

Australian Communist



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1920-2020

**YEARS
OF THE**

**AUSTRALIAN
COMMUNIST
MOVEMENT**



“The formation of the Communist Party was an act of decisive importance for the working class movement in Australia. It crystallised and gave concrete form and expression to the real hopes and aspirations of the Australian workers...The founders of the Party had dared to act, dared to struggle, dared to form a Communist Party. Therein lay a great contribution to Australia's development.”

***– E.F Hill, “Australia's Revolution:
On the Struggle for a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party” (August 1973)***

The founding of the first Communist Party of Australia took place on October 30, 1920. It was an historic event of significant importance in the development of the working class movement in Australia. Strictly speaking, it may not be entirely accurate to define its founding as the birth of the communist movement in this country. Precursor organisations and individuals existed and had tried to organise the working class towards a broadly defined socialist or communist future.

The founding of the Communist Party of Australia in 1920, however, marked a qualitative rupture with those organisations and attempts that came before it. Inspired by the historical example of the world's first successful socialist revolution just three years prior in Russia, and the upsurge in the movement of the working class globally at the time, the founding of the Party marked the beginning of an attempt to organise the working class movement for revolutionary emancipation in Australia on the basis of the scientific understanding of Marxism-Leninism. It is in this sense that we can speak of the founding of the first Communist Party as the beginning of the Communist movement in Australia.

2020 marks 100 years of that Communist movement. While the original Party is no more, having been liquidated in 1991 long after succumbing to revisionism, the revolutionary working class movement that sprung from its birth continues unabated. Today, no party or organisation can claim to be sole successor to the original Party, nor that the inspiring history of the Communist movement over the last 100 years belongs to them alone. We, the CPA (M-L), are one organisation among several that can trace its history back to the original Party. We continue to organise towards the goal of successfully guiding the working class movement in Australia for the necessary revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system and the establishment of an independent and socialist Australian republic.

Due to the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, our plans to celebrate the centenary anniversary of the Communist movement in Australia have not been able to take place as we would wish. This special edition of *Australian Communist* is just a small gesture towards marking the occasion. We hope readers will find the contents interesting and insightful, as well as inspiring for those whose task it will be to continue working towards the next 100 years of the Communist movement in Australia.

Editors, December 2020



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100 Years of the Australian Communist Movement

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welcome!



Warmly Welcome the Centenary of the Communist Movement in Australia

by CPA (M-L) Central Committee

This statement was first published on January 1, 2020.

October 30 2020 will mark 100 years since the founding of the original Communist Party of Australia.

The immediate inspiration for the formation of a Communist Party in Australia was the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia in 1917, and the subsequent creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The introduction of Marxism-Leninism to Australia through the advocacy of the Communist Party built on local conditions and traditions of struggle against injustice, British imperialism, and exploitation. The Eureka Rebellion of 1854, when the flag of Australian independence was first raised, and the great strikes of the 1890s, when the newly emerging Australian working class stood in direct conflict with capital on a large scale for the first time, gave a concrete Australian context to the theories and international experience of Marxism and Leninism.

Marxism-Leninism stood in contrast to the reformism of the trade union movement which had sought to improve the conditions of the working class through the Labor Party acting in parliament and within the limits of the capitalist system. The Labor Party and the trade unions in turn also influenced the Communist Party and the ways in which it sought to build the movement for socialism. Negatively, this led it at times, to place the parliamentary electoral interests of the Labor Party above the independent class interests of the proletariat.

The great struggles in which Australian Communists participated and led are a matter of deep pride and inspiration. On building sites, on

coal fields, the railways, wharves and shipping, in factories and amongst many professional and semi-professional working people, the Party's influence through its members' involvement in many struggles, and party publications, was everywhere in evidence.

Communists led and fought to prevent evictions of the unemployed and destitute, fought fascist gangs such as the New Guard, opposed imperialist wars, and refused to load pig-iron bound for the Japanese imperialist war against China in 1938. They strengthened the Party during a brief period of illegality during WW2, stood resolutely against the anti-communism of the Menzies government, working day and night for months in cities and country building and mobilizing a broad united front that defeated the referendum to dissolve the Communist Party in 1951-2, stood up to the Petrov conspiracy and the Royal Commission into the Party in Victoria.

Communists led the struggle to defeat the penal provisions of the Arbitration Act in 1969, turned the Vietnam War into a mighty crusade against US imperialism and actively supported struggles of the First Peoples, women and migrant workers.

Communists and their families were hunted, vilified and demonized by the ruling class. Many lost their jobs for serving the working class in the great class struggle against capitalist exploitation and imperialist wars. The overwhelming majority of party members were workers, dedicated to serving the people. They were self-less and courageous, striving for self-discipline and humility, consciously studying Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao, arming themselves with



the science of revolutionary Marxism-Leninism for Australian conditions. We strive to uphold these values as communists today.

The ability of capitalism to survive the Great Depression and continue relatively unscathed into the 1950s and 1960s led some leading members of the Party to lose confidence in the people, the revolutionary movement and in the working class as the leadership of that movement. Our Party, the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist), was formed in 1964 when it proved impossible to support and work with the defeatist leadership of the original Party that was deliberately vilifying and rejecting the main revolutionary principles of Marxism-Leninism. Another group of members left in 1971, forming the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA).

The defeatist liquidators took things to their logical conclusion in 1991 when they dissolved the original Communist Party. In October 1996, the SPA retook for itself the name Communist Party of Australia (CPA). In early 2019 a group of members left the new CPA and declared the foundation of the Australian Communist Party (ACP).

Neither our Party, the CPA nor the ACP are the original Communist Party formed in 1920. No Party can claim that the centenary of the Communist movement in Australia and its inspiring history belongs to it alone.

Real ideological, political and organisational differences exist between those parties that can

trace their history back to the original Communist Party. There are differences on the revolutionary working class organisation, the bourgeois state, parliamentarism, imperialism, mass work and the application of Marxism-Leninism to Australia's local conditions. Without ignoring these differences, our Party seeks mutual agreement that a revolutionary movement must exist to promote the independent class interests of the workers. We seek mutual rejection of the defeatist notion that socialism has been a failed experiment. We seek agreement with the view that the main class contradictions and class struggle between labour and capital, and the necessity of proletarian led revolution to resolve those contradictions in accordance with the teachings of Marx and Engels, and further elaborated by Lenin, have not disappeared, but are sharper than ever today.

Our Party honours the aspirations of the founders of the original Communist Party of Australia for an independent socialist Australian republic and continues to work towards that aim.

The greatest tribute we can pay to those who founded that Party is to work to strengthen the revolutionary movement that they began in 1920.

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Fight for revolutionary anti-imperialist independence and socialism!

Celebrate 100 years of the Communist movement in Australia!



The Communist Movement in Australia – 100 years

by Alice M.

30th October 2020 is the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Communist movement in Australia.

The Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) pays tribute to the founders of the Communist Party in Australia and the generations of workers and comrades who dedicated themselves to serving the working class and building the communist movement in Australia.

Communism instils confidence in the power of the people, led by the revolutionary working class, to end the exploitative and oppressive system of capitalism and imperialism, and build socialism - a society run by the working class for the people. Socialism lays the foundations for the classless society of communism.

Communism is not a romanticised utopia, a wishful ideal. It's a scientific and logical conclusion reached by Marx and Engels through their meticulous research and examination of capitalism and capitalist relations of production, classes, and their own participation in the practice of class struggle. They revealed and concluded that the antagonistic and irreconcilable contradictions between labour and capital in the capitalist relations of production creates the necessary material conditions and tools that compel the socialist revolution and the seizure of power by the revolutionary working class.

Marx and Engels' findings and theory were further developed by Lenin, Stalin and Mao through their revolutionary practice and working out their own country's revolutionary path to socialism. The general principles they developed in the course of their revolutionary practice have universal application, enriching the theory and practice of Communism. But Lenin and Mao

insisted that the Communist Parties of each country should not merely uphold these general principles as a blue print for their revolutionary path to socialism. They must chart their own country's road to socialism in line with their local historical, economic, political and social conditions, and guided by the principles of Marxism-Leninism. International conditions play an important role in influencing internal events, but are not decisive.

As with all living things, the growth of the Communist movement is constant, uneven, many sided and doesn't flow in straight, uninterrupted lines. The revolutionary movement grows out of the development of productive forces, and reflects the twists and turns of class struggle and the relative strengths and weaknesses between labour and capital. In its turn, the Communist movement acts on and changes the material world.

Capitalism and imperialism create fertile ground for the revolutionary seeds of socialism and communism. The revolutionary working class and its organisation, the Communist Party, are vehicles of socialist revolution. The Communist Party of the working class is entirely different from capitalist parliamentary parties which serve capital and chain the working class to capitalism and its institutions.

Communism is not a dogma. It's a science in the service of the people. In its 100 years the Communist movement in Australia has had significant influence at different times on working class struggles and on the development of revolutionary working class consciousness. The struggle for socialism and communism in a world dominated by capitalism and surrounded by its bourgeois ideology is not without its shortcomings and setbacks. Nevertheless, the ongoing crises and decay of capitalism and



imperialism compel the Communist movement to advance, albeit, at different paces depending on prevailing objective and subjective conditions.

Communism is a powerful force for change when connected to the real world of the struggles of the working class and the people.

Many rich lessons can be learned from the achievements and shortcomings in the development of the Communist movement in Australia over the past 100 years.

The birth of Australia's communist movement

Class struggle in Australia began with the European colonisation and the brutal theft of the First People's country by British colonial imperialism. Throughout the 19th century, Australia's working class grew in numbers and class consciousness. Trade unions were formed and industrial action regularly broke out.

Rebellion and resistance to capitalist exploitation expressed itself in the organised Eureka Stockade armed mass rebellion, the 8-hour day struggles, the shearers' strikes of 1891 and many others. Militant working class ideas of 19th century Europe were brought to Australia.

Australia's working class accumulated rich experiences of struggle in the period preceding, during and after the imperialist World War I. The 1917 Russian October Revolution introduced more scientific socialist consciousness into the

spontaneous battles against conscription, imperialist war and relentless attacks on the working class. It offered the concrete vision and inspiration of a society run by the working class.

The Communist movement and its party in Australia were born out of local Australian conditions and class struggle, and were politically inspired by the 1917 October Russian revolution. But the Communist Party of Australia and its ideas of socialism were still in the early stages of development.

Depression, Fascism and War

During the global economic Depression in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, communists in Australia fought side by side with the people in all struggles against the economic depression, poverty, homelessness, and unemployment. Communists were activists in trade unions, workplaces, communities; they were organising with the unemployed, the poor, the homeless, the farmers, students and academics.

Communist Party members diligently studied Marxism to understand the economic situation and the political tasks needed to change the world through class struggle. They stood side by side with workers in factories, suburbs and rural communities fighting against poverty, unemployment, low wages, homelessness, and organising resistance to evictions. Many were unemployed, living in poverty themselves and evicted from their own homes. They tirelessly explained how and why capitalism exploits and oppresses workers and were instrumental in organising resistance by the working class shouldering the burden of the capitalist economic crisis.

As people's resistance to the economic crisis grew, so did state repression. The Crimes Act was extended, declaring Communist Party activities unlawful; anti-trade union legislation and other laws suppressing people's democratic rights to protest were rolled out. The deepening state repression was met with more resistance and calls for greater democratic rights.



Communists organised and led mass movements against war and the rise of fascism; against the racist White Australia Policy and the Immigration Act used not only against the Asian and non-British European people, but also against communists. They opposed the rise of Hitler and defended the Soviet Union. Communists and many others were inspired, and grew in confidence, from the enormous achievements made by the Soviet people under Stalin and the Soviet Communist Party leadership. They worked closely with and supported the First People's campaigns and struggles against discrimination, for justice and equality. Many artists, writers, performers and musicians were communists deeply involved in the many struggles of the people. Australian Communists joined the International Brigades to fight against the fascist Franco regime in Spain.

In 1937, Port Kembla wharfies refused to load pig iron on the ship *Dalfram* for export to imperial Japan in their war against the Chinese people. The relentless and desperate anti-communist propaganda, vilification and demonising of communists and the Communist Party only strengthened their conviction and confidence in the power of the working class and socialism.

In the early years of World War II the Communist Party was briefly banned. But this did not deter Communists and supporters from continuing to work underground, switching to different methods of work to protect the party's mass work, the members, sympathisers and activists. They opposed the traitorous "Brisbane Line", and even organised guerrilla units to harass any potential Japanese invasion.

Many leaders of the long 1949 miners' strike were members of the Communist Party. The Chifley Labor government sent the army to smash the miners' strike.

1950-1951 Communist Party Dissolution Bill

In 1950, the Menzies government introduced the Communist Party Dissolution Bill to ban the Communist Party. The target of the attack was not only the Communist Party but the strong and



well organised working class movement, militant unions and the democratic and progressive organisations in Australia.

The legislation would give power to the Menzies government to declare individuals and organisations as Communists or sympathisers and ban their activities. Rank and file union activists, union officials, peace and social justice activists, could be sacked from their jobs. Workers campaigning for higher wages, equal pay for women, and world peace could be caught in the net, labelled as communists and face five years' imprisonment. The Menzies government was preparing to set up concentration camps capable of holding 1,000 communists and their families.

On 22 September 1951 in a nationwide Referendum on the Communist Party Dissolution Bill, a majority of Australian people rejected the reactionary Menzies government's attempt to ban the Party and crush the working class and progressive movements. The defeat of the Referendum was the result of 18 months of



colossal united front mass work led by the Communist Party of Australia and D. H. Evatt (then Opposition Leader of the Labor Party). Across the country, unions, peace and democratic rights and civil rights organisations, people from many different walks of life and political backgrounds, in cities and rural communities, were actively organising against the ban on the Communist Party. The Australian people's defeat of the anti-Communist Bill stands alongside the mass struggles at the Eureka Stockade, the World War I anti-conscription struggles, the 1969 mass battle against the Penal Powers, the 1966-1971 mass mobilisations against the Vietnam War, the 1998 MUA dispute, the opposition to 2003 Iraq War, and the "Your Rights at Work" union mobilisations in 2005-2007.

1956 - Differences in the Communist movement

In 1956 a major rift developed in the international communist movement precipitated by the change of direction in the Soviet leadership led by Khrushchev after the death of Stalin. Khrushchev loudly rejected the principles of Marxism, scientific socialism and the enormous achievements of the Soviet people under the leadership of Stalin and the Soviet Communist Party. This impacted on the entire international communist movement dependent on political and ideological leadership from the Soviet Union. Khrushchev rejected Marxist principles and the lessons of the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, instead pushing for peaceful transition to socialism through bourgeois parliamentary elections. He argued for peaceful co-existence between imperialism and socialism. It led to some abandoning Marxism-Leninism and scientific socialism.

Within the CPA the differences were not solely centred on Khrushchev's rejection of communism in the Soviet Union and slandering Stalin's contribution to the communist movement. Even before the 1956 major split in the international communist movement, political differences were growing within the CPA over the course of socialist revolution in Australia. The

change of direction in the Soviet Union and disagreements in the international communist movement crystallised the existing political and ideological differences within the CPA. Differences were emerging over the Communist Party's approach to parliamentarism, trade unionism, the bourgeois state, communist organisation in the period of bourgeois dictatorship and communist methods of work.

Dependency on the Soviet Union for political guidance and direction was a major shortcoming in the CPA from its inception in 1920. In many ways this was inevitable, but it held back the will and ability of Communists to investigate and work out independently the political situation in Australia and our own path to socialism. By 1964 there was still little willingness amongst some in the leadership of the old CPA to correct this major error and develop its own class analysis of Australia and socialist revolution. It reflected the historically colonial origins of European Australia and looking for overseas guidance.

Differences over the course of Australia's socialist revolution and the abandonment of Marxism by the new Soviet leadership continued, leading to the formation of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) in 1964.

1964 – A new direction

In March 1964 the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) was formed, setting itself the task of scientifically investigating and analysing Australian conditions through the study of Marxism. The founding members of the CPA (M-L) and its Chairman Ted Hill set themselves the task to uphold the revolutionary integrity of the Communist movement in Australia founded in 1920. The founders of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) began the job of rectifying the mistakes and shortcomings in the old Communist Party to improve the work of CPA (M-L) members and supporters in serving the working class and the socialist movement.

The first 40 years of the Communist Party were examined. Shortcomings and weaknesses were identified and the CPA (M-L) set about correcting



the ideological, political and organisational errors in the CPA's approach to bourgeois parliament, trade unionism, the bourgeois state and revolutionary organisation, independence and unity in the united front, and the left sectarianism that separated communists from the people. The CPA (M-L) condemned the vilification of Stalin and the rise of revisionism in the Soviet Union and internationally.

Australian conditions

Analysis of classes in Australia revealed Australia as an economic, political and military dependency, controlled first by the British, and after World War II, replaced by US imperialism. It recognised the anti-imperialist character of Australia's socialist revolution, exposing imperialism and the local comprador bourgeoisie as the dominant class, with small farmers, small businesses as potential allies of the working class. The two main decisive classes standing against each other are the imperialist class (mainly foreign capital and local monopolies) and the working class, with the small to medium businesses and farmers caught between the two main classes.

Trade Unions

The CPA (M-L) views trade unions under capitalism as having two sides. They are important working class mass organisations in resisting capital's relentless grinding down and intensifying the exploitation of workers. They are important schools of class struggle. The other side of trade unions under capitalism is their inherent bourgeois politics and ideology which tie workers to capitalism and divert struggle away from ending capitalist exploitation of the working class and the fight for socialism. Structurally trade unions are tied to capitalism. Communists belong in unions, fighting side by side with workers against capital's attacks, strengthening the collective power of the working class and drawing out the lessons of class struggle.

The old CPA's main aim for Communists working in trade unions was to simply capture official leadership positions. Trade unions were seen as

vehicles for change to socialism. This political view denied an aspect of trade unions' role in maintaining the dominance of capital and co-opting workers to capitalism. The main emphasis had been on communists capturing leading official positions in unions, abandoning the essential mass work of protracted struggle and political education and channelling working class struggle into parliament.

Inevitably, this led to communists deserting working class independence from the ALP and capital. The switch to social democracy by these "communist" leaders reached its peak during the 1983 Hawke and Keating's ALP Accord with the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). Some leading CPA members, also in leading positions of peak trade unions, including the ACTU, strongly pushed the bosses' Accord on workers, much to the disgust of many rank and file members and organisers. It was inevitable that some of these leaders took the next logical step of leaving the CPA to join the ALP and seeking preselection for parliamentary seats. Ultimately, this and the abandonment of Marxism led to the CPA becoming irrelevant, and it was only a matter of time before the remaining members dismantled it in 1991. The same so-called communist trade union leaders supported the deregistration of the Builders' Labourers Federation (BLF) by the Hawke Labor government and other state ALP governments in 1980s.

Parliamentarism

An important area of political difference was the attitude to parliament and parliamentary elections. For many years the CPA stood candidates for election, with little result or influence. There was virtually no analysis or criticism raised that parliament was a bourgeois institution; on the one hand it was formed by democratic election, and on the other hand it relied on the two-party competition (Liberal – Labor) promoted by the bourgeois media and the wealthy capitalist patrons of the main parties. The illusion that democracy was the right to vote every three years for a parliamentary party was assumed to be the only real democracy that



would reflect the needs and desires of the masses. The old CPA accepted and strengthened this illusion, and encouraged the further deception that improvements in workers' conditions, and ultimately socialism, could be achieved simply through elections in this bourgeois institution.

The CPA (M-L) has never rejected the idea of standing members for parliamentary election in principle. However, in our view parliament can be used to advance the revolutionary objectives of the working class in the right timing and conditions, but importantly as a reflection and a gauge of the level of working class political consciousness. Furthermore, it would be mainly as a platform to promote the revolutionary position of the Party and support the revolutionary struggle of the people, in times when this was legal. The great distinction of the CPA (M-L) position was - and continues to be - the emphasis on mass work among the people in workplaces, communities, trade unions and progressive organisations. The emphasis is on developing independent grass roots people's organisations and mass movement.

In 1970 a group of CPA members loyal to the new revisionist leadership of the Soviet Union after the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia, and unhappy with growing "New Left" tendencies in the CPA, split from the CPA forming the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA). In 1996, not long after the old CPA dismantled itself the SPA took the name CPA.

Methods of work – mass work

The CPA (M-L) identified errors in the old party's ideology and methods of work. Left-blocism and a self-satisfied left bubble of likeminded people became a problem in the Communist Party of the 1950s. It wasn't easy to be a communist and belong to the Communist Party in the Cold War period of the 1950s. It was easier to socialise and

seek comfort from politically likeminded people and congregate in Party headquarters. This led to arrogance and the isolation of many communists from the people.

