

***Revolutionaries***  
***and***  
***Reformists***

Communism and the Australian Labour  
Movement 1920-1955

**Robin Gollan**

Communism has played a central part in Australian political nightmares for over half a century. Yet it has received scant serious attention comparable in scope and perspective with this work.

This book places the Communist Party of Australia firmly in its political context, national and international, from the 1920s to the mid-1950s. It is important in its insights into the general history of Australian radicalism; its contribution to Australian history, especially labour history; and its placing of radical Australian history in a world context. It is written from the perspective of one who joined the Communist Party of Australia because it seemed the only party 'committed to the struggle for socialism and against fascism' and who left it because this 'no longer seemed the case'. Its breadth, perceptiveness, and understanding commend it to all people concerned with the continuing political struggles of the Right, the Left, and the Centre.

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# Revolutionaries and Reformists

**Communism and the Australian Labour Movement  
1920-1955**

ROBIN GOLLAN

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# Preface

THIS book is centred on the Communist Party of Australia from its foundation until the mid-1950s. But it is not intended to be a history of the party. There is little about the facts and problems of organisation and virtually nothing about the struggles within the party on questions of theory, strategy, and tactics. Rather, it is an attempt to set the Communist Party and Communist ideology as expounded by the party in the context of Australian politics, more particularly the politics of the labour movement, over a period of thirty-five years. Because the Australian party was deeply concerned with international issues and closely dependent for its policy and interpretation of events on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, it has been necessary to extend the canvas beyond Australia. Likewise, because the Communist Party saw itself as having a total world view, it has also been necessary to touch on some matters which are not normally thought of as being political. Thus the book is highly selective, episodic, and not strictly chronological. If it gives a general impression of what Communists thought, why they thought as they did, and how in general they acted, it will have succeeded in its purpose. If, also, it stimulates other scholars to study more closely questions raised, either directly or by implication, it will have been even more successful.

Since the book depends in part on personal experience it is only fair to state that I joined the Communist Party in 1936 because it seemed to me to be the only party in Australia fully committed to a struggle for socialism and against fascism. I left it, with regret, in 1957, because this no longer seemed to be the case.

As is usual in the writing of any book I contracted many debts of gratitude but I will mention only two. My wife, Anne, played a much more positive part than the one which is often allotted to wives in prefaces. My greatest debt, however, is to Moira Scollay who did much of the research on which the book is based and who also made many helpful suggestions as to interpretation.

Canberra 1974

Robin Gollan

# Abbreviations

ACTU	Australasian Council of Trade Unions
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ANU	Australian National University
ARU	Australian Railways Union
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
ASP	Australian Socialist Party
AWU	Australian Workers' Union
BMA	British Medical Association
BWIU	Building Workers' Industrial Union
CAR	<i>Commonwealth Arbitration Reports</i>
CMF	Citizen Military Force
CPD	<i>Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates</i>
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DLP	Democratic Labor Party
FCM	Federal Committee of Management
FEDFA	Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association
FIA	Federated Ironworkers' Association
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
MMM	Militant Minority Movement
NEI	Netherlands East Indies
NLA	National Library of Australia
OBU	One Big Union
PPS	Pan-Pacific Secretariat
SMH	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>
TLC	Trades and Labor Council
UAP	United Australia Party
UN	United Nations
UWM	Unemployed Workers' Movement
VDC	Volunteer Defence Corps
VSP	Victorian Socialist Party
WEA	Workers' Education Association

WFTU World Federation of Trade Unions  
WIUA Workers' Industrial Union of Australia  
WWF Waterside Workers' Federation



# Contents

Preface	v
Abbreviations	vii
1 From War to Depression	1
2 The Popular Front	33
3 The Imperialist War?	79
4 The Great Patriotic War	99
5 The Interlude of Hope, 1945-7	144
6 The Cold War I (1948-9)	206
7 The Cold War II (1950-5)	255
Perspective	285
References	290
Works Cited	306
Index	315

# 1 From War to Depression

FOR radicals all over the world the Russian revolution was the most important fact of the forty years after 1917. Australian radicals, although far from the scene of action, were no exception. A minority in the Australian labour movement had criticised capitalism in general and Australian capitalism in particular from the 1890s onwards. The alternative socialist society which was foreshadowed took many different forms, as did the means proposed to achieve it. The Russian revolution, being the first successful revolution carried through in the name of socialism, was an achievement and a model of which all socialists would henceforth have to take note. In Australia only a small minority, but one which grew to significant proportions between the mid-1930s and the mid-1940s, ever identified with the revolution and what flowed from it. But for all socialists it was a fact in relation to which they had to determine their own positions; for anti-socialists it was initially a deadly menace, which later lost its threat and became a convenient means of damning all socialist ideas and actions.

Australian society was not disrupted by the war to the extent that most European countries were—a disruption which made the Russian revolution possible and which seemed for a few years after the war ended to make similar revolutions probable in a number of other countries. But Australia was not unaffected. Sixty thousand young men were killed, and from their sacrifice was built one of the great national myths. Australia shared with most European countries the light-hearted enthusiasm with which they entered the war. A few dissidents—pacifists, left-wing socialists, and members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)—opposed involvement in the war from the beginning, but the general reaction was that Australians must be there to “do their bit”; indeed it was an opportunity to demonstrate the depths of their imperial patriotism and the achievements of their young country. But as the price the war was exacting gradually became evident, the early enthusiasms gave way to war-weariness and the com-

munity divided on many matters connected with the war—divisions which lasted to the end of the war and afterwards.

In the immediate post-war years what was happening in Europe was filtered through to Australians by a generally ignorant, highly selective, and reactionary press, balanced only by a trickle of left-wing literature which interpreted events in terms of the ideological assumptions of its writers. What this literature had in common was the conviction that the war was the final evidence of the destructiveness of the capitalist system, and that capitalism must be replaced by some form of socialism. What form and how it was to be done—the perennial questions of socialist theory—remained as questions to which different answers could be given. The conquest of power by the bolsheviks put a powerful weapon into the hands of those who chose to see in them an example to be followed, for had not the bolsheviks alone amongst the socialist parties succeeded? Those who took this view called themselves communists and set out to form a communist party. Such a party could only be formed from people of previously diverse and divergent opinions, with little precise information about the October revolution, and with a minimum of theoretical fodder to sustain them. So for the first few years until the theoretical and, perhaps more importantly, the organisational lines were drawn, there was a broad area of opinion anxious to call itself communist.

The first number of the *Proletarian Review* (later *The Proletarian*), issued by a Melbourne communist group and edited by Guido Baracchi, one of the few intellectuals who early identified with communism as distinct from the earlier radical and revolutionary positions, is instructive. The books reviewed by Baracchi were *The State and Revolution* by V. I. Lenin and *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat* by Karl Kautsky. The former, which contains the essence of the theory put into effect by the bolshevik revolution, was reviewed favourably; the latter, whose ideas had been fiercely criticised by Lenin, was reviewed critically. The basic proposition of *The State and Revolution*, that socialism could only be established by the destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus and its replacement by a working class proletarian state, became the testing point to determine those who were or were not communists.

But in 1920, however crucial this proposition was seen to be, books recommended, or at any rate advertised, covered a wide spectrum of opinions on the left. They ranged from the classics of Marx, available in Australia from early in the century, such as *Wage, Labour and Capital*, and the three volumes of *Capital*, to 'some works on sex', including Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* and Havelock Ellis's *Man and Woman*. The first communist paper advertised nine novels by Jack London, the anarchist works of Kropotkin, and guild socialist writings of Hobson, Cole and Penty. William Morris's *Useful Work Versus Useless Toil* found a place beside Oscar Wilde's *The Soul of Men Under Socialism* and *What Means This Strike?* by Daniel De Leon. The most popular book, however, as noted by the paper was R. A. Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 'full of weighty propaganda, served up in the conversation of men on the job in the lurid blood-red language of men on the job'.<sup>1</sup> A kind of socialist catechism, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* was a storehouse of simple arguments for socialism as against capitalism, and was probably more influential than any other book in forming a rudimentary socialist (or communist) consciousness.

Reading by those on the left was catholic, but the conclusions drawn were sectarian. In 1920 a socialist who was not satisfied with the Australian Labor Party (ALP) could join any one of at least eight socialist political groups or six others which aimed to reorganise the trade union movement in a revolutionary direction. For reading matter there were twelve socialist and revolutionary journals in addition to the official journals of unions and the ALP. All of the journals were associated with a group, a faction, or a party, each of which believed itself to be the single and unique repository of the socialist truth. As Ian Turner remarked, quoting Dwight Macdonald, 'the smaller the sect, the more grandiosely optimistic its propaganda usually was'.<sup>2</sup>

The Russian revolution did not end the factionalism of the left, but it did provide a focus for those who wished to identify with it. To identify they called themselves communists and sought to be accepted as the Australian section of the Third International (Comintern) which had been formed at a congress in Moscow in March 1919. This

congress declared itself the legitimate successor to the First International founded by Marx, and denounced the Second International which had collapsed at the outbreak of World War I. In ringing words it declared its purpose:

'Remember the imperialist war!' These are the first words addressed by the Communist International to every working man and woman; wherever they live and whatever language they speak. Remember that because of the existence of capitalist society a handful of imperialists were able to force the workers of the different countries to cut each other's throats. Remember that the war of the bourgeoisie conjured up in Europe and throughout the world the most frightful famine and the most appalling misery. Remember that without the overthrow of capitalism the repetition of such robber wars is not only possible, but inevitable . . . The Communist International considers the dictatorship of the proletariat the only possible way to liberate mankind from the horrors of capitalism. And the Communist International considers the Soviet power the historically given form of this dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>3</sup>

The second congress, held in July and August 1920, adopted a detailed plan of organisation set out in twenty-one conditions which any party seeking to become a part of the Comintern would be required to meet.<sup>4</sup>

The twenty-one points were designed to separate those who accepted the bolshevik view of revolutionary theory and tactics from those who accepted the approach of the parties of the Second International or who occupied any intermediate position. Acceptance of the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat was the *sine qua non* of party membership, and associated with it there had to be a willingness to denounce not only the capitalist class but also the reformists in the socialist movement, whose rejection of the concept of the workers' dictatorship made them assistants to the bourgeoisie. All such reformists had to be removed from positions of responsibility in the party and replaced by people who met the necessary conditions. Such drastic action was declared necessary, because in most countries of Europe and America the class struggle was entering the phase of civil war. So the party had to be tightly organised and capable of carrying on illegal activity in the army and elsewhere.

Additional requirements were that parties wishing to become part

of the Comintern must call themselves the Communist Party of the appropriate country (section of the Communist International), must accept the decisions of the Comintern, and must adopt a centralised system of organisation founded on the principle of 'democratic centralism'. In countries which had colonies the party was required

to support every colonial liberation movement not merely in words but in deeds, to demand the expulsion of their own imperialists from these colonies, to inculcate among the workers of their country a genuinely fraternal attitude to the working people of the colonies and the oppressed nations, and to carry on systematic agitation among the troops of their country against any oppression of the colonial peoples.

Iron discipline should prevail in the parties, and all those who did not accept its policy and principles of organisation should be rigorously excluded—in particular a close watch should be kept on members who were also members of Parliament.

The ideas about organisation, based on the practice of the bolsheviks, were to remain as essential principles, although the strategy of the party was to change according to the interpretations made of the current situation. Thus, at the third Comintern congress in 1921, a distinct change in policy occurred. By then it was clear that the revolutions expected in Germany, Italy, and Hungary had failed. While not abandoning the proposition that the capitalist system was in a state of prolonged crisis, the congress acknowledged that the 'first period of the postwar revolutionary movement . . . appeared in significant measure completed'.<sup>5</sup> By 1926 the Comintern was satisfied that capitalism had recovered from the severe post-war crisis, but that the recovery was only temporary. To deal with the new situation the tactic of the united front was developed in 1921. This meant that without abandoning their separate and distinct organisation, communist parties should try to make alliances with non-communist workers to win immediate gains, such as better working conditions. In the process of achieving such gains it was assumed that communists would emerge as the most committed and trustworthy leaders of the working class.

In Australia a communist party which met Comintern specifications

can hardly be said to have been formed before the end of 1922, although from 1920 onwards various parties, groups, and people of different radical tendencies fought to become the legitimate Communist Party. The story of these struggles has been told in some detail elsewhere,<sup>6</sup> and will be treated only in summary here.

There were two well established but small socialist parties which in late 1919 and early 1920 considered seeking recognition as the Communist Party of Australia: the Victorian Socialist Party (VSP) and the Australasian Socialist Party (ASP). From the time of its formation in 1906 the VSP had been torn by conflicting ideas about strategy and tactics.<sup>7</sup> The differences centred around such matters as whether the struggle for socialism could be best fought by an independent propaganda and educational organisation, putting forward its own policy and perhaps standing its own candidates in parliamentary elections, or by directing attention to influencing the ALP. There was a further difference between those who believed in the primacy of political action and those who, influenced by the ideas of the IWW, considered that industrial struggle was the only effective means of undermining capitalism and establishing a socialist order. In long term the predominant trend was for the VSP to become a propaganda organisation seeking to indoctrinate the ALP with its socialist ideas. When the question, to be or not to be a communist party, came to the fore in 1920, the VSP debated it at great length, with acrimony and confusion about the issues at stake. It finally resolved in favour of continuing on its established lines, on the grounds that the methods of the Russian revolution, born out of the Tsarist autocracy, were not appropriate to Australia. Members who had advocated the Comintern policy left the VSP or were expelled.<sup>8</sup>

The main contest for acceptance as the legitimate branch of the Comintern occurred in Sydney, where the oldest socialist organisation was the ASP. In December 1919 it stated its allegiance to the Comintern,

and announced 'its *immediate aim* [to be] the dictatorship of the proletariat, with all political power in the hands of the working class.' In its manifesto, *Australia*

*and the World Revolution*, it denied that any improvement in the condition of the working class was possible under capitalism, repudiated all 'immediate demands', affirmed that its attitude towards 'all other political organisations, whether alleged socialist or avowed defenders of the present social order, is one of scathing criticism and militant opposition', and declared its immediate purpose to be 'agitation . . . to arouse the workers, education to enlighten them, and organisation to marshal them for the conquest of state power.'<sup>9</sup>

The ASP statement was in accord with what was then known about Comintern thinking, of which the most important feature was the need to separate the Communist Party from all other parties and groups claiming to be revolutionary. Pure in theory, the ASP had little connection, however, with the facts of politics in Australia. So it was soon in conflict with men who had less pure theory but more political realism, but who were also far from a united group.

In September 1920 the ASP convened a conference to establish a united Communist Party. The Comintern would recognise only one Communist Party, and this was the first attempt to bring together the discordant groups and individuals who considered themselves to be communists. At a conference to which sixty were invited and twenty-six came, there were three distinct groups, and a fourth wavered between the others. Though small in numbers, the members of the conference were leaders of the several tendencies within the left wing of the labour movement. The three groups were, first, the representatives of the ASP, who were well read in Marxist theory (an élite group in their own eyes) but who had few contacts with the mass labour movement; second, a group of militant trade union officials led by J. S. (Jock) Garden, who were strongly entrenched in the trade unions, and for whom theory was much less important than action; and third, men of the IWW, which during the war had been the most effective anti-capitalist grouping. The IWW rejected political action as a means of achieving a socialist society, and believed that only by building a mass industrial union movement, which would itself constitute the new society within the body of the old, could a socialist society be established. However, the disintegration of the IWW under the blows of repressive legislation and its own internal weaknesses,



together with the example of the Russian revolution, forced some members of the IWW to consider the possibility of entering a communist party. The conference constituted itself the one Communist Party of Australia, but within a few weeks it split and there were two.<sup>10</sup>

For two years from late in 1920 the two parties devoted themselves primarily to fighting each other, except that the trade union officials grouped around Garden were also actively involved in the unions and the ALP. In the manoeuvres of the two parties to gain recognition by the Comintern, events favoured Garden and his Sussex Street communist party. The decision of the third Comintern congress in 1921 in favour of developing the united front meant that Garden and his associates were able to claim that they were effectively carrying through this policy—they were co-operating in the unions and the ALP with men who were not communists. On the other hand the rival party declared its doctrinal purity and denounced all of those whom it considered to be less than pure. But it was the trade union dominated party which late in 1922 gained Comintern recognition, and henceforth made its main impact on Australian society through its influence on the trade unions.

While the contest for communist legitimacy was going on, the mass labour movement was strongly influenced by radical ideas. Evidence of this can be seen most clearly in the negotiations for the establishment of the One Big Union (OBU) and the decisions of the All-Australian Trade Union Congress which met in June 1921 in Melbourne. The two overlapped, both in the people involved and the ideas which moved them.

The idea of the OBU was current from 1918, when, on the initiative of the Miners' Federation, a congress of New South Wales unions was convened by the New South Wales Trades and Labor Council (TLC). Inspired by the ideas of the IWW, the congress decided to form the Workers' Industrial Union of Australia (WIUA), the purpose of which was set out in the preamble to the findings of the congress:

action to secure a complete change, namely, the abolition of capitalist class ownership of the means of production—whether privately or through the State—and the establishment in its place of social ownership by the whole community.

This was to be achieved by 'the workers uniting in one class-conscious economic organisation to take and hold the means of production'.<sup>11</sup> The means of reaching the stated aim of the preamble was by the social ownership and workers' control of industry, but the statement was sufficiently general to allow people with differing assumptions to make what they would of it.

One strand of thought present in the minds of the men who met in 1918 was that by adopting an alternative life style they could begin the process of building 'the structure of the new society within the shell of the old'. This took them to gaol rather than to the new society, but, in the view of at least one historian, was the only truly revolutionary position ever adopted by any Australian radicals.<sup>12</sup> It was a minority position, and the majority saw the future in terms of organisation to achieve power. Some of those who were concerned with power saw the means as being the creation of a powerful industrial organisation which would itself take over the control of society from the 'class state' and its administrative apparatus in the form of parliaments and governments. Others, who proved to be the strongest group, saw merit in an industrial organisation which would also act politically.

By 1920 the idea of the OBU had spread to the other states or had been generated independently—in any case it was a nation-wide movement. At the same time the movement had shed its most radical element, namely the belief that the OBU should be built from the grass roots and should constitute an alternative to the existing trade union structure. It had become a matter for negotiation between trade union officials, although in a number of unions the membership was offered the opportunity to vote for or against entering the WIUA.<sup>13</sup> The most important of these was the Miners' Federation, which late in 1919 decided to hold a ballot on the question,

that we proceed to organise the mining department, on such lines as the membership may determine, and that we then become part of the O.B.U. when in the opinion of the mining department, other satisfactory departments are formed.<sup>14</sup>

A ballot in which nearly 15,000 votes were cast resulted in a 2:1 majority in favour of the OBU. Ballots in the Waterside Workers'

Federation (WWF) and the Trolley and Draymen's Union produced 'no' majorities, but the miners decided to go ahead and to operate under a new constitution as the WIUA (Mining Department) from January 1921. It was the only department ever to be formed, but desultory negotiations continued throughout 1920 and were given new life in 1921.

The Australian Workers' Union (AWU) was the key to the revival of interest and the ultimate failure of the OBU. From the beginning of the movement for the OBU, the AWU, the largest, the most bureaucratically controlled, and the most conservative of the large unions, had blown hot and cold on the issue. Committed as they were to parliamentarianism and industrial arbitration, the officials of the AWU were hostile to and afraid of the revolutionary implications of the OBU rhetoric. On the other hand a substantial minority of the members of the union favoured the idea, and also the officials realised that they might be able so to contrive things that the AWU would itself become the OBU.

