

RECONSTRUCTING AUSTRALIAN COMMUNISM

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IN December, 1971, the Communist Party of Australia suffered its second split in eight years. In 1963, a relatively small grouping had left the party to form the Peking-oriented Communist Party of Australia (Marxist–Leninist). By comparison, the later split was far more traumatic: it took three years—during part of which period the party was virtually paralysed—to come to a head; it compromised the CPA internationally; and the new party, the Socialist Party of Australia, took with it much of the CPA's trade union support and many of its most experienced cadres. In this article I shall attempt to show that this **trauma represented** an important stage in the party's coming to terms with its own history, and was inevitable if the party was to develop as an effective revolutionary force. Further, I shall argue that, despite its critical weakness immediately following the 1971 split, the CPA is now demonstrating the potential to lead a viable communist movement in Australia.

The Origins of Australian Labourism and Communism

Contemporary Australian society presents a fairly orthodox, advanced capitalist appearance. It is highly industrialized and urbanized, and its monopolistic economic structure is thoroughly penetrated by foreign capital: The final touch to this normality is a new social democratic **régime** armed with working class electoral support on the one hand, and the latest OECD capitalist development plans on the other. But a closer examination of this social formation reveals **unique**—and politically significant—characteristics, the product of the **peculiar** development of capitalism in **Australia**.¹

When this development began in the early nineteenth century, the capitalist mode of production was already dominant in England, along with large-scale **industry**. In contrast to the process of capitalist development in Europe, Australian capitalism did not emerge from the upheavals of any transition from feudalism: its components, human and material, were at first simply imported. While capital formation **presented** few difficulties, the absence of a class **dependent** for its livelihood on the sale of its labour-power was a constant obstacle. The

convicts and free settlers, who made up the earliest workforce, found plenty of scope for their entrepreneurial talents in the large tracts of cheap and arable land, and on the goldfields from 1851. The availability of land, and the fact that fortunes—or at least sufficient personal wealth to ensure financial independence—could be literally picked up off the ground without any capital outlay, played havoc with the class structure upon which capitalist production depends. (In the concluding pages of Volume One of *Capital*, Marx draws attention to this problem in the case of a Mr Peel who prudently imported his own supply of labour-power into Western Australia, only to see it lured away on arrival by better prospects than those offered by Mr Peel's subsistence wages.) Labour-power thus became an expensive commodity indeed: even convicts, who were forced to work for wages, received more than their "free" proletarian brethren in England, and real wages doubled in Australia between 1840 and 1890.

This early experience had a profound influence on the formation of working class organizations and ideology. What were probably the best wages and conditions in the world, together with the excellent prospects of social "betterment", obscured the basic antagonism between capital and labour. Social inequalities were neither as extreme nor as inescapable as in Europe, and this comparison fostered the myth of Australia as a "classless society" and "the workingman's paradise". The small craft unions that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century, far from being expressions of class antagonisms, were associations of solid, respectable citizens, only too willing to unite with other sections of the community to "keep the water on and the foreigners off". In many cases, their charters expressed their main function to be upholding of law and order, and even the Word of God. The early capitalists, for their part, had little need for labour-repressive policies. Primary accumulation was facilitated by the importation of capital, the discovery of gold and high prices for agricultural exports. Scarcity of labour militated against the establishment of labour-intensive industries, but profit-rates were high in mining, grazing and other enterprises in which labour was a relatively minor factor.

The colonial administrations played a typically interventionist role in capitalist development, in the provision of investment funds, transport and subsidies. Moreover, all classes united and easily thwarted the squatters' attempt to limit access to representative institutions by establishing a hereditary assembly of "the bunyip aristocracy". The first trade union representative was elected to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly as early as 1859; ease of access to such bodies bolstered the illusion that the state was a neutral umpire in any clash of interests and any legitimate interest could only benefit from its intervention.

In these circumstances, the emergence of labour parties in the Australian colonies in the 1890s hardly represented a working class assault on the representative institutions of the state. They were pragmatic organizations formed to co-ordinate the activities of the existing parliamentary representatives of the small craft unions. These representatives, who were in many cases propertied notables, pursued policies in which genuine working class interests were dissolved in class collaborationist practices and which were wrapped up in an ideology that combined petty bourgeois radicalism, populism, racism, chauvinism and idolatry of state power. That is not to say that they were unfaithful to their constituents, still less to their own class origins. Capitalist and worker perceived common enemies: Russian and Japanese military invasion, an influx of Asian immigrant workers or cheap foreign commodities, and the "squatocracy's" predilection for free trade.

From the 1890s on, when the first "long boom" ended, industrial strife did break out, and workers were violently suppressed by troops and police. In spite of these obvious manifestations of class violence and partisanship on the part of the state, the fact remained, as Humphrey McQueen put it, "Unionists wanted nothing better than to talk to their employers; and when the employers refused to talk, the unionists wanted the government to make them."²²

The stage was thus set in 1907 for a deal between the trade unions and capital that was to set the pattern for Australia's economic and political development for decades. Compulsory arbitration of industrial disputes by state appointees, a White Australia policy and protectionism were the elements of that deal, and the Australian Labour Party, above all, remained unshakeably loyal to these three great national institutions for the next sixty-six years. It is a grim irony that the trade union movement itself initiated the arbitration system which has allowed the state to bind the unions to it in a way that Edward Heath could only envy. In 1911 a Labour Attorney-General proposed the notorious "penal powers" which, in their developed form, armed the state with power to fine and de-register unions, and to imprison union officials who refused to pay fines, disobeyed injunctions or otherwise found themselves "in contempt of court".

It is true that, from its formation up to the late 1960s, the ALP proclaimed the intention to introduce greater social equality and ultimately even "socialism". But its "socialist" vision was as innocent of any marxist influence as it was of class combativity, proletarian internationalism or criticism of capitalist social relations. Its egalitarianism was as much an aggressive nationalist celebration of existing Australian society as it was a—passively enunciated—prophecy of its eventual evolution to socialism. While the occasional threats to "cut off

the heads of the tall poppies" have not been welcomed in ruling circles, the ALP's actual record in office could only inspire their confidence. A Labour government in 1910 made Australia the first English-speaking country to introduce military training in peacetime, and Labour governments have been entrusted with the nation's affairs in both world wars. While in office, the ALP has demonstrated its sensitivity to the interests of capital in energetic strike-breaking, featherbedding inefficient industries by raising tariffs whenever called upon, and financing the expansion of local and foreign-owned enterprises. Even the establishment of General Motors, the largest car manufacturer in Australia, was originally financed by a Labour Government.

In the 1890s, when the long boom ended, a series of bitter and protracted strikes occurred among miners, shearers and some other industries where greater concentrations of workers were to be found. These strikes, and the working class movement that slowly emerged in the aftermath, were the first **stirrings** of proletarian organization and ideology in the country. In the early years of the twentieth century, the IWW was the backbone of this movement, but small, socialist groupings grew up at the same time.

By the time the Bolshevik Revolution occurred, the ALP had already extended its influence over the trade union movement as a whole, although this influence remained weakest in the few unions based on relatively large-scale industries. The development of these industries, and the rise of larger concentrations of workers, were the still unfulfilled preconditions of a revolutionary proletarian movement. When the first reports of the events in Russia reached Australia, the few expressions of unmixed enthusiasm came mainly from small syndicalist, anarchist and socialist groups. It was an enthusiasm uninformed by any knowledge of Bolshevism as such. In the wake of the Russian Revolution, some of these groups came together to form the Communist Party of Australia^s in October, 1920, but the new party was a highly unstable amalgam, none of whose elements could be described as **marxist** in any real sense.

From its first attendance at Comintern congresses in 1921, the CPA began to receive the former's literature and ideas, but these had little impact in stimulating an interest in **marxist** theory. By the time Australian communists were becoming aware of the advantages of prefiguring their activity in theoretical terms, the Comintern had fallen under Stalin's influence and had ceased to be an inspiration for the development of **marxist** theory. While its theoretical analyses and tactical pronouncements were never denied the lip-service of the CPA, they were often shelved in practice. Some commentators have interpreted the shifts in CPA theory and practice in terms of a constant struggle between two influences: a native radical tradition that

supposedly inspired its constituent elements on the one hand, and a rag-bag of foreign doctrines imported from the Comintern on the other. But it was an instinctive sensitivity to local conditions that prompted deviations from Comintern policy, rather than an alternative strategic perspective.

The Depression dealt a heavy blow to the Australian working class: half a million were unemployed, and those who retained their jobs were forced to accept large cuts in wages and increases in working hours. The CPA threw its weight behind two important movements—the Unemployed Workers' Movement and the Militant Minority Movement. Through the latter, it established rank-and-file organizations within trade unions to mobilize support for militants opposing conservative and opportunist leaderships. The party first captured official trade union positions in this way in the Miners Federation in 1933, and similar success followed, especially on the waterfront, which became a traditional preserve of communist influence. The party itself grew from 500 members in 1929 to 2,500 by the end of 1931, and its lack of political coherence at this time was matched by its militancy and "mass style of work". In the same period, the party established a mass anti-fascist movement which attracted many liberal intellectuals and other non-proletarian elements who had no other affinity with marxism than a recoil from fascism. The main focus of party work, however, remained in the unions.

This emphasis was crucial for the external and internal development of the party. Within the trade unions, the prospects of dislodging more and more rightwing leaderships, and even of achieving dominance over the Australian Council of Trade Unions, were good. On the other hand, the obstacles to even modest electoral success—single member constituencies, the established two-party system, weighting of rural votes and gerrymandering—were insuperable. Communist participation in elections could then be no more than an opportunity to inveigh against the farce of bourgeois democracy, and the CPA ran a much smaller risk of falling into "parliamentary cretinism" than many of its fraternal parties.

But trade union politics proved to have its own dangers for a revolutionary party. Once elected to office, communists were forced to operate within bureaucratic frameworks and to fight the employers and the state with the weapons available within those frameworks. In consolidating their positions, elected officials often resorted to the same manipulative tactics as their opponents. The party's preoccupation with gaining and holding official positions, together with its lack of political development, left it incapable of resisting its militants' degeneration into economism and bureaucratism. Moreover, as the number of communist trade union officials grew, so did their influence

within the party, which increasingly reflected their economist outlook and bureaucratic style. The gradual penetration of stalinist dogmatism and authoritarianism merely reinforced these tendencies, hindering the development of revolutionary politics and marxist theory.