Party membership was publicly known with members and sympathisers under constant surveillance by the state, exposing activists and workers.

The CPA (M-L) moved away from this left sectarian echo chamber organisation. Instead members were urged to integrate with ordinary people in workplaces and communities, learning from the people ways to connect the longer-term goals of socialism to the immediate day to day struggles of the people, without abandoning the principles of communism and succumbing to the all-pervasive and surrounding pressures of capitalist ideology and culture. It required a change in practice and attitude by communists towards ordinary people as the teachers of communists, instead of communists being arrogant know-alls.

Communists must be anchored to the people...We don't seek the lime light, the spectacular and the self-importance of capitalist individualism.

Organised and systematic study of Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao were now closely linked to the revolutionary practice and development of Marxist theory in Australian conditions. Communists must be anchored to the people in workplaces, communities, unions, fighting for livelihoods, in anti-war, peace and democratic rights campaigns, in people's environmental struggles. We don't seek the lime light, the spectacular and the self-importance of capitalist individualism.

Revolutionary Organisation

In the view of Marxist-Leninists, Communist Party organisation must serve the politics and ideology of the revolutionary working class. A Communist Party operating in the hostile environment of capitalism and the bourgeois state obviously must protect its organisation, members and



supporters. The years of reactionary anti-communist propaganda, outright lies and distortions has planted distrust and suspicion about communists and communist parties. We continually strive to overcome the obstacles standing between communists and the people, always guided by the political consciousness of the people with whom we work.

The CPA (M-L) organisation and work are best characterised as the Iceberg principle. Only the top tip of the iceberg is visible to the state. The exposed tip is a small number of public people. The great majority of Party members are the fish swimming in the sea of the people. They don't hide their communism from the people with whom they work, but nor do they go out of their way to proclaim themselves to the bourgeois state.

Revolutionary service to the people

The founding members of the CPA (M-L) came from different walks of life across the country. They were mostly former members of the old CPA and included union leaders, factory workers, labourers, railway workers, office workers, lawyers, doctors, teachers, journalists and many others. Many were publicly known and active in all states across Australia. Some of the more publicly known included Paddy Malone, Victorian State Secretary of the BLF; Norm Wallace, Victorian Assistant State Secretary of the BLF; and Norm Gallagher later National Secretary of the BLF; Ted Bull, Victorian State Secretary of the Waterside Workers' Federation, Harry Bouquet and Peter Close along with other wharfies and seafarers; Clarrie O'Shea, the Tramways Union Secretary who led the 1969 Penal Powers struggle; Mel Mooney; Ted Hill, Chairman of CPA (M-L), Dulcie Steffanou, Betty Oke, Betty Little-O'Shea, Fortis Antipas, Jack Lazarus, Cedric Ralph, Rick Oke, Ken Miller, Charlie McCaffrey (ex-Ironworkers Federation and State Secretary of the CPA in South Australia), Dr David Caust, Marjorie Johnston, and Roy and Muriel Baynes,

Bert Chandler, Syd Clare, Jim Dabron, Jim Sharp and Don Wilson.

And there were many other fine working class Communists across the country steeled in the hard lives and fierce battles of the Great Depression, WW2 and the Cold War.¹

But these and other publicly known leaders are only the tip of the much larger CPA (M-L) organisation and members working with the people. The political influence of the CPA (M-L) and its members involved in people's struggles is wider and deeper, than the public appearances.

Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, young activists and militant workers were joining the CPA (M-L). Fresh from national anti-Vietnam war protests and the Clarrie O'Shea Penal Powers battles they were schooled in the experiences of mass struggle and inspired by the working class leadership of the CPA (M-L). They were politically inspired by the Chinese Revolution, Mao Zedong, and the heroic people of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh and the Communist Party of Vietnam. Political study, discussions and learning from the CPA (M-L) veterans gave them profound understanding of the necessity for protracted and patient mass work and deep connections to the people. Independently of the CPA (M-L) they formed the Worker Student Alliance that spread across five states.



Comrade Ted Bull addresses workers

¹ More information about some of the veteran CPA (M-L) comrades can be found at <http://cpaml.org/ourcomrades.php>



Comrade Dulcie Steffanou, a lifelong revolutionary and Party member whose outstanding contributions to the movement were often not publicly seen

Many became leaders in the struggles of the people in workplaces, unions and communities. Some were publicly known but most were not. John Cummins, the former State President of the Construction Union (CFMEU), was one of the publicly known young working class activists. John left the university, got a job as a builders' labourer, joined the union and became one of the working class' long time courageous leading sons. John always upheld Marxism-Leninism, studying and applying Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao in his union work as a militant and revolutionary worker serving the working class. He was a leading member of the CPA (M-L) collective leadership.

Mass work

The CPA (M-L) approach to mass work and the communist party organisation operating under the capitalist state means most of the party and its members involved in the struggles along side the people are not publicly known. This enables communists to both learn from the people and guide in the day to day struggles, all the time accumulating the practical, theoretical and

political knowledge of Australia's conditions and revolutionary struggle for anti-imperialist independence and socialism. Communism is not rammed down workers' throats. Communists listen, respect and learn from the people, introducing socialist politics according to the level of consciousness and conditions. Not as an abstract utopia, but connected to people's real lives and experiences, without needing to prove themselves by constantly waving red flags.

The other side of this publicly unseen, and "seemingly unrewarding communist mass work" is that achievements in people's struggles are often not credited publicly to the Party and its members.

Mass line and mass work connected to study is central in the work of CPA (M-L) members.

Inevitably, mistakes are made and learned from. It's not the making of mistakes in themselves that is the problem, it's the inability to recognise and correct mistakes.

For 56 years, CPA (M-L) members deepened involvement in workplaces, unions and communities - amongst the manufacturing workers, construction workers, electricians, plumbers, railway workers, tramway workers, nurses, teachers, car factory workers, rubber workers, factory workers in multinational food processing corporations, cleaners, rural workers, in services and hospitality industries, public servants, bank workers, local council workers, postal workers, retail workers, students, doctors, lawyers, scientists, accountants, academics, and many others, as well as amongst migrants in factories and ethnic communities. But because most of their day to day political involvement with the people is protracted, unspectacular and not publicised they are often publicly unknown, but respected by the people they work with.

We're involved in child care centres and kindergartens, community health centres, school communities, parents' groups, local environment, in working class suburbs fighting against freeways, multinational corporations and oil refineries for protection of local communities



and the environment, fighting for public education.

The 1969 Clarrie O’Shea Penal Powers struggle is a testament to the CPA (M-L) political work serving the people.

In national moratoriums leading opposition to US imperialism, against conscription and supporting the National Liberation Front of Vietnam. In the late 1960s and early 1970s during the powerful national Moratorium mass movements against the Vietnam War, CPA (M-L) activists and supporters were calling out US imperialism as the main enemy in the war against the Vietnamese people and Australia’s master. The national movements for Australia’s independence grew out of these struggles.

CPA (M-L) members were at the centre of struggles against the CIA engineered dismissal of the Whitlam government, the fight to defend Medibank, against the ID Card, against apartheid in South Africa; in solidarity with independence movements by the people of Timor Leste, Indonesia, West Papua and Bougainville, in Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands and Oceania.

In 1974, members and supporters initiated and led campaigns against US military bases, organised the Long March to North West Cape, demanded the closure of Pine Gap and all US military bases in Australia.

There’s not enough space in this already long article to acknowledge all the comrades involved in the many battles of Australia’s working class in workplaces and communities across the nation.

CPA (M-L) members were among the rank and file workers in the manufacturing and metals Union (now AMWU) vigorously opposing the Accord concocted by the ACTU and Hawke government. A rank and file metals union group and its newspaper were viciously attacked, its members vilified by the Union leadership and threatened to blacklist them across the industry. Homes of union delegates and rank and file outdoor local council workers, battling the ALP sell outs controlling their union, were shot at in the middle



CPA (M-L) founding Chairman Ted Hill (L) with Comrade Charlie McCaffrey (R)

of the night. Much is already known about the history of the BLF under sustained attack by the capitalist state with the help of Labor governments.

In the mid-1980s, the CPA (M-L) was warning about imperialism devouring Australia’s manufacturing, de-industrialising and restructuring Australia’s industries and tightening imperialist domination. CPA (M-L) members and party literature warned that imperialist “globalisation” was undermining and destroying the foreign dominated car industry, steel manufacturing, the tools industry, and driving the privatisation of public utilities. The Party was warning that the capitalist and imperialist restructuring is creating two tiers of workers – a small core of permanent workers and a large periphery of casual low paid workers with few rights and conditions.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s in the ongoing big battles of the giant multinational car factories of Ford, GMH and Chrysler in South Australia and Victoria, communists and their supporters were with car workers battling not only against the multinational car company owners, but also against the union official leadership who played more of a role of controlling workers rather than leading and supporting them in winning their demands. Party members were active in car workers’ rank and file organisations and strongly supported by the majority of workers. Over time, both rank and file organisation members and the majority of car workers were supporting action over broader industry issues such as



nationalisation of the car industry and broad political issues. The bosses, in collusion with the ALP aligned union leadership, tried to crush car workers' militancy and their rank and file organisation. Representatives of the rank and file organisation were sacked. But this did not end the militancy of car workers. Important lessons were learned about mass work and the necessity to protect rank and file activists from the bosses and sell out union leaders.

In Victoria's LaTrobe Valley, home to the state's power stations, Party members and supporters stood up to Hawke and led the long strikes for wages and conditions. They led the massive struggle against privatisation of the state's power generating stations in the LaTrobe Valley.

The popular theoretical section called *Marxism Today*, which was featured in every issue of the Party paper *Vanguard* for many years, and continues today online on our website, was originally started and maintained by a group of



Comrade John Cummins dedicated his life to serving working people

young railway workers. As well as this, they distributed Party material, and held union positions in their work depots and on state committees for many years. At all times they kept up their close links with fellow workers and supported and guided many struggles. None of this could have happened had there not been regular contact, encouragement and suggestions from the Party leadership.

Fighting for the future

Working people want genuine democracy, secure jobs and livelihoods, guaranteed workers' rights, urgent action on climate change and protection of the environment. They want a system that delivers universal free public health and education, science, technology, and culture that serve the people not monopoly profits. They want the Sovereignty of First People and a just Treaty. They want justice, equality and an end to racism, and a world free of imperialist wars and interventions.

But the decaying and crumbling system of capitalism and imperialism can only deliver deeper exploitation, insecurity, suffering, oppression, and imperialist wars. A genuine socialist system, with the revolutionary working class firmly in charge, will eradicate the inherent crises and injustices of capitalism and imperialism.

The tide of socialism and communism is unstoppable. It demands a Communist Party and communist movement deeply connected to the working people and committed to the revolutionary service of the people.

Serve the people and join us in the struggle for an independent and socialist Australia!

Immediate Fighting Program of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist):

<http://www.cpaml.org/web/uploads2/fighting+program+2019+v7+FINAL.pdf>

General Program of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist):

<http://www.cpaml.org/generalprogram.php>



Talk on the Centenary of the Communist Movement in Australia

by *Michael Williss*

The following is the text of a talk given by CPA (M-L) supporter Michael Williss to a public meeting held to commemorate the centenary of the founding of the original Communist Party of Australia. The meeting was jointly organised by the South Australia Labour History Society and the Search Foundation. Four of the six speakers were from the Search Foundation, the successor organisation for those who dissolved the old CPA in 1991. Bob Briton, former General Secretary of the current CPA, and now General Secretary of the newly formed Australian Communist Party also spoke.

Comrades and friends,

We are speaking today on a platform whose focus is The Communist Party of Australia, 1920 – 2020: Achievements celebrated – lessons for the future...

I want to address you as a representative of one of our three Communist parties – in my case, the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist).

My personal preference for the focus of our talk would have been The Centenary of the Communist Movement in Australia 1920 -2020.

The original Communist Party (CPA), founded on October 30 1920 did not see out its centenary. It was dissolved in 1991. It lasted 71 years.

The achievement we should be celebrating is not the dissolution of the original CPA, but the continuation of work in the name of Australian Communism by people whose commitment to Marxism-Leninism was stronger and more determined than those who walked away from it.

I am not making an exclusive claim on behalf of my own Party. The CPA (M-L), formed in 1964, is now 56 years old. The current CPA was created by a pro-Soviet group that left the CPA in 1971, originally naming themselves the Socialist Party of Australia and then renaming themselves the Communist Party of Australia in October 1996. In early 2019 a group of members left the current

CPA and declared the foundation of the Australian Communist Party (ACP).

It should not matter whether a Communist party is fifty years old or five days old. If it expresses its commitment to a future Communist Australia in the name it carries, and makes a genuine effort to involve itself in the struggles of the Australian people, then it should be accorded an equal status with all others. That is the position we have adopted towards both the current CPA and the new ACP. We have said that “Neither our Party, the CPA nor the ACP are the original Communist Party formed in 1920. No Party can claim that the centenary of the Communist movement in Australia and its inspiring history belongs to it alone.”

I can tell you that both the ACP and the CPA have agreed with us. Bob Briton is here and can confirm that for the ACP. In an email discussion with me earlier this year, CPA President Vinnie Molina said, “We do recognise and agree that our two parties were both grown out of the original Communist Party of Australia dissolved in 1991.”

We have also adopted the position towards both the CPA and ACP that we should acknowledge the ideological, political and organisational differences that exist between us. Each Party can reserve the right to express its own opinion on these. However, advanced workers and activists in the various progressive movements find it



difficult to accept the reality of three separate Australian Communist parties. Advanced workers and the more militant sections of the trade union movement vigorously promote the slogan “United we win, divided we fall.”

It must be our responsibility as Communist parties to try and unite in the service of the Australian working class. We can reserve our differences whilst seeking common ground.

For example, after the initial hostility arising from the split in 1963-4, moves were slowly made towards reopening discussions with others in the Communist movement. At a conference on the History of Communism in Australia held in Melbourne in August 1980, our founding Chairperson, Comrade Ted Hill offered self-critical reflections on his own role in the divisions between Communists in this country. He concluded by saying: “We are concerned to develop in every possible way the unity and integrity of the Communist movement. There must be exchanges of views and the deepest possible study of Marxist-Leninist general principle in order to guide actual struggle in Australia.”

On 18 September 1982, at the suggestion of our Party, a discussion was held between representatives of the CPA (M-L) and the CPA. The latter was represented by Bernie Taft, Mark Taft and Rob Durbridge. It was agreed that Ted Hill, representing the Party that had proposed the talks, should make the opening remarks. At the end of a lengthy presentation, Hill concluded:

On what we regard as fundamental questions of Marxism we are perfectly happy to discuss them. They should not necessarily be put on one side and hidden as though they don’t exist. If discussion shows greater importance should be

attached to agreement on given questions then differences can be placed in a subordinate position. Differences on many questions doubtless exist and their resolution or ultimate critical disagreement may be a fairly long process. The search in our opinion should be for common ground, the narrowing of differences and joint efforts in unity in the struggles and demands of the Australian

people. Sooner or later the Australian people will insist upon one Communist Party that upholds in Australian conditions the fundamental principles of Marxism. Hence our proposal about this discussion. Every effort ought to be made at least in exploring the ground for agreement both for our two sides and others who avow adherence to Marxism.

In the course of discussions that lasted over quite a few hours, Durbridge suggested a joint statement and suggested the SPA be

included. He said, “I feel it would be much more powerful if the whole Communist movement including the SPA, made a statement in a very general way on the current circumstances and working for the workers.”

Hill agreed, saying that “Perhaps publication of the material of the other” could be achieved, and suggested that the Socialist Workers Party, a Trotskyite organisation that had a certain following, and some of whose members Hill did not think “are so bad”, should be included.

The outcome was a four-page supplement to which each of the CPA, CPA (M-L), SPA, and SWP contributed a page. It was carried in each of the parties’ papers.

The achievement we should be celebrating is not the dissolution of the original CPA, but the continuation of work in the name of Australian Communism by people whose commitment to Marxism-Leninism was stronger and more determined than those who walked away from it.



Further talks between the various left parties and organisations occurred in December 1984 and January 1985.

In 1983, the Hawke government, with the support of the ACTU, and leading members of the original CPA, had introduced the Accord. This attack on wages and conditions was the green light for employers to misuse sections of the Trade Practices Act against unions when they attempted to fight back. Robe River, Dollar Sweets, Mudginberri and SEQEB were all cut to a template and encouraged Communists and progressives to develop a fightback agenda. Comrades of ours in the ACT were instrumental in organizing the first National Fightback Conference in Canberra in 1986. The emphasis was on developing networks of activists across a range of organisations. I recall talking to Hill and Gallagher one moment, and Peter Symons and Jack McPhillips (SPA) the next.

Communication was open and respectful.

Participants left Canberra having agreed to establish state Fightback committees and to convene again in Melbourne the following Easter. The core of the continuing Fightback organizing were the four parties: CPA (M-L), CPA, SPA and SWP. However, differences arose between those who wanted to promote an agenda of rank and file militancy independent of the ALP, and those who sought to take advantage of the disillusion with the ALP to create a “more progressive” social-democratic party. A document in support of the latter, “Towards a New Party of the Left”, was widely circulated, mainly by CPA members and those in a new breakaway from the SPA, Pat Clancy’s Association for Communist Unity (ACU).

Now I know I am speaking to an audience that I assume is largely supportive of a social-democratic alternative to capitalism, but I am also speaking as a Communist about a century of Communist movement in Australia.

Regrettably, the moves within the CPA to support a new social-democratic party saw the rot set in that would prevent the original CPA from ever

seeing in its centenary. However, the Communist movement continued and still exists.

Despite the dissolution of the CPA in 1991, the discussions which had taken place between the parties had ongoing value.

One important practical outcome of the discussions between the parties was the relative ease with which the labourers’ union (largely under the influence of our Party) and the craft union (largely under the influence of the SPA and its rebranding as the CPA). In the late 1980s, the Builders Labourers’ Federation was deregistered by the Labor Government. In the early 1990s agreement was reached on an incorporation of the remnants of the BLF with the BWIU in a new union, the CFMEU. In Victoria this process was led by our comrade John Cummins who became the new union’s Federal President and was President of the Victorian branch until his death in 2006. In South Australia, a remarkably respectful and mutually supportive relationship between our comrade Martin O’Malley (BLF) and the SPA/CPA’s Bennie Carslake (BWIU) saw the CFMEU take its rightful place as the union for all construction workers.

Recognising the great significance of the defeat of Menzies’ referendum to ban the Communist Party, the CPA and ourselves jointly organised and sponsored meetings in Victoria and South Australia to celebrate the 60th anniversary of its defeat. Veterans of the campaign from both parties spoke. That was in October, 2011. More recently, on the occasion of the centenary of the October Socialist Revolution, our Party proposed, and the CPA agreed, to issue a joint statement on that momentous event. The same statement was carried by both parties.

In an International Women’s Day event in Melbourne last March organised by the ACP, CPA (M-L) activist Shirley Winton was an invited speaker.

No doubt there will continue to be opportunities for the three parties to seek common ground whilst acknowledging and reserving differences.



One of those differences is the question of organisation. The original CPA was an open organisation largely built around suburban branches. When we re-established ourselves as the CPA (M-L) we decided that membership should in general not be disclosed, and that it should where possible be workplace based.

Workplace based organisation concentrated the Party's efforts on workers at the point of production and deliberately steered our focus away from organizing around local, state or federal elections.

Non-disclosure of membership had three objectives: to minimize surveillance of our members by state organisations; to give them some protection from individual harassment and intimidation by fascist street thugs; and to prevent the barriers to their political work that can be erected by people who have swallowed the all-pervasive anti-Communism embedded in our education, our culture and our political system.

An early study of our Party by ASIO conceded some success with the first of those – making state surveillance difficult.

The ASIO report, 101 pages long and written in 1968, four years into the life of our Party, stated:

“...many of the Party's characteristics do not conform with those usually attributed to a Communist Party. Whilst it is possible to establish, by means of membership cards, the size and complexion of the C.P.A., to describe the Party's organisational structure from its National Executive, through State, District and Section Committees to Locality Branches, to clearly delineate policy and policy changes in the C.P.A. and to observe its

activities in many fields, ranging from the “cultural” to the industrial, it has not been possible to do these things with regard to the C.P.A. (M/L).”

In effect, our Party organises as an iceberg, with a relatively few public spokespeople and most members engaging in mass work in their workplaces and community organisations, but often without attribution to the Party of the gains and advances that they achieve in mass work.