The fortunes of the OBU were revived at the All-Australian Trade Union Congress of June 1921, where much else was also decided. Called by the federal executive of the ALP, the congress aimed to bring the trade unions closer to the political party.<sup>15</sup> The first item dealt with was the objective of the ALP, which was declared, with no effective opposition, to be 'the socialisation of industry, production, distribution and exchange'. The congress then turned to a consideration of the way in which the objective could be achieved, and in doing so took up the most radical stance ever adopted by a conference of this kind in Australia. Yet it was a compromise between competing interests. Turner has analysed them. First there were ALP politicians and the AWU, who wished to gain the solid support of the trade unions and were prepared to accept, in word if not in deed, the idea of a socialist objective. Second the ALP left, influenced by guild socialism, wished to give some substance to the socialist objective which they believed could be put into effect by parliamentary means, but only with the support of the union movement. Third there were the industrialists, led by the miners' officials, who wanted social ownership of industry

and workers' control. They were prepared to co-operate with the politicians, but maintained the threat that if their terms were not met they would withdraw their support. Fourth there were the Sydney communists, led by Garden, who, applying their interpretation of Comintern policy and buttressed by Lenin's *Left Wing Communism*, sought to 'permeate' the Labor Party and the unions and win them for the revolutionary rejection of bourgeois democracy. They were satisfied to compromise and settle for as much of their programs as they could get the congress to accept. Finally there was a handful of 'left' communists who were opposed to any compromise.

The congress decided that the way to achieve socialism was by the nationalisation of banking and the main industries; that nationalised industries would be run by boards representing both the workers in them and the community generally; and that the boards running particular industries would establish a Supreme Economic Council to control the economy as a whole. In the minds of the industrialists the Supreme Economic Council would ultimately render Parliament redundant. This did not appeal to the politicians, so the compromise was that the congress would elect a Council of Action to oversee industrial matters but which would also work in harness with the ALP on political questions. The industrial organisation envisaged was the OBU. The preamble adopted by the congress stated in part:

There could be no peace as long as want and hunger were found among millions of working people and the few who constituted the employing class had all the good things of life. Between those two classes the struggle must continue until Capitalism was abolished. Capitalism could only be abolished by the workers uniting in one class-conscious economic organisation to take and hold the means of production by revolutionary industrial and political action . . . These conditions [capitalism] could be changed, and the interests of the working class advanced only by an organisation so constituted that all its members in any one industry, or in all industries, should take concerted action when deemed necessary, thereby making an injury to one the concern of all.<sup>16</sup>

To achieve the objectives of the preamble the workers in all industries should be brought into a single organisation, the name of which would be the Australasian Workers' Union (not the WIUA).

The policies adopted in Melbourne ran into difficulties when, three months later, they were considered by the Commonwealth conference of the ALP in Brisbane. There, despite opposition, the socialisation proposal was retained, as was the Supreme Economic Council, but they were both relegated to comparative obscurity in the party program: socialisation became the 'objective' of the party and the methods agreed upon (for example the Supreme Economic Council) were to be simply regarded as an amplification of the objective. At the top of the 'fighting platform' the 1905 objective was retained: 'the cultivation of an Australian sentiment. . .'. Socialisation was effectively put into cold storage, from which only the left of the labour movement and the political opponents of Labor were anxious to withdraw it. The OBU proposal suffered a similar fate.

After the Melbourne congress, what was intended to be the constituent conference of the Australian Workers' Union was held. The AWU, the WIUA (Mining Department, the WWF and the Australian Railways Union (ARU) were present, and reported that their members favoured the OBU scheme. The conference appointed a provisional council, which met in May 1922 to discuss practical matters, such as whether the combined union would seek registration in the Arbitration Court, the existing awards and agreements which would be placed in danger if unions dissolved to become part of a larger entity, and problems associated with the property possessed by the existing unions. Despite the uneasiness of the miners' leaders and critical comments by Garden, secretary of the New South Wales TLC, the provisional council continued to meet at lengthening intervals to prepare a constitution and a case for registration. When the case came before the Registrar of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court in May 1924, registration was opposed by twenty-four unions and eight employer organisations, the unions' opposition being based on the fact that the new union sought to occupy areas of potential membership which they already held. The court rejected the request for registration, and the OBU lived on only in the name of the Miners' Federation and in ideas held by individuals about the merits of greater unionism.

The court decision marked the end of the OBU. The idea was one of the expressions of post-war radicalism, which was generally on the decline from 1921 onwards. Factionalism and the competing interests of individuals and organisations were part of the cause of the disintegration of the relative unity of 1921, but more fundamental were the changing economic conditions. The deepening economic crisis had not eventuated, and although in some respects the 1920s was a decade of only moderate prosperity, it was also a period of rapid economic growth. Sectors of industry, notably coalmining, remained depressed, and aggregate levels of unemployment high (an average of 8 per cent), but over all it was a period of growth, particularly in secondary industry.

Indications of growth can be seen in the increases in capital equipment and employment in manufacturing industries and in the total population. Capital equipment more than doubled in value between 1920 and 1929, employment increased by about 27 per cent between 1920 and 1927, the peak year for the decade, and population rose from 5.3 million in 1920 to 6.4 million in 1929.<sup>17</sup> The growth of secondary industry was a consequence of high protective tariffs, of heavy overseas investment (much of it in the form of government loans), and an active immigration policy. Within secondary industry the important areas were, first, heavy industry, where steel production, established on a large scale during the war, was expanded and consolidated; second, in the assembly and part manufacture of motor vehicles, numbers for which rose from 99,000 in 1921-2 to 571,000 in 1929-30; third, in the electrical industry. The twenties witnessed the arrival of the motor car, the telephone, and the radio on large scale. But they were the occasion of only a short-term 'boom', which reached its peak in 1926-7. From then there was a steady decline into the great bust of the depression.

The 'boom' was big enough, however, for the confident predictions of the left—that capitalism was in a state of general crisis—to lose a good deal of the apparent validity they had had immediately following the war. By 1925 the shape of the post-war radical movement was much changed from that of four years earlier. The OBU was dead, the Communist Party had not grown, and in 1924 its members had been

excluded from the ALP. After the 1925 New South Wales election, which returned to office a Labor government led by J. T. Lang, and the disastrous electoral showing of communist candidates, there were moves to disband the Communist Party. This did not happen, but some of its most effective leaders, including Garden, threw themselves behind Lang, who for a time took up a left labour position. His government, which lasted until 1927, implemented more ameliorative legislation than any government which had preceded it. It introduced child endowment, widows' pensions, and the 44-hour week. It liberalised the Workmen's Compensation Act and legislated for more effective control of coalmining.

The legislative achievement of the Lang government was considerable. But the other side of Lang's activities in the ALP was creating a situation which, apart from a short interlude, was to keep Labor from office in New South Wales for fifteen years. Not content with the support won by his legislative record and his radical-sounding oratory, Lang set out to gain absolute control of the ALP machine by ruthless elimination of opponents and, where necessary, changing the constitution of the party to suit his purposes. In short term his authority in the party was absolute, but in longer term the struggle against his dictatorship divided the labour movement for more than a decade. The beginning of the crisis in the party coincided with the depression. While Lang carried through worthwhile internal reforms, the main practical expression of radical ideas in the second half of the 1920s was in the trade unions, in particular in the policies adopted by some unions towards international contacts. In 1927 the aspiration towards a national organisation of the unions, which had been strong in 1921, was given practical form by the formation of the Australasian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). The inaugural conference adopted the socialisation objective of the Labor Party, and also decided to attempt to change the union movement from a craft to an industry basis, with centralised control of industrial disputes. It was another version of the general idea of greater unionism, which had failed in the case of the OBU but succeeded with the ACTU, not least because the way in which the ACTU functioned left most real authority in the hands

of the individual unions and the state trades and labour councils. It did, nevertheless, acquire a useful guiding and educational role.

The AWU labelled the inaugural conference as 'red', and claimed that its purpose was to institute a scheme for white-anting the labour movement of the Commonwealth in order to bring it under the domination of the communists and the 'red wreckers'.<sup>18</sup> The attitude of the AWU is to be explained by the personal animosity of its officials to some of the moving spirits in the ACTU as well as to its long-standing concept of itself as the union of Australian workers. In addition some of the decisions of the conference were quite unacceptable to men for whom the preservation of the white Australia policy was a first article of faith. For example, the conference decided to set up a peace committee,

whose duty it shall be to establish a Bureau of Peace, and to keep in close touch with the working class of all nations, particularly those bordering the Pacific, for the purpose of helping to prevent future war and to help to bring about world peace.<sup>19</sup>

In furtherance of this aim the executive of the ACTU, elected at the conference, decided to affiliate with the Pan-Pacific Secretariat (PPS), which had been appointed at an international conference of unions held at Hankow in May 1927.

The decision to affiliate was not a result of communist control of the ACTU. Ideas of international working class co-operation were widespread amongst people on the left of the labour movement, and, although the PPS had been created on Comintern initiative, this did not then have the significance it was later to assume—when Comintern initiative could more readily be associated with the service of Russian national interests. The attitude of the left was one of sympathy with the oppressed people of Asia, and a general opposition to European and American imperialism. This was demonstrated in the 'hands off China' campaign. The Comintern-Kuomintang collaboration in China between 1923 and 1927 was interpreted by the left in Australia as an example of a united front between communists and non-communists which should have the support of all socialists. Thus there



were demonstrations in Sydney in November 1926 against British intervention in China, and in January 1927 the New South Wales TLC set up a 'hands off China' committee. The decision of the ACTU to affiliate with the PPS was largely motivated by the same sentiments.

One consequence of affiliation with the PPS was the decision to publish a journal, the *Pan Pacific Worker*, under the authority of the ACTU. In its statement of intention the *Pan Pacific Worker* (2 April 1928) listed five policy points: to popularise the decisions of the PPS; to combat the danger of a new world war, particularly in the Pacific; to support national liberation movements in Asia and the Pacific; to publish information about working conditions in the same countries; and to advocate trade union unity, nationally and internationally. The paper put this policy into effect, and also grasped the nettle of the white Australia policy which was dear to the hearts of those in the main stream of the labour movement. While somewhat equivocal, the policy was internationally oriented. The paper (1 June 1929) declared the need for militants to carry on a determined struggle against all forms of race hatred fostered by 'capitalism and reformism'. It recognised, as a matter of principle, that people should have the right to emigrate freely between countries, irrespective of their race. But it considered that the government's migration scheme was one which worked exclusively in the interests of the capitalist class and it argued that militants should aim to draw all migrants who entered the country, whatever their race or colour, into the union movement.

In January 1928 Jack Ryan, a communist and director of the labour research bureau of the ACTU, left Australia to attend a Pan-Pacific conference in Shanghai. News of his departure was greeted with protests against the government for issuing him with a passport, and they became even more shrill when plans to hold a Pan-Pacific trade union congress in Australia in March 1929 became known and when in Shanghai Ryan addressed a manifesto to Japanese unions in which he said that 'the Pan-Pacific Trade Union organisation could not function without doing something to assist the oppressed workers of China, India, Korea, the Philippines, and other islands of the Pacific to gain their independence'.<sup>20</sup> In Parliament Senator Duncan spoke

at length of the danger to Australia of such sentiments. Australia, he considered, had enough problems of its own without meddling in the affairs of other countries, particularly as this could bring us into conflict with friendly powers. But the key question was India,

bearing in mind always the importance of India to Australia and what it would mean to us if Great Britain were to lose control of that country. India has often been described as the fairest jewel in the British Crown. One cannot conceive of the British Empire retaining any influence whatever in the East if India is lost. . . .<sup>21</sup>

The loss of India was the aim of Ryan and his associates, according to Duncan, and furthermore there was a photograph of the last conference, at which the only white men present were the Australians, all the others being 'Asiatics'. The conclusion drawn by, amongst others, the Prime Minister, S. M. Bruce, was that the ALP had abandoned the white Australia policy, an interpretation which was indignantly denied by the federal Labor leader, J. Scullin.<sup>22</sup> But opposition to association with the PPS was not confined to the political opponents of labour. At the second congress of the ACTU the president of the Melbourne Trades Hall Council moved (unsuccessfully) to dissociate the ACTU from the *Pan Pacific Worker*. His reasons were that it was disseminating communist doctrines, and that it was 'damned impertinence for a heterogeneous mob of Asiatics with unpronounceable names to lay down a policy for the Australasian Council of Trade Unions of Australia'.<sup>23</sup> The proposed conference was not held in Australia, partly because the government announced its intention to refuse entry to delegates, but also because the ACTU cooled towards the idea.

The affiliation with the PPS, which lasted for only three years, had been rendered largely nugatory by events in China where, shortly after the affiliation was made, the Chinese front split and Chiang Kai-shek turned against and slaughtered his communist allies. Early in 1930 the ACTU disaffiliated from the PPS. This was partly a result of events in Asia, but more immediately of the change in policy of the world communist movement, the details of which will be considered later. In the meantime internationalist sympathies had moved

from China to the USA, where the celebrated case of Sacco and Vanzetti was approaching its brutal climax.

Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were executed on 23 August 1927 in the state of Massachusetts for a murder which it is reasonable to assume they did not commit. Their real crime was that they were anarchists and Italian migrants to the USA at a time when the white Anglo-Saxon ascendancy was deeply afraid of 'reds' and convinced of the dangers inherent in southern European migration.<sup>24</sup> The details of the trial are much too complicated to be discussed here—they may be followed in the many books and articles written about the case at the time and later. The bare bones are that Vanzetti was indicted for a hold-up and attempted murder in mid-1920. A few months later, with Sacco, he was indicted on a charge of murder which went to trial between May and July 1921. They were found guilty, and from then until the day that they were strapped into the electric chair seven years later they were the subject of a series of appeals to every possible court, every possible appeal for clemency, and an international movement of protest against their conviction. What is clear is that they were subject to vindictive prosecution and that they received far from a fair trial. The judge was deeply prejudiced against them. The prosecuting attorney made much of their anarchist beliefs (which they made no attempt to deny) with the aim of influencing the jury, but which were irrelevant to their guilt or innocence of the crime with which they were charged. Simple men, they maintained a magnificent dignity before a court in which they did not expect to receive justice. This was retained to the last public appearance. In his speech before sentence Vanzetti, who spoke for both, since his command of English was better than that of Sacco, began,

What I say is that I am innocent, not only of the Braintree crime, but also of the Bridgewater crime. That I am not only innocent of these two crimes, but in all my life I have never stole and I have never killed and I have never spilled blood. That is what I want to say. And it is not all. Not only am I innocent of these two crimes, not only in all my life I have never stole, never killed, never spilled blood, but I have struggled all my life, since I began to reason, to eliminate crime from the earth.<sup>25</sup>

In Australia the actions of solidarity in support of Sacco and Vanzetti were organised by the International Labor Defence Committee, which grew out of the 'hands off China' committee. On the day of the execution the Seamen's Union called a strike. The New South Wales TLC organised a march through Sydney. The ACTU called for a boycott of American goods. And the *Argus* reported that the prison in which the execution was to take place was guarded by machine guns, tear gas, and high pressure hoses.<sup>26</sup> Australia in the twenties was a closed society, and the concern of that part of the left which was prepared to protest against intervention in China or the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti was exceptional. The two dominant attitudes towards the outside world were an imperial patriotism, which celebrated the mystique of empire, and isolationism, which celebrated the virtues of Australian society and wished to exclude alien influences. The predominance of these latter attitudes was reinforced by the depression.<sup>27</sup>

The depression of the 1930s was the most serious disruption of economic life which Australians have experienced. It was part of a world-wide phenomenon, and Australia was as severely affected as almost any other country. In one respect the impact was greater because, as a result of their favoured position in comparison with Britain, with whom they compared themselves in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Australians' expectations of prosperity were higher. The twenties was a period of diminished prosperity as compared with the pre-war years, but it was an insufficient preparation for what happened between 1929 and 1933.

The causes of the depression were analysed contemporaneously by the best economic experts,<sup>28</sup> and some work has been done subsequently which brings more recent economic theory to bear on them.<sup>29</sup> However, this work has done less to vary the earlier interpretation of causes than to propose alternative policies which might have been followed by governments and other institutions to lessen the effects of the depression. The proximate cause of the depression in Australia was a drastic fall in the price of export commodities. The boom of the twenties had been financed in part by investment from Britain, which had to be

paid for by exports. With the fall in prices the bills in London could not be met except by a drastic reduction of imports and the mobilisation of whatever overseas resources were available. This in turn depressed Australia's internal economy. How to deal with the problem was the matter in contention throughout the depression. No satisfactory solution was found, with the result that by 1932 approximately one in three Australian workers was unemployed.

The depression was no surprise to the communists. They had forecast it from the end of the war, but its early failure to eventuate made them, when it did come, Cassandras rather than prophets. In retrospect it is tempting to say that the sixth Comintern congress in 1928 foretold the coming economic depression of the capitalist states, but this is not entirely borne out by the facts. The congress did declare that world capitalism was entering a 'third period'. The first period had been the unstable immediate post-war years; the second a few years of temporary stability; the third, from 1928 onwards, a period of extreme instability. As to the nature of the instability, there were differences of opinion.<sup>80</sup> In the course of the debate Stalin, who was to bestride the communist movement for a generation, emerged as the undisputed leader of the Comintern, as he had already become of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In the debates of the executive committee of the Comintern in 1928-9 he, or those who spoke for him, isolated and then destroyed Bukharin as a 'right deviationist', his 'error' being that he had held out some prospect of capitalist countries stabilising themselves. His downfall coincided with clear evidence of depression in the USA and other countries of the West. Stalin had caught the predictive wave of depression at the right moment, and to him was attributed, whether rightly or not, the prescience which enabled him to see the coming devastation.

Before there was any agreed interpretation of the form which the third period would assume economically, there was an agreed policy on a new strategy and tactics for communist parties in capitalist countries. The new strategy was based on the assumption that there was no real difference between bourgeois democracy and fascism. They were both dictatorships of the bourgeoisie, the one masked and the other open.

Therefore there was no point in defending systems of representative government and civil rights. The only alternative to fascism was socialism, to be achieved under the leadership of the communist parties. The idea of the united front from above—that is, by alliances with other working class leaders—was abandoned and replaced by the idea of the united front from below. In practice this meant uniting the working class under communist leadership alone. To secure this end the workers had to be taught that all who claimed to be socialists but were not members of the communist parties were misleading them. So European social democrats and Australian Labor men became, in third period communist parlance, social-fascists. The more left they were, the more dangerous, and the ultimate term of abuse became left social-fascist.

The full force of the new line did not hit Australia until late in 1929, although the debate from which the line was hammered out was available in the columns of the Comintern journal, *Inprecorr*, and in the report of the Australian delegate who attended the conference. As expounded by the official historians of the Communist Party,<sup>31</sup> the reason for the slow reaction was that the party was under the control of right-wing opportunists who wished to co-operate with the ALP. According to this version it was only when a new group, with the support of the Comintern, won the leadership at the end of 1929 that the new left policy was put into effect. The new group was led by L. L. Sharkey and J. B. Miles, who were to remain the dominant figures in the party for the rest of the period covered by this book. However, as is usual with history written by the victors, the facts are somewhat different. It has been shown by a more independent writer that in fact the leaders who were displaced in 1929 had been moving towards the new policy in response to changing conditions in Australia even before it was adopted by the Comintern.<sup>32</sup> Their defeat was due to a factional struggle for office rather than to any deep-seated policy differences. Nevertheless the gaining of control of the central organs of the party by Sharkey and Miles was of great significance, since both of them proved to be unquestioning adherents of the now dominant Stalin.

The events which were pushing the party to the left even before Comintern policy changed were the beginning of the economic decline

and an offensive by the employing class against the standard of living of the workers. The Prime Minister, Bruce, made this quite explicit in May 1929 when he said:

A critical examination of our present position leads inevitably to the conclusion that the basic cause of all the economic troubles of Australia to-day is the high cost of production, the reduction of which is the first step that we must take to bring about a solution of our problems.<sup>33</sup>

To bring about the reduction, the government armed itself for battle with the unions by an amendment to the Crimes Act, the Transport Workers' Act, and the 1928 Arbitration Act.

In 1928-9 there were three major industrial disputes, in each the cause being the attempt to reduce workers' conditions. They occurred on the waterfront, in the timber industry, and in the coalmines. In September 1928 waterside workers went on strike against an award of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court which considerably worsened their conditions of employment. The government threatened to apply the section of the Crimes Act which empowered it to impose heavy penalties against unions on strike in essential industries. The WWF advised its members to return to work pending further negotiations with ship owners, but in most cases they refused. The government then passed the Transport Workers' Act, under which all waterside workers were required to have a licence, which could be withdrawn if they refused to accept an award or disobeyed a lawful instruction. Known to the workers as the 'Dog Collar Act', it drove the men back to work, and at the same time gravely weakened the union.