The Second World War brought another massive influx of members into the CPA: at the end of the war its membership was estimated at 23,000. This membership was an insubstantial pageant, swelled by "Red Army communists" who quickly melted away on the unglamorous battlefield of the cold war. Nonetheless the CPA, enjoying greater prestige and the reflected glory of triumphant Soviet armies, felt emboldened to confront the ALP (then in office) with a good deal more animus than it had shown in the Third Period (1928-35) when the Comintern had called on Communists to direct "the main blow" against social democratic parties. Its political line against social democracy in general brought it into open conflict with the CPGB. In view of the present restraint on mutual criticism within the international communist movement, not to speak of the liquidationist strategies many communist parties promote in collaborating with social democratic parties, it is refreshing to reread the polemics between the CPGB and the CPA, however wooden their style may seem to us now. The debate began with a letter from the CPA Political Committee criticizing the CPGB's support of the Attlee government:

"The false estimation of the role of social democracy and of the economic and political condition of Britain reached its climax in the [CPGB] Central Committee's pronouncement that Britain was 'in transition to socialism'. The non-marxist character of this estimation is quite clear when it is remembered that we are here dealing with the second strongest imperialist power in the world, where monopoly capitalism is in complete control and the bourgeois state has not been undermined and the government is led by social democrats whose role is so well-known to all students of marxism-leninism as that of the saviours of capitalism, more particularly in the moments of gravest crisis.

"The 'transition to socialism' theory is plainly without any foundation in fact but reinforces the assertions of the Labour Government leaders that they are marching to socialism along the 'middle path', thus again strengthening the social democratic illusions among the masses. This false estimation of social democracy is still continued, in our opinion, by the new slogan of the so-called 'Left Labour Government'. The whole line. . . is a tailing behind social-democratic leaders and it led to the illusion, oft repeated, that the Labour Government 'could be forced to operate a socialist policy at home and abroad'. It is true that mass pressure could force a policy of peace and co-operation with the Soviet Union, but this does not yet constitute a Socialist policy. Consequently, the idle chatter about forcing the enemies of Socialism to adopt a socialist policy at home and abroad merely helped in the deception of the masses."¹⁴

The party's new confidence was bolstered by the rapid development of heavy industry in Australia during the war and in the boom that followed it. The party had never made significant inroads into rural

and small craft unions, but its efforts in the larger unions during the thirties and forties had been crowned with success. Immediately after the war, communists added to their prestige by leading a number of well-timed strikes, and were clearly threatening the ALP's hegemony in the trade union movement as a whole. Within the ALP, however, attitudes towards the communists were hardening, and certain catholic elements, actively supported by the church hierarchy, began a virulent anti-communist campaign within the trade unions. In 1949 communists, overestimating their own support, led a coalminers' strike which disrupted many other industries. The Labour Government sensed the growing isolation of the communist strike-leaders, enacted draconian legislation to counter their agitation, and finally sent troops in to work the mines. The breaking of this strike was a major turning point in the party's fortunes, the beginning of a decline that only ended in the early seventies. The party simplistically interpreted this defeat as due to "sectarianism" towards the ALP, and during the fifties, it constantly vacillated between united front policies and renewed bouts of "sectarianism". The extent of the ALP's hostility can be judged by that party's decision in 1950 not to oppose the new Liberal Government's legislation outlawing the CPA. When the High Court declared the new law unconstitutional, it was submitted to a referendum. It was largely due to the influence of the new ALP leader, H. V. Evatt, that Labour now opposed the anti-communist legislation, and the referendum was defeated by a narrow margin.

In the fifties, the party was diminished, isolated, and very much on the defensive. Its only comfort was the consolidation of Soviet power in Eastern Europe and the victory of the Chinese Revolution. But the more it identified with international communism and reproduced the latter's line, the more it contributed to its cold war image as a foreign incubus in the Australian body politic. It was in this decade, however, that a large number of CPA cadres went to China for extensive training, in which they gained a solid grounding in marxist theory and imbibed the "central lesson" of the Chinese experience as their mentors saw it: a successful revolutionary strategy is based upon an analysis of the national situation rather than upon the mechanical application of universal prescriptions. Given the prominent part later played by Chinese-trained leaders in initiating the present trends in the CPA and in engendering within it a theoretical debate, the CPC must be seen as a decisive influence in the development of a self-generating marxist tradition in Australia.

The habit of independent analysis, however, had little time to develop before the Sino-Soviet dispute presented the party with one of its most serious dilemmas. The leadership wavered between support for the one side then the other, and a clear division emerged within the ranks of

prominent cadres. The issues themselves were complex enough: the validity of the Soviet-proclaimed peaceful co-existence strategy (based upon the assumption that world imperialism would be outstripped, and thereby destroyed, by the economic development of the Soviet bloc), the peaceful — not to mention parliamentary — road to socialism in advanced capitalist countries, and the independent role of wars of national liberation in the anti-imperialist struggle. The CPA's experience with labourism and state intervention in defence of capital at home, and its contacts with Chinese, Vietnamese and Indonesian communism abroad, gave it good grounds to doubt the entire Soviet strategy.⁵

But in the party's internal struggle, these issues were skewed and overlaid by the pro-Chinese faction's loyalty to Stalin, and the stalinist manoeuvring, demagoguery and vulgarization of theory indulged in by both sides. In fact, the split that eventually occurred in 1963 was a classic illustration of the self-destructive tendencies inherent in stalinist parties, particularly in their unresponsiveness to any influence but the inscrutable pronouncements of their leaders, and *raison d'état* glossed over with dogmatic phrases. The opacity of the salient terms of the debate ("creativemarxism", "the struggle for peace", "neo-trotskyism" etc.) was the measure of the distance that the party would have to traverse if it was ever to achieve a clear perception of its political tasks and what the tasks demanded of it.

For the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist), which the pro-Chinese faction founded in 1964, this journey never began. Though dependent on Chinese patronage, it has remained untouched by the theoretical contributions of Chinese communism.⁶ It fairly quickly degenerated into a sect with secret membership and a prolific press which does little but repetitively celebrate Chinese development, heap personal abuse on CPA leaders and advocate armed struggle. About 200 ex-CPA members, almost all from Melbourne, joined it, including some prominent trade union officials.

Immediately after the 1963 split, the CPA could hardly have presented a more orthodox appearance. Those who had been disquieted by the revelations of the CPSU Twentieth Congress had failed to force a timely reappraisal of the past, and the leadership had failed to so much as circulate the text of Khrushchev's speech, let alone unleash a debate on its implications for the CPA. The crushing of the Hungarian uprising shortly after had been met with the same complacency, even though the combined effect of the two events was a mass exodus from the party, especially by intellectuals. The party organization was of a classic bureaucratic centralist type in which internal debate was almost totally absent. Indeed, a talent for infiltrating and controlling bureaucratic structures was encouraged by the internal workings of the party

and it was an indispensable skill for the party's style of intervention into trade union affairs. This skill was regarded as sufficient qualification for a revolutionary cadre.

The orthodox appearance of the party, however, was not able to mask for long trends that were eventually to lead the party out of the mainstream of the international communist movement. The CPSU Twentieth Congress had left a permanent question mark over party infallibility, however inadequate its "revelations" were from a marxist viewpoint and however the CPA continued to avoid its real implications. Similarly, the Sino-Soviet dispute had irreversibly shattered the monolith of "the socialist world" and had created two competing systems of revealed truth, neither of which was exactly illuminating the CPA's way forward. By 1964 the old "internationalist" leadership was being replaced by new leaders such as Laurie and Eric Aarons, John Sendy and Bernie Taft. Even though this group was at first indistinguishable from its predecessors on the issue of orientation towards the-Soviet Union, they had all undergone training in China in the preceding decade, and shared an—as yet unexpressed—impatience with the banal prescriptions which the Kremlin dispensed to the faithful in the international communist movement. Their accession marked the beginning of the CPA's slow and groping development of an independent stance.

The Developing Crisis

The growth of a critical attitude towards the Soviet régime in the mid-sixties provoked little articulate opposition within the CPA. In line with a decision of the Political Committee, an Australian delegation to the USSR in 1964 criticized the manner of Khrushchev's removal and the subsequent expunging of his name from official history. It called for discussion of anti-semitism and political censorship in the USSR. Soon after, the CPA Central Committee voiced criticisms of the trial of Daniel and Sinyavsky. On his return from Moscow in 1964, Laurie Aarons declared, "We do not follow a Moscow line, a Peking line or an Italian line. Ours is an Australian line." The following year, a CPA delegation visiting Moscow was asked to sign a long anti-Chinese article which had actually been written by CPSU publicists. The delegation's refusal (later unanimously endorsed by the CPA Political Committee) strained relations between the two parties.⁷ The fact that these and other demonstrations of independence went virtually unchallenged in the party up to the invasion of Czechoslovakia, far from signifying unanimity, was due to the conception of party discipline held by the more orthodox cadres—a conception which proscribed the public airing of differences, even in defence of the Socialist Motherland.

The growing critical attitude to the Soviet Union was only an outward sign of a more important process of theoretical development within the CPA from 1964 to 1968. Notwithstanding the above disclaimer of an "Italian line", the PCI was a natural focus of Australian attention at the time. Its legitimation of a national analysis and its mass work were readily appreciated by Chinese-trained cadres. Moreover, the Italians had criticized Soviet "democracy" and had advanced a concept of socialist pluralism which the CPA leadership saw as a far more appropriate model for western socialism than its monolithic Soviet counterpart. PCI policies, however, have never been accepted in *toto*: its predilection for gradualism and parliamentarism were foreign to the traditions of the CPA.

The new task assumed by the leadership now revealed the extent of the party's theoretical impoverishment and isolation from the debate in the intellectual community. For the resurgence of marxist thought was beginning to have an impact in Australian universities, and it was clearly in the party's interests to participate in the revived radical intellectual movement. In 1965 it was decided to discontinue the party's theoretical journal, *Communist Review*, and start another to be called *Australian Left Review*. The aim of the new publication was to sensitize the party to the most recent developments in western marxism, and provide a forum for exploratory theoretical contributions from the party itself. Above all, it was intended to attract contributions from non-party intellectuals, and for this purpose the new journal was placed under an independent editorial collective whose members were not necessarily in the party. It has always suffered from the tension between its purpose of breaking new theoretical ground and its need to appeal to a broad readership, but it nevertheless played a central role in introducing new concepts and issues into the party, and stimulating debate on fundamental questions which had formerly been answered by "authoritative pronouncements".