So, what are the lessons for the future?

Communist organisation is still needed in Australia, as indeed it is in every capitalist and socialist society. In our view it needs to take seriously the application of Marxism-Leninism to the struggles of the people, and to its creative development in the light of changing circumstances.

Australian Communists have maintained their ideological, political and organisational structures despite the attempt to destroy them by Menzies, and the success, to a certain extent, of their destruction at the hands of those who did achieve Menzies' goals in 1991.

We do not need an international socialist motherland or fatherland. We have grown up and left the home of the Comintern. Khrushchevite revisionism saw the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union long before the formal dismantling of left-over socialist institutions by Gorbachev and Co.

We do not need an international socialist motherland or fatherland. We have grown up and left the home of the Comintern. Khrushchevite revisionism saw the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union long before the formal dismantling of left-over socialist institutions by Gorbachev and Co.

Likewise, the Deng-era reforms have taken China from the socialist road to the capitalist road, and even to the highway of social-imperialism.

Some are tempted to see the restorations of capitalism in such strong bastions of socialism as



an indication of the failure of socialism. The Chinese Marxist Pao Yu-ching has argued strongly that these restorations were not failures, but defeats. If they were failures inherent in socialism, we would be justified in abandoning the effort to establish it here. If, however, they are defeats then we are justified in maintaining our commitment to a socialist future, ever more confident that we can overcome the forces opposing us.

We were often called, in our early days, the “Maoists”. It was intended to be a disparaging label and we did not use it ourselves. However, we continue to draw inspiration from the somewhat clumsily translated term Mao Zedong Thought. We are determined to continue our study of the classics of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Zedong, as well as those of our founding Chairperson, Ted Hill, not to be know-alls, not to take solace in an out-of-date dogma, but to *know*

the teachings in order to *use the method*, as Stalin-era President of the USSR Mikhail Kalinin said “daily, hourly, in the most diverse, peculiar, unprecedented circumstances.”

The centenary of our movement is a living, continuing process and not an exercise in nostalgia for a Party that was dissolved in its 71st year.

Despite our relatively low public profile, we continue to recruit great young people who are doing fantastic, effective mass work in their workplaces, their communities and around questions of the defence of democratic rights, defence of the unemployed and precariously employed, and for an independent and peaceful Australia freed from the grip of imperialism and its drive to war.

Long live the Communist movement in Australia!



Reflections from Working in the Car Industry in South Australia

by Ned K.

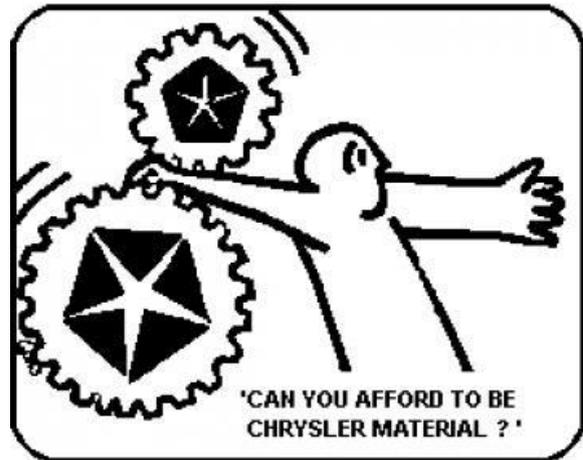
The factories of the multinational car companies were one area where CPA (M-L) supporters played a significant role in building rank and file organisation and class struggle trade unionism, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. This article is a reflection by one such worker on his experiences at that time. Today, the car manufacturing industry in Australia has been completely wiped out at the hands of the imperialist multinational corporations that dominated it.

When I was in my early 20s, I worked in a large car factory in South Australia for a few years. Previously I had worked in the food processing industry.

In both industries, in the big workplaces with more than one hundred workers, union membership was close to 100% of all workers. There was also a culture of workers electing their union reps for their departments. Collective action by members over company rejection of log of claims or over company attempts to speed up production lines were common. This was particularly the case in the large car plants like the one I worked in where there were thousands of workers.

In the car factories, there was on-going struggle by workers not only against the multinational car company owners, but also against the union official leadership who played more of a role of controlling workers rather than leading and supporting them in winning their demands.

Luckily for me, the car factory that I worked in had already developed active rank and file organisation which any car worker, not just departmental union reps could join. The company and the union officials were opposed to this level of organisation among workers, fearing that they would lose control of the workers. Workers involved in the rank and file organisation produced and distributed leaflets to let workers know what was going on in all areas of the factory



and also exposed collusion between the company and union officialdom during major disputes.

These newsletters were popular among migrant workers in the factory. The rank and file organisation in the factory had participants from different cultural backgrounds, especially those from southern European backgrounds.

Some of the members of the rank and file organisation were also members of the Party. However, they never imposed their view on other members of the rank and file organisation but always supported them and stood with the workers in struggles big and small.

The company became worried when they could see that the majority of workers in the factory were no longer reluctantly following the recommendations of the union officialdom when disputes arose. More and more, workers looked to the rank and file organisation for leadership.



Over time, both rank and file organisation members and the majority of car workers supported action over broader industry issues such as nationalisation of the car industry and also broad political issues. With respect to political issues, car workers took strike action when the Whitlam Government was dismissed by Kerr and his US big business masters in 1975.

During the development of rank and file organisation in this car factory and others like it in SA, Party members who worked in these factories did not reveal their Party membership except to workers who wanted to join the Party. Car workers who joined the Party through working closely with existing Party members understood the need for organisation that could survive in all conditions. The level of organisation and class consciousness of the car workers reached such a level that the car factory multinational owners took one drastic step after another to try and maintain their power over the workers.

They sacked militant union rank and file representatives, and spied on workers to find out which workers were involved in rank and file organisation. When this failed to stem the rising tide of worker solidarity and collective actions, the multinationals resorted to mass sackings which included targeting workers they thought were part of the rank and file organisation. The union officialdom was aligned with the ALP politically. They came out in the daily press and supported the multinationals' targeted sacking of rank and file leaders.

Unfortunately, the car factory owners with the collusion of the union officialdom did a pretty thorough job of smashing car workers' rank and file organisation. One lesson from this for any

workplace today in any industry is that, like in society generally, workers' organisation does need to be like an iceberg so that the boss class and their lackeys in parliament or union officialdom can never know the total membership of the workers' organisation. In the car industry in the 1970s in SA, the multinationals showed they were prepared to cast the net wide when layoffs came, in order to maximise their chances of getting rid of any suspected Party members and progressive rank and file workers.

My experience of working in the car industry in the 1970s showed me that the Party's ideas about the need for the workers to become the ruling class of a socialist Australia were true. That experience also showed that a special type of organisation was needed to win for workers. It had to be strong enough to withstand all the tactics of the bosses to divide the workers. The nature of the class society in which we lived then and still live in today requires a workers' leading organisation which has membership deep among the workplaces and workers' communities.

The big factories with thousands of workers in them were fertile ground for development of working class leaders. These workplaces have largely gone now due to how capitalism has developed in Australia. However, the workplaces of today are in some way places including workers of diverse backgrounds who have experienced harsh conditions and tremendous struggles before their arrival in Australia. They are now participating in workers' struggles in their new home and taking leading roles in these struggles, whether they are farm workers, hospital workers or mine workers.

The future is bright for the working class in Australia.



More than Meets the Eye – the CPA(M-L) in NSW

Part 1: Bert and Syd

by Louisa L.

The breadth of the work of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) has never been readily apparent to those looking on. But there's more than meets the eye.

For several decades after its formation in 1964, the CPA (M-L) worked in a hostile environment in Sydney where the old CPA, dissolved in 1991, was strongest.

Khrushchev's poisonous "secret speech" to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 caused huge divisions in the Australian party (after initial but superficial condemnation) and in progressive forces across the world. Till then, the

Comintern, the international organisation of communist parties run by the Soviet Party, had the final say in the Australian Party, even though it lacked detailed knowledge of Australian conditions.

International relations between parties had not been understood in those years, when the Soviet Union was under constant and brutal attack from united capitalist forces.

Much of these inter party relations are analysed in E.F. Hill's work, particularly in the posthumously published *Communism in Australia, Reflections and Recollections*² which makes a much more dispassionate appraisal of



Comrade E.F Hill (L) with Comrade Bert Chandler (C) and well-known Australian author Thomas Keneally (R)

² *Communism in Australia, Reflections and Recollections*, E.F Hill:
<http://www.marxists.org/history/erol/australia/hill-last/index.htm>



events.

The essence of communism was the battleground. While triggered by the international split, the struggle against revisionism was key. Core principles of Marxism-Leninism had to be studied and implemented in Australia's circumstances. Just as Russian conditions were unique in 1917, so are each country's.

In Sydney, parties that followed Trotsky's lead, miniscule before 1956, were growing by the 1960s. The old CPA, with its increasingly relaxed attitude to organisation and a New Left liberalism in the face of corporate power, was relatively large. Some struggled against liberalism within the CPA, but study of Marxism in Australian conditions was often superficial. Its mainly young members often existed in a bloc, with little direct contact with the wider community beyond those who called themselves 'left'.

The greatest strength of these parties was in Sydney.

Painting targets

In a recent book, *The Far Left in Australia since 1945*, the introduction to Chapter 2 on "Maoism" suggests the CPA (M-L) and its followers were "arguably the most despised grouping within the Australian Far Left".

Let's leave aside the wisdom of an avowedly left critique using the term "far left", which certainly paints a target on any groups so named, especially when politicians and media talk of "extremists like Antifa".

Beyond that, the term of "despised" gives the idea of something below human condemnation, as if we should have been grouped with paedophiles and those in power who covered up their activities.

This is despite the contending parties or groups still bearing the names "communist", "socialist" or "left" cooperating in the 1980s at such events as the 1989 Fightback Conference in Melbourne, which saw presentations from almost all of those

parties. In Sydney it led to some united efforts against nationwide attacks on the working class.

Bert

Only a small section of our members have ever made their membership fully public. There were times in the old party when not revealing membership was very important. Witness Bert Chandler.

Bert had both acclamation from the people and attack from their enemies. Few now know his name.

Written records about Bert begin in 1932 when he was prominent in the Australian Labor Party in country NSW. As Lithgow Mayor in 1937 Bert was "responsible for the most progressive works in the history of that municipality". (*Grenfell Record and Lachlan District Advocate*, 1 June 1939)

The Advocate said he was deeply involved in cultural, political and welfare issues, as diverse as the Show Committee, hospital board, Horticultural Society and as an "active organiser for the relief of distress amongst the unemployed". This foreshadowed the broad community connections of our later member.

By 1937 he was on NSW ALP's Central Executive.

He remained with the ALP when the Communist Party was illegal between June 1940 and late 1942, able to work and speak freely.

In May 1943, as General Secretary of the NSW Labor Party, he told the Wollongong May Day rally that "there must be a complete organisation of the people" in order to defeat fascism. (*South Coast Times and Wollongong Argus*, Friday 7 May 1943)

In all likelihood he had been already a member of the CPA for some years, but in 1945 he publicly joined, moving straight on to the Central Committee. By 1947 he was CPA electoral Campaign Director.

Cold war, hot water

The Cold War poured heat on dissidents. In 1953



Bert was one of three men charged with sedition, under Section 24D of the Commonwealth Crimes Act, after raids on suburban homes and the Communist Party's offices.

The Crown Prosecutor raged, quoting this sentence, "The monarchy is a useful weapon to protect the system, to stifle class-consciousness, foster class-collaboration, and paralyse working-class action for social change." (*Illawarra Daily Mercury*, Thursday 20 Aug 1953) Shock horror!

The prosecution failed. For Bert, who ran the Party's publishing business (making money by sales of the racing paper 'Trot Guide') they tried again. Bert was hauled before the 1954-55 Royal Commission on Espionage, nicknamed the 'Sharpley Commission' after a communist renegade or spy, Cecil Sharpley.

Bert was undeterred. In 1964 he took a leading role in the new party led by Hill. With him he brought his wide connections with everyday people and communists across the state, his organisational skills and his courage. By then he was working at the state-owned Small Arms Factory.

A comrade who worked closely with him when he managed Sydney's East Wind Bookshop from the late 1960s said, "He was single-minded in his struggle to make socialism a reality in Australia. He never veered from his course. But no one is perfect. He could be too demanding." Remarking that was hardly surprising given the hard times he lived through, the comrade said he was a "wonderful man. I loved him. He made history in Australia".

To this writer, he was kind, gentle and ethical, a communist measured in his words and actions. He was the meeting point of a web of people across the state.

Syd

During the anti-Japanese war, the Party developed close links and members among the Sydney Chinese. These links were cemented during the 1938 *Dalfram* struggle at Port Kembla,

when then Attorney General and later Prime Minister Bob Menzies earned the nickname "Pig Iron Bob" for trying to force waterside workers to load pig iron bound for Japan.

It followed the 1938 massacre of up to 300,000 thousand Chinese people by invading Japanese troops in Nanjing. Workers also warned our pig iron could return as bombs.

The Chinese community was galvanized, and their staunchest allies were the communists. When wharfies led by Ted Roach refused to load pig iron bound for Japan onto the *Dalfram*, the Sydney Chinese community largely supplied them with food, straight from the markets. (Rupert Lockwood, *War on the Waterfront*)

Syd Clare was an active member of the Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) in Sydney. The dispute influenced him, as it did all waterside workers in Australia.

Syd appeared in the WWF film *The Hungry Mile* leading striking workers off a ship. He joined the CPA (M-L) at its foundation in 1964. He was not the only WWF or Seaman's Union member to join, including in Port Kembla. But they were definitely in the minority.

The old party which controlled the union, worked to box in members of the CPA (M-L). The public membership of the old party meant they were all well known, both to the bosses and the union officials. At times there were immediate physical threats. This is not to sling mud, as the split was bitterly felt on both sides, but just a statement of fact.

Some of our WWF members and supporters were of Chinese and Aboriginal heritage, and worked more freely in the Australia-China Friendship Society, where Syd was NSW Branch President for many years, or in the Chinese Youth League. A frequent visitor to China, Syd and the Society were devoted to the Gung Ho Industrial Cooperatives movement (the International Committee for the Promotion of Chinese Industrial Cooperatives) and raised considerable funds in support of their work.



Towards the future

A larger group operated, under similar conditions to the waterfront, in the building industry, especially in the Builders Labourers Federation (BLF). They formed the bulk of the group that supported the takeover of the NSW BLF by the Federal organisation, with support from every state organisation.

Full time union officials can remain true to the people, but in a soup of numbers' games and jockeying for position, faced daily with compromises with capitalism, it's much harder. Unions are part of capitalism. Our Party members in the building industry and elsewhere learned to focus both on the big issues and on quiet work, behind the scenes, with no flags flying.

Leadership comes from the masses to the masses, in a never-ending cycle. Those who separate themselves from everyday people, those with egos, motivated by individualism, can never fully serve the people. (Mao Zedong, *Some questions concerning methods of leadership*)

Leadership comes from the masses to the masses, in a never-ending cycle. Those who separate themselves from everyday people, those with egos, motivated by individualism, can never fully serve the people.

When he became NSW BLF President in 1974 Johnny McNamara remained a rank and filer. Others also remained on the job. Their leadership came from listening to and learning from their workmates.

The state played on divisions which saw the BLF deregistered and destroyed in NSW.

The key NSW BLF leader overestimated his own capacity and the union's strength, acting as if it were a revolutionary party capable of taking on the whole state apparatus.

Through the 80s and early 90s, as organisers were arrested day after day, the Building Workers Industrial union, dominated by the Socialist Party of Australia, poached BLF members. (There was discontent within SPA about this and

eventually a group led by BWIU leader Pat Clancy left the SPA.)

Everything exists in particular contexts, from the past, within the present and into the future.

There was and is much more for the Party and its members to learn.



More than Meets the Eye – the CPA (M-L) in NSW

Part 2: Vietnam, State Forces, and an East Wind

by Louisa L.

The Vietnam Moratoriums brought politics to the fore among workers and students. Though outnumbered, Party members were involved in leadership through Worker Student Alliance. Despite ‘Maoist’ labels, WSA was regarded respectfully within the leadership. It went out of its way to leaflet factories and talk with workers as well as students. Students were the main, but not exclusive, targets for most other groups.

WSA emphasised the need to see the war as part of US imperialism’s attempts to broaden its empire especially in Asia, through a series of wars and coups. Unlike other groups, it organised and propagandised for independence.

Our members and supporters were deeply involved in the leadership of the Draft Resisters Union (DRU) here, especially in its later stages. One had already joined the list of those jailed around the time of the huge Moratoriums in 1970. Through till Whitlam’s election in

December 1972, a coordinated plan by the growing band of those refusing to register for so-called National Service was rolled out. At every appearance by Liberal politicians, another resister would stand, give his name and address, and demand to be arrested.

This had a profound impact every time it happened. I still remember the collective intake of air as my quiet and serious friend Steve from school days, sitting next to me but without a word, suddenly stood to confront Attorney General Ivor Greenwood. He was not arrested, though secret police were very evident. There were too many brave young men like him. Jails would overflow and suburban outrage with it.

Memories of times past are imbued with their spirit. And so it is with this article. It carries the marks of its birth.

Working class leadership was critical. When workers stopped work to stop the war, it rocked



People march against the Vietnam War in Sydney 1971



foundations.

In contrast, young university students are prone to adventurism. The Party's militancy drew in young supporters who, like this writer from 1975, often lacked working class discipline. The actions that grew from this are covered in numerous books and articles. NSW based pieces almost always come down one-sidedly condemning "Maoist" adventurism.

But would the same writers condemn the adventures of the DRU's pirate radio station, illegally broadcasting at night, with balloons hoisting the antennae and careful watch kept for tracking police? All the while, many hundreds of resisters waited their turn, hid or had spectacular escapes.

During the Vietnam War and soon after, Worker Student Alliance worked with the Anti-Bases Action Coalition against the U.S. military bases that increasingly littered the continent, before the latter merged into the Campaign Against Foreign Military Bases in Australia, CAFMBA. The Party took the initiative in all three, but they had wider membership.

CAFMBA operated from the late 60s to mid-70s. This alphabetic mouthful, which was easier to pronounce than it looked, was small, and joined bigger events aimed at US imperialism, organised from Melbourne and Adelaide. Here, its members, some of them ex-draft resisters took part in the 1974 Long March, a bus and vehicle convoy to Northwest Cape in Western Australia.

As the convoy arrived at towns across Australia, leaflets, megaphone diplomacy, street theatre and quiet conversations greeted locals. It was the first, but not the last time street theatre made an appearance in the work of our members and supporters through the 70s.

Things were heating up, on many fronts.

The State and Revolution

The Vietnam War and the Moratoriums educated many people about the ruthlessness of the state overseas, and locally where police removed

identifying numbers before committing deliberate organised violence.

Sydney police were also notoriously corrupt and brutal. In cahoots with major crooks they ran crime. Everything from illegal gambling, drugs and prostitution to who could hold stalls at Paddy's Markets, then the major fruit and veg market. Murder was their game, so bashing a few protesters was an afternoon picnic.

For some like this writer, either you cried and hid, or decided to resist, because it was clear the police were overwhelmingly outnumbered by the people. There were instances which particularly shocked contemptuous police. In 1972 Gay Liberation's young men and women fought furiously as police tried to make arrests. This was not what Sydney coppers expected! They had bashed and murdered and blackmailed queers with impunity. Then an International Women's Day march outside Bidura Girls' "Home" in Glebe made sure those that police attempted to arrest were freed none too gently.

Several young blokes in or close to the Party in Sydney were casually sexist and homophobic. They copped furious flak from a majority of young members and supporters, some of whom had been involved in the battles with police against the same attitudes. The so-called universal "he" in E.F. Hill's writing was also criticised.

In April 1975 the Vietnam War ended. The world's mightiest power had been defeated. The masses, with good leadership, had made history. People sensed this collective power. We were all asking big questions.

An East Wind

From the early 1960s, the East Wind Bookshop was managed by Bert Chandler in Pitt Street, Sydney, then part of Chinatown. It was the Party's public face. Paperback editions of communist classics for a dollar or less brought legions of young people to the shop, including this writer who as a schoolgirl bought *The Communist Manifesto*, little thinking how important it would be in her life.



Bobby Da Fong, not of Chinese heritage, was nicknamed for his summer and winter thongs, made a reluctant living as a tattooist, often persuading potential customers against getting one. His heart was with the revolution and hour upon hour he slogged in the East Wind Bookshop, with another comrade who gave up PhD study (pre fee-free university courses, a rare event for the son of Jewish refugees) to devote himself to the movement against war in Vietnam. Both set up openly Marxist-Leninist stalls, as well as supporting WSA and the Moratoriums outside factories and at universities.