The strike of timber workers followed immediately the defeat of the waterside workers. An award made by Mr Justice Lukin revoked the 44-hour week which had first been granted in 1920, and returned the timber industry to 48 hours. Other parts of the award were also to the disadvantage of the workers. The strike lasted nine months, and in the course of it the industry was kept going by non-union labour and in some cases by union labour approved by the strike leaders. It was marked by mass picketing, some violence, and the arrest of seven

union leaders who were charged with conspiring to 'unlawfully molest, intimidate and assault' non-unionists during a mass picket.<sup>34</sup>

As on the waterfront, the men returned to work on the court's terms, but for some of them there were no jobs to return to.

The 1929-30 lockout of the northern coalminers was one of the longest industrial disputes that Australian workers ever experienced. Beginning in February 1929, it did not end until June 1930. It, too, was caused by the attempt of employers, supported by the government, to reduce wages. In July 1928 the conservative New South Wales Premier, T. R. Bavin, initiated conferences to find a means of reducing the price of coal. The recommendation was for a reduction which would be financed partly by government and partly by employers and workers. The Miners' Federation refused to accept the wage reduction, so the colliery proprietors locked them out. Then began a long struggle in which numerous court actions, mass demonstrations, pickets, and violence all had a part. In the end the miners were starved back to work.<sup>35</sup> As Australia entered the depression, the trade union movement was proving quite incapable of defending the standard of living and working conditions of workers against the combined attack of governments and employers, and the operations of the market.

A Labor government led by James Scullin came to office in Canberra in mid-1929, and immediately found itself grappling ineffectually with economic problems of a magnitude that no previous Australian government had been forced to face. The Bruce-Page government had fallen as a result of its attempt to alter fundamentally the industrial arbitration system. It had consistently attributed the industrial strife of 1927-9 to the activities of extremists in the unions. So, in an act of bravado, Bruce brought down a Bill which, if it had been passed, would have ended the dual control of arbitration by states and Commonwealth. His Maritime Industries Bill was designed to abolish all Commonwealth awards except those applying to the maritime industry, over which the Commonwealth could exercise undivided authority. A revolt in his own party led to the defeat of the measure, which was followed by an election. The ALP fought the election on a program of maintaining the



federal arbitration system, a promise to deal with unemployment, which had already reached about 12 per cent, and a promise, made by the deputy leader of the party, E. G. Theodore, to end the lockout on the coalfields. It was a landslide win for Labor, which won forty-six seats in a House of seventy-five. Five ministers lost their seats in Parliament, including Bruce, the Prime Minister, who was defeated by E. J. Holloway, a trade union official who had been fined £50 for his part in the timber strike. Labor was in office in the Commonwealth for the first time since the conscription split thirteen years before, but it was not in power, as it had only seven of the thirty-six seats in the Senate.

The problem which faced the new government was how to manage a capitalist economy which was moving into deep depression. Without the theoretical equipment, the inclination, or the power to seek socialist solutions, it was pushed inevitably towards the adoption of the policies of its political opponents. In their simplest terms the alternative policies available to the government were either to attempt to stimulate the economy by monetary and other means or to reduce spending by lowering the level of government expenditure and reducing wages and all other sources of income. The labour tendency was to attempt the first, on the grounds that the working class must not be called upon to carry the weight of the depression. Common sense, as it appeared to the business community, supported by the prevailing truths of economic theory, favoured the second. The government and the labour movement were torn between these opposing policies which, when they were presented in detail, were not so simply distinct as has been suggested. Different weights were attached by competing advocates to bank policies, note issue, protective duties, and so on. These will not be considered here: only the broad lines of policy as they were drawn will be noted.

By the winter of 1930, with the depression deepening, it was announced that, at the invitation of the government, an official of the Bank of England, Sir Otto Niemeyer, would visit Australia to inquire into its economic plight. At a meeting in Melbourne in August of Scullin, the six state premiers, and Niemeyer, it was agreed that government spending should be cut, with the aim of restoring the con-

fidence of the business community. Balanced budgets, in the eyes of those who believed (in the cliché of the time) in 'sound finance', were essential to the restoration of prosperity. Niemeyer also made it clear at the conference that in his view the Australian standard of living was too high and would have to be reduced. The Melbourne agreement precipitated a bitter struggle within the government, the ALP, and the labour movement. In the course of the struggle inflationary policies, which in retrospect would probably have been a more effective means of dealing with the depression, commanded the support of caucus for a time. Two ministers, J. A. Lyons and J. E. Fenton, resigned from the government and later from the party—Lyons to become the leader of the anti-Labor alliance and later Prime Minister. At the same time open war broke out between Lang, who had taken office in New South Wales following the elections in October 1930, and the federal leadership of the party. But in June 1931 the general policies agreed to at the earlier Melbourne conference were given more formal shape in the Premiers' Plan, signed by all state premiers and Scullin, by which they agreed to five things:

1. A reduction of 20 per cent in all adjustable government expenditure.
2. Conversion of the internal debts of the governments on the basis of a 22½ per cent reduction of interest.
3. Increased taxation, both Commonwealth and State.
4. A reduction of bank interest rates.
5. Relief for holders of private mortgages.<sup>86</sup>

The Premiers' Plan was a complete victory for the academic economists whose advice had been called on from early in the depression, for the conservatives, and for the advocates of 'sound finance'. But, by putting on the clothes of its political opposition, into which it had been forced by the Commonwealth Bank, by the hostile majority in the Senate, and by its own uncertainties, the government did not solve its own problems.

The ALP was already irrevocably divided. The right wing had left it, and in New South Wales, under Lang's leadership, the party was in revolt. Lang, contrary to the Melbourne agreement, in February 1931

produced his own 'Lang plan'. In it he proposed that Australian governments should pay no further interest to British bondholders until the British government agreed to scale down the debt, as America had done with Britain's war debts. He also proposed that the interest on internal loans be reduced, and that the Commonwealth abandon the gold standard and adopt what he called (without explaining its meaning) a 'goods standard'. One part of the plan he put into effect. In April he defaulted on overseas interest payments then due, and followed this with other defaults. The Commonwealth government, which under a 1929 amendment to the Constitution was responsible for the debt, paid the interest due and then took court action to recover it from New South Wales, which now owed the money directly to the Commonwealth. The ALP machine also took action. A special conference of the party in March expelled the New South Wales executive, which was controlled by Lang. Thereafter there were two Labor parties in New South Wales, with the vast majority of members adhering to Lang against the federal authorities. In the Commonwealth Parliament the Lang supporters, numbering seven, were expelled from the ALP caucus, but continued to support the government in critical divisions in the House. When they voted against it in November 1931 the government fell, and in the following elections the United Australia Party (UAP), led by Lyons, was returned to office, where it was to remain for almost a decade. Six months later, in May 1932, the Governor of New South Wales dismissed the Lang government because, in his opinion, it was acting illegally. In the subsequent election Lang's party was heavily defeated.

The outline so far given of the politics of the depression has been confined to parliamentary and government action and manoeuvre. The complete failure, both in the Commonwealth and state spheres, of Labor governments to shield the society from the consequences of the depression (which reached the depths in 1932, when about one in three of the work force was unemployed) brought them under most violent and persistent attack from both left and right. Only Lang, by means of his radical demagoguery, retained significant support from the left, and by the same token became the blackest ogre in the eyes of the right.

From the left the criticism was that the Labor governments had failed to carry out Labor policy. But what was Labor policy? In official statements issued by union and ALP conferences there was usually a ritualistic bow to the proposition that unemployment was inherent in capitalism and could only be solved by the socialisation of industry. But, having observed the ritual, conferences then got down to the advocacy of particular measures which they believed would make capitalism work more equitably for the working class. The most widely held beliefs were grounded in the assumptions of under-consumptionist economic theories. This attitude has been summed up by Louis:

With scant regard for the niceties of terminology, however, most union spokesmen referred vaguely to 'the shortage of money', or occasionally even more vaguely to the shortage of 'meal tickets', and their major line of reasoning was developed from the observation that the pay they received enabled the workers to purchase only a portion of the commodities produced. Thus for most propagandists, increased purchasing power meant higher wages and an income for those at present unemployed. They argued that an increase in purchasing power would stimulate demand and this would lead to a revival of industry and more employment. In direct contradiction to deflationary theorists, union spokesmen were convinced that prosperity and high wages went hand in hand; but they rarely endeavoured to explore very far the ramifications of the purchasing power argument.<sup>37</sup>

Linked with the idea that greater purchasing power was needed was the idea that the banks and other monetary authorities were responsible, and must be reformed. In Douglas Social Credit theory, which had an influence extending beyond its nominal adherents, expansion of credit was the single prescription necessary. For others it was one of the most important. As to why the banks could not see the self-evident truth of the under-consumptionist argument, there were various explanations. The one most widely accepted was that it was a conscious conspiracy of the 'Money Power' to break down the Australian standard of living. Under-consumptionist beliefs delayed but did not prevent the Scullin government from implementing the deflationary measures urged on it by business, conservatives, the right wing of the party, and its technical advisers. Lang tried to have the best of both worlds: in words he lambasted the 'Money Power', particularly the overseas bond-

holders; but in practice he largely put into effect a deflationary policy.

The idea of socialism as a serious alternative to capitalism made some headway in the ALP for a few years in New South Wales. In February 1930 the metropolitan conference of the New South Wales Labor Party decided to 'set up a committee to devise ways and means to propagate the first and principal platform of the party—the Socialisation of Industry'.<sup>38</sup> Two months later the proposal was adopted by the state conference and a committee was appointed to implement it. The purpose of the committee as listed was to propagate the idea of socialisation by the following means:

- (1) By addressing public meetings either open air or indoor.
- (2) By distributing leaflets on Socialisation which the Committee hopes to publish.
- (3) By organising units or groups for the above purposes.
- (4) By donations to the printing or propaganda fund which the Committee hopes to establish.
- (5) By any other means. . . .<sup>39</sup>

Under the direction of a central socialisation committee, socialisation units were established in association with ALP branches. Through them an eclectic socialist critique of capitalism was disseminated. This has been summarised as follows. The depression was the final crisis of capitalism, brought about by its own internal contradictions. The depression intensified the class conflict, which would be resolved only by the social revolution, in which the working class would take power and socialise the major means of production. This could be done only by the Labor Party, which was the mass party of the working class; but how was a matter on which the propagandists were vague. They assumed that the depression experience, in conjunction with socialist propaganda which explained to the workers the cause of their suffering, would create a class conscious working class capable of taking power.

Given such a working class, the party could, during the social revolution, take over political power—bloodlessly, it was hoped. But there was considerable uncertainty concerning the method of the take-over: an election with a 'socialism in our time' mandate, the crumbling of the capitalist class before the irresistible force of the

preponderant working class, a general strike, a mass insurrection—all these seemed to be possibilities.<sup>40</sup>

The apex of the socialist propagandists' achievement was reached at the state conference in 1931.

In a close vote this conference adopted something more than a socialist objective. In a close vote it also adopted a plan to achieve socialism in three years. The 3-year plan included the vesting of all ownership and control of specified properties in a people's government. Such properties would then be managed by industrial commissions with direct workers' and producers' control. But the elation of the socialist propagandists was short lived. Lang and his party managers had been prepared to give the enthusiasts a free hand so long as they dealt in generalities, but a 3-year plan (easily identified by anti-socialists with the Soviet 5-year plan) was a very different matter. By means of skilful manoeuvre, coercion of delegates, and ridicule of the utopian proposals, the 3-year plan was recommitted and defeated. This was not the end of the socialisation units, but they now had the active opposition of the Lang group, which moved steadily against them and succeeded in having them disbanded two years later. In the meantime socialist ideas were widespread in the rank and file of the party—but there was a lack of unity amongst the activists, one group splitting off and joining the Communist Party.

The Communist Party may have infiltrated the units, but in its public statements it condemned the leaders as left social-fascists misleading the workers by socialist phrases and an illusory militancy. The Communist Party position was fully formulated by 1930. The *Theses of the Central Committee Plenum, Communist Party of Australia*, of June 1930,<sup>41</sup> sets out this position. The working class, it was asserted, was under attack from the capitalists, the Commonwealth Labor government, the state governments, and reactionary trade union officials. Under the impact of the deepening crisis the workers were becoming more radical, but it was the function of the Labor leaders to divert this radicalism from an attack on the capitalist system and, indeed, for Labor governments to lead the offensive against the workers.

The class conflict has reached such a stage that all the forces of reaction are driven into one camp, from whence they must concentrate their drive against the working class. This, in itself, raises the conflict to a still higher stage. (p. 171)

Only the Communist Party truly represented the interests of the workers, so the task was to build a mass party, based on the factories, which would expose the rule of the ALP *and* lead the workers in militant struggle. Later policy statements announced the aims of the Communist Party as being to smash the power of the capitalists and big landowners, withdraw from the British Empire, and set up a workers' and farmers' republic—the dictatorship of the proletariat. The main points of emphasis are contained in the peroration:

Down with Imperialism. Down with Capitalist Governments. Down with Labor Traitors. Down with Langism. Down with Fascism. Long live the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Long live the Workers' and Farmers' Soviet Republic of Australia.<sup>42</sup>

The communist statements and aims were fully in accord with Comintern policies, but in the absence of a Comintern it is reasonable to speculate that other militant groups, in the face of the failure of Labor governments, would have adopted a similar stance. The communists were able to claim that they alone carried the true revolutionary torch because they alone were built on the model of the bolshevik party.

Most Australians did not accept the communists' estimate of themselves. Within the labour movement the violence of their denunciation of all other trends in the movement isolated them from the great majority of workers. Nevertheless, in the desperate depression days they gained a greater influence than they had had before, and on this they were able to build in later times. The two organisations through which communists and their ideas (often much diluted) gained influence were the Militant Minority Movement (MMM) and the Unemployed Workers' Movement (UWM). The former operated in the trade unions; the latter's title speaks for itself.

The MMM was essentially a faction in the unions which expounded

the general policy of the Communist Party, namely that the leaders of the ALP and unions were social-fascists, and proclaimed the need for rank and file control. In a few unions, notably the Miners' Federation, members of the MMM emerged as an alternative leadership, leading local struggles against the employers, denouncing the passivity of the union leaders, and demanding more militant action. As the depression began to lift, members of MMM moved into positions at all levels of the trade union movement, supported by workers who may not have accepted the full communist program but who recognised in members of the movement men who were courageous fighters.

Membership of the MMM often overlapped with that of the UWM. One reaction of unionists and their officials was to avoid the unemployed like the plague—they constituted a threat to their own jobs. By contrast, the UWM and the MMM stated a class position: that all workers had common interests which could be protected only by united action. While the reality fell far short of the ideal, Militant Minority members made common cause with the unemployed in organising community self-help, in resisting evictions for non-payment of rent, and in the free speech flights in which militants confronted the authorities who wished to keep the unemployed out of sight and so out of mind. In these several ways during the depression individual communists emerged as popular leaders, experienced in political struggle, who later moved into positions of authority in the labour movement, in particular in the unions.

The communists believed that the depression would move the mass of the workers to the left and that they would demand revolutionary solutions to their problems. It had this effect on a few, and the Communist Party gained in members, but with a membership in 1934 of fewer than 3,000, it was still only a handful. The most general effect on the workers was one of disillusion with politics, although many retained their faith in demagogic leaders such as Lang. In the community generally the movement was to the right. Election results were one clear evidence of this. Another was the spate of organisations of right-wing tendency which were thrown up, ranging from the quasi-fascist New Guard, to the many anti-political organisations such as



the All For Australia League, to the secessionist movements such as that which aimed to cut off the Riverina from New South Wales. Their conviction was that government could not be left to the politicians.<sup>43</sup> In this they resembled the communists, but the resemblance stopped there. They believed that the men born to rule were businessmen.

## 2 The Popular Front

THE depression did not really end until the outbreak of war, although in the second half of the decade of the 1930s there was a substantial economic recovery from the depths of 1932. By 1937 production had reached levels comparable with those of the late 1920s. Wages and pensions had been restored to pre-depression levels, but unemployment still fluctuated around 10 per cent, with the rate in some regions much higher. It was a dismal decade made gloomier by uncertainty about the future. Judge Drake-Brockman of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court was merely reflecting a commonly held opinion when he remarked that 'it would appear that the world must reckon with the existence of a large army of unemployed many millions strong as a permanent feature of world economic life unless a remedy can be found'.<sup>1</sup> So it is not surprising that the main concern of most Australians was with matters close to home.

Nevertheless what was happening in the larger world could not be entirely ignored. George Johnston has recaptured the mood. Having referred to the traditional Australian sense of isolation, felt deeply in the 1930s, he balances it with the interest which Australians had in people who had actually been in Europe recently. In his book the journalist narrator interviews many such returning travellers in their ship-board cabins, fresh from novel experiences in the big world, and giving by their physical presence a reality to things far away.

He had to be there, right there in front of us, sitting in a tasteful cabin with the *louvres* faintly whistling, describing the smoke pall above the Reichstag, or the massed banners tossing on the Tempelhof or the endless torchlit tramlings of the Brownshirt columns down through the Brandenburger Tor and along the Unter den Linden and the Wilhelmstrasse . . . or telling of the night-rappings, the shots in the streets, the forced arrests, the marks on the walls, the brandings, and the whispered rumours of Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald and Ravensbrück . . . or scoring the grim comic-opera of Mussolini ranting from his balcony . . . Only then did it all move out of the pages of the lobster-pink editions of the Left Book Club that were on Helen's bookshelf; only then did it become part of the true and terrible dissonance of the times.<sup>2</sup>

Most Australians did not meet such people to bring alive what was happening over there, but the newspapers told them something. A summary list may help to focus events in time.

Between 1935 and 1939 the post-war settlement of the world disintegrated. In March 1935 Hitler announced the restoration of military conscription, without opposition from the victors in the war. In July 1935 Baldwin succeeded Macdonald as Prime Minister of Britain, with Hoare as Foreign Secretary. In October Italy attacked Abyssinia and the League of Nations applied economic sanctions to Italy, but only half-heartedly. The British government's policy was 'sanctions short of war'. The British Labour Party demanded more effective sanctions and was thus open to the accusation of being the war party. This told against it in the 1935 general elections, when it was heavily defeated. The Hoare-Laval plan to partition Abyssinia caused an explosion of opposition in Britain, with Baldwin dismissing Hoare and replacing him with Eden, who was more committed to opposition to Mussolini's ambitions. Nevertheless, those sanctions which might have halted the Italian army were not applied, and the Abyssinians were defeated by May 1936, when Mussolini proclaimed the existence of a new Roman Empire. While the Italians were overrunning Abyssinia Hitler occupied the Rhineland in March 1936 without opposition. The significance of this has been noted by A. J. P. Taylor.

The German reoccupation of the Rhineland marked the end of the devices for security which had been set up after the first World war. The League of Nations was a shadow; Germany could rearm, free from all treaty restrictions; the guarantees of Locarno were no more. Wilsonian idealism and French realism had both failed. Europe returned to the system, or lack of system, which had existed before 1914. Every sovereign state, great or small, again had to rely on armed strength, diplomacy and alliances for its security.<sup>3</sup>

Germany and Japan entered into the Anti-Comintern Pact, a declaration against communism and, although unstated, a general alliance against the USSR. Mussolini declared the existence of the Rome-Berlin axis, also directed against Russia. France and Russia signed the Franco-Soviet Pact. While the pacts were being made the Spanish Civil War

broke out in July 1936, and continued to the verge of Hitler's march on Poland with which World War II began. The slide to world war proceeded steadily throughout 1937 and 1938. In July 1937 Japan, which had occupied Manchuria in 1931, began her full-scale war on China. In February 1938 Eden resigned as Foreign Secretary in protest against Chamberlain's policy of rapprochement with Italy (Chamberlain had replaced Baldwin in May 1937). Halifax became Foreign Secretary. In March 1938 Hitler carried through the *Anschluss*, the incorporation of Austria into Germany. Then Hitler began his demands on Czechoslovakia for the cession of the Sudetenlands.