The re-orientation of the party was given enormous impetus by the social and political radicalization from 1965. In the twenty years since the end of the Second World War, the "long boom" had done much to deaden political life in Australia. The myth of "the lucky country" had a good deal of factual basis, in a world economic conjuncture which favoured Australian agricultural exports and which attracted a large capital inflow to stimulate its new secondary and mining industries. The "unlucky" ones were also the silent or readily silenced—the 20% of the population who lived below the poverty line, the Aborigines who were totally isolated (if not actually interned) on "reserves", cattle stations and in shanty towns, and the migrants who, because of their ethnic divisions and inexperience of local conditions, were easy prey to super-exploitation. Thanks to these conditions and to the cold war,

the Menzies Liberal government had been able to maintain its sixteen year dominance in spite of its mediocrity, ineptitude and conservatism. But from 1965, when Menzies introduced a harsh conscription scheme and committed troops in Vietnam, the consensus collapsed. As in the United States, the peace and anti-draft movement was centred in the universities, where there was already widespread dissatisfaction with the parlous state to which Liberal policy and mismanagement had reduced the education system.

The CPA leadership correctly predicted the explosive potential in this political situation, and pushed for the party's active participation in new radical struggles. Far from being prompted by a shrewd opportunism, this orientation went hand in hand with the growth of a new conception of the revolutionary process in advanced capitalist society, and the relation between the revolutionary party and the wider movement. The inapplicability of the Soviet model of revolution was tacitly admitted, but this admission was only the beginning of a painstaking process of coming to grips with the strategic implications of a more complex society, defended (in Gramsci's phrase) by so many superstructural "forward trenches". The work of analysing contemporary capitalism was closely related to the ideological struggle which the leadership now initiated.

The CPA Twenty-first Congress in mid-1967 approved sweeping changes in party organization and orientation. The old "democratic centralist" apparatus was replaced by a new constitution designed to facilitate internal democracy and greater rank-and-file intervention in the workings of the party's decision-making bodies. It also adopted a document entitled *Communists and the Battle of Ideas* which called for greater intervention in ideological debate. But the break with the past was most evident in the searching, 44-page Report of the Central Committee, delivered by Laurie Aarons. The tone of the Report was far from that of an "authoritative pronouncement": it was tentative in its conclusions and self-critical of the anti-intellectualism, sectarianism and lack of theoretical vitality that plagued the party in the past. It raised the problem of the complexity of class structure and the specificity of Australian monopoly capitalism. It presented socialist revolution, no longer as the project of a monolithic working class, but rather that of a bloc of diverse social forces and mass movements: it could only be made by "a coalition of left forces" and would result in a multi-party state. Within the trade unions, unity should not be sought through alliances between factions "at the top", a strategy which holds the labour movement back to conservative programmes based on the lowest common denominator: unity should be forged at the base, within the rank-and-file. Bureaucratic control could only be confronted by rigorous, grass-roots activism which would democratize and unify the

trade union movement and lead in turn to the latter's intervention in political and social issues. The CPA's change in trade union policy at this congress took concrete form in its raising the demand for workers' control in industrial enterprises.

At this point, opposition to the changes was scattered and inarticulate. The main opposition came from party trade union officials disquieted by what they saw as a shift away from a working class orientation towards a preoccupation with student and intellectual issues. Many no doubt felt that the new industrial policies denigrated their own expertise and hard-won positions in existing union apparatuses, and that the political demands they were being asked to raise were "in advance" of the workers. Some of these fears may have been well-founded, but the resistance met was much more a product of the party's earlier neglect of political issues and failure to politicize its industrial cadres. The leadership could not but have been aware that they were making a "revolution from above" and that the process could not be rushed without risk. On the other hand, if the party was to play a leading part in the ongoing mobilization around the new radical demands, it could not afford the time to set its own house in order. The innovations therefore continued apace.

In 1968, two further influences were evident. The first of these was the interest in Gramsci's work. At this stage, his Prison Notebooks were untranslated, and no reliable account of his marxism was available. It is not surprising that a distorted conception of "gramscianism" was imported into the CPA⁸—a conception that inflated the role of intellectuals and confined the problem of hegemony to the sphere of ethics and ideology in a way that obscured the problem of the state. Even industrial agitation tended to be posed in "counter-hegemonic" terms that devalued economic struggles rather than locating them in a comprehensive strategy.

The second influence in this period was the new régime in Czechoslovakia, immediately relevant since the critique of Soviet institutions implicit in the "Prague Spring" echoed that already expressed by the CPA. But more importantly, the Action Programme of the Czechoslovakian party concretized the socialist democracy and "humanist values" which the CPA leadership was at pains to build into its own model of socialist society. The liberalization of Czech society received wide and enthusiastic coverage in the CPA weekly, Tribune, and in June, 1968, Eric Aarons wrote a lengthy appreciation of the Action Programme itself⁹ and its relevance to the development of theory in the CPA.

Given the CPA leadership's pro-Dubcek stand, events in Czechoslovakia could not have avoided precipitating a confrontation with the still silent opposition within the party. In mid-July, 1968, the

National Committee met to discuss the Czech situation and its attitude in the event of a Soviet invasion. It issued a **statement**¹⁰ declaring support for the CCP programme "for socialist regeneration and democratization" and **disapproval** of the slow withdrawal of Warsaw Pact forces after military manoeuvres in Czechoslovakia. It stated its belief that the CCP not only had the right to decide its own programme without interference, but that the success of this programme was of crucial importance to the struggle for socialism in the west. Cadres' meetings were called throughout the country to mobilize support for the CCP and the stand taken by the CPA National Committee.

Within six hours of the news of the 20th August invasion reaching Australia, the CPA National Executive issued an unqualified condemnation of the Soviet action. Whatever remaining loyalty the leadership may have felt towards the Soviet Union died then and there, and far from being content with a ritualistic denunciation, it organized a series of actions and large public meetings to rally support for its position. At the time, almost all of the pro-Soviet faction joined in this **clamour**, and the leadership's past and proposed actions were approved by 37 votes to 2 in the National Committee. Had the CPA let the invasion slip into history, it might well have remained in the mainstream of the international communist movement and might also have contained its pro-Soviet minority within some rough consensus. Such a course of action, however, would have amounted to a complete reversal of policies adopted at the previous congress. The invasion was not, then, to be passed off as an isolated and unfortunate mistake.

Two weeks after the invasion, *Tribune* carried an article by Eric Aarons on the significance of the Soviet action. "Clearly, this was no sudden aberration", he asserted, and the origins of this "monumental blunder" were to be found in the deformations of Soviet society itself. Aarons argued that the Soviet leaders identified the interests of international socialism with their own national interests, power was dangerously concentrated in the bureaucracy, the régime regarded democratization as inconsistent with socialism and it had dogmatized and debased **marxism** into a justification for its own rule.¹¹ Circulation of *Tribune* was thereupon banned in the Soviet Union.

The following issue of *Australian Left Review* carried another contribution on the Czech question by a member of the National Executive, Ted Bacon. Turning the Soviet justification for the invasion—the internal affairs of a socialist country are the legitimate concern of the whole socialist world—on its head, he stated that the mistakes of the USSR were not the internal affair of that country, but are the concern of the entire international movement:

"The occupation of Czechoslovakia has not only cast a shadow on the sincerity of all

[the Soviet leaders'] declarations of principle—it has also demonstrated the necessity for re-examining the past. Denigration of Stalin, Beria, Molotov or Khrushchev were never satisfactory 'explanations' for marxists, but most believed or hoped that the mistakes of the past would never recur, that their causes had been or were being eliminated. Now a continuity of error is revealed and its basic sources must be investigated and properly analysed."¹²

From the Czech crisis on, a dissident minority within the CPA began to materialize. A veteran party functionary, Alf Watt, and the editor of the Miners Federation journal, Edgar Ross, cast the two dissenting votes on the National Committee against the leadership's policy on Czechoslovakia. Two members of the National Executive, Pat Clancy and W. J. Brown, later reversed their stand against the invasion in the light of "new evidence" produced by the Soviet and Czech governments to the effect that a counter-revolutionary coup was imminent immediately prior to the invasion. But it was not the time to organize a right-wing faction, and for another eighteen months the opposition restricted itself to uncoordinated protests against the further implementation of the new policies.

Relations with the CPSU continued to deteriorate throughout 1969, as the Czech issue showed no sign of dying down, and the CPA expressed opposition to the Soviet line before and during the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties held in Moscow in June, 1969. At the preparatory meeting held there three months before, the National President, Richard Dixon, expressed the CPA's disapproval of the draft resolutions intended to be adopted at the main meeting. He declared that it compromised the autonomy of individual parties, camouflaged serious differences over Czechoslovakia and other questions, ignored the growing demands for democratic participation in western societies and its importance for communist movements in those societies. The same criticisms were put more forcefully by Bernie Taft and Laurie Aarons at the Meeting itself, and in the upshot, the CPA refused to endorse those resolutions it had objected to.

In Australia, 1969 saw an intensification of political and social radicalization on many fronts. The most obvious of these was the anti-war and anti-draft movement, but Women's Liberation and the Aboriginal movement were now mobilizing as well. Communists were heavily committed in all these movements, where many cadres were influenced by the New Left. From the right of the party came accusations of adventurism and opportunism, although the party's involvement was clearly in line with its emphasis on self-activating mass movements the thrust of which was "counter-hegemonic" and contributed to a global critique of contemporary capitalism. One challenge that could not be lightly dismissed was directed against the often uncritical acceptance of New Left stances, particularly its branding of all

organization as "Stalinist" and its contempt for working class politics.

But it was the party's industrial policies which drew most fire. Agitation around the slogan "Stop work to stop the war!" was seen as "left-adventurist" even though it evoked a positive response: strikes in support of moratoriums, instances of effective black bans on war material bound for Vietnam as well as increasing involvement of workers in the anti-war movement itself.¹³ The National Committee's encouragement of grass-roots activism and workers' control initiatives were seen as "left-sectarian", since they were offensive to right-wing union officials whom some communist officials saw as useful allies.¹⁴

The question of confronting the penal powers—the powers of industrial tribunals to impose criminal sanctions on trade unions and their officials—was a particular bone of contention. As was noted earlier, the compulsory arbitration system has, since its introduction, played the major role in the containment of working class struggle in Australia, acting as a legalistic umbrella for the direct use of state power in industrial disputes. Its long term benefits have been more-or-less effective wage-pegging in non-political guise, and the reduction of trade unions to what one commentator has described as "part of the apparatus of the state".¹⁵ The penal powers were resorted to frequently by employers and the court, and constituted an effective brake on industrial actions. In January, 1969, the CPA National Committee called for mass action directed against the penal powers, which the minority saw as a "political" question which was "too advanced" for the workers at that stage. Four months later, the Secretary of the Victorian Tramways Union, Clarrie O'Shea, was imprisoned indefinitely for contempt of court for refusing to pay fines imposed on his union. The following day, half a million workers went on strike in what was the beginning of a wave of massive strikes and demonstrations throughout the country. The employers were forced to agree to a permanent moratorium on the use of the penal powers.