Wharfie Jimmy Dabron joined them at East Wind most afternoons after lugging cargo all day, to lug boxes and bags of books. Because the turnover was so high, there was plenty to do. Jim was kind, tough, calm, generous and a deep political listener and thinker with long years of working class experience. He had lots to teach, but was

always learning.

This was unlike many of us young people, focused on a revolution or coup round the corner, studying the Marxist classics and Australia, but also caught up with frenetic activity, too often thinking we knew it all.

By the mid-1970s the bookshop increasingly held Australian political economy and history books, including a groundbreaking but largely forgotten book, *The Black Resistance*, which used the sources of British colonial invaders, to expose not only massacres but a continent-wide guerilla war holding hostage the invader's desire for safety and total control, for around a decade or even longer in each area it attempted to occupy. Authors Barry York and Fergus Robinson saw it as "An introduction to the history of the Aborigine's struggle against British Colonialism" and dedicated it to "those brave men and women



Participants of the Long March to North West Cape US military base in 1974



who died defending their country.”

In the acknowledgements, they wrote, “A special debt is owed to the political inspiration provided in *Australia’s Revolution* by E.F. Hill.”³

ASIO & Co

Of course, the East Wind (and later Australian Independence Bookshop) was bugged by ASIO. This contributor remembers well a comment on the outcome of a series of medical tests she’d made there being repeated by “a member of the public” as she handed out leaflets for the July 4 protest of 1975. It was meant as a threat. We know you and what you are doing. There were many other examples. People with no political involvement were followed, simply because they visited what were “known houses” of communist activity. This could be based on just one suspected communist living in a big university share house with numerous visitors.

In the ‘70s, a number of the political Special Branch of NSW Police specifically targeted activists associated with the Party. Attempts to arrest some were accompanied by “Gotcha!” which proved premature, as our supporters never went without a struggle! Even family members had their home phones tapped, on the off chance that some commo skullduggery might occur in residences not lived in for years by said Maoist baddies. (This well before the scandals were uncovered that saw Premier Bob Carr disband Special Branch and promise its files would be available to all those featured in them. But not it seems to at least one Party member whose partner applied with her signature as a surprise birthday present.) By the ‘80s, Special Branch members would regularly visit the shop

and trawl its shelves. We knew them. They knew us.

Nazis and their mates preferred to visit when only an old and frail Bert or, in later years a youngish female, were alone. Bravery is not their strong suite. They had a particular hatred for “Maoists” who, when they gathered to jeer at one May Day parade (unlike those on the ALP-dominated podium) quietly made sure they never had the gall to turn up again.

(Like Covid, capitalist conditions eventually suited and bred them. The first leaflet distributed in 1976 by National Action, now Australia First, declared it wanted “the sound of Maoists ripping off their Eureka bumper stickers to be deafening”. We immediately knew we were on a winner.)

Eventually the shop’s name changed to the Australian Independence Bookshop. By then it held Sydney’s largest collection of First Peoples’ books outside Black Books, run by Aboriginal cooperative college Tranby. The Australian Independence Bookshop, had a regular flow of First Peoples, workers and students through it.

Paul Keating’s ‘recession we had to have’, combined with the effect on Australian people’s reflection after the collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union, the temporary preeminence of the USA and the shutting down of the remnants of the old Communist Party of Australia, saw the bookshop move from Haymarket and eventually close. This was not long after the Socialist Party of Australia’s bookshop, five doors down also closed.

We had long since buried our hatchets, if not our quite different ideologies and ways of organising.

³ *Australia’s Revolution: The Struggle for a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party*, E.F Hill:

<https://www.efhill.com/s/Australias-Revolution-On-the-Struggle-for-a-Marxist-Leninist-Communist-Party.pdf>



More than Meets the Eye – the CPA (M-L) in NSW

Part 3: Whitlam, Uncle Sam, and the People

by Louisa L.

In 1974 Sydney, ten years after the party was formed, an already heated atmosphere was overlaid by venom with the takeover by the federal Builders Labourers Federation (BLF) of its NSW branch. A recent Vanguard article, [‘Munday and Gallagher, two lives in working class struggle’](#), covers that period and pays tribute to both antagonists in that dispute.

From the beginning, the Party was known for its militancy and the BLF continued to be, as it was under Jack Munday’s leadership, a lightning rod for young activists. But it was soon overshadowed by more immediate battles.

Whitlam

On July 4, 1975 Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and other dignitaries were farewelling Marshall Green, U.S. Ambassador at a posh Wentworth Hotel party. Green arrived after Whitlam’s election to interstate protests led by our activists pointing out he was a hatchet man, a CIA coup-master. Indonesia, where up to two million people were massacred just ten years earlier (and the first time the USA used Islamist forces to wield weapons) was his career highlight.

This was an intense time. Through the 60s and 70s Sydney was a major Australian destination for refugees from murderous CIA-coups in South America. The most recent was Chile, just three years before our protest.

Campaign Against Foreign Military Bases in Australia leaflets warned Green had almost certainly set up mechanisms for the overthrow of the Whitlam Government. Yet some then and now ridicule our Party’s concern with the forces of the imperialist state and our consequent determination to be immersed with the masses, like Mao Zedong’s “fish in a sea of people”.



Mass protest against the dismissal of the Whitlam government in Sydney, November 1975

Ironically, the youngest of us were, like other left groups, behaving as a left bloc. Events would soon change that.

Whitlam’s overthrow saw massive protests and birth of organisations, including People for Australian Independence. It had no snappy title but launched the following year taking over where Worker Student Alliance left off, it captured the vibe of the moment. Hundreds of Eureka flags were screen printed in a Darlinghurst flat. Thousands of ‘Independence for Australia’ badges and tens of thousands of leaflets were grabbed by eager protesters. Independence made perfect sense. An unelected representative of a foreign government had sacked Australia’s elected government.

Party members and supporters devoured Marxist-Leninist classics in small study groups and branches. Our collective lens focused on their application in Australia. So, when young members of the old CPA eventually tried to counter the Eureka flag’s popularity with a badge, impaling out of context Marx’s words ‘Workers have no country’ (originally ‘working



men have no country') we shook our heads. Didn't they remember the old party's Eureka Youth League the decade before our Party's ejection from it? There was arrogance on both sides.

If other left groups called us bourgeois nationalists, the facts and the people showed otherwise.

CIA

These days CIA involvement in the bloodless coup against the Whitlam Government is well known to activists, but in the early years after it, that was definitely not the case. Our comrades did much of the early research to join the CIA dots.

Students for Australian Independence leaflets, distributed in early 1976 charted the similarities to the lead-up to the Chilean coup and outlined Governor General Sir John Kerr's service to the CIA. Unlike Chile, the army never got off grey alert, as Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) President Hawke, himself tainted with CIA connections, stood down trade unions immediately.

Yet we were more critical than most protesters, seeing Whitlam's wage indexation, for example, as disarming the people, because workers no longer had to organise collectively for wage increases. As time passed indexation was indeed whittled away till it was scrapped.

Like every left group of the time we were sectarian, but we refused to separate ourselves from the masses of everyday people by raising indexation inappropriately to attack a much-loved leader.

NSW University was the most working class university and the one where our supporters were strongest. When Whitlam, the toppled hero, visited early in 1976 he was met with the two questions he was due to answer the very day he was sacked, "What's at Pine Gap?" and "Is Richard Stallings a CIA agent?" Whitlam refused to answer the first, and in fact may not have

known. While Pine Gap paraded as a joint military base, it has always been US run for a peppercorn rent, today outsourced to US war corporations like Raytheon Industries. Whitlam answered the second affirmatively, about key Pine Gap operative Stallings, who rented his Canberra home from his good mate Doug Anthony, then Country Party leader.

By then we were already on the trail of that other CIA man, the Governor General.

Sir John

Sir John Kerr was an easy target, rotten on so many levels before he sacked Whitlam. Legal counsel against equal pay for Aboriginal workers in the Territory, the judge who jailed Clarrie O'Shea in 1969, with clear links to the CIA...

We tracked his moves through the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Vice Regal column. Everywhere he went, we, our mates and anyone else we could let know turned up, sometimes in busloads, roaring. The Royal Motor Yacht Club, opening something-or-other, anywhere he thought he could feel safe among his adopted class. Didn't matter. We hunted and hounded him, the protests growing. Some members of the larger and less militant Citizens for Democracy, in which CPA(M-L) members were also involved, joined as protests grew. Till Kerr went overseas and stayed there, returning to be buried in a secret grave with no state honours.

Politics is not about individuals, though they have their importance. But public pressure built through the year largely because of the protests we led, till general anger overflowed again on the first anniversary, Remembrance Day, 1976. The working class and its allies remembered. The ALP took charge.

But our street theatre from the edge as the crowd grew was pointed. A bosses' cop. A CIA agent. A capitalist fat cat. Uncle Sam. And the people.



More than Meets the Eye – the CPA (M-L) in NSW

Part 4: No Surrender

by Louisa L.

On February 20, 1976, less than three months after Whitlam was sacked, a small notice announced that US Vice President Nelson Rockefeller would be visiting Canberra and Sydney. The head of one of the largest US imperialist conglomerates as well as VP, he was giving royal assent to his new colony.

In Sydney he would celebrate with the misnamed “Australian-American Association”. In reality the American name preceded the Aussie one, showing who had first place in the relationship. Set up in New York by Murdoch empire founder, Sir Keith Murdoch in 1948, it was an agent for economic and cultural imperialism, among other things offering lucrative cultural and academic scholarships for hand-picked recipients. Nearly 50 years later it operates with impunity and five-star ratings, while the Chinese-funded equivalent, the much smaller Confucius Association, causes widespread gnashing of teeth, as a danger to democracy.

The AAA’s online 2020 gala honours Kathy Warden CEO and President of war corporation Northrop Grumman.

The other Rockefeller guest was the United States Chamber of Commerce, AmCham for short. Now with offices in five Australian capital cities, it describes itself as “Australia’s largest and most prestigious international business organisation” and “the voice of international business interests”. Back in ’76 we exposed AmCham and AAA as undermining our independence. Things have not improved!

Like latter day reality TV, in 1976 we had 38 days to organise. We plastered the suburbs with screen printed posters inviting people to the first meeting of the Mobilisation Against Rockefeller

(MAR). Interstate groups were contacted. A Vietnam vet (a former commissioned officer) and his wife joined. He told us how he and the men under his command painted up army vehicles and planes at night four years earlier: ‘Vote for Whitlam and be home by Christmas’. There were English and American accents, including Tex, who soon launched the CYIA (Committee of Yanks for an Independent Australia). Dogmatic and humorless? Hardly. Tex was involved in an independence show on community station 2SER and helped work on the newspaper, National Southern Cross.

It was a wide reach, to match Rockefeller’s economic empire. According to the first verse of our street theatre’s reworked Christmas carol,

‘Old King Rockefeller bagged all our best resources

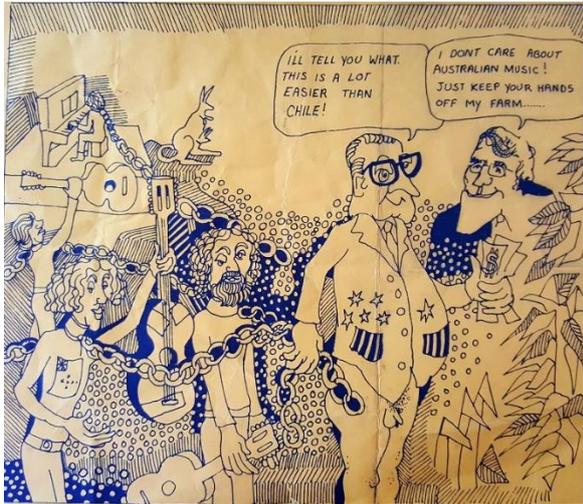
Then he sent to CIA to muster up his forces

E-ss0, Pan Am, White Wings too, Co-olgate Palmolive

Then he grabbed uranium, for atomic fu-u-el’.

Of course. The timing of Whitlam’s sacking also involved a US corporate court case over failure to supply uranium, blocked by his government and the will of the people.

Five days before his Sydney visit, MAR and Campaign Against Foreign Military Bases in Australia almost filled a thousand seat venue at NSW Uni with four bands. This was in tune with our emphasis on cultural independence through numerous other concerts, bush dances and events over years, like internationalist Afrika Nights which members helped organise alongside the Pan Africanist Congress and Black Consciousness members, and those fighting for



Detail from an MAR and CAFCA fundraiser before the Rockefeller protest by Kings Cross artist Maurie

Eritrean liberation. A packed Sydney Town Hall concert with People for Australian Independence and Citizens for Democracy was hosted by Bryan Brown. These events breathed the history none of us learned at school.

So, on Wednesday March 31, 1976 a thousand people turned up to protest.

We were keen to get close to the Wentworth Hotel, perhaps through the front doors, by dividing into two marches. What a debacle! Only two people knew the not so grand plan. Police let loose with boots and fists. On Elizabeth Street they broke a woman's ribs before arresting her and a number of others. Regrouping in Hyde Park, it was left to others to announce legal assistance. We had made no preparations for that. It was an important lesson in looking after people and on focusing long term work alongside everyday people, rather than just the fireworks of big events. We began by fundraising for those arrested.

Work

This spectacular stuff paled in comparison to most comrades' labours.

Helen Hambly exemplified this long-term work. Despite debilitating asthma, she dedicated much of her life as a communist to work with First Peoples. By the 1990s, in her eighties and stuck in

Sydney, she still knew First Peoples around the continent. When 'Bran Nue Day' toured from Broome, at interval the whole Seymour Centre turned as this pint-sized 'granny' roared the name of the drummer, her 'godson'. He rushed down, tales of family and friends overflowing. She never boasted. You won't find her in the history books, but she travelled often alone to remote places, sometimes illegally visiting people on missions assisting them to get organised.

Through the 70s into the present day, members and supporters continue their daily efforts. On the buses and railways, in hospitals and schools, in factories and academia and the public service, on wharves and driving trucks, their work was and remains quieter, longer-term, deeper, slower and powerful.

Nurses, both members and supporters, drove the Party's national struggle to protect Medibank, underpinning its strength, one of many struggles we directly helped organise.

The Party encouraged young students to become workers. Union militancy was not universal in the late 70s. Some of us found ourselves under attack at work. One was expelled from his job as a bus conductor three times, but workmates came to his rescue. Often workers understood solidarity far better than union officials. Our educational backgrounds in largely migrant workplaces, meant we could effectively voice grievances. Sometimes it was a small issue, delayed arrival of safety gloves, that lit a fire of action. It was a time when lessons came thick and fast.

For this writer, four years on a metal industry process line gave infinitely more than I gave back, including lifelong friendships. It underpinned a real understanding of the web of relationships, collective wisdom and discipline, strategy and tactics that had till then been words on a page. It taught me to ask questions and listen, to rely on the people for strength, to sense when they were ready to act. After being unsuccessfully sacked for the fourth time in four years, I knew my time was nearly up. I did a Dip Ed and headed into teaching, profoundly changed. It didn't mean I



always followed these lessons, or didn't make mistakes, but at least I had a fighting chance.

The collective ideological leadership of the Party – in study, in discussions, in *Vanguard* (the longest continuously published left paper in Australia), the *Australian Communist* and in Ted Hill's prodigious output above his full-time legal practice defending workers – showed these small battles in their wider context.

Errors

Rather than left blocs criticised by Hill and the Central Committee, the mistake of younger members and supporters from the mid-80s, was that we had no independent presence beyond the party publications and public spokespeople after People for Australian Independence's successor, Australian Independence Movement, folded.

Only those who do nothing make no mistakes. But this was a serious one, particularly for a party that lauded Mao Zedong's *The Question of Independence and Initiative in the United Front*, which warned that when working with others, although concessions could be made, both independence and initiative must be maintained. Beyond our workplaces, we were often subsumed in the united front.

There were other mistakes too. During the Whitlam period, the imperialist power of the Soviet Union, bearing a fake socialist façade that shamed its heritage, grew around the world. Research, at the suggestion of communist veteran Bert Chandler, exposed its moves into Australia.

Few knew that Khemlani loans affair (the final excuse to ditch Whitlam) involved millions from the Moscow Narodny Bank. In Wolloomooloo, it partnered with shady slum landlord and developer Sid Londish. Other 'development' deals included Queensland's Fortitude Valley. Like its US counterpart, the KGB was busy building favourable connections in unions and the ALP generally.

This was important research, showing superpower contention as a great mover in politics then as now, with a rising China.

But in Sydney our young members and supporters (unlike many others in the Party) greatly overestimated the power of the new superpower, often seeing it as more dangerous than a weakened US imperialism. While Boris Detentevich rightly joined Uncle Sam in guerrilla theatre, wielding giant missiles, facts spoke for themselves. US imperialism was still numero uno here. It held state power.

Industry or community

From the early '80s through to the late '90s, the Party's chairperson, Bruce Cornwall, and other members and supporters were instrumental in the Peace Squadron which, alongside Paddlers for Peace took to Sydney Harbour each time US warships sailed in. The focus on the enemy was sharp. In 1983, the NSW Government banned nuclear powered ships.

US policy was to neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear arms, so the Paddlers and Squadron treated all US ships as potentially nuclear armed. Eventual Greens MLC Ian Cohen was famed for his surfboard bow-ride from a US aircraft carrier. One of our loosely defined mob was less shimmering in 1988. He climbed up an accommodating aircraft carrier sewage pipe, stepped on board with "G'day mate!" to an African American Naval Officer in regimental finery, who offered his white-gloved hand to our friend's poo covered one, and shook it.

Bruce and others spent decades in working with numerous church and left political groups in the peace movement, including the 400,000 strong Sydney Walk Against the War before the US invasion of Iraq. Others took leading roles in the latter on behalf of their unions.

Industrial issues also held our attention, including the destruction of the Builders' Laborers Federation (BLF). There were many picket lines, small and large that drew our support or in which



we marched alongside workmates.

The oral history, *No Surrender*, charted the historic three-month strike and occupation of Sydney Harbour's Cockatoo Island Dockyard in 1989. It honoured the occupiers and strikers who were unable to win the industrial support from the ALP-dominated union movement that would have ensured victory. It drew connections to the bigger struggle for independence and reflected the many hours the author spent on the island in support during the struggle and with the occupiers afterwards.

Community struggles were, and continue to be, numerous and diverse, including small ones that won against offshore sandmining, or gaining East Timorese families refugee status, against hospital closures in Sydney and regional NSW or rapacious overdevelopment. There are too many to list.

No one will do it for you

The majority of our work has been below the surface of huge events, in the day to day slog of jobs away from media spotlights. Some of us have been deeply involved on state union executives, while maintaining full time work in schools, hospitals and construction sites. We work together and individually to draw together corporate connections, like Rupert Murdoch's hunt for multi-billion-dollar profits from schools, or that overthrew the corrupt leadership of the Heath Services Union and helped keep hospitals in public hands.

We have been at the heart of actions that hit national front pages or were barely a blimp in local ones.

In unions, we focus on rank and file organisation, pushing for the most militant positions possible in often narrow opportunities, so our workmates can gain a few scraps from the capitalist table, but also learn how to fight effectively to get out from under the US imperialist thumb. We work hard in trade unions, but we try not to succumb to trade union politics.

In connections with First Peoples' struggles we expose the danger of divisive corporate plans that might otherwise be hidden and stand with them when their enemies try to smash and destroy. First Peoples will lead their own battles, but they are not alone.

We work quietly in numerous community struggles, building webs of connection despite weaknesses rising from the capitalist stew in which we all live. We aspire to something better than individualism and ego. We trust the Peoples of this continent and its islands, for only with them can imperialism be overthrown.

History did not end with the rise of US imperialism as the sole superpower, despite the proclamations of its pet historians. Another dangerous superpower has risen. Yet people still stand in defiance.

After 100 years of struggle for the classless society of communism in Australia, we are all better placed to move forward, not because we have made no mistakes, but because we accept their inevitability, analysing and learning from them, enriched by them, as we are by what we have done well.

If you don't write your own history, no one will do it for you. So, these four articles focus on the role of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) in Sydney and in NSW. But we have to be truthful. We are not the only ones struggling for a better future. There is no sense in point scoring or mud-slinging, to distinguish this or that group from the other. The Peoples of this continent and its islands need leadership. They want a unified and strong response to the destruction, by war or climate change or mounting attacks under Covid's cover. It is the people versus imperialism.