With Chamberlain as broker the Munich agreement was reached on 29 September 1938—granting Hitler his demands. Six months later, in March 1939, the remainder of Czechoslovakia was dismembered. Bohemia was declared a German protectorate, and Slovakia an independent state. The war of nerves against Poland then began. Britain guaranteed her support to Poland, and opened timid negotiations with the USSR, which were protracted and devious. On 23 August a non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union was announced. On 1 September Germany invaded Poland from the west and this was followed by the Russian invasion from the east. On 3 September Britain and France declared war on Germany.

In the five years which preceded the war the Australian government was led by Lyons and, after his death at Easter 1939, briefly by Earle Page, then R. G. Menzies. The policy of these governments on international relations was consistent: they followed Britain. Menzies, as Attorney-General, stated this relationship with Britain at the time of the Italo-Abyssinian crisis.

The first thing which we should remember is that as a Commonwealth we cannot be at the same time in the British Commonwealth of Nations and out of it. If we declare our neutrality in a matter that affects Great Britain, and in relation to which Great Britain is at war, we should be prepared to face the consequences. The moment that we declare our neutrality we should be ready, to use a homely metaphor, to paddle our own canoe, and to paddle it carrying a weight of armaments that would threaten to sink it at any moment . . . our policy in relation to the peace of the world, so long as we remain in the British Commonwealth of Nations, is inextricably bound up with the policy of Great Britain.<sup>4</sup>

The policy of the British Empire was nominally that of the maintenance of the post-war settlement by collective security to be implemented through the agency of the League of Nations. But as the toothlessness of the League became increasingly evident in its failure to stop the war in Abyssinia and to prevent the German reoccupation of the Rhinelands, Britain moved firmly towards the policy of appeasement. This became Empire policy at the Imperial Conference in May 1937. At this conference Britain was represented by Chamberlain, South Africa by J. B. M. Hertzog, Canada by W. L. Mackenzie King, New Zealand by M. J. Savage and Australia by J. Lyons. Only Savage, the sole Labour Prime Minister at the conference, was opposed to the line of policy adopted, which was made quite specific in the final paragraph of the *Proceedings*.

Finally the members of the Conference, while themselves firmly attached to the principles of democracy and to parliamentary forms of government, decided to register their view that differences of political creed should be no obstacle to friendly relations between governments and countries, and that nothing would be more damaging to the hopes of international appeasement than the division, real or apparent, of the world into opposing groups.<sup>5</sup>

In retrospect Nicolas Mansergh, not usually given to harsh judgments, was prompted to comment:

It is not easy to dissociate appeasement from the controversies which later surrounded it or the general condemnation which overtook it . . . Yet here it may be noted that, while the adoption or the endorsement of the policy in each instance is understandable, the phrasing of the concluding paragraph of the section on foreign affairs in the *Proceedings* embodies sentiments hardly consistent with the dignity of a great Commonwealth confronted with the shameless aggression of European tyrants unmatched for their cruelty and faithlessness since the Dark Ages.<sup>6</sup>

The Australian government needed no pressure to follow Britain in the policy of appeasement; indeed it was a more enthusiastic appeaser than Chamberlain himself. Lyons discounted any fears that Eden's resignation was a result of any change in direction of British policy. He stated that Eden had resigned because he objected to the opening of conversa-

tions with Mussolini until certain conditions had been met, namely that Italian propaganda of an anti-British character in the Near East should cease, that Italian troops should be withdrawn from Libya, and that a satisfactory arrangement should be made for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Spain. Chamberlain had decided to go ahead without such assurances, and this, according to Lyons, was in accord with agreed policy. He said:

The Commonwealth Government believes that the principles of British foreign policy outlined by Mr Chamberlain are in effect an expression of the essential aims and ideals of the League and in no way in conflict with them . . . The recent approach made by Great Britain to Italy with a view to alleviating strained relations in no way represents a departure from the resolutions adopted at the Imperial Conference.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly he gave assurances that the *Anschluss* was not a forerunner of further acts of aggression. Fears for Czechoslovakia were not warranted, because, he said, 'the tension was lessened when Great Britain announced that assurance had been received from Germany that the independence and integrity of Czechoslovakia would be respected'.<sup>8</sup> When Czechoslovakia came under the axe, Lyons, on the eve of the Munich pact, told the House of Representatives that all members 'will be united in their appreciation of the notable services which Mr Chamberlain has rendered in the cause of peace'.<sup>9</sup> And following the agreement, Page hoped that it would 'inaugurate a new era in international relations'.<sup>10</sup> Mansergh has summed up:

In general it is not in doubt that the Australian government fully endorsed Mr Chamberlain's policy of appeasement at every stage of the Czech crisis, and at decisive moments encouraged Mr. Chamberlain to make further efforts to secure a settlement even at the price of greater concessions by the Czechs.<sup>11</sup>

Japan could become an immediate threat to the security of Australia, and it was the determined policy of the Lyons government to conciliate her at almost any price. Japan was a potential military threat but she was also an important trading partner. By 1935 she was the largest supplier of textiles to the Australian market and a large buyer of exports,

including wool, some 14 per cent of Australia's total exports going to Japan in 1935-6. Following a brief period from 1935 to 1937 when, pursuing a policy of diverting trade to Britain, Australia restricted imports of Japanese goods, there was a return to active encouragement of trade with Japan. This included the export of iron—a subject of disputes between the government and the left-wing unions in 1938-9 considered later in the chapter. This combination of fear of Japan and a desire to maintain a profitable trade had two effects. It made the government reluctant to protest against Japan's naked aggression in China, which included the humiliation of British citizens and attacks on their interests there, and it also affected Australia's attitude to any co-operation between Britain and the USSR. As Mansergh puts it,

It was Australia's fear that any rapprochement between Britain and Russia would compel Japan to align herself militarily with the Axis Powers and thereby make peace in Asia directly dependent on peace in Europe. Accordingly the Australian government between 1935 and 1939 generally favoured a policy of conciliation in Europe effected through direct negotiation with the Axis Powers and independently of the Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup>

'Don't annoy Japan' might be said to be the slogan of the Australian government, put into effect by both political and economic appeasement.

The faith of Lyons and Menzies in appeasement died slowly. As late as December 1938 Menzies said that there was a strong case in favour of Germany rearming because she was surrounded by nations armed to the teeth. But he also reproved the nazi leaders for believing that they could obtain justice by threats,<sup>13</sup> an empty admonition since that was the means by which they had successively reached their objectives.

The dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 put an end to the policy of appeasement. This fact was borne in on even the Australian government, which made no protest against Chamberlain's unilateral guarantees of support to Poland, Greece and Roumania—made without consultation with the dominions. In April Menzies, as Prime Minister, broadcast to the nation.

The peace of Great Britain is precious to us, because her peace is ours; if she is at war, we are at war, even though that war finds us not in European battlefields,

but defending our own shores. Let me be clear on this; I cannot have a defence of Australia which depends upon British sea power as its first element, I cannot envisage a vital foreign trade on sea routes kept free by British sea power, and at the same time refuse to Britain Australian co-operation at a time of common danger. The British countries of the world must stand or fall together.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless Menzies also urged Chamberlain not to enter any agreement with the USSR the implications of which would extend beyond Europe, because of the consequences it might have for Japanese policy. In May 1939 he announced the intention of his government to try to establish closer diplomatic contact with Japan.

The stand of the Australian government during these years was based on the assumption that Empire unity was the prime objective of policy. The labour movement became increasingly divided from 1937 onwards, but the stand of the Labor Party in Canberra, although stated in different terms from those of the government, had a similar practical result. Isolationism was its theme: support for appeasement was its consequence. Thus in 1935, speaking on the Abyssinian crisis, John Curtin, the newly elected leader of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party, advised caution. He said he believed that a world boycott of Italy would be the most effective method of deterring her, but added that he did not expect this to happen. Instead, sanctions, if applied, were most likely to lead to an extension of the war. Therefore the ALP policy was to avoid any warlike acts against any other nation.<sup>15</sup> He maintained this stand for the next four years, approving, for example, the Munich agreement in similar terms:

as Australia's duty is primarily to its own people, the first responsibility of either the Government or the Opposition in this Parliament is in respect of the safety of the citizens of this Commonwealth, and until we can be satisfied that we have done all that we can to ensure that, and are able to guarantee it as far as it is possible humanly to guarantee anything, we cannot afford to become a participant in the disputes of Europe, to be tied to treaties which, by a process of supplication and expansion, lead us into the position of having to go to war in respect of developments with which we have no concern, and for which we cannot be responsible.<sup>16</sup>

This statement of opinion was also in line with the defence policy



which he had consistently advocated. He had less faith than the government in Britain's capacity to come to the aid of Australia in any war which would extend to the Pacific; therefore he believed that greater emphasis should be placed on home defence—in particular, on the building of air defences. At the same time Australia should keep out of European entanglements.

The situation within the broad labour movement was more complicated. This can be best examined by looking at the debates and decisions of the ACTU. The congress of the ACTU in 1935 took an isolationist position, but by 1937 the balance had shifted. The 1937 congress debated at length a motion from the Labor Council of New South Wales. In the debate most of the opinions and policies which were to be the common object of contention for the next four years were expressed, although changes of circumstances varied their political force and to some extent changed the people or groups who supported them. In the most general terms the congress divided on the issue of involvement or non-involvement in matters external to Australia, although the form of the argument, and the terms in which it was expressed, varied.

The resolution adopted by the 1937 congress stated that Australia was necessarily involved in what happened in other countries; that 'the world is indivisible'. It saw the threat to world peace as coming from German and Italian aggression in Spain, German aggression in central Europe directed finally towards Russia, Japanese aggression in China directed against Russia and towards the domination of the Pacific and Australia. The principles to be applied to cope with this threat were the organisation of the masses against war; opposition to the rearmament policies of the Baldwin and Lyons governments; support for collective security through the League of Nations; and, within Australia, democratic control of the army and opposition to conscription and labour camps. In addition the motion proposed the reduction of armaments by international agreement and the strengthening of the machinery of the League of Nations. To realise these aims the motion urged a united effort of all working class bodies to build up actions for peace and to keep the government under constant scrutiny. In moving the resolution

R. A. King, secretary of the New South Wales Labor Council and vice-president of the ACTU, expressed a general opposition to war, stating that armaments were being given priority over adequate wages for workers and that militarism was being instilled into the minds of the youth in the schools and the militia forces.<sup>17</sup>

The resolution was both the exposition of a policy and the statement of a dilemma. The policy rested on the belief that Germany, Italy, and Japan were aggressive and either engaged in or preparing for war, in which the main sufferers would be the Soviet Union and China, but which would also involve Britain and Australia. The only means to resist this was by collective security to operate through the only machinery available, namely the League of Nations and the system of treaties by which the post-war settlement was supposed to be secured. The dilemma arose from the lack of trust in the governments which alone could operate the system, and an ingrained suspicion of their militaristic tendencies and their lack of concern for the people of their own countries. The logic of opposition to rearmament arose from this difficulty. Collective security required rearmament but the rearmers could not be trusted.

The clear alternative was isolationism, a policy which could be argued either from the right or left. From the right the impulse came from the belief that the policy of collective security was designed mainly in the interests of the Soviet Union, the last interest which the right wished to support. On the non-communist left there was equal suspicion that the purpose was mainly concerned with Russian interests and this meant that the Australian working class was being made a pawn in Soviet politics. The intellectual roots of the non-communist left were varied, but the two strongest were pre-communist international socialist ideas and the Trotskyist critique of Stalin, the Comintern, and the communist parties.

At the 1937 congress of the ACTU an amendment to the original motion laid the common ground. Moved by D. Cameron, a militant representative of the Melbourne Trades Hall Council, it expressed an aggressive isolationism:

That this Congress realising the immediate dangers of another world-wide war, arising from the present situation in European countries, and from the policy of financial interests provoking and financing wars, declares its re-affirmation of Labor's platform against War, as endorsed by the All-Australian Trades Union Congress held in 1935, and which includes:—

- (a) Non participation in overseas wars,  
and
- (b) Opposition to Conscription.

Further, this Congress declares that it is opposed to any Treaty, Pact, or Agreement being entered into by the Federal Government with any overseas Government which includes preparation for or/and participation in war.<sup>18</sup>

The argument in support of the amendment was mainly in terms of working class opposition to institutions such as the League of Nations, 'a League of Warmongers' in Cameron's opinion, which, according to A. E. Monk, had failed to act for democracy in Spain and did not stand for peace. The Seamen's Union delegate, W. J. Clarke, took a similar position when he declared that 'he was opposed to war and would not be deluded into engaging in war by loquacious communists'. The correct position for workers, he said, was to have nothing to do with war: 'If Capitalists realised that workers would refuse to fight they would see that no more war came'. His were views very similar to those which prevailed in the second International before the outbreak of World War I. They were minority views at the congress but they reflected opinions widely held in the labour movement—opposition to and suspicion of the government and an equal suspicion of the communists, who were the most ardent opponents of both appeasement and isolationism.

World-wide communist policy officially took a new course at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern which met at Moscow in July-August 1935. G. Dimitrov, the Bulgarian who had won world notice in 1933 for his courageous defence at Leipzig of those accused of burning the German Reichstag, gave the keynote report.<sup>19</sup> In it he declared that fascism was the main enemy of the working class and the main danger to world peace. It was therefore the duty of communists to resist it internationally and in the internal politics of countries. Its two tactics were to be collective security in international relations and the building of a popular front of all groups and individuals opposed to

fascism. The first was to be achieved by means of the League of Nations and by pacts between countries guaranteeing mutual support in resisting fascist aggression. The second—the popular front—could only be achieved on communist initiative by seeking a united front of the labour movement from above and below; that is by formal agreements between the various working class parties including the communist parties, as well as the development of a mass movement of the rank and file of the labour movement. To this united labour movement, it was hoped, would be attracted other anti-fascists, irrespective of their class or their political affiliations, thus constituting a broad people's front prepared to work for the defence of democracy against the internal and external threat of fascism.

This was, of course, a major turnabout from the line of policy which had prevailed during the 'third period'. Social democracy was no longer the main bastion of capitalism but became, in this reading, a major potential ally in the defence of democracy. How this was expounded in the Australian setting is considered below. Here it must be noted that the change was not so abrupt as it appears in an account which dates its launching from the Comintern congress. There had been firm moves in this direction during the previous twelve months in a number of countries. In 1934 the USSR entered the League of Nations and in May 1935 the Franco-Soviet pact was signed in Moscow. In France a popular front had been established before the congress was held, and was probably a factor in persuading the French government to enter the alliance with the Soviet Union. In France the front was a response to internal political pressures, the rise of a strong fascist movement having pushed communist and socialist leaders into each other's company if not each other's arms. In June 1934 they agreed to take common action to defend democratic liberties, to oppose rearmament, and to campaign against fascism in Germany and Austria.<sup>20</sup> This led on to the unification of the socialist and communist trade union centres and later to the electoral agreement which brought the popular front to power in May 1936.

Australian communist leaders moved slowly towards the new position. In December 1934 an article in the *Communist Review* reported that

united front proposals had been made to the Labor Party. It noted that the united front was proving successful in France, Spain, and the USA, and that an anti-fascist wave was rising in Europe. But the approach to the leadership of the ALP was no more than a gesture, the real bite of the article being that the united front could only be built from below.

There must be no hanging back awaiting a reply from the Labor Party Executives, but, on the contrary, our efforts must be intensified in building organisation in the factories, workshops, and industries, amongst the unemployed and small farmers, and in every working-class organisation. (p. 3)

In practical action the move towards the new policy was faster, the turning point being the Anti-War Congress, organised by the Movement Against War and Fascism in November 1934. The attempt by the Commonwealth government to prevent the delegate of the World Movement Against War and Fascism and noted Czech writer, Egon Kisch, from landing, provided a focus to rally democratic opinion against the restrictive and parochial prejudices of the government. Although Kisch was believed to be a communist, his courage in forcing his way into Australia aroused great sympathy, particularly as he was himself a victim of nazism and had seen and heard the brownshirt columns marching in the Unter den Linden and the Wilhelmstrasse.

Egon Erwin Kisch, the man who arrived at Australia's door in November 1934, was a man of mystery to most Australians, but his name at least was soon to be well known. A delegate to the All-Australian Congress Against War and Fascism which had been arranged to coincide with Melbourne's centenary celebrations and the dedication of the Shrine of Remembrance, he was declared a prohibited immigrant on his arrival at Perth. When the ship reached Melbourne, with the assistance of a reception committee which included the writers Vance Palmer, E. J. Brady, Katharine Susannah Prichard, and Bernard Cronin, as well as Federal ALP politicians Frank Brennan and Maurice Blackburn, a writ of *habeas corpus* was taken out in the Victorian Supreme Court against the ship's captain. The court found against Kisch, but as

the *Strathaird* was about to sail he jumped from the deck to the wharf, thus breaking not only his leg but also into the headlines of the newspapers.<sup>21</sup> In Sydney, legal actions continued. In the High Court, in an action before Mr Justice Evatt, he gained a decision which permitted him to land, but on shore he was immediately required to pass a dictation test in a European language. The language chosen was Gaelic, and, not assisted by the eleven European languages he was reputed to speak, he failed the test.<sup>22</sup> He was then arrested, placed in hospital, but granted freedom of movement under bail, so far as a fractured leg would permit. The next legal move was an appeal to the High Court on the grounds that Gaelic was not a European language within the meaning of the Immigration Act. The court by four to one upheld the appeal: Kisch was released, only to be pursued by further legal actions, and Scotsmen wrote angry letters to the newspapers protesting against the indignity done to the language of their fathers. Kisch finally left Australia on 6 March 1935, some four months after his first brush with the Australian law at Perth. In the meantime his treatment had become a test case of the quality of Australian democracy, and he had become a symbol of opposition to fascism, war, and Australian illiberalism, which some interpreted as incipient fascism.

Australian democracy failed the test, although the degree of protection which Kisch obtained from the courts did something to modify the impact of the authoritarian acts of government. The most abysmal failure was that of the Attorney-General, Menzies, who at this early stage of his long career in Commonwealth politics gave full expression to the fundamental authoritarianism which lay behind the façade of liberalism and respect for human liberties he so constantly proclaimed. Menzies asserted the right of the government to control the terms on which any foreigner could enter Australia, and cited the clauses of the Immigration Act which empowered it to do so. The government had decided to exclude Kisch, he said, because of 'certain information' in its hands. The details could not be revealed, but 'considerable sources of information are available to the Government of any country like this, indicating the class of association of these gentlemen of international communistic activity'.<sup>23</sup> He admitted that the Congress Against

War and Fascism bore an attractive name and that he detested 'the very notion of fascism in a country like Australia'—he was later to make complimentary remarks about fascism in a country like Germany.<sup>24</sup> But, he said, the congress was not about war and fascism, it was neither more nor less than the expression in Australia of the international communistic organisation. He then went on to give his views on free speech, for which, he said, the government stood, with one limitation.

We are a self-governing community; we have adhered to the parliamentary systems of government, and we cannot submit to the enunciation of opinions in this country designed to bring about the revolutionary overthrow of the existing order, or the existing parliamentary system . . . Free speech is an admirable thing; free speech is the law of life in democratic communities, but this Government believes, as I think most honourable members believe, that the limits of permissible free speech are passed by propaganda which aims at the overthrow by violence of the government of a country. (CPD, Vol. 145, pp. 258-9)

There was no doubt that he was right about the opinions of 'most of the honourable members', but as a statement of 'liberal' philosophy it rings rather strange. Several members of the Labor Party criticised the government's action but only two, Blackburn and Brennan, did so in defence of democratic rights.