Theoretical debate within the party intensified sharply from the latter part of 1969 to the Twenty-second Congress in March 1970. The debate focussed on documents¹⁶ circulated by the leadership and intended to be put to the congress for adoption. The debate was carried on in the journal *Discussion* which came out at short intervals and was exclusively concerned with internal discussion of issues arising out of these documents. The importance of raising democratic demands—including workers' control and the imposition of popular control on the economy—in sharpening the struggle for socialism was given particular emphasis, and extra-parliamentary mass struggle conducted by "the coalition of the left" was envisaged as the decisive process in the socialist transformation of society. This transformation is prefigured within the problematic of Gramsci's "war of position" and creation of a

socialist hegemony: since the decisive confrontation with the state can only occur when that hegemony has been won, the repressive aspects of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" are not as salient as the orthodoxy suggests and tend to deform post-revolutionary society. Participatory democracy and mass activism were seen as the hallmark of the CPA's strategy for social change and its vision of socialist society. These echoes of Mao's "mass line" once again point to the significance of former links with China. In this context, too, far-reaching criticisms are made of the Soviet bloc, now no longer referred to as "socialist", but as "the socialist-based countries".

The trade unions remained the crucial area of struggle. There was a lengthy analysis of "pressures for integration into the system": economist orientation, reformist ideology, the legalist fetish of seeing the arbitration system as delimiting the perspectives of industrial action, the artificial separation of industrial from political issues, and politically undirected militancy ("too much agitation and too little propaganda"). A special section was devoted to a discussion of "conservatism within the Left". The documents called for a confrontation with the fundamental organizing principles of the system—the "sacred rights" of the capitalist class over enterprises, compulsory arbitration and bourgeois legality—and a conscious intervention by trade unions in all spheres of social life. An immediate task was to replace the existing craft union structure with one which would unify the workers in each industry (thus ending the paralysis produced by "demarcation disputes" between unions) and break down the existing separation between professional and manual workers' organizations.

"The new unionism based on wider aims, would recognize that the workers' movement faces a more powerful adversary than the individual capitalist—a closely-knit monopoly-arbitration-government structure which works on a general strategy. The essential aim must be to meet this with an overall strategy for social change, which involves a total challenge in all domains to the influence, domination, power and authority of the owner, controller and manipulator of our society."¹⁷

The minority's attack on the congress documents proceeded from a Soviet-oriented orthodoxy and formalism. The failure to name "marxism-leninism" as the party's source of inspiration was seen as important as the party's lapses from internationalism in failing to recognize the Soviet Union's "leading role" and to endorse the resolutions of the International Meeting and in its recalcitrance over Czechoslovakia. Involvement in the non-proletarian movements was seen as an abandonment of the working class in favour of a left-opportunist practice. The de-emphasis of a repressive proletarian dictatorship constituted a departure from fundamental **marxist-leninist** principles.

The new practice of open internal debate, and the circulation of written polemics placed the minority at a disadvantage. It was not simply that the habit of internal debate was unfamiliar (or perhaps even unsavoury,) to them: they were also opposed by extremely competent publicists. However, the minority now achieved a measure of coherence in campaigning against the acceptance of the leadership's documents by the Twenty-second Congress. Perhaps the clearest statement of the former's position was Alf Watt's pamphlet "Official CPA Congress Documents Analysed", a vigorous attack on the new policies which, in its positive pronouncements, applied the orthodox strategic and tactical precepts of the international communist movement to Australian conditions. More accurately, it reproduced the conventional collapse of strategy into tactics, and of existing class forces into a naively projected social polarization between "the monopolies" and "the people".

The united front is named as the "key tactic" and is intended "to win economic and political reforms". The united front itself was to mean nothing less than "ALP-Communist Unity" and the primary expression of this unity was to be a parliamentary coalition, since parliament "can be filled with genuine representatives of a people's mass movement against monopoly . . . passing laws around which the mass movement can be further rallied, and becoming an organizing centre against monopoly". This tactic was the unavoidable first stage of a two-stage socialist transformation, and the CPA leadership's attempt to promote radical demands represented a "fatal short cut", an "adventurist dream".

What was missing from Watt's pamphlet was any notion of the positive content of the socialist project, and inevitably there was not even an attempted answer to the strategic question of how that content was to be achieved. This strategic renunciation was expressed in the attitude adopted to the programme of the ACTU and "the progressive aspects" of ALP policy, which, "arising from the struggles of the workers, express their vital interests, though perhaps incompletely, and are the best available programme for united front activity and working class advance". This, and rigid insistence on the Soviet model ("Propaganda for anti-Soviet socialism is not propaganda for socialism at all") as the only possible one, exhausted the available "socialist" perspectives.

Watt equated the CPA's criticism of the Soviet Union and failure to endorse the decisions of the 1969 International Conference with anti-communism and capitulation to imperialism. In this context, he applauded—at some length—the PCI's firm stand against "anti-Sovieters" when it expelled the *Il Manifesto* group.

The minority coalesced in the support mobilized for an alternative

programme written by Edgar Ross,¹⁸ in consultation with other prominent members of the minority, for submission to the Twenty-second Congress. It lacked the clarity and pointedness of Watt's polemic, but it expressed the same line and echoed the same silences. It spoke of building "unity on immediate demands" in the unions without coming to grips with the questions of the level at which this unity was to be achieved or the nature of the demands. The defence of "the right to strike" was not informed by a strategy for confrontation with the system which severely curtails that right. Ross affirmed "the decisive role" of the USSR internationally and of the **marxist-leninist** party nationally, and made the following implicit reference to the CPA leadership:

"To be able to play its distinctive role the Communist Party wages an incessant struggle against the infiltration of capitalist ideas into its ranks, and the labour movement as a whole, particularly those which, under the guise of 'bringing **marxism-leninism** up to date' denigrate the role of the working class, suggest that it does not need to set up its own political power, its own state organizations to consolidate socialism, that not the class struggle but propaganda for general 'truths' and moral maxims will bring about socialism and that therefore, not the working class but intellectuals are the leaders of the socialist **cause**."¹⁹

The worst evils that had to be suppressed in the movement at the present time, according to Ross, were "anarchists and followers of the Fourth (Trotskyite) International". In its positive pronouncements, the *Alternative Statement* was distinctly reformist:

"We see as the most important thing the development of a united mass movement around immediate issues posed by the capitalist class and in furtherance of a programme of positive demands reflecting itself in parliament and other spheres, laying the basis for unity to bring about a revolutionary change in society along the lines of the stated objective of the Labour Party and our own—the socialization of the industry, distribution and **exchange**."²⁰

The references to trotskyism in the CPA were to become more common as the polemics intensified, although the only "evidence" of its presence was that a journalist on *Tribune*, Denis Freney, had once been a member of a Pabloite group. A tactic frequently resorted to by the minority was the creation of straw men: the leadership's policies had as little to do with trotskyism as with the abandonment of the theses that the proletariat is the leading revolutionary force and that it must replace the bourgeois state with its own state apparatus.

Thus the exchange of polemics made quite explicit two irreconcilable strategic conceptions, encapsulated in the contradiction between **traditional frontism** and the new "coalition of the left", between the deliberate restriction of the Communist movement to the lowest common denominator of a broad front and the immediate pursuit of advanced demands, and between insistence on Soviet dominance in

the international Communist movement and its rejection. These antagonistic strategic conceptions were inseparable from the minority's insistence on the adequacy of Soviet model of socialism and the leadership's conviction that a whole new vision of socialism had to be constructed. The party's involvement in the new industrial militancy and radical mobilization at home, and its partisanship in the controversies raging in the international movement, meant that these antagonisms could not fail to produce diametrically opposed views on day-to-day practice and decisions.

Indeed, the very urgency of these issues was a contributing factor to the theoretical default on both sides. Despite the minority's insistence on a "class approach" in social analysis, any intelligible account of class interests and differentiations was suppressed in the opportunist formula of "the anti-monopoly alliance". The leadership's formulations for their part relied on social categorizations that were in parts vague, ambiguous and lacking any reference to basic capitalist social relations. The minority's programme relied heavily on the assumption of the neutrality of the state, but the fact that this assumption flatly contradicts classical marxist theory did not stimulate any debate about the nature of the capitalist state. Related to this was the lack of analysis on both sides of the political role of the ALP.

The Twenty-second Congress dashed the minority's hopes that the new trends within the CPA could be reversed: the Statement of Aims recommended by the National Committee was adopted by 118 votes to 12, and similar majorities were gained on other important issues. Soon afterwards the minority began, in effect, to organize as a faction within the CPA and lay the ground for a future split. Ross and Watt started an enterprise known as Socialist Publications, the main task of which was the publication of a newspaper, Australian Socialist, and at the same time they began to form "socialist unity committees" from handpicked dissidents in the CPA. Apart from continuing the polemics, which now included the claim that the decisions of the Twenty-second Congress were vitiated by the leadership's manipulations, they set out to obstruct the circulation of Tribune and boycott party meetings. Disciplinary action was finally taken against Ross and Watt, and after they confirmed that they intended to continue these activities, they were expelled. About the same time, Socialist Publications brought out a Declaration, signed by over 300 CPA members. It consisted of a restatement of Ross' Alternative Statement and a list of the leadership's errors, including "impatient, ultra-left activities", "adventurist policies and tactics", abandonment of united front policies for alliances with "ultra-radical fringe forces", "trotskyism", a "vacillating, opportunist position" and so forth. At this stage, the activities of the minority were seriously damaging the CPA's position in those trade unions in which

members of the minority held official positions. While these activities showed no sign of eroding the leadership's majority support in the party, the number of veteran industrial cadres who identified with the minority was sufficiently large to disrupt the functioning of the party. The prolongation of the internal crisis led to a paralysis far more damaging than the eventual split.