To the huge and dangerous forces that face us all, we speak our defiance.

With the people we raise collective banners. Our actions speak two words – **no surrender**.



An Overview of the History of the CPA (M-L) in South Australia

by Nick G.

The Australian state of Victoria was the birthplace of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist). In its early years, its strongest base was in that state, leading opponents to label it the “Victorian break-away Hill group” (referring to founding Chairperson, Comrade EF Hill).

However, the new Party had contacts and supporters in other parts of the country.

One of those was Comrade CJ (Charlie) McCaffrey in South Australia. Details of Charlie’s life can be found on our website.

(see www.cpaml.org/ourcomrades.php)



Comrade Charlie McCaffrey

The new Party was founded on March 15, 1964. McCaffrey, a long-standing and leading member of the original CPA, assessed the fight against

revisionism in both its local and international manifestations and decided to join.

In November 1964, under the heading “Leading Union Official Joins Communist Part M-L”, *Vanguard* reported:

Mr. C. McCaffrey, for a long time a leading official of the Ironworkers’ Association, and a leading member of the Communist Party of Australia (nominally headed by Mr. Sharkey), has joined the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist).

Mr. McCaffrey was a member of the South Australian State Committee of the old Party. He expressed in that Committee his complete disagreement with the revisionist line of the old Party.

His joining of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) is very warmly welcomed.

With Charlie, although not disclosed publicly, were other CPA members including Dr David Caust, Marjorie Johnston, Bill and Shirley Warton and Roy and Muriel Baynes.

At the time of his joining the CPA (M-L), Charlie was working at the SA Rubber Mills, one of the largest factories then in SA, as union delegate. His leadership of Communist work in the unions in SA was recognised by the old Party when the 1963 State Conference had resolved to “express to Comrade McCaffrey its sincere appreciation for his work on the State Committee of the Party over a period of many years”.

Support for People’s China

Charlie remained at the Rubber Mills until a decision by SA comrades was made to establish a branch of the Australia China Society (ACS).



Much of the preparatory work was done by David and Tess Caust. Apparently, some time in 1965, David and Tess travelled to Melbourne to confer with Hill about extending ACS organisation into South Australia. There was no formal link between the two organisations, but given the developing international situation, and Caust's own perceptions of his obligations as a Party member, he wanted his involvement ratified by Hill. This was little more than a formality, and David, Tess and Charlie worked towards convening a meeting of interested potential members.

The founding meeting of the SA branch of the ACS was held at the Caust home on February 25, 1966. Those who attended were David and Tess Caust, Charlie and Lil McCaffrey, Marj Johnston, Roy Baynes, and several workers from the SA Rubber Mills. David Caust was the first President and Lil McCaffrey the first Secretary and Treasurer. From the start, calls for diplomatic recognition of China, and for promotion of friendship and understanding between the peoples of China and Australia, came from the best elements of the working class.

Tragically, David Caust died at the early age of 46 in August 1968. In his enthusiasm for the work of the Society, he had allowed his surgery's waiting rooms at Plympton, a working class suburb, to become a virtual reading room of Chinese magazines. Among those of his patients who were influenced in this way were Bob and Rhonda Creek who were later to become active branch members during the early 70s. Bob was a worker with the then state-owned Electricity and Water Supply Company and, in due course, became President of the ACS branch for several years.

Charlie had visited China in 1959 with a CPA delegation including Ernie O'Sullivan, a worker from Melbourne and a colleague of Ted Hill's. Charlie recognised the need for the Party to initiate the opening of a bookshop from which both Chinese and Australian Communist publications could be sold. He had no savings of his own and had to borrow funds from friends to

open the shop. He also had to resign, at the age of 65, from the Rubber Mills in order to manage the shop with his wife, Lil. In its first week, the shop had sales worth \$2.50!

Whilst the shop was a necessity (the CPA had banned Chinese publications from its own shop and would not, of course, distribute anything by the new Party), it was also like a magnet to the young activists emerging in schools, universities and workplaces eager to take part in the anti-war and related revolutionary movements.

Roy Baynes was elected to the position of Secretary of the ACS following Caust's death. Roy had been working as a seaman when China was Liberated in 1949, and his contacts with Chinese seamen developed in him a love for the New China. He had his legs severed below the knee in 1962 when a ship's cable snapped. "I'll lick this disability when I get my new legs," he told comrades, but the artificial limbs were often painful and he walked with difficulty.

Nevertheless, he was a tireless worker for friendship with China, making endless visits to schools and, after diplomatic relations had been established, to the airport to greet visiting Chinese delegations or hosting guests from the Chinese Embassy. (In 1971, Roy also brought together a group of 18 doctors, lawyers, specialists and physiotherapists to form an SA Limbless Association – something that was duly noted in his ASIO file.)

Testimony to his commitment to China was his response to a request from SA teachers in China for any books he could send in English. Getting books from libraries and private donations, he packed over 200,000 volumes into more than 100 tea chests, which were then loaded by ACS volunteers onto visiting Chinese cargo ships berthing at Pt Adelaide. Roy died in February 1983 just months after being awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for his work for Australia-China friendship. After Roy's death, his wife Muriel became secretary of the ACS (later ACFS -Australia China Friendship Society). Both were hard-working, loyal members of the Party.



Shirley Warton became Treasurer of the SA Branch in the early 1970s and also national treasurer. Her husband was shop steward at the Rubber Mills. Both were solid working class comrades.

Marj Johnston and her partner Jean Thompson were founding members of the ACFS. She and her brother Elliott had joined the CPA in 1941; Elliott remained with the CPA after the split, while Marj, an activist in the peace and women's movements, joined the CPA (M-L). She and Elliott attended the Second International Peace Conference at Sheffield, England in 1950. Returning by herself, but without a passport, she was allowed onshore at Fremantle only after union intervention. Back in Adelaide, she started a campaign to change "peace-lovers" into "peace-fighters". She was one of the founders of the New Theatre in Adelaide, at which plays with left-wing themes were performed. She was later awarded life membership of the ACFS.

Revolutionary surge

An early group of activists had created the Student Worker Coordinating Committee (SWCC) and they readily accepted the political and ideological line of the CPA (M-L). As the Party's influence among young people grew, the SWCC became one of the founding organisations of the larger Worker-Student Alliance (WSA). This group soon became the most militant and most influential of various left groups active at the time.

The growth of the Party's influence on young people was rapid. They absorbed both the revolutionary spirit of Mao Zedong in the fight against revisionism and imperialism, and the CPA (M-L)'s revolutionary rejection of bourgeois trade unionism, New Leftism and parliamentarism.

Some, however, mistook the revolutionary surge as an actual revolutionary situation rather than as a stage in a developing revolutionary movement. When the Vietnamese people won their war against US aggression, and the war and conscription ceased to be driving forces motivating people's opposition to US imperialism



SWCC around 1968-69

and support for revolutionary work, some of those young people became disheartened and drifted away from the movement.

Working class – the leading force

The youth movement against the war, and the fight for diplomatic recognition of China and interest in its socialist development, were not the only areas of CPA (M-L) influence. The new Party had carried with it at the time of the split, a number of CPA members active in areas such as industry, the wharves, education and construction. The latter two were also areas into which university students moved. Others moved into the car industry.

The State Secretary of the Builders Laborers' Federation (BLF), Les Robinson, and its organiser Ron Owens, were supporters of the Party. In October 1969 they had shown their support for the students protesting against the war by defying a United Trades and Labour Council (UTLC) ban at the official Labour Day procession, on the carrying of slogans attacking police brutality. Together with the students and other militant workers, they had marched as a large separate group.

In June 1970 they were both arrested on a site visit at the Modbury Hospital where they attempted to organise labourers into the union. Les was charged under the Road Traffic Act and



Les Robinson

Ron under the Police Offences Act and the Lottery and Gaming Act in a perverse use of laws never intended to prevent union organising. More significantly, both faced charges issued by the Chamber of Manufacturers of having breached orders made in the SA Industrial Commission that the union should stop hindering the business operations of certain building companies and three sub-contractors. This use of civil proceedings in an industrial dispute was a new ruling class tactic following the defeat of the penal powers of the Arbitration system in the great O'Shea struggle the previous year.

When the BLF officials sought the support of the UTLC, its acting secretary, J Calnan, wrote back denying that "the arrests were ordered by the construction companies...it cannot be said that the charges are in the nature of an industrial matter."

In court, further treachery was revealed when it was disclosed that the Australian Council of Trade Unions' (ACTU) Bob Hawke had been in secret negotiations with the UTLC, Collaroy Constructions, the Chamber of Manufacturers and the Australian Labor Party (ALP)-led Plasterers' Union (which claimed the labourers as their members) and had approved a strikebreaking proposal whereby a supervisor from the construction company would be enrolled as an FEDFA member (a union contesting coverage of crane drivers on construction sites) and placed on standby to operate the crane should the BLF member driving it walk off during a concrete pour.

Vanguard gave substantial coverage to Hawke's approval of strikebreakers against the BLF.

With their case on hold until September, Les and Ron demanded that the Trades and Labour Council change what had become a corporatised and class collaborationist Labour Day march by removing invitations to the Chamber of Manufacturers and other employer organisations, and by banning the use of vehicles carrying commercial advertising for business interests. The police band and the mounted police were not to take part. A teacher from the WSA was interviewed on a television current affairs program about the right of the group to join the march, which they did, again alongside the BLF.

When their court case resumed on September 9, Les spoke defiantly and refused to plead, saying:

The reason I am summonsed before this court is because I was arrested at the request of the boss and his accomplices. As a trade union official, I was carrying out the policy of my members, the branch and the federation in protecting my members' work.

My appearance in this court on an industrial matter is without precedent in SA and perhaps Australia.

Therefore, I refuse to enter a plea because I consider that this court is representative of the boss class and, as a working class leader, I can expect no justice from a bosses' court.

Les was fined \$20 with \$22.90 costs. Referring to the 1969 defeat of the penal powers in the O'Shea strikes, he said the court fine was "a new form of penal powers".

"It is the policy of the federation that we do not pay such fines and I will stick by that policy," he declared.

He was jailed for 22 days.



Bosses look for new penal powers

The try-on in the capitalist courts emboldened the employers. They were desperate for new penal powers to replace those smashed in the O'Shea struggle in 1969. Again, they focused on the BLF. It was the most militant union in SA. After Les and Ron began recruiting members in 1967, they had grown the union from 300 to 3000 members. But the recruitment often involved picketing worksites and taking advantage of contradictions between competing employers and contractors.

In 1972, a dispute arose between the union and Adriatic Terrazzo and Foundation which went to the courts seeking an injunction against the union on the basis of another civil law, the law of torts. A tort is a harm or damage caused by the action of another person who, if found guilty, is liable to make good the harm or damage, typically by a payment to the successful claimant. It was intended to resolve matters between persons in the civil arena, not between unions and employers in the industrial arena.

Les and Ron refused to appear to answer the charges and instead concentrated on reestablishing picket lines broken up by police the previous day and strengthening those at Adriatic sites. Concrete deliveries to Adriatic sites were blocked. This was despite a director of Adriatic, Mario Candeloro, admitting in the Supreme Court that he had threatened to blow Robinson's head off with a shot-gun if concrete deliveries to the firm were stopped or the men were forced to join the union.

Having defied the court, Les and Ron were arrested within days and jailed indefinitely for contempt of court.

Les and Ron adopted an attitude of proletarian defiance and firm class resolve.

"I will stay in as long as is necessary to win this dispute" said Les. "I will not purge myself to the court unless it means we can win the dispute."

"By winning, I mean that Adriatic Terrazzo & Foundations Pty. Ltd. agree to employ union labor. I will settle for nothing else."

"This is the policy of our members and it is paramount that we uphold this policy, even if it means going to jail."

Ron agreed. "Nobody likes the thought of going to jail," he said. "However, I'm defending union principles and I'll stay inside indefinitely. I won't purge myself, either."

Although sent to jail, Les and Ron were heartened by support from prison officers who, at a meeting the previous week, declared unanimously that they would not process any union official arrested under the tort law. Non-processing of prisoners meant that they would not be documented, escorted, locked in a cell or supervised by the officers.

Further heartening support came from CPA (M-L) leaders Ted Hill, Clarrie O'Shea and Ted Bull, who sent a message of encouragement to them in jail.

The federal executive of the ABCEF (ie. BLF) also sent three Victorian comrades to assist the SA branch while Les and Ron were inside. Marco Masterson wrote in May 1973 that "1972 ended a year of great struggle by the Federation on many fronts: wages, and against the war in Vietnam, building Unionism and job improvements...But I feel our best effort was in South Australia."

While rank and file members kept up the struggle to free Les and Ron, the response from other sections of the union movement was less than satisfactory. Placing their hopes in an ALP win in the federal elections, they feared that the dispute would play into the hands of the conservatives. That hostility continued even after the Whitlam (ALP) win.

The so-called "progressive" Labor State Premier Don Dunstan led the attack. He claimed that Robinson was not prepared to negotiate and wanted to use his union to defeat a Labor



Government, both State and Federally. The Premier's statement had no word of criticism of Adriatic.

It was only after eight days of jail time that the UTLC met and decided to support the BLF on the principle of opposition to the use of tort in industrial disputes. A unanimous vote banned all Adriatic Terrazzo and Housing Industry Association work until the tort action was dropped and, on that basis, Les and Ron were then released from jail. Every member of the union in SA had been on strike, and a national stoppage by construction labourers was imminent.

However, the promised support from the UTLC failed to materialise. Dunstan was facing a state election in March and worked to cool things down. That left Les and Ron vulnerable to further attacks by the capitalist builders, and they were back in court again on February 13, 1973 where their union (now the Australian Building and Construction Workers Federation) was slapped with a permanent order banning it from "interfering with or threatening by illegal means the business of Adriatic Terrazzo and Foundation".

Industrial action had now been established as "illegal means".

Historian Humphrey McQueen concluded that the lack of action by the organised union movement in support of the ABCWF "opened the door for a strategic attack on the labour movement...What began as a try-on around Adelaide set a battle plan to disorganise labour" (McQueen, *We Built This Country* p. 226).

Other fronts of struggle open

At the beginning of 1972, Charlie McCaffrey took out a two-year lease on premises in the ship-building city of Whyalla. A bookshop was opened but did not quite see out the lease given a shortage of comrades prepared to invest the time in managing the shop in a relatively remote regional community. Nevertheless, the initiative reflected the Party's desire to embed itself in

industrial communities. Whyalla remained a desirable place in which to build a base, and in 1976, the WSA paper *People's Voice* listed two post office contact boxes, one in Adelaide and one in Whyalla.

A new approach to mass work, spurred by publication of Hill's *Looking Backward, Looking Forward* and study of Mao Zedong's writings, encouraged workers and students to experiment with new forms of workplace organisation and struggle.

In particular, the old Party's focus on winning leadership positions in unions and using the bureaucracy of those organisations to somehow shift the workers in the direction of socialism, in an alliance with the ALP, was rejected. Leadership of unions by Communists was not bad in itself, but a narrow focus on it had tended to neglect the more important matter of organising and educating rank and file members at the point of production where their strength really lay.

In the early 1970s more and more workers had joined the WSA and the Party. This included Greek workers at the SA Rubber Mills following a prolonged dispute which WSA had supported with various fund-raising activities and a presence outside the factory gates. While some workers came into the Party from foundries, component manufacturers and other smaller factories, a simmering tension was brewing in the large car plants. Out in the north, General Motors-Holden employed thousands as did Chrysler in the south. In both plants, Party members encouraged rank and file organisation as a counter to the dead hand of car industry unions, and the Vehicle Builders Union (VBU) in particular.

Workers at the Chrysler plant at Tonsley Park, disillusioned with the pro-company stance of the VBU, had established a rank and file committee in late 1973. It brought out a regular newsletter advocating policies that were much more advanced than those of the union. The newsletter also ran editions in Greek and Italian so as to facilitate communication with, and bring



unity to, the multicultural workforce. In a big plant such as Chrysler, workers in one section often don't know what is happening elsewhere. The weekly newsheet was handed out at the factory gates, often by WSA student members. About 2,000 of these were handed out each week. Workers were informed of any stoppages, meetings and other struggles taking place. Any event, such as an accident, intimidation of workers by foremen, refusal by the company to pay workers' compensation, was printed, together with regular analyses of capitalism and of the Labor Party as a party of capitalism. The Rank and File gave workers at the plant an avenue through which to raise grievances against the company that could not be squashed by shop stewards controlled by and loyal to the VBU.

Whilst there was involvement of other left groups and militant individuals in the Rank and File, the predominant influence was that of the Worker Student Alliance and the CPA (M-L). By following the mass line, listening to workers and articulating their demands in a more politically focused manner, these comrades won the respect of workers throughout the plant.

In 1972, at the invitation of the Whitlam government, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) had sent officers to Australia to compile a report on the Australian economy. The report was published in December 1972, with the main emphasis on the necessity for continuous economic growth, suggesting methods which, if successful, would not interfere with the employers' "prerogatives", their profits, but instead would be "advantageous to all parties concerned". They included a wage freeze ("wage indexation"), so-called "job enrichment" and "worker participation" projects, and liberalization of trade and tariff policies.

The Rank and File Committee at Chrysler saw the danger in all of this and gave VBU shop steward Will Heidt the task of analysing the report and drawing out its implications for workers. The result was a 60-page booklet, *Battle for Working Class Organisation on the Shop Floor – Against*

the Labor Plan and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. It was published in 1974 by "a Chrysler shop steward on the basis of discussions in the Rank and File Study Group on Worker Participation". It was circulated well beyond Chrysler and alerted the bosses and the VBU to the fact that workers had brains and could use them.

The two car manufacturers in SA, General Motors Holden (GMH) and Chrysler, had not adapted particularly well to changing market demands for smaller cars. They had both introduced small car models but their focus was on larger and heavier six-cylinder models. Both companies flooded the market with cars that were not selling particularly well, leading to overproduction and stockpiling. The answer, as it always is under the anarchic market of capitalism, was to shift the burden of a declining rate of profit onto the backs of the workers. Sackings, speed-ups, getting fewer workers to do work previously done by more were commonly resorted to.

Peter van Arend

By late 1974 and early 1975, workers had been in dispute with Chrysler over severance pay caused by the company's stated intention to retrench workers.

In the Arbitration court, Chrysler and the unions agreed there would be no sackings before the severance pay scheme had been finalized and agreed to by the workers.

On March 15, 1975, Peter van Arend and 50 other toolmaker workers were sacked by Chrysler. Peter refused to accept the sack and continued to report for work, overwhelmingly supported by workers in his own workshop, by shop stewards and workers in the press shop and throughout plant.

A decision on voluntary retrenchments was not given until the morning of Wednesday March 19, the day of the last stopwork meeting at Chrysler. The 50 toolmakers including van Arend had been sacked before a vote on the severance pay scheme had been taken.



A motion from the floor of a mass meeting instructing the VBU Executive to renegotiate the scheme and to implement the 32-hour week policy of the union was refused by the chair although carried by an overwhelming majority.

Peter van Arend was taken to court by the company and had an injunction placed on him ordering him not to enter the plant – he courageously ignored this. Then he was jailed for contempt until he agreed to purge his contempt and obey the injunction. He took a firm working class stand before the court, declaring that:

‘with all due respect to this court, I have been forced to take this stand because it is contrary to trade union principles to resolve industrial disputes in civil courts...the company is using this court to intimidate its workforce and the trade union movement...I am fully aware I am in breach of the bosses’ law. It is a travesty of justice that those equally guilty of breaking the law are not here before this court to face up to their actions.’

On April 18, Rank and File members and supporters held a demonstration outside Trades Hall. Shouts of ‘Free van Arend’, and ‘Bosses union bosses gaols’ greeted VBU officials as they arrived for a meeting. Abbott, president of the UTLC and state secretary of the VBU, was so shaken he had to enter the meeting with a bodyguard. Car workers blocked his entry and demanded action to support van Arend.