Maurice Blackburn was the most consistent civil libertarian in Parliament in this oppressive period of political intolerance, often finding himself in conflict with his own party, the ALP. He pointed out that there was a Crimes Act under which there were ample powers to deal with anyone who advocated the overthrow of government by violence. As to communism, he said:

I have given sufficient study to the Communist position to decide that I could not accept it. But I understand it. Its position is that you cannot change the existing system by parliamentary means; that if you obtain a majority at the elections, the ruling classes will refuse to accept the people's decision, and will then take by force—a reactionary *coup d'état*. The Communists say that that is what the workers must realise is at the end of parliamentary agitation. I do not agree with that. But it is a reasoned position, and one which I understand. I have taken the pains to understand it in order that I might make up my mind as to whether I could or could not be a Communist. Having studied the Communist position, I

came to the conclusion that I could not be a Communist. But the Communists are perfectly entitled to express their opinions.<sup>25</sup>

Blackburn's attitude was exceptional. The most general lines of criticism of the government by ALP politicians were that the facts were not known, that Kisch had said that he was not a communist, and that the government had produced no evidence that he was.<sup>26</sup>

Kisch himself denied that he was a member of the Communist Party. As reported in the *Argus* (13 Nov. 1934) he said:

I am not a member of the Communist party, neither am I a political writer nor an agitator, . . . I am merely a pacifist, viewing with interest and concern the economic background of the countries preparing for war. I do not attack Germany, but Fascism and the war preparation, which is going on everywhere.

In the book which he subsequently wrote about Australia he insisted that all he had said about party affiliation was that he was not prepared to commit himself.<sup>27</sup> This was a normal tactic for communists to adopt in situations where admission of membership of the party was a plea of guilty to a pre-established crime. Kisch's reception by Australian authorities would have been sufficient evidence to suggest to him, having experienced Hitler's gaols, that prudence dictated non-committal replies. If he were a party member, and he probably was, he would not be convicted out of his own mouth. Whether such tactics are justifiable morally remains a matter for debate: that they are the commonly accepted tactics of politics and war can scarcely be denied. Kisch preferred to stand on his record as an anti-fascist and a writer. In both of these respects his credentials were unexceptionable.

For the right-thinking people from the best suburbs the fact that Kisch was probably a communist, that he was also a cosmopolitan, a man born in Czechoslovakia who had lived in Germany and was now domiciled in France, and a writer whose works had not been translated into English, was enough to condemn him. He was clearly a person whose mission was to upset the supposed tranquil society which was free of the dissensions of Europe. Some or all of these attributes predisposed a minority to him. For communists the position was clear.



Kisch was supposed to be, or known to be, a communist, and it was essential to get his anti-fascist message to the Australian people. Some intellectuals were deeply upset by what they saw as the xenophobic obscurantism of Australian reactionaries. Thus the movement in support of Kisch brought together people who had never co-operated before: a minority of intellectuals and unionists made common cause in organising meetings and demonstrations to hear and support Kisch.

Linked with him as a cause was Gerald Griffin, a New Zealand delegate to the same conference, who had been excluded by means of a dictation test in Dutch and deported back to New Zealand, but who managed to return to Australia under a false name and behind uncharacteristic horn-rimmed spectacles.<sup>28</sup> Together or separately, they addressed large meetings in Melbourne, Sydney, and on the coalfields, at one of which Kisch was greeted by a Scottish pipe-band. Their presence in the country was an embarrassment to the government, a vindication of the actions of those who had supported them, and the first taste by communists of the fruits of the popular front.

The actions in support of Kisch gave communists the experience of the excitement and satisfaction of defending a democratic cause, but their leaders did not immediately draw from it the general conclusions which were later to be incorporated in the decisions of the seventh Comintern Congress. Two articles by R. Dixon, one of the more lucid expositors of Australian communist policy, demonstrate the changes which occurred in communist thinking between mid-1935 and mid-1937.<sup>29</sup> In the first article, written just before the decisions of the seventh Congress were made public and some months before they reached Australia, Dixon found himself with the unenviable task of attacking the Versailles settlement, British (and hence Australian) imperialism, and of declaring the League of Nations dead but partly resurrected by the entry of the Soviet Union. In his version the withdrawal of Japan and Germany from the League had left it largely under the control of Britain, France, and Italy, the first two being satisfied powers who wished to maintain the *status quo*, the latter on the verge of invading Abyssinia. He thought that Italy would be left free to carry out its

designs by Britain and France, who would be anxious to conciliate Mussolini in the hope of bringing him into a concert against the threat of Hitler. If this happened the League would be finally destroyed. The only force deterring the League from bowing to the demands of Mussolini was the presence of the USSR in the League and the existence of the Franco-Soviet Pact. Shortly, communists were to abandon their criticisms of the *status quo* established at Versailles and defend it as the condition of resisting Hitlerite aggression. They would tone down their criticism of British imperialism and speak instead of the defence of democracy against fascism. They would also profess a belief in the League as an instrument of peace. At the same time they would be bitterly critical of the failure of the appeasers to stand up to Hitler. But the communists were not alone in the dilemma which faced them. Criticism of the Versailles settlement had been central to liberal opinion for fifteen years. How then to deal with Hitler, who had come to power in part because of his promise to right the injustice to Germany at Versailles?

Early in 1937 six Melbourne professors and university lecturers, many if not all of whom were shortly to be firmly opposed to appeasement of the dictators, submitted a manifesto to Prime Minister Lyons who was about to leave for the Imperial Conference.<sup>30</sup> In it they asked the Australian delegation to urge on the British government the need to make economic concessions to Hitler, Mussolini, and Japan. They went on to say:

A few years ago we believed in the possibility of avoiding war by peaceful settlement of disputes through the League of Nations . . . This was to be accomplished by progressive disarmament, together with a system of collective security—the pooling of resources against a declared lawbreaker. That was before the Manchurian, Abyssinian, and Rhineland episodes.

Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese militarists have been able to persuade their people that they have real grouches. They have suffered from exclusive trade policies, and Germany has been deprived of her colonies, while those of Italy and Japan are relatively poor and miserable. They can therefore kindle aggressive imperialist desires in their people. The British Empire could cut the ground from beneath the feet of these dictators by offering to take steps to remove grievances.<sup>31</sup>

Patterns of thought which had been cut in the long period in which the Versailles settlement had been rightly under criticism still prevailed with these academics. Hitler soon proved the error of their judgment and they recognised it.

By 1937 the issues were clear and simple for the leaders of the Communist Party. In his May article Dixon stated them. He argued that fascism was the main instigator of war, and, while all capitalist states were potentially warlike, some were more or less interested in the maintenance of peace. The League of Nations, while it had not shown itself to be effective in the past, was capable of being pushed into a peace-preserving role. An alliance between Britain, France, and the USSR, and the co-operation of these three states in the League of Nations to impose collective security on the aggressors would prevent aggression and secure peace. To the criticism that it was unlikely that the reactionary Baldwin government would act in the way suggested, Dixon replied that everything depended on a popular front mass movement. Such a movement aimed to replace the Baldwin and Lyons governments by Labor governments 'subservient to the Peoples Front'. But in the meantime even the reactionary governments might be forced momentarily to act in accord with the principles of collective security. As to preparation of the military force to back collective security, he spoke vaguely of arming the people and a democratic army. The defence of democracy, which was the second head of policy, provided some theoretical difficulties. In classical Marxism-Leninism the democracy in capitalist society is an illusion, a smokescreen hiding the reality which is the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The lesser of two evils argument was put forward by Dimitrov and repeated by Sharkey in a companion article to that of Dixon.

Just as Marx chose the alternative of bourgeois democracy as against feudalism, so do we choose parliamentary democracy as against fascist dictatorship, in order to preserve the gains of the working class under bourgeois democracy, to abolish which is the chief task set the fascists by finance capital.<sup>82</sup>

In defending democratic liberties, he said, communists would accept their true inheritance as heirs to the Australian democratic tradition

whose symbols were the Eureka stockade and the fight against conscription.

Speaking of the same period in Poland, Isaac Deutscher, one of the great Marxist scholars, said that the popular front policy appealed to the young who were beginning their political career. Nevertheless it was not conducive to the development of genuine Marxist understanding.

The Party propaganda, disseminating the vaguest of 'democratic' and antifascist slogans and the most insipid 'let's all get together' proclamations, was jettisoning all the criteria of proletarian interest and class struggle. It hardly differed from the routine propaganda of right-wing socialists, except that it markedly lacked any genuineness. Ideological shallowness and a patriotic-democratic vulgarity characterised the Party which once drew its inspiration from Rosa Luxemburg's flowing thought.<sup>83</sup>

How far is this a valid picture of the theoretical underpinning of the popular front policy in Australia? The leaders of the party, and most notably Sharkey, hedged their theoretical bets. Thus in the article quoted above, in which he designated the communists as the inheritors of the Australian democratic tradition, he was careful to qualify it with:

We are not Kautskyians, contrasting parliamentary democracy with Soviet democracy and rejecting the Marxist-Leninist dictatorship of the proletariat in favour of a, however 'purified', bourgeois democracy. (p. 39)

However, the majority of those who entered the party at this time, or were influenced by it, were probably primarily anti-fascists who believed correctly that in Australia it was the most effective vehicle to carry such sentiment.

The Spanish civil war was the first great test of the popular front as the political form with which to oppose fascism and of collective security to contain fascist aggression. Collective security was not seriously attempted, and in the long run the popular front went down to defeat. It was a bloody civil war in which the sufferers were the people of Spain. It was also a fact of world politics which deeply engaged the thought

and emotion of men and women throughout the world. In the vast literature which it generated at the time, and in the histories which have been written in the thirty-five years since it ended, the moral as well as the political implications have rarely been questioned. It has been called the 'last great cause', a cause to which people of radical, liberal, and humane opinions could commit themselves without qualification; where there could be no question as to which was the right side and which the wrong. The idea that it was a pure cause was given reality in particular by the behaviour of English, French, and American intellectuals for whom the war was a struggle between democracy and fascism, between civilisation and barbarism. Some of them supported their convictions with their lives, others less finally with their pens. In the perspective of history and the light of facts which were hardly knowable at the time the purity may be somewhat tarnished but it would be difficult to reject the judgment of Herbert Matthews, one of the men who reported it most extensively and courageously. Writing in 1972, he said,

What I am sure will be my final, reasoned judgment on the Spanish Civil War is that those of us who championed the cause of the Republican government against the Franco Nationalists were right. It was, on balance, the cause of justice, legality, morality, decency.<sup>34</sup>

Some Australians saw it that way then, and later, but, as might be expected, its impact was less than in Europe or America, although by no means insignificant.

Australians first heard of the revolt of the Spanish generals on 20 July 1936. The *Sydney Morning Herald* in its editorial announced that 'Spanish Morocco has broken out in revolt under a military leadership which, whether it be called Fascist or monarchist, seems definitely anti-Republican'. The *Argus* on 25 July told Victorians that

Although the situation in Spain is still obscure, it appears that the Government forces, consisting principally of Socialists and Communists, are taking the offensive against the rebels, who comprise Royalists and Fascists.

Seven days later the same paper welcomed the return from Britain of

the Attorney-General, Menzies. It reported him as satisfied that 'democracy is the one hope of the world and that the British world is the one hope of the rest of the world'.

From the deposition of Alfonso XIII and the establishment of the republic in 1931 the Australian press had reported events in Spain: strikes, murders, riots, the burning of churches; the right-wing rising led by General Sanjurjo in 1932 and the left-wing revolt in the Asturias in 1934. Spain was clearly a country of violence, but from the newspaper reports it was difficult, if not impossible, to tell what it was all about. Indeed very few Australians knew anything about Spain.

People who had recently lived in or visited Europe—travellers, artists, journalists, and students—might be assumed to have had more detailed knowledge. But so far as the documentary record goes, in most cases they didn't share their knowledge with others. For example, *The Australian Quarterly*, a journal in which one might have expected to find some informed comment, had between 1936 and 1939 only one article on Spain. There were, however, exceptions. In the *Australian Highway* (journal of the WEA) of July 1936 there was an article, 'Revolution in Spain?', by a young Sydney history lecturer, R. M. Crawford, shortly to begin his distinguished career as professor of history in Melbourne. Despite the unavailability of information in Australia, of which he complained, Crawford managed in a brief article to present a most informative picture of the immediate pre-war events. He saw Don Manuel Azana (then President of the Republic) as the only person with any chance of holding the balance between right and left, and foresaw a military dictatorship as the most likely rallying point for the right.

In October Nettie Palmer, who had been living in Barcelona at the time of the insurrection, returned to Melbourne. Shortly to become president of the Victorian Spanish Relief Committee, she expressed in articles and broadcasts a deep love of Spain and its people and an enthusiasm for the beginning of the social revolution that she had seen in Catalonia.

She explained the Australian attitude as:

What's the good of finding out exactly what happened in July? Hasn't Spain always had revolutions? . . . Isn't it always in a state of war, with martial law and *pronunciamentos*? Whichever party wins now, won't there be another reversal in a few months, with a new *pronunciamento*?<sup>35</sup>

For her, Spain was not simply a place of 'blood and fratricide'. A woman had asked her:

Tell me, are there any flowers in Spain? I knew what she meant: she knew of course that in old Romantic Spain there were roses—how else could a Carmen carry a rose in her mouth—but she wanted to know if in modern and actual Spain there were people growing gardens, people aware of flowers.

Nettie Palmer's answer was, 'Yes, there are flowers'.

Flowers on sale in great kiosks in the most famous Barcelona street, the Ramblas, that promenade with its avenues of plane trees running through the heart of the ancient city . . . All through the summer those flowers were tended and watered and gathered in rotation: and there were wildflowers as well along the roads between the fields. 'All through the summer', I said—but no, this year the summer was snapped off short on 19th July, when not only flowers had to die.<sup>36</sup>

Flowers were one fact and one symbol for her: bread was another. She had seen the defeat of the military uprising by the striking and armed unionists, anarchists in the main, but also socialists, communists, Trotskyists and republicans. She wrote:

Suddenly on that Tuesday, 21st July, the strike as far as food-supplies were concerned was lifted altogether. The same syndicalists that were [had been] patrolling the road were detailing men off to return to their job of feeding the population. Someone had advised me to see if any bread remained in the village. It seemed to me unimportant but I enquired: The baker greeted me in his apron. 'Not ready yet,' he said, 'but I'll be round as usual about two this afternoon with white *and* brown.' This went to show that the social fabric was being maintained precisely by those who worked at it. Next day when we managed to go to town on an armed lorry we were to see some more of this anarchism in action.<sup>37</sup>

Nettie Palmer was moved by the fact of working men running their city: but she was not unaware that the same men had burned every church in Barcelona except the cathedral.

From 20 July 1936 until early 1937 the war in Spain was the main front page (or middle page as it then was) news story of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, with the qualification that in December the King and Mrs Simpson took over. It was also the subject of frequent editorial comment. To a lesser extent this was also true of the other major metropolitan newspapers. From early 1937, while it remained important news, the war was pushed progressively to the right and the bottom of the page and then over the page to obscurity. The reports were of battles, atrocities, rumours (later hard news) of Italian and German support for the rebels and of Russian arms and international brigades for the government. There was plenty of news, but only by very close study would it have been possible for readers to build up any coherent picture of events.

Most Australian newspapers gave actual or lip-service approval to the policy of non-intervention. Between the middle and end of August 1936, all the major European powers had signed the non-intervention agreement. In practice the agreement was a smokescreen behind which Italy and Germany committed troops, weapons, and machines, Russia reluctantly provided war materials, and the Comintern organised international brigades. The Australian newspapers accepted non-intervention as the desirable policy, but, according to their editorial view of the war itself and where they stood in relation to the total European situation, they emphasised the breaches of non-intervention by the Axis powers or Russia. Thus the policy of the *Sydney Morning Herald* could be interpreted as being more on the side of the Spanish government than was that of the *Argus*. The *Bulletin*, on the other hand, had no doubt that the newspapers were pulling the wool over the eyes of an innocent people. It was isolationist, anti-communist, pro-Franco and convinced that the *Sydney Morning Herald* was trying to drag Australia into war. For the *Bulletin* the war was simply a part of the communist conspiracy which would fail:

people everywhere feel that world revolution is not only a cruel and cowardly but an unscientific policy, and that the belief cherished by Reds that the doctrines of a man without a country who never did a tap of work in his life could be imposed on people of all races, to the utter overthrow of systems and institutions



centuries old and churches which have lasted for thousands of years, is the most dangerous and damnable superstition that has ever taken possession of the human mind. (25 Nov. 1936)

It praised the resolution and magnanimity of the rebel forces and sneered at those of the government. For example, in November Franco didn't take Madrid because he didn't want to destroy the city—a strange comment on the most intensive aerial bombardment of a city up to that time. As to the government forces, in reference to Alcazar,

In Toledo the Spanish counterpart of the wonderful Red Army could not beat even a few hundred resolute men imprisoned, with their women and children, in the ruins of the old fort. (14 Oct. 1936)

Perhaps the most curious exercise of logic, but equally one of the most characteristic of the *Bulletin* as the carrier of one Australian tradition, was an article entitled, 'That was a War'. Spain was a mere skirmish compared with World War I and was getting much too much publicity.

Not only newspaper scaremongers: windy professors, over-age fire-eaters, pulpit thumpers, Melbourne's lately-heard urgers of a Moscow war-policy and all the rest of those who keep the world restless with their war-yapping might get back their sense of proportion by letting their minds face up to that slaughter that *was* slaughter. Perhaps it would be enough if the newspaper alarmists alone undertook the job of correcting *their* minds with a draught of history. (4 Aug. 1937)

The *Bulletin*, at this time, fully occupied the broad fringe of right-wing lunacy.

Probably the most influential commentator, at least in Sydney, and certainly the most persistent, was Stephen H. Roberts, Professor of Modern History at Sydney University. He spent 1936 in Germany, from which came his *The House that Hitler Built* and a stream of articles for the *Sydney Mail*, a subsidiary of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, as well as articles in the *Sydney Morning Herald* itself. These continued until December 1938 when the *Sydney Mail* was discontinued.

Roberts saw the Spanish war primarily as an unfortunate incident likely to upset the delicate balance of Europe. Spain had relapsed into barbarism and become a 'thorn in the side of Europe'. In 1936 he was for appeasement, for accommodation with Hitler and Mussolini.<sup>38</sup> As the war bogged down at the end of 1936 he began to argue a solution by partition, broadly along the line on which the front had settled—'a workers' state around Catalonia in the East and a nationalist state in the West'. From then on his articles were heavily weighted towards military and strategic comment. By mid-1937 he was hoping for a settlement of the Spanish problem, most likely to be achieved, he considered, by the victory of Franco. To make this the more palatable Franco was pictured as different from the other dictators:

Franco has not unified the country. He has set up a loose Junta . . . and has secured a kind of federal compromise . . . He has tried none of the autarkist ideas of the other dictators, none of the intolerable regimentation that one finds in Italy and Germany. In all, his moderate policy in the last fifteen months has won over many foreigners who were formerly suspicious of his Fascist ideas.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout 1938, as his faith in the effectiveness of appeasement declined—'the implicit challenge of Rome and Berlin'—he was urging the importance of Britain reaching an understanding with Franco.

Isolationism and acceptance of British policy were the predominant Australian attitudes; non-intervention was the justification of both. The two sections of the population for whom the war was most important—Catholics and communists—responded differently to these predominant trends. For Catholics the logical political consequence of their view was isolationism, and in this they were with the main trend. For communists it involved a political campaign against non-intervention and steps to assist the republican government so far as these were practicable. Between them also there was a battle to win the minds of a generally uninterested people. At one level it was a contest of atrocities. In this the Catholics outdid the communists. In the early days of the war, for example, headlines in the Melbourne diocesan paper, *Advocate*, give the flavour: 'Dreadful Deeds in Spain', 'Wholesale Massacre of the Clergy', 'Unbelievable Atrocities Perpetrated'. Detailed descriptions

follow: the heads of clergy paraded around the villages on plates; nuns stripped, raped, and made to walk nude through the streets; priests torn apart and hung over statues of the Virgin;<sup>40</sup> twenty-two Christian Brothers killed, forty-three burned alive, priests and laity shot like dogs.<sup>41</sup>

Archbishop Duhig of Brisbane gave the matter an Australian reference. As reported in the *Argus* (15 Sept. 1936):

Communists in Spain who were guilty of crucifying a priest on a church door head downwards were characterised by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane (Dr Duhig) yesterday as a crowd of diabolical blackguards. Impassioned appeals were made by him at Ipswich and Nundah to the Catholic community to continue with unabated zeal their support of religious education, which was the bulwark against Communism.

