either of the descriptions "socialist" or "left".' The Melbourne base of this tendency is worthy of note.

#### 2. The New Left, 1960

During 1959-60 the new left has been marking time. 1960 opened with a second interstate conference in Sydney in January, at which some 30 attended, from Sydney, Canberra, and Melbourne. The collapse of the Outlook Committee in Melbourne at the end of 1959, however, was not followed by any immediate reorganisation. The essence of the dispute was over attitudes to the Victorian A.L.P., which is further to the left than other state branches and which has maintained some links with the communists, e.g. on the matter of unity tickets. Discussion groups appear to be less active than in 1959. However, both Outlook in Sydney and *Overland* in Melbourne have maintained their policy of holding occasional readers' meetings.

#### 3. The S.L.P. Group

I have received the following statement from a small Socialist Labour Party group in Sydney:

The Sydney S.L.P. Study and Discussion Group was formed in November, 1957, for the purpose of re-establishing the Socialist Labour Party in Australia. This Group is based upon the fundamental principles of Marx, Engels, Morgan and De Leon. The Socialist Labour Party advocates the ending of Capitalism by means of the peaceful plan of Socialist Industrial Unionism formulated by Daniel De Leon. In pursuance of these aims, the Group holds four meetings each week to conduct Group activities, study and speakers' classes, etc. This Group so far has concentrated its efforts on the sale and distribution of the 'Weekly People', official organ of the Socialist Labour Party of America, and literature published by that party. This has been done as a preparatory step before the actual launching of the Socialist Labour Party in Australia.



## 4. The Trotskyists

I have received the following communication concerning trotskyism in Australia:

Your interesting monograph *The Socialist Left in Australia, 1949-59* is not quite accurate in regard to Trotskyism. The Trotskyist organisation, the Australian Section of the Fourth International, has functioned continuously since 1933. It did not group into a faction in 1956-57.

There was a minority secession from the Fourth International in 1953, resulting in non-participating organisations functioning in USA, Britain and one or two other countries. This followed the F.I. adoption of the Pablo (F.I. Secretary) theses on the 'Rise, Decline and Fall of Stalinism'. These theses explained stalinism as the product in the isolated Workers' State of the period of reaction which followed the post-First World War revolutionary upsurge, and which would prove more and more out of consonance with the new world revolutionary upsurge, in which conditions the Soviet bureaucracy would not maintain its erst-while monolithism.

The sectarians who reacted against this living marxism have since seen the Pablo theses validated by events and no longer maintain their original line of opposition. The neo-trotskyist group members in Sydney were accepted to membership of the Australian Section of the F.I. at Easter, 1960. The Section's public organ is *International*.

## Addendum C: Some Comments on Criticisms

## 1. 'No Red Star to Guide', by K. D. Galt (Nation, May 21, 1960)

The review of the first edition of this monograph in *Nation* was generally favourable. It summarised many of the main points of the monograph, though like most of the reviews concentrating on the crisis in the Communist Party and neglecting the Fabian socialists and the dissident groups. A number of possible omissions were mentioned, mostly relevant to developments in Melbourne.

## 2. 'Ex-Communists', by F. Kapfelmacher (The Observer, May 28, 1960)

Most of this review was framed in emotional and abusive language. The first column of the article was a sober summary of some features of the monograph, particularly the discussion of communist developments. The next two columns mentioned certain omissions; e.g. failure to suggest reasons for the special strength of communist intellectuals in Melbourne, failure to consider the relative weakness of communist intellectuals in Australia, by contrast with Britain and America, the alleged failure to consider the impact of the 1956 crisis on fellow-travellers, and a denial of something not said in the monograph - that there was an atmosphere of repression in Australia in the early 1950s. These points have been taken up in Addendum A. The final two columns moved into the sphere of fantasy. Communism's strength was claimed to be unshaken. ('The influence of the Party... is now exercised mainly through fellow-travellers, by

manipulating the emotions, delusions - for example anti-Catholicism -, and interests of essentially unpollitical neutralists.') Reference was made to orders from overseas to communists operating among middle class groups, students intellectuals, and businessmen to disguise their political identity, and stress was laid on alleged betrayal by intellectuals, infiltration into universities, subversion by fellow-travellers, etc. A typical comment follows:

Only a politically blind man can fail to notice the familiar signs of emergent quisingism... the often minute but significant signs of commission, but more frequently of omission, occurring at times in the most unlikely quarters... Communist influence... will grow, if the pernicious doctrine now peddled by the more degenerate and treacherous among our 'illuminati' is allowed to spread unopposed.

3. Note in *The Sun-Herald* (Sydney), June 5, 1960

This two-paragraph comment describes the monograph as 'painsaking, well-documented', but questions whether it is worthwhile expending so much energy on such a limited problem. The answer to this is that the decline of socialist movements and radicalism has been widespread in many countries since 1950 and deserves to be explained. The rise of a new left and a new concept of socialism also calls for an explanation.

## 4. 'Is There a New Left?', by D. J. I. (Libertarian Society Broadsheet, Sydney, June, 1960)

The review in this roneoed foolscap bulletin is one of the best because of the moderation of the language used and the fairness in which the monograph's contents are summarised before being answered. The author questions whether intellectuals have ever been really strong in the Communist Party and argues that 'rather than any "new left" what we have is the old left outside of the formal C.P. organisation. Nothing is very new about them except their interest in thioism... People who are not anti-communist are in the position of not having seen through one of the great illusions of our time'. This lack of new interests is shown by the fact that the Sydney Anarchist Group gets one mention in the monograph and the Libertarians none.

## 5. 'The New Left... How Important?', by M. J. Charlesworth (Catholic Worker, June, 1960)

Like the Libertarians, Catholics have the advantage of discussing matters such as this from a background of social theory and from a position. This review outlines the content of the monograph quite adequately and fairly but, like the *Sun-Herald* and unlike the *Observer's* reviewer, wonders whether the socialist left is sufficiently important to justify a detailed study.