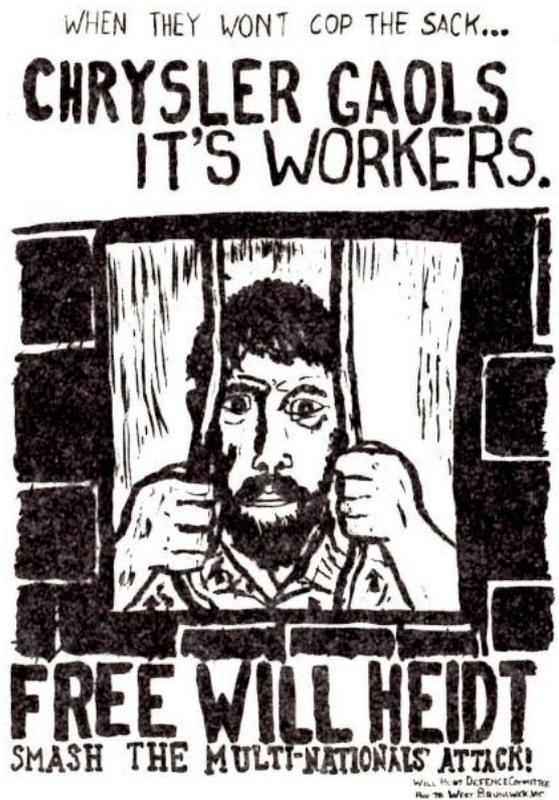
Despite van Arend’s gaoling involving a principle around which the whole union movement should have united (use of civil courts in industrial disputes), unions under the control of the ALP and the two revisionist parties were largely silent. On the other hand, unions led by CPA (M-L) supporters or their allies gave much-needed support. The Melbourne Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) placed a total ban on the handling of all Chrysler goods and contributed financially to help Peter’s wife and four children while he was in gaol. The BLF also organised support. In SA, the Plumbers and Gasfitters also gave financial support.

Although the state ALP government also opposed the use of civil courts in industrial disputes, Premier Don Dunstan was conspicuous by his lack of action. The VBU state secretary Abbott had been preselected for a safe Labor seat in the SA parliament. Five previous VBU secretaries had ended up in parliament. Rather than jeopardize their relationship with the big bosses, and the parliamentary career paths of their leaders, the VBU launched a furious attack on the Rank and File.

Van Arend was released on April 30 without having purged his contempt. He should have been a natural choice as a speaker on May Day; however, the ALP-controlled May Day Committee refused to have him as a speaker. Faced with their refusal, marchers brushed aside the ALP chairman and gave the microphone to van Arend who thanked supporters, said the ALP had failed the workers, and called for nationalisation of multinationals like Chrysler.

Will Heidt

Still plagued with overproduction, on October 17 1975 Chrysler sacked 230 workers and then tried





to get other workers to take on a greater workload.

Will Heidt and others refused to work a five-person job with four workers. The matter was referred to arbitration which recommended further union-company talks and a return to arbitration on December 5. Before this, Chrysler again tried to transfer a worker from Heidt's section on the Trim Line, which stopped work in protest. Heidt stopped the line pending the arrival of union officials, but was sacked.

Chrysler called in three security goons to remove Heidt, assaulting him in the process. The former Royal Dutch Marine fought back and was supported by hundreds of workers who forced the guards out. For defending himself, Will was charged with assault – there were no charges against the security thugs.

Within minutes, four cops arrived and tried to arrest Will. Hundreds of angry workers surrounded the cops and prevented them from taking Will out of the plant. The police, scared and humiliated, left.

At a mass meeting that afternoon, 2,000 workers demanded Will's immediate reinstatement, that he return to his section on the Trim Line, and condemned the use of police and security thug violence in an industrial dispute.

Later that day, Will and another Chrysler worker, Martin O'Malley (later state secretary of the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union CFMEU) were attacked by police when entering a nearby hotel for a drink with worker supporters. The two were arrested and Will, as a reprisal for the humiliation police had suffered in the car factory, was viciously bashed. They appeared in court the following day, represented by student and worker supporters with a sign that said "Gaul bosses, not workers!" For defending himself at the factory, Will was charged with assault – there were no charges against the security thugs. However, no-one was there from the union to represent them. Their cases were adjourned.

For the next couple of weeks, Will played a game of cat and mouse with the police, making appearances at the factory and then disappearing into a network of safe houses. He was seized by police on January 29 1976, refused bail and remanded until February 16. On that date he was gaoled indefinitely for having violated a Supreme Court injunction forbidding him from entering Chrysler. The conditions for his release were that he agreed not to enter the plant and apologised to the court for violating the injunction. He refused to do this.

Will also faced four civil charges: two for assault and two for resisting arrest arising from the police and security thug attempts to remove him from the plant in November, when in accordance with union policy, he refused the sack and "sat-in" on the job.

In SA, the day after his arrest, workers refused to start work for three hours in protest against his violent sacking. On Saturday, February 1, supporters marched the one kilometre route from parliament house to Adelaide Gaol; this was repeated the next week, only it was a bigger and more militant demonstration with Chrysler workers shouting "Free Will Heidt" and "Gaul bosses not workers". Another march was held the following week.

As with van Arend, support for Will from the official trade union movement was minimal. Waterside workers in Melbourne donated money to his defence appeal and a meeting of 150 railway workers at Spencer St. Station voted to black-ban the handling of Chrysler cargo.

The NSW and Victorian branches of the BLF called for Will's immediate release and the Victorian branch set up a rank and file group to develop struggle in his support.

The Victorian branch of the VBU passed a motion calling for Will's immediate reinstatement and the dropping of all charges – members instructed their leadership to organise shop floor meetings and collections of money in a move that was very



Supporters marching the one kilometre route from Parliament House to Adelaide Gaol in defence of Will Heidt, 1 February 1976

embarrassing for the VBU in SA.

In SA, the VBU washed its hands of Will, saying that under their rules a worker who is dismissed by an employer is only kept on as a member for 6 more weeks. It told Will to accept the sack in violation of its own policy.

Will Heidt Defence Committees were established in Melbourne and Adelaide and did much good work.

The SA state ALP government of Don Dunstan did nothing to support Will Heidt although ALP policy was the same as Will's -to oppose police and civil court interference in industrial disputes. A combined unions delegation to the SA government met with Attorney-General Peter Duncan, probably the most 'left-wing' government minister, but nothing was achieved.

Heidt was eventually released from jail after 7 weeks on March 16, 1976. The court considered 7 weeks "sufficient" for Will to have purged his contempt. He had not apologized to the court

and made this clear on his release, saying he had not done so because he opposed police and civil court interference in an industrial dispute.

Despite the support of workers at Tonsley Park, Will was unable to win reinstatement. Not only was he banned from Chrysler, he was effectively black balled by other employers throughout Adelaide. But he did not surrender his politics and worked at the Bowden-Brompton Community Centre, a strongly working class part of Adelaide, with great success.

Party base at Chrysler smashed

The 1976 log of claims was a complete sell out by the VBU. At the July general meeting, VBU official Kevin "Shady" Lane admitted that "If we took the results of our negotiations to a mass meeting, we'd get lynched".

A July 26 combined meeting of Chrysler and GMH shop stewards voted in favour of holding a mass meeting two days later. These were intended to be joint unions meetings of the four unions with



coverage in the car industry, but the union leaderships kept their members at separate meetings.

Unlike the Chrysler plant, workers at GMH had not taken the Chrysler workers' path of establishing a rank and file committee because conditions were more favourable to working through the shop stewards, generally a more worker-oriented group than those of the VBU at Chrysler. By the time of the joint Chrysler-GMH shop stewards meeting, an Action Committee had been established to coordinate action between the Woodville and Elizabeth GMH plants. On August 5, the Action Committee initiated guerilla strikes in the Press Shop and Trim Fabrication at Elizabeth. GMH sacked workers in these plants.

The following day, shop stewards extended a "work to rule and work without enthusiasm" policy to other sections at Elizabeth. GMH stood down workers throughout the plant and on August 13 sacked 49 mechanics in the Vehicle Assembly Plant.

At Chrysler, thousands of workers rejected the VBU Executive's recommendation to accept the 1976 log of claims. Pat Meehan, VBU organiser and former president, took an inaccurate and damaging version of their motion to Chrysler bosses, giving them an excuse to stand workers down. When challenged, he said "I hope they all get stood down and the militants can get up before a mass meeting and explain why."

Despite this provocation from the union, VBU members banned overtime for seven weeks amidst a Chrysler threat that it would leave the state if militancy continued. VBU officials called a mass meeting on September 9 in an effort to lift the bans but were opposed by the majority of workers who challenged officials and left the meeting believing the bans were still on. The next day Dominic Foreman, VBU Secretary, told the capitalist press that the meeting had not been officially closed and that therefore it was up to the VBU Executive to decide on the bans. The VBU took up Fraser's demand for secret ballots on industrial action and the result, met with

skepticism and anger by Chrysler workers, was that the motion supporting the bans was narrowly lost in what later emerged in the Arbitration Commission to have been a union-rigged ballot.

It was not long before other companies sought to have secret ballots. September saw Adelaide Brighton Cement applying for a secret ballot clause in its award and referring directly to the Chrysler situation as a justification. The VBU had breached the dam and the anti-union floodwaters were pouring in.

Overproduction was again plaguing Chrysler. At the start of July 1977, Chrysler announced it would either stay on a five-day week and sack 850 workers, or go on a four-day week and sack 350. Workers, the company said, could "take their choice".

The VBU refused a call by hundreds of workers to convene a mass meeting and instead called in the shop stewards and told them to put the option of the four-day week to members at the plant. The higher officials were not prepared to front the workers.

The Rank and File newsletter called on workers to reject the four-day week, refuse all sackings and place black bans on the new model Galant and the movement of new cars from the Chrysler stockpile.

At a mass meeting on July 12, the VBU proposals were overwhelmingly rejected and motions supporting the Rank and File proposals passed. The motion also said that the bans could only be lifted by another mass meeting. When a VBU official tried to frustrate the passage of motions from the floor by leaving the meeting, he was dragged back by about 50 angry workers, pushed back onto the stage and told to run the meeting properly. The capitalist press described this as violence and a near riot by "extreme radicals" from what they always mis-named the "Student Worker Alliance".

On July 13, Michael Williss, a teacher member of WSA and the Party appeared on the TV current



affairs program *This Day Tonight* as a WSA spokesperson to effectively rebut claims by Dunstan and the union that WSA had infiltrated Chryslers with student radicals who bore most of the responsibility for “violence” and “extremism” at the plant.

About 100 members of the VBU attended a meeting at Trades Hall on July 14. Most were “loyalists” brought in from other workplaces and from amongst the pro-union shop stewards from Tonsley Park. Only about 20 Rank and File supporters attended and were outvoted. It was revealed that a VBU shop steward had eleven workers charged with assaulting the union official on July 12.

What was not revealed at this meeting of VBU members was that the officials had been colluding with the company to identify every known member and suspected supporter of the Rank and File to be included in the mass sacking being prepared for the following day. ASIO knew in advance of what was being prepared behind the members’ backs. A field officer report on the July 14 meeting included the following:

(Name redacted) has advised that persons alleged to have taken a leading role in events at Tonsley Park on 12 July (listed at Para 8 of ADL 742) will in all probability be dismissed by the company on 15 July 1977. The company is understood to have VBU backing for the proposed action to occur but expects WSA reprisals e.g. ‘sit-ins’ and demonstrations to occur. (This information is strictly non gratis and must remain so until the company publicly announces the dismissals.)

Not only did the VBU help the company compile the list of those to be sacked, it also broke the long-standing union policy of “last on, first off” in order to get some of the key Rank and File workers, who had been at the plant for up to eight years, sacked.

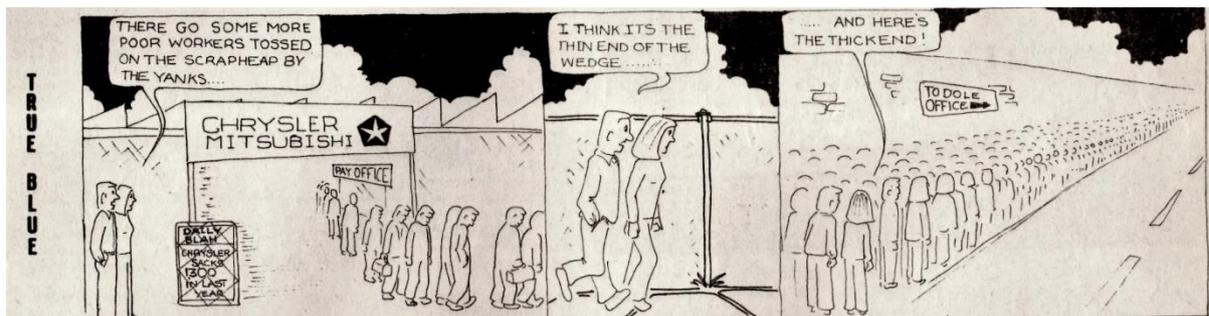
On Friday July 15 1977, near the end of the shift, Chrysler sacked 700 workers, including those specifically targeted as the Rank and File. The plant was brought to a halt as workers walked off the job. Ten cars in different areas were overturned and smashed. Racks of parts were tipped over and scattered about the floor, body panels waiting to go onto the line were smashed with hammers and tools thrown about the plant. Later a picket was placed on Chrysler’s spare parts division to prevent urgent spare parts from reaching Adelaide Airport in time for the plane.

Although the Rank and File newsletter continued to be produced and distributed within the Tonsley Park plant, and workers continued to fight over issues without VBU support, the core of the Rank and File organisation had been effectively smashed.

Party continues to lead

The defeat suffered by the Rank and File did not dishearten CPA (M-L) members and supporters in other parts of the SA workforce.

At Elizabeth GMH, the Party had influence in the shop stewards committee and the Woodville-Elizabeth Action Committee. Our influence had grown over time and had to take into account the shop-floor popularity of established leaders like Ted Gnatenko, a Bulgarian migrant who had started with GMH at Woodville in in 1954 but had



A comic from a rank and file publication of Chrysler workers at the time



transferred to toolmaking and Elizabeth in 1963. In 1965 he became a shop steward and in 1970 the Senior Shop Steward for the Metal Workers at Elizabeth. His fluency in six languages endeared him to many of the 6000-strong multicultural workforce. Gnatenko was aligned with the Left Caucus which had grown out of cooperation between the CPA and left-leaning members of the ALP during the fight against the “groupers” of the Democratic Labor Party.

In 1969 the body shop (part of the Assembly Division of GMH Elizabeth) was occupied by mostly Italian workers. These workers would only allow Gnatenko (AMWU) senior shop steward to represent them having previously turned the fire hoses on security guards and Vehicle Builder’s Employees’ Federation (VBEF, ie. VBU) officials who tried to get them to leave.

In December 1970, GMH apprentices occupied the foyer of the administration block at Elizabeth to protest at the indifference shown to their complaints by their unions (Amalgamated Engineering Union, Australasian Society of Engineers, Electrical Trades Union) and GMH. The occupation lasted two hours and was repeated the following year on January 22 when 80 apprentices occupied the foyer for three hours.

It was within this workforce that our influence began to grow in the early 70s. We played a positive role in supporting Gnatenko when he was sacked in Christmas 1974 after chairing a mass meeting of all workers following a GMH decision to sack 1000 workers. We sought permission from GMH to have the meeting within the plant but this had been refused. Gnatenko convened the meeting anyway and was sacked. There followed nearly two years of legal argument in the Industrial Commission and the Supreme Court which resulted on 26 November 1976, with a judgement that found the dismissal unfair. Gnatenko was ordered to be reemployed to his former position as a toolmaker on terms not less favourable and payment of any loss of wages he had suffered in the interim.

In September 1976, two shop stewards, Les Bowling and Brian Noone, were suspended from

office for one year by the VBU. Bowling had worked in several factories before starting at GMH and had been a member of the SWCC. The union had recommended that the shop stewards committee lift an overtime ban and a “work to rule”. Bowling and Noone were obliged to put the motion to members in their sections but did so without a great deal of enthusiasm, and the workers rejected the recommendation. The VBU decided that the two shop stewards needed to be disciplined.

The following day, GMH gave Noone and Bowling notice that they were to be transferred out of the Vehicle Assembly Plant (VAP). Workers reacted angrily at both the VBU demotion and the GMH transfer and forced both the VBU and GMH to back off. Noone and Bowling were reinstated as shop stewards by the VBU in the VAP.

Not to be outdone, the VBU Executive again suspended Les and Brian from office under a rule of their federal body. The second attempt to get rid of these two shop stewards met with even greater opposition from the shop stewards committee and the workers, and so the VBU backed down and, on 17 October, reinstated them for a second time.

However, shop floor activism resurfaced in mid-1978 over the log of claims. There were reports in the capitalist press alleging sabotage on the line. Workers were in a defiant mood, with anger directed at both the union and the company. According to the VBEF minutes:

Shop stewards called a meeting (9.8.1978) of their members to deal with matters arising out of the Log of Claims, and that L. Bowling, C. Sweeney and B. Noone had led a march of members into the Administration Block at Elizabeth – this action led to the dismissal of L. Bowling and Sweeney – and B. Noone receiving a final warning on Thursday morning.

The VBEF refused, at heated meetings of shop stewards and activists, to support Bowling and Sweeney, denying them any financial assistance to pursue claims of unfair dismissal based on



Gnatenko's precedent, on the grounds that the two shop stewards may have "been engaged in illegal activities" (VBEF General Minutes, 16.8.1978).

Meanwhile, the traditional Labour Day march had degenerated into little more than an excuse for Labor and ACTU leaders to play at being "heroes of the working class", with their clear message being that all problems would be solved with the election of Labor governments. On October 9, 1977 less than 400 people gathered to take part in the march. Many of those were supporters of WSA, carrying Eureka flags and marching with Chrysler workers. The latter carried a banner reading "Secret Ballot – Bosses Weapon – Chrysler says 2,530 workers; VBU officials say 3,117 votes". At one stage, this group was attacked by ALP officials and police who tried to rip up the banner. Hawke and other bigwigs had to cancel their planned speeches at Tarntanyangga (Victoria Square) and headed off to the bar of Trades Hall on South Terrace, half a mile away.

Worker Student Alliance

Reference was made earlier in this article to the Student Worker Coordinating Committee (SWCC). This group of about ten young people, formed around 1967-68, were the first young people to support (and some to join) the Party. They were also amongst the first to offer an alternative to pacifism and Labor Party domination of the Campaign for Peace in Vietnam (CPV). They carried banners calling for "Victory to the Viet Cong" and denouncing imperialism and its war. They carried flags of South Vietnam's National Liberation Front.

In 1970, groups taking an anti-imperialist line within the anti-war movement created an umbrella group called the Adelaide Revolutionary Socialists (ARS). The groups included the SWCC, Adelaide University's Students for Democratic Action (SDA), a Flinders University group the Flinders Revolutionary Socialists, Secondary Students for Social Action and an anarchist group, Provo.

SDA had been formed in 1968 to oppose the state Liberal government's electoral gerrymander. Its two main leaders were Peter O'Brien and Rob Durbridge. Both were critical of the ALP as well as the Liberals, but from a New Left perspective which elevated the student movement above that of the working class which was derided as, at best, unable to break through the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie, and at worst, simply racist and backward.

From the beginning of 1970, editorial responsibility for the SDA's *Grass Roots* newsletter, now in its third year of publication, was split between the New Left and supporters of the Party, with each group taking turns to edit an issue.

The first real test of strength for the anti-imperialists within the anti-war movement, was a demonstration against US imperialism and the Vietnam War called for late in the afternoon of Friday May 8, the day before the first Moratorium march.

Durbridge was instrumental, with ourselves, in these arrangements, made at the meeting place of the Adelaide Revolutionary Socialists. The ARS had attended meetings of the newly-formed Vietnam Moratorium Committee (VMC) but had not yet been able to challenge the influence of the ALP, CPV and CPA over the VMC. The aim of the ARS demonstration was to support the slogans "Victory for the Viet Cong", "Support the NLF" and "Smash US imperialism".

At 4.30pm on Friday May 8, 1970, some four thousand students and others marched out of Adelaide University and up the 'Ho Chi Minh Trail' (Gawler Place to Rundle Street, left into King William Street, left into Pirie Street and on to the march's conclusion in Tarntanyangga). There were anti-imperialist placards, red flags and NLF flags. As the marchers turned into King William Street, they were attacked by about twenty drunk conscripts from the Woodside army base. These thugs bashed whoever was in the way between themselves and the NLF flags, some of which they successfully seized and burned. The



marchers tried fighting back, but the police intervened, arresting some of the young soldiers. A few went to trial but some had been released from paddy wagons on North Terrace and told to get back to base.

Between the first May Moratorium and the second one in September lay July 4, US Independence Day. The ARS decided to hold another anti-imperialist rally on that day. The march set off along the 'Ho Chi Minh Trail' but was attacked by police. A comrade was arrested outside the Town Hall and placed in a paddy wagon. The marchers rocked the paddy wagon back and forth but couldn't free him. Relations with the cops continued to deteriorate, and once the marchers were back behind the sanctuary walls of Adelaide Uni, a number vented their frustration by throwing stones at the cops.