When the dispute broke out into the open, the CCP and CPSU joined in. Both *Rude Pravo* and *New Times* published articles²¹ on the dispute and referred to the minority as "the genuine marxist-leninists". The *Rude Pravo* article, "Trotskyism or Leninism" (attributed to W. J. Brown) was even reprinted separately by Peace and Socialism Publishers. In accordance with CPA practice, these articles were published in *Tribune* with a reply and a request that the relevant eastern European journals return the favour. This—it goes without saying—was not done. At the same time, the Soviet Embassy lent its financial and moral support to the minority.²²

In spite of its influence and powerful friends, the minority did not yet feel in a position to form a breakaway grouping outside the party, and it made one more spectacular attempt to discredit the party leadership. Brown laid formal charges against the National Secretary, Laurie Aarons, alleging that he breached party rules by conspiring to change party policy as a result of "discussions with acknowledged trotskyites", notably Freney, and that he thereby brought the party into disrepute nationally and internationally.²³ A committee of five was selected to hear the charges, and for three months it solemnly heard evidence and arguments from the contending parties. The stalinist assumptions underlying these charges, no less than the absence of any evidence to support them, rebounded against the minority: the hearings provided a valuable platform for the majority view, and the inevitable result was a report from the Committee dismissing the charges as grotesque and severely criticizing Brown for having brought them.

During the latter part of 1971, the proposal to split the CPA was gaining support among the minority, although a sizeable section still opposed it. The minority held a meeting of its sympathizers in September, but most of those present opposed a split at that stage. On 5th December a second meeting was held, and a small majority voted for a split. About 400 CPA members thereupon left the party, and the Socialist Party of Australia was formed. The split severely depleted the CPA membership and trade union influence in Adelaide and Sydney, where the party had maintained a constant presence in the maritime unions. Other unionists, as a reaction to hectoring from both sides, left the party and consciously distanced themselves from both groupings.

The 1971 split was no more a clean division on ideological lines than the 1963 split. Many orthodox communists with no enthusiasm for the new policies were repelled by the machinations of the splitting faction, and the heavy-handed interference by the CPSU and the Soviet Embassy in the internal affairs of the CPA. Moreover, communist orthodoxy proscribed splitting a "legitimate" communist party, irrespective of substantive principles involved. The Soviet Union did not promise to withdraw recognition of the CPA (and in fact has not done so to date). Hence the new party, founded on rigid adherence to the CPSU and the official international communist movement, paradoxically was condemned, within the latter, to a somewhat dubious legitimacy. In certain areas, particularly Victoria where the earlier split had hit the party hardest, active steps were taken to prevent the defection of elements which had most in common with the splitters. Thus many who were still steeped in the old stalinist traditions remained in the party. On the other hand, where the splitters were strong, as they were in South Australia, many industrial cadres and trade union officials joined the new party simply in order to remain effective in their existing spheres of activity.

Since the formation of the new party, the Soviet Union has continued to give it all possible encouragement short of exclusive recognition as the Australian section of the international movement. At the end of 1972, both the CPA and the SPA were invited to the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the USSR, and it is clear that the Soviet authorities have no intention of breaking off relations altogether with the CPA while the possibility remains that that party can be coaxed, persuaded or blackmailed into a new conformitv.

In terms of industrial strength, SPA's position was at first more promising. It had strongholds in the Waterside Workers' Federation, Seamen's Union and certain unions in the building and motor industries. Inroads have subsequently been made into *some of* these, especially by the CPA on the Sydney waterfront. In 1973 the SPA lost its representation on the Executive of the ACTU.

The **Whitlam** Labour Government has received almost unreserved support from SPA since it was elected in December, 1972. Given the small size of the latter, its identification with Labour policy is not so much a united front, as a liquidation, which goes some way to explain its dwindling support and its inability to recruit new members. Another factor in this failure is its mindless celebration of the Soviet bloc, to the point where it has on at least one occasion given pride of place in its newspaper to reprints of *Rude Pravo* features defending treason trials of dissidents. This is hardly the stuff to foment proletarian revolution in Australia.

The CPA after the Split

The CPA held its Twenty-third Congress in April, 1972, in a despondent mood. According to all the immediate indicators, the party was at the nadir of its fortunes: its active membership could not have been more than about 1,500, its sources of funds and channels for working class agitation were severely reduced, many of its branches had been disrupted by the split, and it now had to contend with a possibly powerful rival which had the backing of the Soviet Union as well as the sympathy of many trade union officials. However, the party reaffirmed the new policies, retaining the 1970 documents and adding one more—The *Left Challenge for the Seventies*, which placed even heavier emphasis on the ideological offensive. It anticipated the election of a Labour government in December that year and the new situation that this would pose for the left. It acknowledged the autonomy of the liberation and anti-war movements and called for a non-manipulative but critical involvement in them. In its analysis of the labour movement, it stressed the importance of building on recent experiences of work-ins and intervention in political and social issues—experiences which have developed the self-confidence and class consciousness of the workers involved, and which have done most to erode "the hegemony of capitalist ideas".

In the political and industrial ferment of the six years prior to the split, communists had participated in all radical social movements, often advocating "advanced" policies, but in general participating on the latter's terms. This represented a break with former manipulative practices that had not gone unappreciated by other militants. In spite of this, the party had failed to attract significant numbers of those militants into its own ranks. One reason for this failure was the dominance of New Left ideology which denied the need for party organization altogether. But the more basic reason was the feeling that the CPA's destalinization had not gone far enough, and that the old habits of thought and action were a long time a-dying, the new "line" notwithstanding. The process had been, after all, a "revolution from above" which had avoided as far as possible alienating the more backward elements in the party. The split, however, seemed to have accomplished the catharsis that had been necessary all along, and for the left in general, the CPA took on a new complexion.

New Left groupings were virtually a spent force in 1972, and while many of their former activists disappeared from active politics altogether, others were analysing the reasons for their failure. In Australia as elsewhere, the New Left was crippled by its lack of theoretical rigour, the fragmentation of the movement into loose formations which fell under the domination of cliques, and the restriction of its social base to intellectuals and students. A need was felt once more for a party

based on the working class, capable of developing a viable strategy for socialist revolution and of uniting at least some of the scattered elements of the Australian left. For many radicals the CPA, tangibly representing the continuity of the revolutionary socialist tradition in Australia, was now the most likely place to start the party-building process. Hence while young workers are the main group represented in the influx of new members since the split, many students and intellectuals have joined as well. The places of the older members who joined the SPA have been taken by much younger cadres—an essential process for a party which had not seen a substantial inflow of new members since the Second World War.

The CPA's present intervention into trade union affairs and industrial struggles is informed by the complementary themes of workers' control in industry and rank-and-file control of existing trade unions. Its propaganda on these issues sometimes lapses into abstract moralizing and sloganizing which, apart from its ineffectiveness, can alienate militants who are involved in difficult struggles against entrenched bureaucracies and depolitized memberships. On the other hand, the successful application of the new policies has on occasions achieved dramatic results and invariably has met with the unreserved hostility of government, management and right-wing union officialdom alike.

The workers' control demand has appeared in many different guises. The work-in tactic has become almost a conventional weapon in the defensive armoury of more advanced unionists: it is employed not only to prevent lay-offs, but also to win positive demands.²⁴ In two large-scale industries—the power and motor industries—workers have successfully regulated production and controlled the speed of the line in the course of protracted disputes. The workers' control concept is also promoted in opposition to the ALP plan to undercut industrial militancy by the introduction of schemes for "workers' participation" in management, "job enrichment" and productivity bargaining. Finally, while not attempting to withdraw from or replace existing trade unions, the CPA has emphasized the need for rank-and-file organizations and shop committees in implementing the demand for workers' control. The latter are seen as important vehicles for industrial militancy in general.

The Builders' Labourers' Federation in New South Wales²⁵ illustrates the new industrial policies in practice. This union was previously controlled by gangster elements which maintained their grasp on official positions by intimidation. The wages and working conditions in the industry were among the worst in Australia, while the workforce itself was highly unstable and largely made up of migrants. A rank-and-file committee eventually managed to organize sufficient support to take control. A leading communist, Jack Munday, became secretary

of the union and initiated a number of measures to prevent the re-crudescence of bureaucratic power and privilege. A six-year limit was placed on tenure of office, wages paid to full-time union functionaries were to be suspended during general stoppages, and the rank-and-file committee was kept going. At the same time, sweeping demands for better pay and conditions were backed up by strikes, a few cases of industrial sabotage and vigilante teams who prevented the use of scab labour. The success of these campaigns, the consequent growth of the union and popularity of its leadership, and the experience gained by the rank-and-file were the pre-conditions for the builders' labourers' later intervention in issues that went far beyond the economic.

The building industry in New South Wales is the Achilles' heel of Australian capitalism. It has the highest profit rates (swollen by rampant speculation in real estate), and the highest rate of bankruptcies and scandals, which frequently involve prominent members of the State Government. "Development" in Sydney parlance is synonymous with massive social disruption, misallocation of resources, environmental destruction and total lack of planning. Entire communities are evicted to make way for office buildings while the housing shortage worsens and two million square feet of office space is unoccupied. The authorities have remained unresponsive to all objections and protests.

In the early seventies, the BLF began to impose "green bans" on demolitions and construction projects in response to requests from resident action committees, conservation groups and the National Trust. Where the bans were not directly enforceable, they were backed up by threats to stop work on all the offending "developer's" current projects. The union repeatedly insisted that these bans were an assertion of its members' right to make and enforce their own decisions on the operation of the industry and on the questions of social policy involved. The building industry, the New South Wales government and the conservative press mounted a virulent campaign against communism, the workers' control movement, "industrial anarchy" and particularly "illegality". An attempt was made to undermine the solidarity of the workers by arguing that green bans threatened their jobs. But by this time, the builders' labourers had achieved a high degree of unity and politicization and the active support of other unions in the industry, and they were being hailed as the saviours of civilization by Nobel Prize winners, Princes of the Church and other pillars of the community. By 1973, forty green bans were holding up approximately £2,000,000,000 worth of "development" contracts in Sydney. In the same year, the union placed bans simultaneously on work at two Sydney universities. The first was to force the authorities at Macquarie University to reinstate a student who had been expelled from a residential college for homosexuality, and the second was in support of

a staff and student strike protesting against the Sydney University Professorial Board's refusal to allow a course in women's studies in the Philosophy Department.

Communist influence in union affairs has also increased in industries that do not provide such scope for spectacular interventions. In these unions, the "new unionism" is gradually being established, tied to a class combativity which is eroding the conservatism, legalistic fetishes and class collaborationist proclivities of union bureaucrats. This is true, for instance, of the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union which, with over 160,000 members (many of whom are in key industries) is by far the largest union in the country. The communist President of the Queensland Building Workers' Industrial Union, summed up the "new unionism" as follows:—

"Within the union structure, the real decision making must be in the hands of the rank-and-file. This means that more energy, more time, more reliance must be put into building job organization; more stopwork meetings, with pay, to discuss union policy; the development of a job delegate organization much superior to that at present.