The reports of atrocities were, of course, true. To Catholics they were not merely atrocities but sacrilege. In his sober and intensively researched book on the war Hugh Thomas says:

The Nationalists since the war have named a figure of 85,940 for all reputed murdered or executed in Republican Spain during the war. This calculation is certainly not an underestimation, though it compares favourably with the wilder accusations of three or four hundred thousand made during the course of the war. Of those killed, 7,937 were religious persons: 12 were bishops, 283 nuns, 5,255 priests, 2,492 monks and 249 novices . . . If the overall figure is accepted, about 75,000 persons may be supposed to have been executed or murdered between July 18 and September 1, 1936—for nearly all the illegal killings in the Republic occurred at the start of the war.<sup>42</sup>

They occurred at the start of the war because for the first few months in the regions where the military rebellion failed, in the south and north-eastern part of Spain, notably in Madrid and Barcelona, something approximating to dual political power came into existence. The workers were armed by the authorities through their organisations, primarily the socialist UGT (Union General de Trabajadores) in Madrid, and the anarcho-syndicalist CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo) in Barcelona, with minorities of communists in each case. Having defeated the insurrection, they then began what they saw as the social

revolution in which the main enemy, the hypocritical defender of property, was the Church. Churches were burned and priests were killed, not so much as an act of retribution as an act of purification.

Gerald Brenan reaches the heart of the matter. He reports an old anarchist:

'What do you think of that?' he asked. I said: 'They are burning down Malaga'. 'Yes,' he said: 'they are burning it down. And I tell you—not one stone will be left on another stone—no, not a plant nor even a cabbage will grow there, so that there may be no more wickedness in the world.'

It was the voice of Amos or Isaiah (though the old man had never read either) or of an English sectarian of the seventeenth century.

. . . Without going far wrong one may say that all the churches recently burned in Spain were burned by Anarchists and that most of the priests killed were killed by them. Such a persecution of religion has not been known in Europe since the 'Thirty Years' War: the Russian Revolution provided nothing to compare to it. It can only, I think, be explained as the hatred of heretics for the church from which they have sprung. For in the eyes of Spanish libertarians the Catholic Church occupies the position of Anti-Christ in the Christian world . . . We forget, I think, our history when we show surprise at this anti-Papist violence. Between the decapitated saints in English churches and the broken altars and blackened walls in Spain there is only a difference of degree.<sup>43</sup>

Correct as that interpretation is, it was hardly to be expected that Australian Catholics in 1936-7 would see it that way. In Catholic countries with an anti-clerical tradition Franco was not universally welcomed. Radical Catholics in France and the *Catholic Worker* in the United States adopted at least a neutralist position. In the Basque provinces the Church supported the government. In Australia, however, the reports of massive sacrilege in Spain provided the emotional charge which projected organised Catholic political action into its crusade against communism—a crusade which was to continue for a generation. Anarchism, despite the smouldering churches of Barcelona, was seen as a lesser evil, a result, according to the *Advocate* (22 Oct. 1936), of 'ignorance, degradation and misery', whereas communism was ruthless and successful.

For communists, Spain was the first critical case for the general policy adopted at the seventh congress of the Comintern. The policy was set

out in a widely read pamphlet by M. Ercoli (Palmiro Togliatti), exiled leader of the Italian Party, and executive member of the Comintern.

As Togliatti saw it:

The heroic struggle of the Spanish people has deeply stirred the whole world. It is the greatest event in the struggle of the masses of the people in the capitalist countries for their emancipation, second only to the October Socialist Revolution of 1917.

The struggle against the remnants of feudalism, the aristocracy, the monarchist officers, the princes of the church, against fascist enslavement, has united the vast majority of the Spanish people. The workers and peasants, the intellectuals and lower middle class people of the towns, and even certain groups of the bourgeoisie, have taken their stand in defense of freedom and the republic, while a handful of insurgent generals are waging war against their own people with the aid of Moroccans, whom they deceived, and the international criminal riffraff of the Foreign Legion.<sup>44</sup>

He went on to say that it was also a war for national liberation—for the Catalonians, the Basques and the Galicians—as well as to defend all of Spain from control by Germany and Italy.

Togliatti referred to the October revolution, but was at pains to deny that the position in Spain was parallel to that in Russia in 1917 or even 1905. The main differences were, he said, that the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution had not been accomplished and that the Communist Party was weak (Thomas says 10,000 members in 1936), the mass groupings being the CGT and the CNT, neither of which was capable of leading a proletarian revolution. In addition to this the peasantry were not revolutionary, and, except in Galicia, had backed Franco. Thus Togliatti saw the task of the Communist Party as being to defend the bourgeois democratic government and to resist the social revolutionary acts of the anarchists and left socialists. As he put it,

there are not a few people who, under cover of the principles of Anarchism, weaken the solidarity and unity of the People's Front by hasty projects for compulsory 'collectivisation', the 'abolition of money', the preaching of 'organised indiscipline', etc.<sup>45</sup>

The Communist Party was to be the party of 'order and discipline', and

this it became, as it acquired strength during the war: as a result of its own efforts, as the distributor of Russian aid, as the controller of international brigades, and as the operator of an extensive secret police ultimately responsible to Stalin.

In Australia as elsewhere the most telling criticism of the interpretation and role of the communists was made by Trotskyists or those influenced by Trotskyist ideas.<sup>46</sup> In Moscow, trials and executions were wiping out the old bolsheviks who had led the revolution in 1917—the burden of the charges being that they were engaged in a conspiracy led by Trotsky against the Soviet state. By 1936 (fully expounded in *The Revolution Betrayed* in 1937) Trotsky saw the USSR as an autocratic bureaucracy but retaining a socialist organisation of industry. It could only be saved by a political revolution. Internally he considered that Stalin had betrayed the revolutionary movements of other countries in the interests of the defence of Russia. In Spain he saw the policy of the communists as being dictated by Russia and as counter-revolutionary—the party of order was suppressing the peasants' demand for the land and damping down the demands of the Catalonians and Basques for self-determination. In May 1937 the Moscow trials extended to Spain, POUM (the Catalonian party of Trotskyist tendency) being suppressed with great brutality—the suppression supervised by Antonov-Ovseenko, whom Stalin sent to do the job. This was the situation which has been given a personal application by George Orwell in *Homage to Catalonia*.

In Sydney there was a small Trotskyist group—the Workers' Party of Australia—which issued a monthly journal, *The Militant*. It carried articles by local writers such as E. Tripp, Laurence Short, and A. B. Thistlethwaite. More to the point were reprints of articles by Trotsky and members of the strong New York Trotskyist group who produced the *Modern Monthly* and the *New International*. John Anderson, who was advertised as speaking at public meetings, was their most distinguished figure.

Trotskyism was not important in Sydney as a trend in the labour movement. It was important amongst intellectuals because it provided a coherent critique, from the point of view of the revolutionary move-

ment, of Russia, the Communist Party, and its policies. It was not entirely absent from Melbourne, as evidence this entry in Nettie Palmer's diary of 8 December 1936:

Ralph Gibson's lecture on 'Fascism v Democracy in Europe Today' . . . Extremely clear lecture—except, I thought, in his brief reference to Russia and the Zinoviev trial: not enough to quote Pritt's evidence as to the more-than-fair trial: there's something further back than the trial: . . . (Later, Trotsky declares the accused were promised their lives, if they confessed. But what use would their lives be to them, after such confessions?)

Nevertheless, the Trotskyist critique was more influential in Sydney than in Melbourne in inhibiting intellectuals from associating themselves with Spain as a political cause. Communists, of course, anathematised Trotskyists and arguments which they identified as Trotskyist. They believed the evidence of the Moscow trials which seemed to show that Trotsky and his supporters in Russia were engaged in a conspiracy against the Soviet state in which they had obtained the willing assistance of Germany. From this it was an easy extension to perceive Trotskyists in Spain as counter-revolutionary saboteurs. This was not simply a cynical disregard for self-evident truth, as it would be tempting to paint it nearly forty years later. Political activists never have the privilege, available to uncommitted observers of events, of withholding judgment until all the facts are known beyond question. They necessarily interpret events in the light of basic assumptions—or perhaps items of faith.

In 1936-7 communists did not question two basic assumptions: first, that fascism incorporated all that was vile in man, and there was plenty of evidence to support that view; and second, that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was building, on the wreckage of the most backward and oppressive society in Europe, a new civilisation of equality and genuine democracy.<sup>47</sup> In addition the Soviet Union was the only unshakable bastion against the aggressive intentions of nazism.

How then to explain the fact that men who a few years or months before were accepted as being paragons of the new society were appearing in court, one after another, to testify to their own villainy: to being

traitors to the socialist revolution which they had helped to make, to their own country, and collaborators with its most deadly enemy, the nazis? Communists found satisfying the explanations put into their mouths by their paranoid prosecutors. Thus, one of Australia's most gentle and learned Marxist scholars, Guido Baracchi, put the case against Karl Radek, who had recently been sentenced to gaol and later executed. He found the explanation of Radek's traitorous conduct in his vanity and frustrated ambition. He cited the instances in which Radek had been 'wrong' in political contest in the past, where he stood against the majority opinion of the party leadership. He saw him as a tragic but misguided character who had spent his life in revolutionary conspiracy but who was unable to adapt himself to the hard and tedious process of building a new society. So he remained a conspirator but now turned against the society which he had helped to establish. Shakespeare had the truth of it, Baracchi thought, in the words of Richard III:

And I . . .

Torment myself to catch the English crown:

And from that torment I will free myself,

Or hew my way out with a bloody axe.

Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile;

And cry 'Content!' to that which grieves my heart;

And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,

And frame my face to all occasions.

I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall;

I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk;

I'll play the orator as well as Nestor;

Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could;

And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.

I can add colors to the chameleon:

Change shapes with Proteus for advantages:

And set the murderous Machiavel to school.

Can I do this and cannot get a crown?

Tut! were it further off, I'll pluck it down.<sup>48</sup>

*Henry VI (Pt III) III, ii, 173-95*

Karl Radek was a modern Richard who had been found out in his infamy—'How well', said Baracchi, 'the Shakespearean cap fits.'<sup>49</sup>



In line with world policy, the Communist Party of Australia presented the war in Spain as a fight between democracy and fascism. The practical step was to try to establish a united front of working class parties in Australia in moral support of the Spanish government:

In Australia let the Communists and Labor Party workers unite into the same firm formation, demanding support for the Spanish people and with the object of bringing about the defeat of the Lyons Government which is a menace to the liberty and peace of the Australian people.<sup>50</sup>

In addition the aim was to create organisations of a politically broader character, within the concept of the popular front, to produce propaganda in favour of the Spanish government, and to provide practical aid. The answer was the Spanish Relief Committee.

The Spanish Relief Committee was launched at a public meeting called by the Movement Against War and Fascism and the International Labor Defence. Its purpose was to render 'moral and material aid to the anti-fascist people of Spain who are waging an heroic struggle against the reactionary forces of that country'.<sup>51</sup> The committee organised meetings, lecture tours and demonstrations. It issued propaganda of which the most regular and informative was a series of circular letters whose contents were drawn mainly from London sources. They quoted reports from Australian journalist John Fisher, son of one-time Labor Prime Minister Andrew Fisher, the famous Canadian doctor Norman Bethune, and the writings of Frank Pitcairn.<sup>52</sup> Returning members of the International Brigade and letters from Australian nurses gave some of the news an Australian flavour. In its role as propagandist the committee emphasised the defence of democracy against fascism, the horrors of the war and the atrocities of the nationalists. As on the government side, there was no need to invent atrocities. To quote Thomas,

Throughout Nationalist Spain, all Masons, all members of Popular Front Parties, all members of trade unions and, in many areas, everyone who had voted for the Popular Front in the elections of February were arrested and many of these were shot.<sup>53</sup>

The Spanish Relief Committee was probably less reckless than the Catholic press in attributing atrocities to the other side.

The main practical achievement of the committee was in the raising of money. This was used to buy an ambulance, to provide medical supplies and clothes, and to assist with the support of orphans in Barcelona. It was given a degree of respectability by being registered as a charity under the New South Wales Charities Collection Act, the Victorian organisation being a subsidiary. In all, the Spanish Relief Committee raised some £16,000. Other less politically committed groups, largely composed of churchmen, were less successful, their contribution totalling only about £4,000. Andrews has estimated an overall total of £21,150.<sup>54</sup>

The driving force in the Spanish Relief Committee was its communist members. But there is no reason to believe that they were other than completely committed to its objectives. In some cases people joined the Communist Party as a result of their experiences in the committee. Nor is there any reason to believe that the non-communists who gave their time to the Spanish Relief Committee were dupes. The fact is that for those people in Australia who wished to make some practical contribution either in ideas or in kind to republican Spain, or more broadly to the popular front movement against fascism, the committee and organisations like it were the only available media. People who joined the Communist Party at this time were primarily anti-fascist, with a genuine belief in the virtue of democracy held in uneasy tension with a dim awareness that all was not right in the USSR. But the doubts could be put aside in the interests of the present struggle. Those who put their emphasis on the Moscow trials or the suppression of the opposition in Spain were dismissed as coffee-house revolutionaries; windbags who talked but did not act. The Communist Party was a party of action in which doubt was a luxury which could not be afforded.

As well as giving moral and financial support, some Australians acted more directly. At least fifty-seven men went to Spain and served with the International Brigade.<sup>55</sup> Of these, thirty-four were killed in action or died as a consequence of the war. They were, with only a few exceptions, all workers, and a majority were members of the Communist

Party either before going or when they returned. They were not recruited by the Spanish Relief Committee which, despite the accusations of some of its opponents, was careful not to give direct military aid to the Spanish government. The International Brigaders got to Europe on their own initiative or with the quiet assistance of their unions or the Communist Party. Four nurses to staff the ambulance were assisted to Spain by the committee, since medical aid was within the terms of its charter.

The publications of the Spanish Relief Committee were an important source of information and opinion for the left. More influential, but pointing in the same direction, was the Left Book Club, which was founded in London early in 1936. The Spanish war gave the managers of the club an extra sense of urgency which remained with it throughout the dark years of Hitler's triumphs and the appeasers' shame. The club was not so influential in Australia as in Britain, but, as one of its historians points out, the strongest overseas support came from Australia.<sup>56</sup> The purpose of the club, which was the brain-child of the radical publisher, Victor Gollancz, has been variously described, though the descriptions are not in conflict. In one version the purpose of the club was to produce a series of books dealing with the three closely related questions of fascism, the threat of war, and poverty, arriving at effective resistance to the first, the prevention of the second, and socialism as a cure for the third.<sup>57</sup> In a second version the aims were

to help in the struggle for World Peace and a better social and economic order and against Fascism, by . . . increasing the knowledge of those who already see the importance of the struggle, and . . . adding to their number the very many who . . . hold aloof from the fight by reason of ignorance or apathy.<sup>58</sup>

For twelve years, from 1936 to 1948, the club poured out books intended to serve these aims, 257 books in all. There was a monthly choice, selected by Gollancz, John Strachey, and Harold Laski, which went to all members. There were also additional books, supplementary books, topical books, educational books, and reprints of classics at prices to members ranging from 6d. to 7s.6d. The high point of the club's

endeavour was in the years from 1936 to the outbreak of World War II, which the club devoted itself to trying to prevent.

A random selection of books of the month gives an indication of the subjects and quality of the publishing enterprise. In 1936 these included *France Today and The People's Front*, by Maurice Thorez, general secretary of the French Communist Party; *World Politics 1918-1936*, by Palme Dutt, a leading British communist theoretician; *Under the Axe of Fascism*, by Gaetano Salvemini, a scholarly examination but also a passionate critique of Mussolini's Italy; and the *Theory and Practice of Socialism*, by John Strachey, a textbook of simplified Marxism by one who at the time considered himself a communist but was not a member of the Communist Party. The first book of 1937 was *Forward From Liberalism*, by the poet Stephen Spender, who, in response to criticism of the book, joined the Communist Party.<sup>59</sup> It was followed by George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, which searched the dark places of poverty; Pat Sloan's *Soviet Democracy*, which argued that Soviet democracy was different from but more profound than capitalist democracy; and G. D. H. Cole lent his powerful intellectual support in *The People's Front*. Two other vintage books were published in 1937: *The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism*, by Robert A. Brady, and Edgar Snow's *Red Star Over China*, which drew back the curtain which had concealed the doings of the Chinese communists since they had been driven out of southern China into the remote northwest.

In 1938 John Strachey asked *What Are We To Do?*, F. Elwyn Jones wrote *The Battle For Peace*, and J. B. S. Haldane, the great scientist, gave advice on air raid precautions in a book called *ARP*. In 1939 *Fallen Bastions*, by G. E. R. Gedye, traced the dreary course of appeasement to Munich, 'Vigilantes' [K. Zilliacus] contributed *Why We Are Losing the Peace*, and the Dean of Canterbury, Hewlett Johnson, celebrated the achievements of the Soviet Union in *The Socialist Sixth of the World*.

Rarely has any publishing venture had the same concentration of academic and journalistic talent as was thrown into the publications of the Left Book Club between 1936 and 1939. The message, well docu-

mented and closely argued, was for collective security against fascist aggression and a people's front movement to enforce it on governments. The books were the central part of the Left Book Club, but it was a political movement as well. In 1939 it had 57,000 members in Britain, who met in discussion groups and organised meetings, lecture tours, plays and films. It brought together on public platforms people of diverse political affiliation, so that a rally in London in 1939 could be addressed by a range of political figures from Harry Pollitt, general secretary of the Communist Party, to Lloyd George, with Paul Robeson as the moving voice of the poor and the black.

The Left Book Club grew steadily in Australia, reaching a maximum of about 4,000 members shortly after Munich.<sup>60</sup> Many of the members simply received and presumably read the publications of the club, but others were more actively involved in groups which discussed the latest books and took part in political activities. In November 1938 there were seventeen groups in New South Wales, fourteen in Victoria, and smaller numbers in the other states.<sup>61</sup> Until late in 1938 the Australian supporters were content to receive all of their reading material from Britain. The launching in November of *Australian Left News* was an important departure which gave notice of a more positive policy of political activity. As the editorial in the first number put it,

The Left Book Club Movement means, if it means anything, a coming together of those who recognise the dangers of the present political and economic position of Australia and of the world in general, on a basis of common action.

In attempting to give the club a more direct local application, the journal reported the doings of all groups, including meetings held, donations to Spanish relief, and so on. It also carried articles on Australian topics. The predicament of the coalminers was the subject of an article by Edgar Ross, editor of *Common Cause*, in the first number. Ross referred to Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* in his introduction to a description of the northern coalfields, where, he said, whole communities were still on the dole. The miners were now fighting a determined campaign to change the social and economic conditions in the coal industry, and this struggle was a part of a more general struggle

to remove the Lyons government, which could not be trusted to do anything to assist the most deprived and disadvantaged citizens. Similarly it could not be trusted to preserve democracy in Australia or prepare Australia to play its proper part in the resistance to fascist aggression. Lloyd Ross tackled the thorny question of the correct attitude to rearmament. He argued that the technical problems of rearmament were inextricably linked with the political: while it was reasonable to support the development of Australian industry, the production of munitions, the training of pilots, and the building of coastal defences, these must be linked with the political purposes to which they would be put. So in the long run 'the best defence of Australia is a system of organised collective security, supported by the people and implemented by *the democratic powers*'.<sup>62</sup> It followed from this that particular questions could only be answered if all the circumstances were taken into account. Questions taken out of context were unanswerable. For example, support for compulsory military training should be conditional on the uses to which Australian forces would be put. If they were to buttress the policies of Chamberlain and Lyons the answer would be different from that which should be given if the purpose was to support collective security.