The following night, at a meeting of the ARS, a split developed, with Durbridge and his supporters criticising attempts to free the comrade from the divvy van and the rock throwing at Adelaide Uni. Durbridge threatened to leave the Alliance if it continued the way it was going.

The more militant section of ARS reconstituted itself as the Radical Alliance of Students and Workers on 8 July 1970 and criticised Durbridge. *Grass Roots*, organ of SDA at Adelaide Uni, ruptured, with Vol 3 no 24 prepared by Durbridge attacking the "hard line faction of the Radical Alliance", and the Marxist-Leninists replying in the next issue under the heading "The proletarian revolution and the renegade Durbridge".

Despite the split, there was still tactical cooperation between the various groups. On 24 July anti-imperialists met to prepare for the Sept 18 Moratorium. It was agreed that an anti-imperialist leaflet would be drafted by Jim Moss (CPA), Durbridge (New Left) and Mike Williss (a Marxist-Leninist) representing the three main ideological trends.

At a meeting on 16 August, it was announced that the Worker-Student Alliance had replaced the ARS. Durbridge and his group were members

initially. On 13 September, WSA discussed a proposal by Durbridge for a student strike at Adelaide Uni the day before the Moratorium on Sept 18. Plans for blockading the intersection of King William and Rundle Streets and holding a street theatre were announced.

The September 18 Moratorium closed down the King William Street and North Tce intersection in a change of plans decided by Brian Medlin and a couple of others in the leadership of the VMC. Brian, Lynn Arnold (later Labor Premier) and Greg O'Hair explained to those in the front line what to do when the march got to the intersection. The change of plan caught the police off guard, and they hurried to break up the occupation, moving police horses into the demonstrators' ranks.

As police moved in, a substance like tear gas affected part of the crowd and it was widely believed that the police were using it as they made arrests. It later transpired that chloropicrin, a tear gas-like substance manufactured for use in WW1 as a poison gas, had been brought and released by a demonstrator. At subsequent meetings of WSA, Durbridge and others demanded that this person confess to his role and hand himself in to the police. Although the Marxist-Leninists didn't support the action of releasing the gas, we opposed Durbridge. Durbridge left WSA after this.

WSA continued to grow and received a certain notoriety thanks to the capitalist press. This rebounded to WSA's advantage as groups of workers engaged in struggle sought its support. In 1971, for example, a phone call was put through to WSA members at Adelaide University. The caller wanted WSA to "get down here quick – there's a revolution going on!" The caller was the owner of a delicatessen, many of whose customers were workers from the nearby Council depot. When WSA members met the striking workers, they were immediately accepted as comrades and helped organise placards and flags for a 2-kilometre march to the Council offices. On other occasions, WSA members supported actions by the BLF and by striking workers at the SA Rubber Mills.



The alliance between workers tired of being told to leave everything up to the union – and through it – to the ALP, and students seeking to implement the Party’s policy of integrating with the working class clearly eclipsed the campus influence of supporters of the New Left.

Of the two founding members of SDA, O’Brien had moved interstate in 1969. In 1971 Durbridge was active in an anarchist movement on campus symbolized by a cartoon character, Rufus, who toyed with revolution and dope-smoking. At a meeting of the July 4 organising committee in 1970, he had produced a leaflet titled “The Communist Party is behind the anti-war movement – a long way behind!”, reflecting general anti-imperialist attitudes towards the revisionists in the old Party. However, in 1972, he joined the Communist Party of Australia, reinforcing its Eurocommunist revisionist wing (the Aarons clique) and represented the CPA along with Mark and Bernie Taft in the 1982 joint discussion between the CPA and CPA (M-L). In 1991 he supported the dissolution of the CPA and became a founder of the social-democratic Search Foundation. Peter O’Brien worked for a time as ministerial adviser to SA Attorney-General Peter Duncan in the Dunstan government but succumbed to heroin and other illnesses.

During 1973 and 1974, Marxist-Leninists continued to provide leadership to the WSA whose numbers now reached more than a hundred committed activists. General meetings were lively affairs where issues were thrashed out in a comradely fashion. The Party encouraged women to take leading roles, disciplining and removing from membership two males who consistently berated women comrades in reference to their sexuality and their bodies, and promoted the involvement of workers from migrant backgrounds.

Flinders Occupation

The Marxist-Leninist influence at Adelaide University was quite open, with our comrades after breaking from Durbridge and the New Left, setting themselves up as SDA (M-L)! But the

Party’s influence among the student left at Flinders was no less strong, and in time came to be quite decisive.

This was certainly evident during the occupation of Flinders University. What began as action by History students against the examination system turned into an occupation of the Registry building where Vice-Chancellor Russell had his office. Investigating Russell’s background, students discovered that he had been involved in research for the American war machine and had been a consultant for the CIA. They threatened to open the VC’s office files, one per week, until their demands were met. The files, once opened, revealed the extent to which Vice Chancellor Russell’s research had been related to military and intelligence agencies and indeed some suggestion that there had been involvement or supportive research for chemical and biological warfare.

The university counter-attacked and had the students cleared from the Registry. However, Flinders students returned to the university and reclaimed the Registry. Police were called in. A number of students were detained but no formal arrests were made. The University no doubt considered it too risky to invite the close examination that court procedure could involve. In fact, the university administration implemented court proceedings to prevent publication of the material that students had ‘illegally’ accessed. Instead, they implemented their own disciplinary action, expelling several students, suspending and disciplining others.

Not only did the Occupation take an anti-imperialist stand, but it also cemented the role and influence of women within WSA and the Party. Their courageous action and decisive leadership at the height of the Occupation saw the influence of women on Party work develop substantially.

It was not only among the students that the Party was influential. In the Philosophy Department were outstanding opponents of US imperialist aggression in Vietnam such as Brian Medlin and Greg O’Hair, both of whom had leading positions



in the VMC. One of the iconic photos of the Moratoriums in Adelaide was that of a spread-eagled Medlin being arrested by group of police. He and O'Hair refused to appear before the Royal Commission into the September 18 Moratorium.

It was Medlin and O'Hair and those others influenced by the Party that the Royal Commissioner had in mind when he described the line of demarcation between the militant and reformist wings of the anti-war movement. He wrote:

One "radical" position on Vietnam was that the United States is a powerful and aggressive nation which seeks to exert power throughout the world wherever the exercise of or ability to exert power is considered by its own rulers to be beneficial to its own interests. The power may be political, military or financial. The initial entry of the United States into Vietnam and its subsequent actions there, although disguised as being support and aid for an existing government in office there, are in reality according to this view merely an exercise of "imperialist" power of the United States in that country.

A more moderate view does not accept the "imperialist" argument, but regards the entry of the United States into Vietnam as a tragic mistake, and its subsequent actions as attempts to overcome that mistake without too much loss of face. The initial military action of the United States was, in the view of many, illegal as well as immoral.

At Flinders Medlin set up a democratic Staff-Student Consultative Committee within the Philosophy Department and introduced the first Women's Studies course in Australia. In 1974-5, he taught a course in Politics in Art which was much influenced by Mao Zedong's *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art*. Among the students were John Schumann, Michael Atkinson and Verity Truman who formed political folk band Redgum, trying to apply the essence of Mao's teachings in an Australian context. The Party's

focus on class and anti-imperialist independence was reflected in many of the band's lyrics. They played at WSA's Eureka Dances and at fundraisers for WSA branches such as the Teachers Action Group. An "underground recording" of their music was made at Australian Broadcasting Corporation studios in Adelaide by Darce Cassidy. The tapes became popular on campuses across Australia and on independent radio. From there they became one of the most popular bands associated with anti-imperialism and a progressive, working class Australian culture.

People's Voice

An important initiative at this time was the publication of the WSA monthly paper *People's Voice*, beginning in April 1975. Coincidentally, it began just as the Peter van Arend struggle was breaking out at Chrysler and made the details of that struggle and the role of the Rank and File available to workers across Adelaide. It was sold at factories and was soon being approached by workers with stories to tell of speed-ups, victimisation, sackings and sell-outs by Labor-controlled unions.

People's Voice ran regular articles exposing wage indexation and inflation and the Hawke-ALP wage freeze, the housing crisis and working women's demands. By March 1976, and to keep up with the demand for progressive information, it changed to a fortnightly publication. This was in the wake of the twin dismissals of Whitlam (at the behest of the CIA) and Heidt (at the behest of Chrysler).

Its first fortnightly edition publicised the arrest of the Storemen and Packers' state secretary George Apap at a sit-in of the city offices of woolbrokers Elder Smith-Goldsborough Mort. They had just sacked 400 employees at the Port Adelaide wool stores and those workers were sitting-in and refusing the sack.

The very next issue reported the release of Will Heidt from Adelaide Gaol. The paper continued through to 1979, by which time WSA had changed its name to Worker Student Alliance for Australian Independence, a clumsy and



unnecessary name change but one which corresponded with a much greater focus within the Party on Australian independence as the “first stage” of a two-stage struggle for socialism.

Among the WSA aligned mass organisations promoted by People’s Voice were the Australian Cultural Association which criticised US cultural imperialism and promoted progressive Australian culture at its dances and on its weekly Independence Voice radio show on 5UV. Also aligned with WSA was the Progressive Art Movement, a collective of visual artists including Annie Newmarch, Christine McCarthy, Jim Cane (CPA), Bob Boyne and Pamela Harris. They held anti-war exhibitions, created a series of great screen print posters, and street murals.

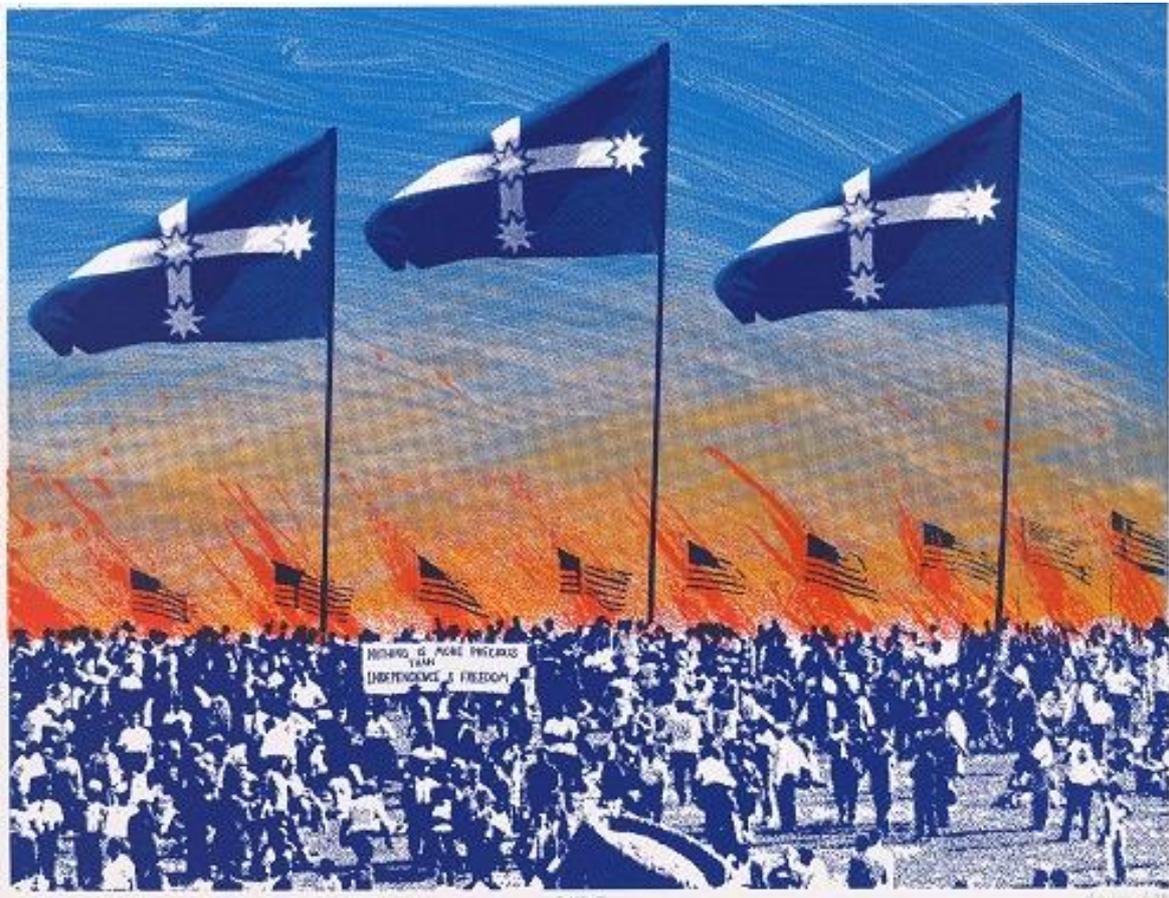
White collars and blue collars

The Party’s real strength in the 70s and 80s was in blue collar industries. The car industry and construction have been mentioned, but there

were also comrades in foundries and parts manufacturing and other traditional workplaces.

This did not mean that white collar professions were ignored. Some Party members became lawyers and others entered teaching and the public service.

The teachers’ union in SA at this time was the SA Institute of Teachers (SAIT) (later the Australian Education Union (AEU)). It had been under the control of headmasters who occupied its leadership. It rejected industrial action, claiming to be more of a professional association than a union. In 1973-4, WSA set up a sub-branch for teachers and trainee teachers, called the Teachers Action Group (TAG). TAG had an active membership of 25-30 and its own publication, *Blackboard*. It depicted the SAIT leaders as holding back the members. This had come to a head in 1979 when teachers had voted for strike action, only to have the Rules amended to



Annie Newmarch’s Sunrise – a example of the art produced by the Progressive Art Movement



require a 2/3 majority (the strike vote had reached a simple majority).

After 1975, a loose coalition of Party/WSA and CPA-aligned activists made headway against the conservatives, winning support for policies at SAIT Branch Council meetings. Although there were some differences between our supporters and those of the CPA, as well as non-aligned progressive teachers, Party members worked as part of a coalition of progressives and did not display sectarianism or try to take over the progressive group. The Party/WSA members succeeded in winning the leadership of the major SAIT affiliate, the High School Teachers Association (HSTA) and built up their influence in the Primary Teachers Association as well.

By 1979, they had decided to directly challenge the conservative leadership, running as Vice-President Mike Williss, who had been active on the Salaries Committee and headed the HSTA, but whose long hair and beard (and female Vice-Presidential partner with only one name!) was still a little too radical for the conservative profession. However, the voice of classroom teachers was being heard, and in the next elections, the conservatives effectively handed the Presidency to a politically conservative, but not reactionary candidate, and the male Vice-Presidency was won by a TAG-nominated classroom teacher.

Once the progressive classroom teacher element had shown it could succeed against the conservatives, it proceeded to change the rules regarding holding office. Influenced by Party policy (in turn influenced by China's Cultural Revolution), TAG argued that there should be time limits on holding elected positions. In China, cadres had been required to vacate their offices and go and work alongside the workers and peasants for extended periods of time to remould their class outlook and keep them oriented towards the proletariat and serving the people. In Australia we were also influenced by Hill's *Looking Backward, Looking Forward* which rejected trade unionism as a bourgeois ideology and criticised the old Party's prioritising of the

winning of elected leadership positions in trade unions at the expense of developing strength amongst the rank and file.

At the time that TAG won the change to a limit on two consecutive two-year terms of office, there seemed like an endless supply of rank and file teachers to draw on for rotations at the leadership level of the AEU. In the 2000s the rule was relaxed to allow 6 years, instead of four, before having to vacate an elected leadership position.

A lasting legacy of our influence within what was later called the Progressive Educators group within the AEU has been the commitment to refuse affiliation with the ALP or any other parliamentary party. It is still the view of this group that teachers and other education workers must maintain an independent capacity to fight for public education regardless of which party holds office.

One thing that was easier to achieve in a union with hundreds of workplaces than it had been in the big factories such as Chrysler and GMH was operating several lines of activists – some in the forefront and some based in schools. Had the Chrysler Rank and File been a bit more strategic about this, it may have been able to prevent the VBU and Chrysler from completely smashing the Rank and File through a mass sacking.

This circumstance within the teacher workforce was made use of when Enterprise Bargaining was introduced for the first time. It was conducted across the entire workforce (which had been enlarged to include all education workers with new classifications for Aboriginal Education Workers, School Support Officers (SSOs) and seconded teachers working in the Department or in specialised areas like music and swimming).

A requirement of Enterprise Bargaining was that all employees be represented with the employer in a Single Bargaining Centre (SBC). This meant that an organisation representing tens of thousands of workers would have a single vote alongside any non-union employee who wished to represent him- or herself, or any small union



with joint coverage of part of the workforce (as the Public Service Association (PSA) did with SSOs).

School-based comrade, Mike Williss, decided to try and mobilise the mass of teachers to neutralise the SBC as an anti-union platform and put out a call for teachers to attend the SBC and register to represent themselves. Of course, this group of initially around 20 AEU members (later 60-70) were all solidly loyal to the AEU and worked with its industrial team throughout the negotiations. The comrade had a method of intercepting Departmental faxes to schools and was able, with others, to write and fax out answering communications through the night, so that the next morning the principals found that Departmental information was analysed and answered by good information in the hands of each school's AEU rep. As the strength and understanding of the rank and file teacher attendees at the SBC grew, meetings of the SBC took on an increasingly fiery and militant tenor and they were able to vote the Departmental CEO out of the Chair of the SBC and replace him with the comrade who had begun the campaign. Much to the Department's outrage, the SA Industrial Commission ordered that this comrade be put on paid release from his school and given access to Departmental fax machines and phones to carry out his duties as Chair of the SBC.

The SBC campaign was a mix of underground work (clandestinely intercepting Departmental correspondence and getting out answers to it), and open reliance on those union members prepared to struggle and win. The Department chose not to revive the SBC in the next round of Enterprise Bargaining, and when it attempted in the third round to reopen the SBC under one of its own choices of Chair, was sharply reminded by teachers who responded to this provocation that the previous Chair still occupied the position and voted for him to take over the meeting which he did, closing down the SBC for the final time.

US Bases get the nod...

The memory of British imperialist crimes in the SA Outback (testing of atom bombs on the lands of

the Maralinga Tjarutja) was still a festering sore when the US spy bases at Narrungar in SA and Pine Gap in the NT became operative in 1969 and 1970 respectively. The Party strongly opposed the bases which had as part of their mandate to spy on People's China and rejected claims to their being "joint US-Australian facilities".

When the US proposed to erect an Omega navigation tower in 1973 to facilitate its global military communications, WSA in Victoria raised the issue and established a Stop Omega Committee. Michael Williss convened a meeting to establish a similar committee in Adelaide. The move was supported by a cross-section of the community and the following organisations were the first to sign on: the Australia Party, the ABCWF, the Uniroyal (ex-SA Rubber Mills) Shop Stewards Committee, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the CPA and WSA.

In early 1974, the Stop Omega Campaign endorsed a Victorian proposal for a convoy of buses to take anti-base protesters to the US facility at North West Cape in WA where transmission towers allowed the imperialists to communicate underwater at appreciable depths to their nuclear submarines. The base had been opened in 1967 when US Ambassador Ed Clark presented Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt a single peppercorn for the rental of the land on which the facility was located.

The prospect of a theatrical return of the peppercorn to the US base commander and an attempted reclamation of the land for Australia, worried the authorities. When the matter was raised at the February general meeting of the Australia China Society, the 40 members present included four separate ASIO field officers who each filed their own report on the meeting. The ACS was requested to support the "Long March" to North West Cape in defence of China which was targeted by the US nuclear submarine fleet.

By the time of the next monthly meeting of the ACS, its AGM, the Stop Omega Campaign had been renamed as the Campaign Against Foreign Military Bases in Australia (CAFMB) and again,



four ASIO field officers filed reports on the other 24 members present as they approved financial support for the "Long March". Bob Creek, the EWS worker and former patient of Dr David Caust, was selected as an ACS representative on the trip.

In the lead-up to the departure of buses for North West Cape, demonstrations of around 70 members and supporters of CAFMBA were held outside the US Consulate and defence contractor Lytton Industries.

The Long March to North West Cape was a major success, with street theatre, rallies and distribution of leaflets conducted at each stop along the way. The WA police found every opportunity to harass and attack demonstrators and were subject to much criticism for removing their police identity badges before each attack. The core leaders of the protest were all aligned with the CPA (M-L) and WSA.

Despite the success of the CAFMBA, North West Cape is still in existence. All US Naval personnel were removed in 1993. It is currently operated under a contract by US missile manufacturer Raytheon.