"Job organization linked with progressive policies and leaderships such as ours, can in a short period develop self-acting democratic structures controlled by the rank-and-file which would more effectively challenge the building industry bosses and challenge the system that bases itself on maximum profit as against the needs of the people.

"This is what I think unionism is all about in the 1970s."²⁶

The strength of the CPA's "counter-hegemonic" strategy has been its insistence on the themes of democracy, self-determination, self-generating activity and the use of these themes in a global critique of capitalism, from economic organization and political institutions to culture. An essential part of this strategy is the linking of general social issues to working class struggle: industrial action has been taken by communist influenced unions in the last two years in support of blacks', women's and homosexuals' rights; an embargo was placed on American goods by maritime unions during the concentrated bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong in December, 1972; funds have been collected by unions and other action taken in support of the Vietnamese, and the Chilean left since the 1973 coup.

Lack of development and clarity in key areas of the CPA's strategic thinking will be dealt with in the next section. But it is important to note at this stage the distance the "new policies" have taken the CPA from the theory and practice of the major communist parties in advanced capitalist countries.²⁷ It has broken with the concept of a two-stage revolution and the timid frontism which constricts strategic demands and perspectives to those acceptable to the lowest common denominator within a front which includes reformist elements. Eric Aarons recently articulated this difference:

"The two-stage idea is that first there will (must) be an anti-monopoly, democratic revolution which will later be followed by a socialist revolution. I am not arguing against possible stages in any revolution, for one must be open-minded to concrete circumstances. What is at stake here, however, is a strategy based on two stages. Without going into details, this concept is related to watering down demands and perspectives (which always leads in the direction of economism and an emphasis on 'unity' which buries principles), whereas in my view the conception of socialist revolution-to-day must be deepened, and perspectives made more, not less, radical."⁹⁸

This line has left the CPA free to project a socialist perspective in theory, and to adopt advanced positions in practice, to lead rather than tail behind working class and social movements.

The CPA's divergence from the practice of the major western communist parties can be clearly seen in the organizations through which it seeks to work. Hopes are not placed on the ascendancy of a Labour Party left or on a possible parliamentary coalition implementing a "common programme". Apart from specific issues, the idea of party ententes within trade union councils has been specifically rejected. Instead, there is a perceived need for independent class organizations which in the short term have to be built up at the point of production; and in the long term, contrary to the implications of the "parliamentary road to socialism", the need for organs of dual power is recognized.

While rejecting conventional frontism, the CPA also rejects the concept of a monolithic party in favour of that of a coalition of revolutionary forces. The adoption of this schema was the first step in its still ambiguous rejection of a "revolutionary legitimacy" inherent in official communist parties. The acknowledgement of trotskysism as a contributor to the revolutionary movement was a break with stalinist demonology which, as we have seen, was seized upon by the right wing in the events leading up to the 1971 split as irrefutable evidence of the party's fall from grace.

The express break with both monolithism and the prefiguring of a one-to-one relation between the revolutionary party and the post-revolutionary state is no doubt an important departure from stalinism, but the very unevenness and underdevelopment of the political organizations of the Australian left effectively limits the application of the "coalition of the left" idea to co-operation with loosely-organized social movements. The SPA's gradualist line and the fact that its practice is limited to that of an electoral machine within the trade union movement and a ginger group to the ALP on the political level, makes it doubtful whether this formation can be realistically included in the left at all. Certainly, the bitterness and rivalry between this party and the CPA, the legacy of the split, makes co-operation between them difficult. The CPA (M-L), for its part, combines an hysterical sectarianism with a flair for unprincipled intrigue and manoeuvring

within the unions. While its members hold positions in some unions and actively promote militant activity, the party itself is a declining force. Its dependence on Chinese patronage, its secrecy, deviousness and inept propaganda have effectively isolated it.

In numbers²⁹ and influence, the CPA, SPA and CPA (M-L) account for almost the entire left. The two aspirants for recognition as the Australian section of the Fourth International are no more than small propaganda groups which concentrate on the publication and sale of their respective newspapers. The relative political sophistication of these groups provides the only possibility of a "left debate" in Australia, and an external critique of the CPA in particular. But the critique as well as potential co-operation are hampered by the trotskyists' insistence that stalinism is the CPA's fixed, metaphysical essence, and thus sufficient reason to count it among the enemies of the working class.

Problem

Trotskyist metaphysics notwithstanding, the recent history of the CPA shows that official communist parties are not necessarily permanently compromised by the traditions of the Third International. The negative lesson in this history consists in the high price of regeneration—loss of influence in the trade unions, loss of membership and long periods of partial paralysis. The major causes of the CPA's decline are not, of course, to be sought in its internal history but in the second long boom from 1949 to the present, and in the success of the anti-communist offensive of the cold war. The internal disputes within the party were for the most part different responses to a social reality that flatly contradicted the nostrums of vulgar marxism and the prognostications of the international communist movement alike. Kelvin Rowley expressed the dilemma as follows:

"In the post-war period, many of those for whom the role of the working class in the struggle for socialism was an article of blind faith, rather than the outcome of rational analysis, have either retained the faith and retreated into dogmatic obscurantism, or have abandoned it and attempted to discover some alternative social base for a socialist movement. Common to both these approaches was an avoidance of the task of actually examining what has happened to Australian workers in the past twenty years. . . . The conclusion is that both the dogmatic and revisionist stances must be rejected: the former because it substitutes a mythical working class which it manufactures out of its own head for the reality; the latter because its assessment of the 'integration' of the working class is superficial and unhistorical. . . . This 'integration' is not due to long-term, structural changes in the nature of capitalism (as such theories require) but rather is due to more transient factors specific to the period which is now drawing to a close. Thus a 'classical' marxist approach is not 'obsolete'; on the contrary, such an approach is indispensable if we are to understand what is happening in the world today. What is obsolete is a tradition of vulgar, dogmatic caricatures of marxism."³⁰

On the strategic problem of building class alliances, Rowley goes on to define the two historical alternatives as follows:

"The first is where labour moderates and weakens its militancy and restrains its demands against capital. This is the 'weak' solution, and the only possible alliance to result would be one of mutual subordination to capital. It is a bourgeois and not a socialist strategy. The 'strong' solution is that, although the working class must provide the backbone of the movement, it can never restrict itself to 'sectional' working class demands, but must concern itself with leading the struggle against injustices wherever they occur, must agitate and organize on all fronts and must try to isolate and weaken big capital whenever possible."¹¹

It is in relation to this theoretical dilemma and this strategic choice that the post-war history of the CPA, and the diverging tendencies it now contains, are to be understood.

For reasons that have been elaborated earlier in this article, the 1971 split left the CPA with a strategic conception which, however much it pointed in a new direction, was undeveloped in crucial areas. The extent of this undevelopment was the extent to which the post-split consensus was more apparent than real. Two of these crucial areas were the party's analysis of the predicted ALP government, and its role in the international communist movement. The latter, far from being a trivial question of protocol, is forcing the party to face its own substantial differences with the mainstream of international communism. The fact that conflicting views on these issues were held by the leadership (and especially among those who had done most to steer the CPA on its new course), together with the perceived need for unity after the party's misfortunes, meant that these problems were disposed of with vague and ambiguous formulations, and where possible, they were skirted altogether. Indeed, the emphasis placed on militancy and confrontation with "capitalist values" amounted to a form of ideological reductionism which distracted attention away from strictly political issues and obstructed the achievement of greater programmatic clarity.

From the split up to the latter half of 1973, the main criticism of the party's theory and strategy came from intellectuals who joined after the split. In many cases, they had been involved in revolutionary politics long before their contact with the CPA. While no strict political homogeneity can be ascribed to this grouping, Louis Althusser's influence on it has been pronounced. Some of these intellectuals are editors of the independent **marxist** journal *Intervention*, which has attempted to stimulate and publish analyses of Australian society and theoretical discussion on issues raised by Althusser. This is clearly not the place to evaluate the latter's originality and general contribution to **marxism**: suffice it here to note the potential corrective implicit in

both **Althusser's** main ideas and the timeliness of their intervention in the CPA.

For that party, despite the peculiarities of its development, has been heavily influenced by the successive theoretical trends in international communism. Indeed, its susceptibility in this regard is a measure of the historical underdevelopment of **marxist** theory in Australia. In common with its fraternal parties in Europe, it embraced first economic determinism, then stalinist dogma. After the CPSU Twentieth Congress and the Sino-Soviet split, the theoretical vacuum was filled by "creative marxism", which in the event covered a haphazard collection of concepts and theories, both survivals of earlier trends and new rationalizations for revisionist policies. It was small wonder, then, that in the late sixties, as the party became involved in movements led by radical intellectuals and New Left elements, it was unable to resist or critically evaluate their ideology. "Creative marxism" gave way to "humanist marxism" which, in its more crass expressions, took the form of unconsidered radical rhetoric and simplistic ethical critiques of capitalist "irrationality". This trajectory was more a succession of trends than a progress of theory, for new currents were rarely justified by a serious and sustained critique of the old. All these currents, moreover, shared a reductionist problematic which systematically obscured the complexity of social determinations. If the CPA was to use marxism for analysis rather than just mobilization, this reductionism had to be overcome.

The "Althusserians" within the party at first joined issue with the "humanist" trend on a fairly theoretical level, arguing for the need for a strategy which recognized the irreducibility of levels of struggle and criticizing the collapse of political perspectives into an undifferentiated ethical struggle against "capitalist values". They have insisted on the need for an exact knowledge of Australian society to inform strategy and to prevent its degenerating into abstract moralizing which fails to confront the complexities of each conjuncture on the one hand, and a populism which fails to differentiate class interests on the other.

But it was not long before two new fronts were opened up, as the group grew more impatient with the party's continuing ambivalence towards the new ALP government and soft-peddalling of its **already**-established differences with the international communist movement. The group's most contentions contribution has been its critique of the **frontism** and parliamentarism of the major western European and Chilean communist parties, a critique based on the classical **marxist** theses on the class nature of the state and the impossibility of wielding it as an instrument of socialist transformation. On these two fronts, the group has drawn a good deal of fire from right-wing elements within

the party, but not from the major part of the leadership, whose differences with the group's political stance are limited to matters of emphasis and tactics.