We answer them [such questions] only in a concrete situation—we support conscription of the Spanish masses against Franco: we assist the defence of the Chinese people against Japanese militarists; we acknowledge the right and the necessity of the Popular Front Government to re-arm; we will take the necessary measures to defend Australia by obtaining the return of a government in whose motives and interests we have confidence. There is no sinister motive in our support of collective security, except our desire to save the world from the horror of war.<sup>63</sup>

The driving force in the Left Book Club, as in the Spanish Relief Committee, was the Communist Party, and at this time, Lloyd Ross, secretary of the New South Wales branch of the Australian Railways Union (ARU), was one of its most effective publicists. His article on defence expressed communist policy but was presented in a manner intended not to antagonise other members of the club who may have been attracted to it from a liberal anti-fascist or even a pacifist standpoint.

In Britain, communists provided the muscle for the Left Book Club to an extent which Victor Gollancz later confessed he had not recognised at the time.<sup>64</sup> But it was, nevertheless, a genuine popular front organisation. In Australia the ingredients for a popular front were much less available, consequently the Left Book Club was more exclusively a vehicle for the expression of communist viewpoints suitably diluted to win popular support in a generally unpropitious climate of opinion. An article in the *Communist Review* lamented the failure of the club to extend its influence more widely. It pointed out that in Britain the club had mobilised not only all kinds of people in the labour movement but also Liberals and Conservatives as well. By contrast in Australia,

Though many members of Parliament are known to be members of the Left Book Club we have seen little or no evidence of any of them being sufficiently touched by the message of the Club to stand boldly forward in the struggle to achieve its aims.<sup>65</sup>

The club did have a significant impact on Australia in influencing trade union opinion and policy. It provided a meeting ground on which communists could make common cause with the handful of people who were seized with the menace of fascism but were not fully persuaded that the Soviet Union was the exemplar of the good society. It was also a fertile recruiting ground for the Communist Party itself, a party whose ultimate revolutionary purpose had become overlaid by a top-dressing of anti-fascism mixed with a faith in the Soviet Union.

It was in the trade unions that the left made its greatest gains in the second half of the 1930s. As the economy slowly and unevenly lifted out of the depression, the frustration and powerlessness of the unions were replaced by a new militancy which sought by trade union action to restore what had been lost during the darker years and to ensure that such losses should never again occur. In this climate communists began to obtain leading positions in powerful trade unions. Reputations made as courageous and consistent fighters in the unemployed workers' movement, or the MMM, or both, carried them into union positions. They

were also assisted, particularly in New South Wales, by the new united front policy which broke down the barriers thrown up during the 'third period' between communists and other militants. A detailed study of the connection between depression experience and later leadership of unions in the Wollongong-Port Kembla region of New South Wales bears out this general proposition.<sup>66</sup> Here, however, the process will be examined in four important unions, the Miners' Federation, the Federated Ironworkers' Association (FIA), the New South Wales Teachers' Federation and the WWF.

In January 1934 W. (Bill) Orr, an eloquent and passionate Scot who as a youth had studied to be a protestant missionary, but who more recently had become known as a leader of the MMM, was elected general secretary of the Miners' Federation. Six months later, on the death of the president, who had been a leading official of the union since the 1890s, Orr was joined by C. (Charlie) Nelson, a fellow member of the MMM, who became acting president and later president. They brought to the union a new aggressive spirit. They had criticised their predecessors for passivity, for their lack of confidence in the rank and file of the union, and for the absence of any positive policies. Orr and Nelson set out to remedy these defects, to lead the miners into struggle to rectify the intolerable conditions caused by the depression and, as a side effect, to help them to an understanding of the communist interpretation of the crisis of capitalism.<sup>67</sup>

Coalmining had been an ailing industry since the war, and the years 1930-3 were merely a particularly depressed interlude in a long-term depression. In a series of pamphlets, *Coal*, *Coal Facts*, and *Mechanisation: Threatened Catastrophe for Coalfields*, Orr and Nelson stated a powerful case. *Common Cause*, the union paper which had been incorporated in the *Labor Daily* in 1925, was resurrected in 1935 and began brightly and persistently to hammer home the analysis and the program. The analysis was that the industry was suffering from low wages and extensive unemployment. Speed-up caused by excessive competition was contributing to unemployment and undermining the health, safety and wages of mine workers. Mechanisation, too, was a threat to employment. Even though it might be inevitable in the long term,



the union was firm that greater efficiency would not be bought at the sole expense of the workers. Safety was also a matter for concern. Occupational diseases such as silicosis took a heavy toll in chronic illness and shortened lives. Accidents were common. Even during the six years of low production between 1928 and 1934 no less than eighty-one miners were killed in New South Wales. This was a higher death rate than in the deeper and more difficult mines of Great Britain, although it was less than that of the United States.

The log of claims which emerged from this thinking was fully articulated by 1937. The union sought a 30-hour week, restoration of wages to pre-depression levels, the introduction of a special pensions fund, and measures to deal with the problems of safety. Miners had no doubt about the justice of their claims but there were some differences about how they were to be won. In general they believed that they could only make gains by industrial struggle, but memories of the great lockout were still fresh and pessimism was widespread. Orr and Nelson advocated a combination of direct action and a tactical use of the arbitration court, but those with other political tendencies within the union did not necessarily accept their strategy. The political allegiance of the majority of miners was to the ALP, while some rejected all political parties and spoke in the language of the IWW and OBU. The aim of the communist leadership was to bring about the greatest possible unity on political and industrial policy.

As applied in the Miners' Federation the united front policy aimed to minimise the effects of political differences in order to unite the miners in the struggle for their union objectives, but at the same time to lead them into political activity in support of the immediate political objectives of the Communist Party. There was no necessary conflict between these two aims. Fascism, it was argued, itself a consequence of the general crisis of capitalism, was the great threat on the international scene: at home the friends of fascism were the enemy. Therefore the bases on which the workers should be united were industrial struggle for improvement of material standards and political action against fascism and the danger of war—the political action in the first instance being directed against those in Australia whose domestic policies were identi-

fied as potentially fascist and at the same time giving comfort to fascism abroad. Thus in April 1935 the central council of the Miners' Federation resolved:

That this Central Council of the Miners' Federation supports the call for a united front of the workers of all political parties in fighting the dangers of war and fascism and for uniting in the struggle against the capitalist offensive.<sup>68</sup>

The central council supported the Congress against War, protested against the exclusion of Kisch and Griffin, and denounced Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia. The motion referring to Abyssinia called for economic and political sanctions, but saw no final solution short of socialism. The motion ended:

In proposing these steps in the mobilising of the working-class forces on a national and international scale against imperialist war, this Council also declares that a final and lasting peace can only be secured by the overthrow of capitalism, which is the cause of imperialist war, and the institution of socialism.<sup>69</sup>

The central council continued to comment on the sequence of crises which led to Munich and beyond. Council was united behind broad communist policy but there were divisions within the union. In his annual report for 1935 Orr claimed an increase of political awareness in the union, but also noted bitter conflict and 'unprincipled sabotage by opportunist forces seeking to make the union subservient to their influences and prevent the union gaining its independence'.<sup>70</sup> He was referring to the struggle for the control of the ALP in New South Wales.

Of the two labor parties in New South Wales, Lang's, commonly known as the State Labor Party, had greater support than the party recognised by the federal party authorities. Against the Lang machine, held together by a mixture of the leader's apocalyptic charisma, toadyism, and strong-arm men, the constitutionally legitimate federal party could make little headway. Paradoxically, at the time when Lang enjoyed the support of the majority of the traditional labour movement, he was an electoral liability in both state and federal politics. In 1936, in

an attempt to restore unity, a special federal conference readmitted the Lang executive as the recognised executive of the party in New South Wales. This produced a formal unity but at the grass roots, in the local branches and in the affiliated unions, the struggle went on. Early in 1938 this grass roots struggle resulted in the formation of the Industrial Labor Party, or the 'Heffron Labor Party', so named for one of its New South Wales parliamentary adherents. While it was outside the formal structure of the ALP, its aim was to build strength in the unions, in the local branches, and in the New South Wales Parliament to the point where it could force a further intervention by federal conference or executive. The industrialists had the moral authority in a contest against Lang's dictatorial clique, the 'inner group' as they were known. In August 1939, at a state conference presided over by the federal president, the industrialists had a majority which swept the executive clean of Lang's men and went on to restore democratic procedures to inner party affairs—not the least of these being the return to the election of the parliamentary leader by caucus rather than by conference, as introduced by Lang in 1926, a practice on which a great deal of his power had rested.

In the political developments which led to the dethronement of Lang, communists had an important part. Their united front policy provided a militant program acceptable to many rank and file labour men who were opposed to the demagogic and machine politics of the Lang junta. Some communists concealed their party membership and took a leading part in the industrial faction's affairs as members of the Labor Party. But the source of the greatest communist influence was the unions they controlled, and of these the Miners' Federation was the most influential. Its delegates were key figures at conferences, and as a union it played a decisive role in 1938 in wresting the control of the *Labor Daily* from Lang. The paper's new board included Nelson as one of its directors.

While the fight for control of the ALP in New South Wales was going on the miners won industrial victories as well. In 1937, in what they designated 'the first round', by strike and court action they restored pre-depression wages and also made some other minor gains. In 1938

they entered the ring for a 'second round'. A six weeks' national strike, the first of such scope since 1916, was followed by extended hearings in the Commonwealth Arbitration Court and legislative action in the New South Wales Parliament. Although the union was dissatisfied with some aspects of the court's decisions and the long delay in implementing them, in general the changes in working conditions were the greatest ever made to the advantage of the workers in the mining or any other industry.<sup>71</sup>

Although the united front bore little fruit at the level of national politics, for a time it had a decisive influence on the politics of the labour movement in New South Wales, which had incidental effects on national politics. In this process the Miners' Federation was the most influential. But other unions were also moving to the left. The FIA elected Ernest Thornton as general secretary in 1936.<sup>72</sup> Thornton was a well-known communist who had stood against Labor Prime Minister Scullin for the seat of Yarra in the 1931 elections. An English immigrant of the early 1920s, he was a man of intelligence, drive and powerful oratory. Although not the most influential leader of the party, his personal characteristics made him the caricaturists' delight—Thornton became the symbol of the 'communist menace'. Progressively, union positions at the branch and national level went to communists, so that by 1940 the FIA, so far as its officials were concerned, was under communist control. Encouraged by the recovery of the metal industries from the depression and stimulated by militant communist officials, the FIA adopted a strategy, so far as the difference in circumstances would permit, similar to that of the miners. Strikes followed by court intervention became the pattern of industrial action. Politically, the branches of the FIA were much more divided than the miners. Lang retained strong support in some branches, particularly in the large branch of Balmain. Nevertheless by 1939, despite the opposition of Lang's supporters, all New South Wales branches had acquired shares in the *Labor Daily* and become affiliated with the Industrial Labor Party.

The concept of the united front had its most unusual application in one of the strongest of the unions of white collar workers—the New South Wales Public School Teachers' Federation. As in other unions,

communists in the Teachers' Federation won positions of leadership by advocating militant policies to restore and improve on salaries and conditions lost during the depression. Initially a small group which grew out of the Educational Workers' League, the communists increased steadily in numbers and influence from 1936 onwards. While the political concept within which they operated was the same as that in other unions, the style of activity was different in a number of ways from that in most other unions. First, with one or two exceptions communists did not reveal their party membership. Second, the limits of militant activity which they advocated were more closely confined than in the FIA or the Miners' Federation. The reasons for secrecy of the organisation were twofold: as public persons, influencing the minds of children in a community generally hostile to communism, their profession of party membership would, they believed, have aroused public protest and probably disciplinary action by the Education Department (a belief which had a good deal of evidence to support it);<sup>73</sup> furthermore, communist teachers believed that there would be less chance of their policies being accepted by the Teachers' Federation if they were known to be members of the party. The style of activity developed in a union with no tradition of direct action was based on publicity. Mass meetings to publicise teachers' demands for increased salaries, smaller classes, and better school buildings were the most characteristic forms of action. They aimed also to involve citizens' committees in combined action for educational improvements; that is, to make greater financial provision for education a political issue. An outstanding example of this was the 1938 conference on 'Education for a Progressive, Democratic Australia'.

The architect and main driving force in executing these policies was S. P. (Sam) Lewis. Supported by able and devoted people whose numbers grew as the policies espoused became more acceptable within the Teachers' Federation, he created a clandestine group within the union which discussed and advocated policies, organised the election of people to union positions, and generally steered the Teachers' Federation from the back seat. By 1942 communists, or people who were prepared to work with them, controlled the Teachers' Federation, but it was a

control within definite limits. All policies pressed for were within the long established traditions of the union, the central one being that the state education system was one of the linchpins of a democratic society and must be preserved and improved. Part of the improvement required better conditions for teachers, so a social good and a trade union objective were made to coincide. In establishing this fusion communists, and above all Lewis, were the inspiration and the means.<sup>74</sup>

Of all the unions which had an influence on general politics and opinion from the mid-1930s the WWF was probably the most influential. Weakened and almost destroyed by the 1928 strike, it survived feebly for the next few years to begin a fight back to life as the depression lifted. By 1938 it was a fighting union again. Improvement in economic conditions was part of the reason for this, but equally important was the new leadership. As with other unions, the depression experience had cleared the ground for a new man, here Jim Healy, who was elected general secretary of the WWF in 1937. He was supported within the union by other able men, such as E. (Ted) Roach, the secretary of the south coast branch, elected in the same year. Healy was one of the most remarkable of Australian trade union leaders. A big and gently spoken man, whose north of England purity of speech was never roughened by Australian experience, he always commanded respect, even amongst those to whom his ideas were anathema. As a communist he pursued communist policy; as a trade union leader he made it more palatable to those who were by interest and inclination deeply opposed to it.

Because of their place in the chain of production, wharf labourers held a key position, if the unions were to attempt to influence foreign policy. ACTU conferences could and did adopt resolutions, but only the WWF could put them into effect. They did so in 1938 when waterside workers refused to load the *Dalfram* with pig-iron for Japan. They maintained the ban for more than two months—despite a crescendo of threats by Menzies and the finger-wagging admonitions of newspaper leader-writers. It is tempting to paint this disinterested and costly action for the men involved as flowing directly from the new national leadership, but recent work has shown this would be an over-

simplification.<sup>75</sup> It was an action in line with the general policy of the union but was opposed initially in the case of the *Dalfram* by Healy, because he was afraid that the government would apply the Transport Workers' Act which had helped to break the union in 1929. It must be attributed to local circumstances in addition to general policy. It was led by Roach, the new branch secretary, who was one of a group of militant and mostly communist leaders who had emerged from community struggles during the depression and in the process had acquired great influence. As expressed by Richardson,

This influence had been built up by involvement in the political protest movement of the depression, by determined efforts to improve working conditions, and most especially by a total involvement in the social concerns of the community. As they had done during the depression, strike advocates carried their dispute into the streets. Propaganda campaigns were mounted in the coalfield communities, at Port Kembla and in the streets of Wollongong. Demonstrators demanded peace and work, and suggested that, while the one could best be achieved by a government which refused to provide aggressor nations with 'munitions materials', the other required politicians who displayed more concern for the unemployed, the destitute and the workers, and less concern for the profits of trade.<sup>76</sup>

The pig-iron dispute was a political strike but its roots lay deep in social experience.

### 3 The Imperialist War?

IN summing up the 'mind of the nation' at the outbreak of World War II, Paul Hasluck wrote in 1952 that

The Australian people entered the war with a united will to resist Hitlerite aggression. A month later there were clear signs of flagging interest.<sup>1</sup>

He explains the flagging interest by the success of the Blitzkrieg in Poland, the German peace offensive, the appeals for peace from Belgium and the Netherlands, and later, the diversion of attention to the war between the Soviet Union and Finland, the popularisation of the idea of the 'phoney war' by communists and, in his words, 'home-bred Australian wiseacres'. In addition the hemisphere and the season had a part. Grim winter was advancing in Europe but Australians were 'being lured by nature to the accustomed languorous sun-bathing on golden beaches'.

From what has been said in the last chapter it will be evident that this interpretation understates the deep divisions in the community and exaggerates the importance of resistance to 'Hitlerite aggression' as the motive for the declaration of war. In his announcement of war the Prime Minister spoke of Hitler's ambition and the need to meet force by force, but in essence it was simply an expression of the traditional relationship with Britain. The law, as he saw it, was that Britain was at war with Germany, therefore Australia was also at war with Germany. Behind this lay an imperial sentiment which sustained the law: 'There can be no doubt that where Great Britain stands there stand the people of the entire British world'.<sup>2</sup> While less imbued with the spirit of Empire, and with qualifications such as the decision of the Labor Party to retain its separate entity and an assertion of the need to prevent profiteering and to preserve civil liberties, Curtin took up essentially the same position. He said:

In this crisis, facing the reality of war, the Labour Party stands for its platform. That platform is clear. We stand for the maintenance of Australia as an integral



part of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Therefore, the party will do all that is possible to safeguard Australia, and, at the same time, having regard to its platform, will do its utmost to maintain the integrity of the British Commonwealth.<sup>3</sup>

Anti-nazi and anti-fascist feeling was less important in the government's decision that Australia was at war, and the Labor Party's acknowledgment of the fact, than was the acceptance of the simple proposition that Australia, as a part of the Empire (or Commonwealth), was necessarily committed.

The communists, soon to be the best organised dissident minority, although shaken by the German-Soviet non-aggression pact, were carried on by the logic of their policy of the previous five years. The *Communist Review* declared (Oct. 1939) that:

thanks to the policy of the ruling circles in Britain and France, these efforts [to prevent war] have failed and the war has extended. Since this is so the working class will do all that is possible to bring about the speedy victory over fascism.

But the fight against fascism abroad will only be successful to the degree that democracy at home is maintained and extended.

Those who in the past have shown themselves to be the friends of Hitler must be cleared from office. An anti-fascist war can only be waged consistently by an anti-fascist government, and the governments of Chamberlain and Menzies are anything but that.

A similar state of mind was reflected in a bitter resolution of the New South Wales TLC:

while condemning the aggression of Hitler Fascism and supporting the struggle for Polish independence, [the TLC] declares that the present Government which was discredited prior to the outbreak of war and does not possess the confidence of the Australian people, is seeking to use the war emergency to stifle criticism and to avoid facing the people. For this reason we endorse the attitude of Mr. J. Curtin in refusing to join in a coalition with this discredited Government . . . The present Government which supported the appeasement policy encouraging Hitler fascism to develop its aggression leading to the present war cannot be entrusted with the task of conducting this war in the interests of Australian democracy.<sup>4</sup>

A week later Tom Wright, a leading communist spokesman in the TLC, moved successfully a limited statement of war aims:

We support the war against Hitler Fascism on the basis that its aims must be confined to the destruction of the Nazi dictatorship, liberty for the German People, and independence for Poland, Czechoslovakia and Austria, and that peace be established on these terms.<sup>5</sup>

While expressing support for the war these statements adumbrated what was soon to become the new communist interpretation that the war was a consequence of imperialism and hence not deserving support.

Communists had been thrown into confusion by recent events. After five years in which everything had been secondary to the proposition that fascism in general and nazism in particular were the undeviating enemies of the Soviet Union, of communism, and of democracy, and that the prevention of war depended upon collective security, they were presented with an entirely new set of circumstances. They had savagely criticised the British and French governments for treating with Hitler; appeasement was a betrayal of the possibility of maintaining peace; in addition it was seen as an attempt by the western powers to divert German aggression against the Soviet Union. They believed that the Soviet would have fought for Czechoslovakia and were convinced that Britain's overtures to Moscow to decide military measures for the defence of Poland were at best half-hearted, but they were not prepared for the German-Soviet non-aggression pact.

A case can be made for Stalin's diplomacy from the occupation of Prague in March to the signing of the non-aggression pact on 23 August. No one has done this with greater understanding than Isaac Deutscher who, as historian, combined a deep detestation of Stalin and Stalinism with a cool appraisal of the combination of forces within which he made decisions.<sup>6</sup> The case he makes, or perhaps the light he throws on Stalin's decision, is purely in terms of *realpolitik*; Stalin was buying time and attempting to avoid a situation in which Russia would confront Germany alone. But communists (and Australian communists were no different from those of other countries) had seen the opposition to Hitler not only as a matter of political and military expediency but also as a moral crusade in which they above all others were carrying the banner of truth and freedom against the forces of darkness. How

then to account for the pact? They sought the answers in the classic works of Leninism.

