

For a Socialist Democracy

Ever since the Kerr-Fraser coup of November 11, 1975 many people have realised that Australia's democracy is not as healthy or as perfect as some claim and many believe. A big movement has grown up calling for a new, democratic constitution to replace the outdated and undemocratic one we have at present. The Citizens for Democracy movement has also called for any new constitution to be adopted by a democratically elected people's convention following a broad national debate.

HOW FREE ARE WE

Australians do have more civil, political and democratic rights than many other people. These important rights were in the main won by ordinary people in struggles for basic rights and a decent way of life. Even these rights are under various forms of attack. The right to strike and to organise freely in trade unions and on the jobs have always been subject to restrictions and are now under severe threat from Fraser with his industrial relations bill.

Then there is the question of whether our democracy goes nearly far enough and how real it is for the average person. One part of real rights is how much power people have to influence things and to carry out what they want. In theory a millionaire and an unemployed person have the same political rights. Yet everybody knows that the millionaire exercises far more power and influence than someone on the dole - and not just in business.

What is needed is social and economic democracy so that rights and freedoms take on real meaning for everybody.

When Australia's constitution was first drafted many opposed it as undemocratic and raised demands such as a single chamber parliament, one vote, one value and democratic control over the appointment of the Governor-General. These and other traditional demands of the democratic movement have now resurfaced with new force.

Having in mind the actions in November 1975 of those upholding the present system, can even these limited reforms be achieved without a powerful movement by large numbers of people?



In any case, do these reforms, important as they are, now go far enough to meet the needs of today, or do our problems require a decisive extension of democracy?

The important starting principle should be that already adopted by Citizens for Democracy: that all public power should derive from the people. This means that we must fight for more than the basic political rights of representative democracy. Power must be decentralised out of the hands of big business and big bureaucracy. There should be public ownership of big economic concerns and real control by those who work in them, subject to guidelines set democratically by all.

Neither capitalist societies nor present socialist countries provide participatory democratic rights at all levels of social life. The alternative suggested by the CPA is self-management socialism which would allow the exercise of far more real power by ordinary people than under capitalism or bureaucratic socialism.