Althusser's own membership of the PCF and orthodoxy in relation to the "official" **international communist** movement is motivated by a belief in a single indivisible international workers' movement that Blackburn and Stedman Jones have aptly compared to Erasmus' conception of Christendom. They point out that, in spite of this, his ideas have led to the formation of left currents in European Communist parties and have, as well, provided the conceptual framework for a complex materialist analysis of the position of particular oppressed groups, such as women, homosexuals and blacks, in a way that relates their liberation movements to the revolutionary struggles of the working class³²—an area in which the major communist parties are notoriously backward. This Althusserian paradox has recently become particularly evident in the CPA, in which a number of serious attempts to analyse the weaknesses of the international communist movement and to lend theoretical coherence to the party's involvement in diverse liberation struggles have borne a distinctly Althusserian stamp.³³ The group's thinking certainly suffers from the usual shortcomings of any set of ideas originally conceived at a considerable remove from working class struggle, and it has often expressed itself in academic terms that hardly confront the day-to-day preoccupations of **militants** in the party, but it has been moderately successful in precipitating debate on major issues. The controversies it generated were pushed into the background, however, by a resurgence of the "international problem".

In October–November 1973 talks were held in Moscow between the CPSU and the CPA to explore possibilities of "normalizing" relations between the two parties. From the CPA's point of view, the only advantage to be gained was sufficient Soviet recognition to allow it to maintain its credentials in the international communist movement. The CPSU for its part appeared to entertain hopes for the CPA's return to the fold, a desirable result in view of the **SPA's** abysmal record. In the first part of these "frank discussions", Laurie Aarons recapitulated earlier criticisms of the USSR's treatment of minorities and dissidents, its lack of democratic institutions and its manipulative interventions into the affairs of other parties, especially into those of the CPA. The Soviet delegates interjected with a mixture of abuse, threats and platitudes about "Soviet achievements".³⁴ However, in the subsequent session, the other two CPA delegates tacitly opposed Aarons' position and agreed to work for the CPA's acceptance of the CPSU's terms for "normalization": recognition of the Soviet bloc as "socialist" rather than "socialist-based", unqualified support for Soviet foreign policy (especially **détente** policies which had been attacked in Tribune) and

cessation of criticism of the USSR in CPA journals. From that point, differences within the leadership were openly acknowledged.

When the right wing³⁵ of the leadership took its stand at the subsequent National committee meeting, it did so on issues far wider than the Soviet one. In its attacks on the "left-adventurism" of the builders' labourers, "sectarianism" towards the ALP and overseas communist parties as much as in its pro-Soviet apologetics, it demonstrated its tacit disapproval of the "strong solution" with which the Aaronses were identified. The right's isolation in the National Committee, which unanimously rejected the Soviet terms, was followed by a spate of polemics between the party leaders, ostensibly in the form of contributions to discussion leading up to the Twenty-fourth Congress in 1974. That the real issue in the debate over internationalism is whether the CPA is to revert to orthodox gradualism is clear from a "symptomatic" reading of John Sendy's contribution.³⁶ It poses the basic question, "Is the party going to develop as a responsible, Communist political organization?", and comments on the international question:

"A number of leading comrades consider that our links with the world communist movement are in fact a hindrance to us and that most CP's, with the notable exception of the Vietnamese, are 'no bloody good' . . .

"It is curious that the party leadership has never in recent times defended the Chilean, Italian, French and other CP's which frequently come under attack in Tribune articles and letters. Nor does it wave a demurring finger (publicly) at such things. The reason is obvious. Some comrades have come to the same conclusion as Ted Hill came to in 1962—that largely the CP's in capitalist countries are being contained by capitalism, are maintaining it and abrogating the development of revolutionary struggle—that we are living in a situation surrounded by a sea of revisionism as Hill put it then."

He goes on to conclude that the party is "well on the way to a left line which can isolate us and ruin the Party for years to come".

Since the chances of a reversal of the party's "new policies" are remote, the dissolution of the former unreal consensus may have the positive result of clarifying the issues raised in this controversy. Another desirable result could be the serious posing of the questions raised by the Labour government and its impact on capitalist development and consolidation in Australia.

In the late 60s the ALP, under Gough Whitlam's leadership, underwent a thorough-going transformation. The old, populist rhetoric gave way to a new image, one much more akin to those of European social democratic parties. Whitlam promised not equality but growth, not nationalization but planning, not a workers' government but a régime of efficient administrators whose trade union affiliations allowed them to guarantee what the liberals never could—industrial peace. Technocratic labourism may have occasioned little

response to the labour movement, but its birth was celebrated by the more progressive elements of capital and the financial press. The enthusiasm with which they supported the ALP's successful bid for office in the December 1972 elections was to a great extent a response to the bankruptcy of the Liberal-Country Party government after its twenty-three years of unbroken rule. Many economic sectors called for the decisive intervention that the Liberals could not make. Subsidization and protection of inefficient industries constituted a continuing heavy burden on other sectors. A lack of government planning and co-ordination perpetuated misallocation of resources and uncertainty of markets. The fact that the coalition parties were tied to sectional (especially rural) interests meant they had no room to manoeuvre to overcome these economic problems. The growing absenteeism, job dissatisfaction, high labour turnover, recurrent labour shortages and strikes pointed to the need for "rational" man-power and integrationist policies which could only be introduced by a government that the labour movement could "trust". Liberal foreign policy, based on containment of communism in Asia and "forward defence" collapsed in the failure of Australia's military adventure in Vietnam—an adventure which had seriously weakened social cohesion at home. In foreign policy, the Liberals now offered nothing but a barrier between Australian exporters and the enormous untapped markets of communist Asia.

The economy which the Labour government inherited, though superficially stable, had serious structural weaknesses. The normal features of an advanced capitalist economy—high wages, monopoly control and large-scale secondary industry—co-exist with low productivity and a comparatively low growth rate. The balance-of-payments had long depended on favourable terms of trade for agricultural exports. The decline in this sector during the sixties was compensated, not by the export of uncompetitive Australian manufactured goods, but by mineral exports whose share of total export income rose in this period from 8 to 29%. Dependence on **non-industrial** exports goes hand-in-hand with a continuing dependence on overseas sources of capital and technology: a third of Australian industry is overseas controlled, while only 14% of new products are developed locally. Australia's heavy dependence on Britain, Japan and the USA is a particular cause of concern.

Australia joined the OECD in 1971, and the following year that body produced a survey of the economy which contained a comprehensive plan for overcoming these weaknesses, and above all, for producing a high and stable growth rate.¹⁷ The new government has followed this plan with extraordinary fidelity. In particular, it has attempted to offer a package deal to the labour movement: in exchange for the latter's

acceptance of wage restraints, it is offered improved social benefits (including a national health scheme), workers' participation in management and inclusion of trade union leaders on government planning boards. Since the new social benefits are to be financed by per-capita levies, and the workers' participation schemes leave the traditional prerogatives of capital untouched, the new régime is hardly a burden on the capitalist class. On the contrary, the latter is the beneficiary of the new medium- and long-term planning, the already significant achievements of recent trade delegations to China and North Vietnam and the new government assistance to Australian enterprises establishing subsidiaries in South-East Asia. Dislocation of the work force was hardly a consideration in the progressive abolition of subsidies to inefficient industries and an across-the-board 25% tariff reduction in July 1973, but again, the financial press hailed this reversal of hallowed Labour policy in the interests of economic "rationalization" as an "act of true statesmanship"

While the new régime has certainly proved that it is "good for business confidence", its standing in the labour movement has become somewhat precarious. It has presided over a boom period in which profit increases have demonstrably outstripped wage increases, and the latter are rapidly undermined by a 14% rate of inflation. A redistribution of national income in favour of the working class has no place in the ALP programme, but present trends point to an actual decrease in the proportion going to that class. In these circumstances, the government's prices and incomes policy met with bitter opposition from major unions. One year after its taking office, the government held a referendum to give the Federal Parliament power to introduce a prices and incomes policy. Many sections of the labour movement campaigned against it, and it was overwhelmingly defeated. The proposed introduction of "workers' participation", "job enrichment" and productivity bargaining have met with an equally sullen reception from left-wing unions.

The CPA's response to the new régime has been a studied refusal to see in its programme an integrated and coherent plan to increase and stabilize growth (and therefore profit) rates, and to that end to tie the work force more closely to the interests of capital at the point of production, in the board room and on government planning panels. Its critique of the ALP government, which starts with the assumption that the latter is a "merely reformist" régime, deals with the items in its programme in a piecemeal fashion, supporting the "progressive" measures and attacking those which it sees as opposed to the interests of the working class (especially the incomes and "industrial relations" policies). The setbacks suffered by the CPA through its "sectarianism" in the Third Period and in the 1949 Coal Strike are repeatedly invoked

in aid of this approach. Finally, most communists see the ALP as a "working class party" by reason of its mass electoral base in that class and its institutional links with the trade unions. It hardly needs to be pointed out that this sociological reductionism is flatly contradicted not only by the rationality of technocratic labourism, but also by the whole genesis and history of the ALP itself. Nevertheless, the conclusion is often drawn that the CPA should *always* give high priority to preserving Labour's electoral base.

It can be said in defence of the present CPA approach to Labour in office that it at least counters illusions that the ALP is potentially a socialist party or that socialism could be achieved by a left Labour government. The CPA's total opposition to class collaboration and insistence on mass activism is at least a partial mobilization against the new threat posed to the independence and effectiveness of working class organizations. Failure to situate the several actions of this government in their wider context, however, leads to a consistent misperception of those actions, a dangerous lion-perception of their overall thrust, and the CPA's resulting lack of strategic coherence.

At the core of this analytic failure is the absence, referred to earlier, of an autonomous notion of political struggle (including a conception of the state that goes beyond a narrow institutional definition) in the CPA's theoretical framework. For an understanding of the ALP is to be sought not in its electoral base but in its relation to the state and the latter's articulation of the interests of capital. Positing an expressive relationship between the trade unions and the ALP is no less misleading: even the most "tame-cat" unions are directly involved in day-to-day class confrontations at the point of production, such that, in the economic sphere at least, they must remain sensitive to working class interests in spite of their subordination to the state. This failure to appreciate the ALP's structural independence from the trade unions also underpins the CPA's blanket inhibitions against "sectarianism". In fact, the political arraignment of the ALP is hardly a bar to unity between communist and Labour militants on the shop floor.¹¹

The recent isolation of the right in the CPA may clear the way for a more rigorous approach to the Labour government. The issue is still very much alive in the internal party debate, and its outcome will determine the party's capacity to produce a coherent strategy for the labour movement for the remainder of the decade.