The BLF (and its later changes in name) continued to be a welcoming place for communists to gain

employment through in the construction industry, or in as an organiser. Peter O'Dea had worked as a barman for seven years when he first came into contact with WSA members drinking at his pub.

"I can safely say that in the whole seven years that I was a barman," he later said, "I never saw anybody associated with the union. It was purely a transaction which the employer organised and I just paid. My first real exposure to strong trade unionism was the Builders Labourers Federation. I got retrenched as a barman and someone got me a job as a builder's labourer and I was absolutely stunned at the level of organisation that was there."

That was in 1973. A couple of years later, O'Dea was put on as acting state secretary when Secretary Ron Owens was sent by the federal management committee to assist with the federal takeover of the NSW branch. When the intervention in NSW was completed, O'Dea was sent to Canberra as a federal organiser in 1976, as part of the federal intervention into the ACT branch of the BLF caused by an attempted takeover of its membership there by the Building Workers' Industrial Union. Joining O'Dea in the ACT were SA builders' labourers Rob Sinclair, Renee van Dalen and Les Bowling, the latter having gone into construction after losing his job at GMH.

O'Dea brought to unionism in the ACT a new militancy and activism beyond the immediate workplace, and encouraged the union to take up the cause of both the Aboriginal Embassy and the revolutionary core of South African opposition to apartheid – the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania. However, differences arose between O'Dea and Gallagher, and whilst the Party was correct to avoid interfering in the internal affairs of unions, it failed to properly handle contradictions between its own members in this union, and losses occurred.

The BLF (or ABCWF, and now the CFMMEU) was always going to come under the bosses' attack. The investors looking for quick profits from new



buildings, bridges and other infrastructure are indifferent to the injuries and deaths in this industry and do not tolerate militant unionism at the workplace.

Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser called a Royal Commission into the activities of the Australian Building Construction Employees' and Builders Labourers' Federation (1981–1982). Fraser wanted the BLF deregistered and its members absorbed into the tradesmen's union, the BWIU, under the pro-Soviet revisionist Pat Clancy.

Called before the Commission, Ron Owens again took a principled working class stand, declaring:

At the direction of my union and of my conscience I refuse to answer any questions put to me. We consider this Commission a further indication of the Australian Government's drastic moves to the right and to hide behind all guises to try to hoodwink the Australian people from the knowledge of the disastrous economic situation they have plunged this country into.

My union colleagues before me have told this Royal Commission how you people are bleeding the taxpayers of thousands of dollars a day while the poor and underprivileged of this country hunt through garbage bins and soup kitchens to exist so it would be senseless for me to try and dent your conscience as you would not have these jobs if you had feelings for the working class of this country.

I can assure your bosses, the Fraser Government and the multinationals that they can no longer hide behind these puny diversions as the workers see the attack on the Builders Labourers as an attack on all genuine union leadership and it will be resisted as Hitler's kangaroo courts were resisted and he too had his puppets so I say to you if you have any respect for the rule of democracy and law you should

disassociate yourselves from this contemptible farce.

Australian Independence Movement

In the early 1980s, WSA for Australian Independence morphed into the Australian Independence Movement (AIM). The AIM inherited WSA's great track record of putting into effect the leadership of the Party in a mass organisation with which it had no formal links simply through the persuasive abilities of Party members and supporters.

In its first year, 1982, AIM opened a shop in the city in the name of the Australian Cultural Association, one of the groups that had operated under the WSA umbrella. The East Bookshop was still being run by the McCaffreys as an outlet for Chinese books and magazines, Marxist-Leninist classics and Party publications. The ACA shop stocked only progressive and anti-imperialist Australian content. An ACA Women's Group arranged activities such as a concert by Sydney's Judy Small, whose first album, *A Natural Selection*, was being sold in the shop.

One of the driving forces in the ACA was its President, BLF organiser Allen Harris. He gave drive and energy to the ACA/AIM through its *Independence Newsletter* and its support for bush dances and the annual National Folk Festival, Renewables Fairs (opposing the fossil fuel industries) and for the regular appearance, to the delight of children, of a Eureka flag carrying Blinky Bill.

When striking Woodville GMH tradesmen approached AIM in 1983 and asked for a Eureka flag, they were also given a banner with the words "Support GMH workers". These were placed in the middle of busy Port Road which went past the Woodville plant. As a result, people driving past honked their horns and support came from the Mayor of Woodville and from local bakeries and supermarkets. However, the ACTU's Hawke was now PM, and at the head of a Labor Government he had called a National Economic Summit of bosses and unions, and he



had made thinly veiled threats against unions that were tempted to “step out of line” and pursue their members’ independent agenda. Support for the GMH workers from other unions slowly faded away, and they were left to deal with the consequences of the shift to the “World Car” by themselves.

AIM/ACA continued to do good work through until around 1986 when the momentum began to dissipate.

Relations with the CPA and others

1982 saw the first of several exchanges between our Party and others. Charlie McCaffrey had joined Ted Hill in discussions with the CPA, the latter including Rob Durbridge. The outcome was a four-page supplement to which each of the CPA, CPA (M-L), SPA, and SWP contributed a page. It was carried in each of the parties’ papers.

Further talks between the various left parties and organisations occurred in December 1984 and January 1985. We did not believe that there could be a reconciliation between revisionism and Marxism-Leninism, but where the interests of the working class required joint activity and cooperation, we pushed for it.

Despite the dissolution of the CPA in 1991, the discussions which had taken place between the parties had ongoing value.

One important practical outcome of the discussions between the parties was the relative ease with which the labourers’ union (largely under the influence of our Party) and the craft union (largely under the influence of the SPA and its rebadging as the CPA in 1996) were able to combine into one construction union. In the late 1980s, the Builders Labourers’ Federation was deregistered by the Labor Government. In the early 1990s agreement was reached on an incorporation of the remnants of the BLF with the BWIU in a new union, the CFMEU. In Victoria this process was led by our comrade John Cummins who became the new union’s Federal President and was President of the Victorian branch until his death in 2006. In South Australia, a

remarkably respectful and mutually supportive relationship between our comrade Martin O’Malley (BLF) and the SPA/CPA’s Bennie Carslake (BWIU) saw the CFMEU take its rightful place as the union for all construction workers.

This was of great benefit when the Howard government set up its “special cop on the beat”, the Australian Building Construction Commission (ABCC) to again try and smash the construction workers’ union. Howard’s “Work Choices’ legislation extended the threat of individual contracts and loss of rights to all workers.

The first try-on came with charges against Victorian CFMEU organiser Noel Washington. In June 2008 he was charged by the ABCC over incidents on job sites the previous year. At the time the charges were laid, Rudd had become Labor Prime Minister and Julia Gillard his Workplace Relations Minister. Washington faced 6 months jail if convicted. Neither Rudd nor Gillard did anything to stop the use of Howard’s attack dog, the ABCC. Gillard lamely muttered that she “couldn’t comment on a case before the courts”.

With the CFMEU needing support, a committee to prepare for setting up an SA branch of Victoria’s Spirit of Eureka organisation organised a sausage sizzle and showing of a Filipino film about the killing by police of seven striking workers at the Hacienda Luisita plantation in the Philippines. It was both an act of solidarity with the Filipinos, and also a call to defend workers’ rights at work in SA. Held at the Australian Education Union, there were five speakers:

- Martin O’Malley, State Secretary, CFMEU on the building bosses’ watchdog, the Australian Building and Construction Commission
- Chris Field, Assistant State Secretary, LHMU, on the CleanStart campaign for low paid workers.
- Wayne Hanson, State Secretary, AWU, on fighting back over the WorkCover cuts.



- Karrangal John Hartley, Aboriginal activist, on the NT intervention and the unpaid wages campaign

- Janet Giles, State Secretary, SA Unions, on YRAW and the Labor Party

Washington’s charges were subsequently dropped in December because the ABCC didn’t give proper regard to procedure. But the need for an organisation to keep alive the rebellious and democratic spirit of the 1854 Eureka rebellion, and to use in current circumstances the rebel’s oath to “defend our rights and liberties” saw the Spirit of Eureka established in SA.

Concurrently with the charges against Noel Washington, ABCC charges were also laid against SA rigger Ark Tribe for “failure to attend to answer questions about a safety dispute at Flinders Uni in May 2008.” His court cases quickly became events for progressive workers and unionists to attend and O’Malley led the defence, accepting support from all corners.

At the same time, Spirit of Eureka began a campaign to commemorate the Eureka Rebellion each year by asking local government councils to fly the Eureka flag for a week in December. At first three, then as many as eleven local councils flew the flag, often after lengthy debates about what the flag represented – an important democratic milestone in Australia or a symbol of white racism. The latter was patiently dealt with by explaining to waverers that the rebellion was the first significant act of multicultural unity in the country, with two of the thirteen persons arrested as “ringleaders” of the Rebellion being



Ark Tribe

black immigrants. In 2009 and subsequently, the flag was also flown above the SA parliament.

For two years, Ark Tribe was hounded by the ABCC which demanded the

bosses’ courts jail him for the mandatory 6 months that his “crime” entailed.

Ark was not an ideologue and was sometimes torn by conflicting loyalties to family, the mates he rode with, the guys he had served in the army with, and the union which he loved. But he understood a basic class truth: injustice must be fought. Injustice would never subdue him or make him turn his back on his own beliefs and values.

Ark’s court case spanned two federal governments, one Liberal, the other Labor. As Labor PM after Rudd, Gillard refused to support him.

Ark’s support instead came directly from other ordinary working class people. Rallies held to coincide with Ark’s court appearances attracted members of a wide range of unions and community organisations. Ark’s defence lawyers argued his case very strongly and effectively, but the deciding factor in his acquittal on 24 November 2010 was the fear by the authorities that things were “getting out of hand” and would be made many times worse by having a rank and file worker jailed for refusing to answer questions related to a meeting to discuss safety on site.

Building an independent working class agenda in SA

South Australians have a good knowledge of how Labor operates at both Federal and State levels. In addition to the 12 years of pioneering neo-liberalism under Hawke and Keating (1983-1996) and pro-US cheerleading and anti-union attacks under Rudd-Gillard-Rudd (2007-2013) at the national level, there were the overlapping years in SA of Rann (2002-2011) and Weatherill (2011-2018).

These years corresponded with the Party’s promotion of the need for an independent working class agenda, recognising that the conservative Liberal-National coalition parties would always attack the people, but that so too would the ALP as a consequence of its commitment to managing capitalism and the



stranglehold that imperialism exerts on the nation.

During Rann's first and second terms, he was often the most popular Premier in the country, but disillusion steadily grew as unions took issue with unfunded WorkCover liability, problems with funding of health and education, and a perception that the government was not doing enough for environmental flows along the River Murray. His treasurer, Kevin Foley, was arrogantly championing the expansion of Roxby Downs whilst at the same time dismissing problems in prisons, notoriously dismissing concerns about overcrowding in 2008 with a pledge to "Rack 'em, stack 'em and pack 'em".

Rann and Foley also championed Private-Public Partnerships as a form of privatised infrastructure development. The Party researched PPPs and published in February 2008 the booklet *Public Private Partnerships: Community Benefit or Crony Capitalism?*

By the time of Rann's third election, in March, 2010 the leader who once enjoyed the highest popularity rating of any state premier at 84%, was languishing at 38% as workers and community activists continued their fight against the State Budget. Rann had been dancing for so long to the tune of Business SA and the Property Council of SA that he could no longer get back into step with the people. He had succeeded several years before in rebadging the ALP as "pro-business, pro-growth and pro-mining" prompting calls in some quarters for a return to Labor values in the ALP.

There were also others who shared a growing realisation that it was too late for the ALP, that it was finished as a vehicle through which workers and community organizations might have their interests promoted. This viewpoint realised that only strong community and people's action could create opportunities for victory and that the promotion of union values had to occur through struggle and not be diverted into attempts to change the Labor Party. To that end four major rallies were held during October-November 2010 in an unprecedented show of unity by public

sector unions. Midday rallies attracted as many as five thousand workers and community activists as nurses, correctional service officers, firefighters, ambulance drivers, teachers and public servants joined forces to demand the withdrawal of attacks on their rights and conditions and upon the services that they provide to the public.

SA Unions provided fertile ground for winning unions to the line of an independent working class agenda. Its Secretary was Janet Giles, a feisty battler who had led the Australian Education Union, and its President was the CFMEU's Martin O'Malley. Its office manager and industrial campaigner was Angas Story who had been involved with the Chrysler Rank and File and had worked for years as senior industrial officer at the AEU.

The severity of the neo-liberal agenda of the Rann Government on behalf of big capital caused grave concern to thousands of workers in South Australia. They demonstrated their feelings on the streets of Adelaide and outside the ALP State Convention in 2010. Rann and Foley required police escorts to enter their own Convention as three thousand public sector workers condemned their attacks on services and conditions.

Foley was forced to resign, and unions pursued their own agenda, demanding that Rann step down as well. Under pressure, he agreed to a timeline that would see his replacement by the ALP "left" faction's Jay Weatherill. While some SA Unions affiliates recognised that a change of leaders without a change of policies was no real victory, many of them could not conceive that the solution was to look beyond the ideology of social democracy because they genuinely believed that capitalism with a human face (social democracy) was a just cause. SA Unions developed and promoted a Charter for workers' struggle independent of the Labor government.

Premier Jay Weatherill's brand of social democracy, in reality was no different to his predecessors. Big Business in the form of Business SA, credit ratings agencies (such as



Standard and Poor's and Moody's) and the IMF were actually at the helm and dictated the Premier's "reform" agenda. Privatisation was adopted by Weatherill with sales of land, buildings and South-eastern forests.



In April 2013, the Party published *Beyond Labor: the need for an independent working class agenda*, a ten-page pamphlet that was distributed within the unions and progressive organisations. It was particularly useful in explaining the shortcomings of the view that the elevation of Weatherill had made it possible to "take back our Labor Party" and to put "labour values" back into the Labor Party.

Party activists were early opponents of billionaire "Twiggy" Forrest's proposal to put Aboriginal people and other welfare recipients on an Income Management Scheme. Weatherill had met with Forrest and agreed to promote the scheme in SA, giving blanket support to the Forrest Report. The Party produced leaflets exposing the scheme and deploring the fact that First Peoples would be unwilling guinea pigs in a punitive exercise that would ultimately extend to

all unemployed and poor people.

Much work was done in the Playford Council area in the northern suburbs where workers were aware that the car industry was being deliberately run down and that many, if not already unemployed, would soon be. We supported a group called Stop Income Management in Playford (SIMPLA) which later became the Anti-Poverty Network (SA). A driving force in the group was a young man, Pas Forgione. Although not a communist, Pas was recognised as a very influential activist and Spirit of Eureka awarded him its annual Spirit of Eureka Award in December 2014. Stephen Darley of SoE described Pas in these terms:

He does what a lot of the radical left doesn't do these days - he goes out to the working class areas and organises there, rather than stay in the 'safe zones' of the CBD and inner-city suburbs. And he is very well received there, he comes across as the opposite of someone just out to 'use' people. He has been a major part in building up SIMPLA (Stop Income Management in Playford) to an excellent and much-needed group, and similarly with the Anti-Poverty Network.

Just as Rann and Foley had faced opposition at an ALP State Conference, so too did Weatherill, especially on the issue of compulsory income management. Pas and a number of our comrades had done the necessary groundwork to ensure that SA Unions and its affiliates would take a stand at the November 2014 ALP State Conference.

A flyer distributed both outside and inside the ALP Convention by supporters of SIMPLA quoted from a statement from ACOSS which said the Forrest scheme would "take our nation back to the 1930s when unemployed people did not get cash benefits and had to work on the roads or beg for charity to survive".

The flyer was well received by passers-by and the majority of delegates inside the ALP Convention.



The community group action attracted media and police attention.

In an example of how a community group can work well with progressive trade union leaders, including SA Unions, their leading body, not only was the flyer distributed widely inside the Convention, but the following resolution was passed near unanimously.

“Convention opposes the Weatherill Cabinet’s rushed embrace of the Forrest Report. Of note, Convention is concerned with the Report’s advocacy of financial penalties for welfare-recipient parents as a means of improving school attendance, its attack on TAFE funding and its replacement by vouchers that would only fund training for employer-approved courses, its call to block cash payments for welfare recipients via the Healthy Welfare Card, and its bland acceptance of increased crime in the community that will flow from the implementation of its recommendations. This rushed support of the Forrest Report has been made without consultation with the Aboriginal people whose lives will be affected and is contrary to Labor values.”

Premier Weatherill was forced to back track inside the Convention in the face of overwhelming support for this resolution. The resolution and the media attention were only possible because of the tireless activism of the people from the working class northern suburbs over many months with support from progressive unionists.

In 2015 Weatherill angered many in the Labor Party, the unions and community organisations with the announcement that he would go through the pretence of consulting the public by holding a royal commission into the nuclear industry, to be headed by a pro-nuclear former SA governor, Rear Admiral Kevin Scare. The intention was to expand further the nuclear industry in SA, from mining to enrichment, energy and storage. Weatherill had to change SA legislation prohibiting any SA government

consulting publicly on the merits of a nuclear waste storage. This legislation had been won years before by the Anangu women of Cooper Pedy in a fight over a plan to move nuclear waste through South Australia.

Party members vigorously opposed the Royal Commission as did groups including Conservation SA, the Medical Association for Prevention of War (MAPW), Friends of the Earth, the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Australian Greens. Thousands of opponents of the nuclear industry made submissions, attended community “consultations” and attended rallies. First Nations peoples took leadership on many occasions. The final report, delivered in May 2016, made 12 key recommendations, including identifying an “economic opportunity” in the establishment of a deep geological storage facility and the receipt of spent nuclear fuel from prospective international clients.

Party members supported the anti-dump movement. On Saturday October 15, four thousand people gathered at Parliament House, Adelaide, to oppose proposals for nuclear waste dumps in SA. They had seen through Weatherill. Led by Aboriginal community leaders including Anangu woman Karina Lester (daughter of Yami Lester who was blinded as a child by fallout from one of the Maralinga A-bomb tests) and Adnyamathanha elder Regina McKenzie, speaker after speaker at the rally denounced the waste dump plans.

SA Unions state secretary Joe Szakacs called on rally participants to make sure they also rallied outside the ALP state convention on October 29 to support ALP members inside the convention who would be speaking against the nuclear waste dumps.

Weatherill sought to circumvent public opposition to the recommendations by referring them to a citizens’ jury of 368 randomly selected South Australians who, after careful deliberation over three weekends, overwhelmingly rejected the proposal for a nuclear waste dump in SA.

Having lost the 2018 SA election, Weatherill was



soon back in the embrace of Twiggy Forrest, announcing in 2019 that he would become the new CEO (one can imagine with a huge salary) of the early education arm of his philanthropic Minderoo Foundation.

Party members have led or strongly supported fights against capitalism's degradation of nature. They led a campaign to block uranium mining in the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary, have opposed fracking and the introduction of a private market in water entitlements and campaigned for the restoration of environmental flows along the Barka-Murray River system, and against testing and drilling for oil in the Great Australian Bight.

Working with the precariat

In recent years, with the closure of much of Australia's manufacturing, dictated by imperialism, a more or less permanently unemployed, under-employed, or precariously (contract) employed underclass has been firmly embedded within the working class.

In such circumstances, the organising experience of the type seen at Chrysler has had to change and be adapted to the changes within the workforce. A start has been made on summing up experiences in organising what some have termed the "precariat". In July 2018, the Party published *Service Sector*

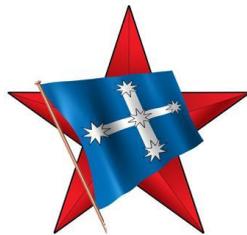
Workers Struggle Shows Need for Bold, Resilient Leadership, a 35-page summary of Clean Start, a campaign by cleaners in shopping malls and city buildings, the writing of which would not have been possible without input from comrades from SA and friends of the Party involved in the Clean Start campaign in SA and eastern states, many of whom were migrant workers. It reflected on new forms of struggle, of struggle under new conditions of ruling class obstruction and legal restrictions, and of struggles by workers who are in the early stages of their organised development.

Conclusion

The Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) is a national organisation. Its general character is that of a fighting organisation of the Australian proletariat. It is a national entity - a national organisation with a national leadership speaking with a national voice.

However, that general character is developed through the particular regional bases in which the Party exists and works. The general character resides in these particular fields of operation and is strengthened by them.

South Australian communists will continue to do whatever they can to build an all-Australian revolutionary party of the working class.



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