This period may well be decisive for the development of an effective revolutionary movement in Australia. The growing industrial militancy of the last few years, expressed particularly in the combativity towards the arbitration system, has led to a weakening of traditional restraints on

working class initiatives in economic struggle. But the now widening gap between the ALP and its working class electoral base is likely to have even more significant political consequences. As well, the ascendancy of technocratic labourism, the abandonment of the ALP's traditional (if purely ideological) identification with the underprivileged and its active courting of the urban middle class has made its links with the trade unions particularly tenuous, as the latter's often hostile reception of key government policies has illustrated. The incompatibility between technocratic labourism and the growing class consciousness in the labour movement is becoming increasingly obvious.

The restraints on working class mobilization referred to would be taxed still further in the event of an economic downturn. And there is every possibility that the next few years will reveal the fragility of the Australian economy, dependent as it is on three major markets and sources of capital and technology: Britain, Japan and America. As recent events have shown, all three are facing difficulties—although to different degrees—in maintaining stable growth rates and their international competitiveness. Should the British or American government attempt to alleviate their serious balance of payments problems by restricting imports into, or the flow of capital out of, their countries, their actions could lead to stagnation and unemployment in Australia. Whether such a recession eventuates in the mid-seventies or not, the structural imbalance of the Australian economy, its low growth rate and the low productivity of its secondary industry, will not be easily eradicated by all the OECD-inspired wizardry at the government's command. And Australian "mini-imperialism", its attempts to establish markets and investment outlets in South-East Asia, will inevitably meet with more and more formidable opposition from US and Japanese imperialism.

Australia in the seventies, then, offers considerably brighter prospects for revolutionary working class and mass mobilization than at any time since the thirties. The CPA's strategic thinking in this new situation suffers from some crucial weaknesses, many of them associated with the difficulty of overcoming its own past. But it remains the only existing political organization capable of implementing an overall socialist strategy for the labour movement and of forging the class alliances essential to the success of the socialist project. This is not simply an observation on its working class and mass links, but also on its independence from the constricting perspectives and political constraints imposed by the "official" international communist movement on its orthodox sections. More positively, it is an observation on its adoption of the "strong solution" which requires that it continue to mobilize around the most advanced demands rather than attempt to dampen

and restrain mass upsurges in the name of a "'unity' which buries principles".

But the immediate obstacles before the Australian left are internal ones: the absence of a productive left debate that could only emerge out of a polycentric political movement, and the CPA's own theoretical backwardness in key areas of strategy.

NOTES

For a more detailed discussion of the development of capitalism in Australia, see Kelvin Rowley, "Pastoral Capitalism", *Intervention*, no. 1 (1972), and "The Political Economy of Australia Since the War" in J. Playford and D. Kirsner (eds.), *Australian Capitalism* (Penguin, Melbourne, 1972) and Bruce MacFarlane, "Australia's Role in the World Capitalism" in the same volume. The genesis of the labour movement is analysed in Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia* (Penguin, Melbourne 1971).

2. "Socialism and Labourism" in Richard Gordon (ed.), *The Australian New Left* (Heinemann, Melbourne 1970), p. 55.
3. A useful factual account of the CPA's history is Alastair Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia* (Hoover, Stanford, 1969).
4. (Australian) *Communist Review*, September 1948, pp. 270-1. See also in the same issue "Reply of the CPGB" and "British CC's Reply Rejected". The effect of this dispute on the CPGB is recounted in Edward Upward's novel *The Rotten Elements*. The relevance of the issues raised in this debate to the later Sino-Soviet dispute was referred to in an interview between CPA leaders and Mao Tse-tung in 1960: see the transcript of this interview in E. F. Hill, *Australia's Revolution: On the Struggle for a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party* (CPA (M-L) publication), pp. 249-254.
- See *ibid.*, pp. 187-223 for Hill's speech to the CPA Central Committee in February 1962. Hill was the leader of the pro-Chinese faction and has led the CPA (M-L) since its foundation.
6. Significantly, almost all the Chinese-trained cadres remained in the CPA.
7. This incident, described in Eric Aarons, "As I Saw the Sixties", *Australian Left Review*, no. 27 (October-November 1970) reveals the CPSU's heavy-handedness in dealing with fraternal parties—a quality that was again to the fore in the 1973 CPSU-CPA talks, referred to later.
8. The fact that Gramsci's writings were contained in occasional articles, correspondence and unedited notebooks makes the problem of interpretation difficult in any event.
9. *Australian Left Review*, no. 4, 1968.
10. *Tribune*, 24 July, 1968.
11. "Czechoslovakia and the USSR: Why?", *Tribune*, 4 September 1968.
12. "On Self-Determination," *Australian Left Review*, no. 5 of 1968, p. 44.
13. Industrial action in solidarity with overseas movements was not new to the CPA. Action had been successfully promoted during the Spanish Civil War, against export of pig-iron to Japan in 1938, and in support of Indonesian and Vietnamese struggles for independence, 1945-8 and 1954 respectively.
14. A clear comparison between the minority's and the leaders' views on industrial

questions was published in pamphlet form by the party in November 1969 under the title "Two Views of Modern Unionism". The pamphlet was made up of an exchange of letters between Frank Purse and Laurie Aarons.

15. Geoff Sorrell, "The Arbitration System" in **Playford** and **Kirsner**, op. cit., p. 255. This is true in an institutional sense, quite apart from the widely held view that trade unions are structurally tied to the state.
16. "Statement of Aims, Methods and Organization", "Modern Unionism and the Workers' Movement" and "Charter of Democratic Rights". Since their adoption, these documents have remained part of the official CPA programme.
17. "Modern Unionism", op. cit., p. 10.
18. Discussion, no. 1 of 1970, p. 20.
19. Ibid., p. 29.
20. Ibid., p. 30. The minority's extraordinary fetishism of governmental power that went hand in hand with its faith in the ALP was shown in their opposition to black bans on war materials bound for Vietnam: "... the decision to withdraw the trips must be made by a govt. and not by some queer form of workers' control". (Australian Socialist, no. 2.)
21. See *New Times*, no. 36 (9th September 1970) for an abridged version of the *Rude Pravo* article, and *New Times*, no. 1 (1 January 1971) for the main Soviet attack.
22. Detailed information on events leading to the split are contained in two CPA publications, "What's Happening in the CPA?" (1970) and the Letter to Fraternal Parties of 16 December 1971. As a result of Soviet interference in the CPA's internal affairs, letters were sent to the CC, CPSU, requesting that Soviet representatives in Australia refrain from discussing with, advising or otherwise assisting anyone in the CPA opposing its decisions and that the CPSU refrain from attacking the CPA in discussions with members of delegations from mass organizations visiting the USSR. The CPA further requested a return to the pre-1968 practice of inter-party consultation about the relation of trade union and other delegations to the USSR.
23. The charges and "evidence" are elaborated in W. J. Brown, "What Happened to the Communist Party of Australia?" (Socialist Unity Committee publication, November 1971). Aarons' defence is contained in a contemporary CPA pamphlet, "For a United Revolutionary Party". And see *Tribune*, 22 September 1971.
24. Workers even took over the construction of the Sydney Opera House in 1972 and thereby forced sub-contractors to concede the stringent demands made by the two unions involved, in both of which communist influence was strong.
25. A detailed account of this union's development and activities is P. Thomas, *Taming the Concrete Jungle: the Builders Labourers' Story* (BLF publication, Sydney, 1973).
26. Ibid., p. 65.
27. A good critique of these parties in general is contained in *II Manifesto's* "Theses", translated in *Politics and Society*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (August 1971). There is a good deal of similarity between the positions taken up by *II Manifesto* and the CPA. Also see Bill Warren's "The Programme of the CPGB: A Critique" in *New Left Review*, no. 63 (September/October 1970).
28. "The Chilean Revolution", *Australian Left Review*, no. 42 (December 1973), p. 8.
29. Approximate memberships are: CPA 2,300, SPA 600, CPA (M-L) 200, main trotskyist groups 200.
30. "The Political Economy of Australia", op. cit., p. 321.
31. Ibid., p. 323.
32. "Louis Althusser and the Struggle for Marxism" in Dick Howard and Karl E. Klare (eds.), *The Unknown Dimension: European Marxism Since Lenin* (Basic Books, New York, 1972), pp. 382-4.
33. In December 1973, the group produced an 85-page discussion document as part

of pre-Twenty-fourth Congress discussion. In spite of a good deal of wordiness and derivativeness, this document makes some theoretical headway on the issues of strategy, liberation movements, internationalism, the nature of Soviet society, the Australian economy and the vexed question of the ALP. A reading of this and other contributions of the group shows it to be selective in its application of Althusser's ideas.

34. While this anti-CPA apoplexy was being enacted in Moscow, Laurie Carmichael (Assistant Commonwealth Secretary of the AMWU and CPA National Executive member) was receiving a pointedly enthusiastic welcome in Hanoi. The long-standing warmth of VWP-CPA relations was based on the Vietnamese' high estimation of the Australian anti-war movement and the CPA's mobilization of material support for the war effort and post-war reconstruction. The Vietnamese' comments to Carmichael (*Tribune*, 30 October 1973) suggested, however, that the two parties also shared a distaste for interference in their internal affairs and grave doubts about *détente* politics.
35. It would be simplistic to identify this group as it first emerged with any coherent position beyond a retreat from those adopted by the party since the mid-sixties, and an admiration of the size and achievements of the larger western communist parties. It is curious that two of its most prominent members, John Sedy and Bernie Taft, played a large part in promoting the new policies. The latter, who was singled out for attack in the 1971 *New Times* article (footnote 21), was the most prominent advocate of appeasement in the 1973 Moscow talks. More recently, it has attempted to re-interpret the existing party programme so as to present it as an expression of conventional *frontism* and the revolution-in-stages schema. Thus they include the ALP in the "coalition-of-the-left" and "socialist-based" is made synonymous with "socialist", etc. Their line strongly echoes that of the minority prior to the split, even though it is expressed with more sophistication and European urbanity.
36. "The Real Issues before the Party and the Congress" (CPA publication, November 1973).
37. For analyses of this plan and the government's adherence to it, see B. Catley and B. MacFarlane, "Labour's Plan: Neo-capitalism Comes to Australia", *Intervention*, no. 3 (August 1973) and three articles in *Arena*, nos. 32-3 (1973) sub. nom. "Technocratic Labour in Office". See also Bill Warren, "Capitalist Planning and the State", *New Left Review*, no. 72 (March-April 1972), for an excellent analysis of capitalist planning.
38. For many militant trade union officials, membership of the ALP is no obstacle to co-operation with communists, participation in advanced actions or even opposition to ALP policy. Bob Pringle, N.S.W. President of the BLF is a prominent example of this phenomenon.