Stalin had already spoken in March of a new imperialist war which was, he said, 'already in its second year, a war waged over huge territory, stretching from Shanghai to Gibraltar and involving over 500 million people'.<sup>7</sup> But at the same time he had left the door open to mutually contradictory interpretations of his remarks. He attacked the nazi aggressors, abused the western friends of nazism, declared his willingness to have friendly relations with all of his neighbours, pledged support for all victims of nazi aggression, asserted that the aim of the appeasers was to lure Germany and Russia into war so that they would mutually exhaust each other, demanded that the western powers abandon appeasement, but hinted that if they did not he might come to terms with Hitler.

When the non-aggression pact was announced and the German invasion of Poland followed ten days later, Stalin's references to an imperialist war began to have a new relevance. If it was assumed, as communists did assume, that the decisions of Stalin were in the interests not only of the Soviet Union but of the world revolutionary movement, then an explanation of his actions had to be found in terms other than those which had been current for five years. If it were an imperialist war then his agreement with Hitler was both understandable and legitimate. So communists, or at least some of them, went back to studying Lenin on imperialist war.

Probably the clearest statement of Lenin's views on war is contained in his 1915 pamphlet, *Socialism and War*.<sup>8</sup> In this he set out his general attitude to war and then applied it to the war in progress. Of war he wrote:

Socialists have always condemned wars between nations as barbarous and brutal. Our attitude towards war, however, is fundamentally different from that of the bourgeois pacifists (supporters and advocates of peace) and of the anarchists. We differ from the former in that we understand the inevitable connection between wars and the class struggle within a country; we understand that wars cannot be abolished unless classes are abolished and socialism is created; we also differ in that we regard civil wars, i.e., wars waged by an oppressed class against the oppressor

class, by slaves against slave-holders, by serfs against landowners, and by wage-workers against the bourgeoisie, as fully legitimate, progressive and necessary. We Marxists differ from both pacifists and anarchists in that we deem it necessary to study each war historically (from the standpoint of Marx's dialectical materialism) and separately. (p. 299)

Such a study of World War I, he considered, led to the conclusion that it was an imperialist war in which right was on neither side. Britain and France were not fighting for the liberation of Belgium but to retain the colonies which they have 'grabbed and robbed'. Germany had been 'done out' of colonies and Britain, France, and Russia ('that veritable prison of nations') oppressed more peoples than Germany but 'it is not the business of socialists to help the younger and stronger robber (Germany) to plunder the older and overgorged robbers'. In fact it was the duty of socialists to take advantage of the wartime difficulties, political and economic, of their respective nations to advance the socialist revolution and the downfall of capitalism.

The main barrier to carrying through this correct socialist policy, Lenin believed, was the apostasy of the parties of the Second International. The 1912 Basle conference had declared against the impending war and in favour of taking revolutionary advantage of it. In the event: (with minor exceptions, notably the bolsheviks), the parties of the Second International had declared in favour of the defence of their own countries. This position Lenin designated as social chauvinism, socialism in words but chauvinism in deeds, leading to the subordination of the working class to their own national bourgeoisie, and an alliance with the latter for the purpose of oppressing other nations and of fighting for dominant-nation privileges. In contrast with social chauvinism, the correct policy for the revolutionary parties in all countries involved in the war would be to work for the defeat of their own government and to take advantage of the military reverses to convert the imperialist war into civil war which would lead to the establishment of socialism. Until the crisis came it was the task of revolutionaries to foster all manifestations of war-weariness, such as fraternisation of soldiers from opposing sides and any demands for peace.

After some hesitation and conflict of opinion the CPA leadership, in

line with communist parties throughout the world, decided that withdrawal of the Soviet Union to a position of neutrality meant that the war had become an imperialist war to which the Leninist analysis applied. It reiterated the dismal history of appeasement, the failure of the western powers to attempt seriously to reach agreement with the Soviet Union, and designated Chamberlain and Menzies as only marginally different from Hitler. As for the ALP, it was following the path of the European social democratic parties in World War I.

In the *Communist Review* of December 1939 J. D. Blake quoted Lenin:

In formulating the question scientifically, i.e., from the point of view of the relations between classes in present day society, we must say that the majority of the social democratic parties . . . have joined their general staffs, their governments, their bourgeoisie, thus taking a stand against the proletariat. (p. 715)

He declared that this was an imperialist war, 'a war between two conflicting groups of imperialist powers for world supremacy'. He referred to Curtin's announcement that Labor stood 'for the maintenance of Australia as an integral part of the British Commonwealth of Nations'. The British Commonwealth, he thought, was a mere euphemism for an empire which enslaved and exploited hundreds of millions of people in India, the Sudan and other colonies. Blake referred back to Curtin's defence of the Munich agreement. Wasn't this a contradiction? Then he had placed his faith on peace by negotiation but now he was for war. But the seeming contradiction was not a contradiction in fact, for in both cases he had supported the policy of Chamberlain and the British imperialists. This, of course, was the obverse side of the position that the communists had now taken. In both cases they had opposed the stand of the British imperialists.

The volte-face of the communist parties in the first two months of the war was a direct response to Stalin's deal with Hitler, but not a simple response. During the five years in which communists had been the most urgent advocates of collective security they had always assumed that this was the only way to contain German aggression. They believed also that the prime objective of Hitler's aggressive intentions was the Soviet

Union, in which he might easily have either the tacit or active support of the western powers. Collective security could prevent war but, if it failed to do so, it would ensure that in any war fought the Soviet Union would be in alliance with the western powers against Hitler and his potential fascist allies. The very presence of the Soviet Union in the alliance would mean that it was not simply a war amongst capitalist powers for the re-division of the world, however much the motives of the British and French governments might be suspect. The German-Soviet non-aggression pact, followed by the treaty of friendship, destroyed this whole pattern of thought at a blow. Some explanation of the entirely new alignment had to be found. It was not found, as it could have been, in a judgment that Stalin was trading moral authority for time. It was found in black and white terms with the black remaining black and the white becoming dark grey.

The consequences for Australia were of the same kind but not of the same order as for France or for England. In France the change in the policy of the leadership of the influential Communist Party caused confusion in its own ranks and dismay amongst the people generally. In Britain it broke up the fragile structure of the popular front. In Australia the main practical consequences of the change in line were the tactical conclusions drawn from it. In practice it meant the continued advocacy of improved working conditions, opposition to any diminution of civil liberties, and a call for peace negotiations. The call for peace was the somersault. From being the sternest advocates of one world, the communists became the isolationists, even though the isolationism was dressed in the clothes of a resurrected collective security: negotiations which would bring the Soviet Union back into Europe. The difficulties of the communists became greater with the invasion of Finland, but that too could be explained, as could the occupation of eastern Poland, as a necessary move to secure the Russian frontier and strengthen its bargaining position in future attempts to resurrect collective security.<sup>9</sup>

The *Bulletin* naturally gloated over the further evidence of communist duplicity.

Nowhere did the Parlor Pinks fall heavier for the Soviet peace swindle than in Australia. Right up to the day of Stalin's invasion of Finland they were apologists for that alleged apostle of peace and his works . . . The swindle has now been self-exposed; but it would be too much to expect that the dupes who swallowed so much have got all the patter out of their systems overnight. They will be heard from again, still babbling that 'Russia's goal is peace and brotherhood, not war and dominance.' (20 Dec. 1939)

The *Bulletin's* reaction was predictable and consistent with its past rumblings. Trotskyists, too, saw Stalin's moves as quite in accord with their previous interpretations of the Soviet Union and the Australian Communist Party as its either treacherous or naïve instrument.

Following the Munich pact, Trotskyists began to forecast that Stalin would come to terms with Hitler. For example the *New International*, the most influential Trotskyist journal received in Australia, argued that Munich was the final failure of the policy of collective security. The alternatives were to return to a position of international revolutionism (which was impossible for Stalin, who would be the first victim of any genuine new revolutionary movement), or to reach agreement with Germany. The *New International* (Nov. 1938) confidently predicted that the second course would be followed. The argument was that Stalin's sole aim was to maintain Russia's territorial boundaries. He had been prepared to enter alliances with the western capitalist powers. This had failed; so why not an alliance with Hitler?

To serve this aim [defence of Russia] it was proper to come to agreement with the class enemy as represented by the democratic imperialisms—this was the policy of the Popular Front. Then why not, when that fails, by agreement with the class enemy as represented by the fascist imperialisms? And, in point of fact, there is no fundamental difference between the two tactics. (p. 325)

Thus the new relationship between Hitler and Stalin, made public by the announcement of the non-aggression pact, was no surprise to those of Trotskyist tendency. But there remained a problem which, during 1940, was to split the Trotskyist movement in the USA, with repercussions in other countries including Australia. The problem was: to what extent was it still valid to regard the Soviet Union as a workers' state?

To the day of his assassination by an agent of the Russian secret police (GPU), Trotsky continued to insist that to some significant extent the Soviet remained a workers' state, and hence it was the duty of the world revolutionary movement to defend it against the military operations of any other country. Trotsky saw the Soviet Union as a bureaucratically deformed terrorist dictatorship, but which retained in its social structure, in particular in the replacement of private by public ownership, the potentiality of development into a true socialist society. In reply to Bruno Rizzi, whose opinions were later amplified by James Burnham, he asserted that it was not true that the bureaucracy constituted a new class which had substituted for socialism a new type of bureaucratic capitalism. Stalinism was not a new order of society but simply a divergence from the socially determined course of history. As Isaac Deutscher puts it, in Trotsky's view

Stalinism was not the norm of the new society, as Rizzi thought, but an historic abnormality; not the final outcome of the revolution, but an aberration from the revolutionary course.<sup>10</sup>

It was the task of the true revolutionary movement to overthrow Stalin and his sycophants but not to permit the destruction of the economic base of socialism which had been laid. As for the war, when it came, it was for Trotsky essentially a continuation of World War I, and in this war, as in the last, the duty of communists was to raise the slogan of revolutionary defeatism. He saw this policy as distinct from the passive defeatism which afflicted the parties of the Third International, whose revolutionary consciousness had been eroded by the years of Stalinist opportunism. Nevertheless he continued to argue for the defence of the Soviet Union. Just as World War II was a continuation of World War I, an invasion of Russia by Germany or the western powers or a combination of both, any of which he thought possible, would be a continuation of the wars of intervention. He argued in support of the Russian occupation of Poland on the grounds of strategic necessity as well as that of the 'lesser evil'. In his colourful words:

The occupation of Eastern Poland by the Red Army is to be sure a 'lesser evil' in



comparison to the occupation of the same territory by Nazi troops. But this lesser evil was obtained because Hitler was assured of achieving a greater evil. If somebody sets, or helps to set a house on fire and afterwards saves five out of ten of the occupants of the house in order to convert them into his own semi-slaves, that is to be sure a lesser evil than to have burned the entire ten. But it is dubious that this firebug merits a medal for the rescue. If nevertheless a medal were given to him he should be shot immediately after as in the case of the hero in one of Victor Hugo's novels.<sup>11</sup>

As with Poland so with the invasion of Finland: Stalin was justified, Trotsky argued, in defending the exposed Russian flank against a probable attack from Hitler. This defence marked the final breach with some of his more powerful American supporters, a breach that had been widening for some time. Deutscher describes it:

As Stalin's invasion of Finland was met in the Allied countries by a campaign for 'switching the war', and for armed intervention in favour of Finland, Trotsky called all the more emphatically for the 'defence of the Soviet Union'. This brought an outcry from his erstwhile disciples: 'Has Trotsky become Stalin's apologist? Does he want us to become Stalin's stooges?!' 'No Comrade Trotsky, . . .', Burnham replied, 'we will not fight alongside the G.P.U. for the salvation of the counter-revolution in the Kremlin.'<sup>12</sup>

The strength of Trotskyism in the United States in the late thirties derived from the group of brilliant intellectuals who wrote for the *Partisan Review*, and the activists of the Socialist Workers' Party and the writers for its journal, the *New Internationalist*. Amongst the former were leading writers and critics including Edmund Wilson, Sidney Hook, James T. Farrell, Dwight Macdonald, and Mary McCarthy. Amongst the latter the leading figures were James Burnham and Max Schachtman. From 1938 to 1940 one after another they abandoned the Trotskyism which for a time had eased the pain of their disillusion with the Russia of the great purges and the Marxism of the Stalinists. At first Burnham and Schachtman fiercely attacked 'the intellectuals in retreat', then in late 1939 and early 1940 they joined them. Refusal to 'defend the Soviet Union' and to advocate revolutionary defeatism was followed by the denunciation of the Soviet Union as 'imperialist'. But for men used to thinking in the terms of Marxism the final break with

Trotsky had to be made in terms of an argument about the nature of Soviet society. Burnham and Schachtman declared, contrary to Trotsky but depending mainly on his writings, that the Soviet was no longer a workers' state in any sense. The general trend throughout the world, they argued, was towards bureaucratic collectivism, and in this process the Soviet Union had gone farther and fastest. The full argument was to appear in 1941 in Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution*. Of Burnham, Deutscher remarks with some acerbity:

He had been a 'good Bolshevik-Leninist', even a 'fierce enemy of American imperialism', as long as he felt that he was riding the tide of history. But having, with Trotsky's unwitting assistance, convinced himself that the managerial class was riding it, he hastened to cast off the ideological ballast of Marxism and to proclaim the advent of the managerial revolution.<sup>13</sup>

Burnham's intellectual progression led in 1949 to *The Coming Defeat of Communism*, a handbook for anti-communists in the cold war, of which an edition was published in Sydney in 1950 with a foreword, recommending it, by W. M. Hughes.

In Australia, following the outbreak of war, the Trotskyist critique had two main effects. In small pockets in the trade union movement it provided an ideological reason for resistance to Communist Party certainties. For some intellectuals, particularly in Sydney, it remained as the basis of the same kind of scepticism about the war which had restrained them from any enthusiasm for the popular front against fascism in the pre-war years. Both of these effects will be considered in the next chapter. The *Catholic Worker*, too, had doubts about the war. On 2 September 1939 it followed its normal denunciation of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union with a statement of policy for Australia:

A clear issue faces Australian workers. In any decision as to peace or war, the interests of Australians must come first. We must not participate in a European War simply because England is involved. This is not any deviation of loyalty to Great Britain. It is simply a statement that in these realistic days the loyalty of Australians is first of all to Australia. It is not a statement that we must kow-tow to Germany or any other nation. It is simply a statement that the interests of Australians must be placed first. If we fight, it must be because Australia is imperilled.

Four weeks later (30 Sept.) the *Catholic Worker*, having absolved God from any blame for the war, attributed it primarily to the 'failure of all people and Governments to seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice' and secondarily to 'the Capitalist struggle for markets, German aggression and Communist treachery. . . .' It stated a view on Australia's responsibility which read in part:

That no Australian should be conscripted for military service overseas, as Australian Christians may lawfully believe it to be their duty to abstain from bearing arms in Europe during the present war;

That, while bearing in mind the truth that Nazis and Communists are our brothers in Christ, Australian Christians should render Britain, France and Poland the utmost material and moral aid;

That, in order to defend Australia from unjust and unprovoked aggression, Australian Christians should be prepared to lay down their lives, if need be, in the defence of the Australian people on Australian soil.

It went on to point to the falling birthrate, the loss of 250,000 people unborn (the lost nine divisions), the evils of birth control and the need for child endowment.

National security demands the security of the family. Our first line of defence is the Australian home. The Government must fortify the home by economic assistance for those who have children.

In the view of the *Catholic Worker* the war should not be the pretext for avoiding the implementation of its social policy.

For the first two years of the war the *Catholic Worker* continued to be highly critical of the government. Child endowment was at the centre of its social policy and the 5s. per child granted by the government it regarded as quite insufficient. In general it called for wage rises for the lower income earners, a harsh limitation on profits (they should not exceed 2½ per cent in wartime), but it had difficulty with the major industrial dispute of 1940—the 3-months miners' strike. It declared that the miners' industrial claims were justified, that the proprietors were wrong, but that it could not support the evident political aims of the miners' communist leaders. Its solution was a national coal board, sub-

sequently adopted by the Menzies government and later elaborated by Curtin and Chifley. The *Catholic Worker* remained cool towards the war, opposed conscription, condemned the Soviet invasion of Finland, demanded that friendly overtures should be made to Japan, but above all concentrated on the communist menace. In its view the communists would take advantage of the social distress and chaos caused by the war to seize power.

The withdrawal of communist support knocked away the main militant prop for the full involvement of the labour movement in the war. At the same time it reversed the alliances: the left became isolationist, and with varying degrees of enthusiasm the previous isolationists were in favour of fighting the war. The April 1940 congress of the ACTU affirmed the policy of Empire loyalty as stated by Curtin, but associated with it a request for government control of war material and industry and the maintenance of civil liberties. The motion was carried by a bare majority of two (67 to 65). Amendments declaring the war imperialist, and proposing either a call to the workers in all belligerent countries to overthrow their own capitalist class or an international conference to negotiate peace were defeated by roughly the same small margins.<sup>14</sup>

The new communist line had its greatest effect in New South Wales, where it forced a new split in the ALP. The Unity Conference of 1939, which removed Lang and his followers from the leadership, replaced them with an executive under very strong communist influence—in some cases the members of the executive being secret members of the Communist Party. At the same time the amendment of the rules which restored the election of the parliamentary leader to caucus resulted in the appointment of W. J. McKell as parliamentary leader. So long as communist policy continued its pre-war direction there was no reason for conflict between the New South Wales executive and the parliamentary leader or the federal officials. But with the change in direction there was. The potential became a reality at the Easter conference of the ALP in 1940—the issue being a statement on foreign policy. The statement declared that:

The Labour Party has always been opposed to imperialist wars, and to-day in the present war situation we demand that every energy should be utilised to bring about a cessation of hostilities and the establishment of peace at the earliest opportunity on a just and equitable basis in order to avoid the needless slaughter of millions. We declare that the Australian people have nothing to gain from the continuance of the war. On the contrary, the management of the war in the hands of the anti-Labour Menzies Government, in association with the anti-Labour Chamberlain Government, means that the war is being pursued in the interests of big finance and monopolists.<sup>15</sup>

Such general anti-capitalist opinions had from time to time found their way into ALP statements and, while embarrassing to moderates, may not have precipitated the crisis which followed the conference. It was a reference to Russia, in what became known immediately as the 'hands off Russia' resolution, which tipped the fat into the fire. By a vote of 195 to 88 the conference resolved that,

while being opposed to Australian participation in overseas conflicts, it is also opposed to any effort of the anti-Labour Government to change the direction of the present war by an aggressive act against any other country with which we are not at war, including the Soviet Union.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* (29 March) considered the statement to be near-treasonable and clear evidence that communists had taken control of the ALP in New South Wales. It was, said the *Herald*, a declaration of friendship for 'the butcher of Finland, the supporter if not yet the formal ally of the predatory Nazi despotism with which the British Empire is at war'. The federal executive of the ALP expressed concern and resolved that the 'hands off Russia' decision be expunged from the records.<sup>16</sup> It was also an opportunity for Lang, who saw his chance to make a comeback.

Driven from the leadership of the ALP, Lang formed a new party with the decisions of the Easter conference as the justification. At a meeting on 18 April, supported by some state and federal parliamentary members, he launched the Australian Labor Party (non-communist). New South Wales now had two labor parties, the 'non-communist' party having six federal parliamentarians as adherents. The state was

soon to have a third party. In August the federal executive, with an election expected in the near future, suspended the New South Wales executive and appointed a new body, including some of the old members but excluding communists and pro-communists. The excluded members then called a conference which constituted a new party which became known as the State Labor Party, or the Hughes-Evans party, after its two best known members. Whereas the Lang group was able to exercise some influence in Parliament, the Hughes-Evans group, lacking any parliamentary adherents, was not. Its main function was to provide a focus for those who accepted neither the federal executive nor the Lang positions, and also to provide a voice for the now illegal Communist Party. It was later, after the Nazi invasion of Russia and the change in the communists' attitude to the war, to amalgamate with the Communist Party.

The passive defeatism which caused the furore in the New South Wales ALP had only one major industrial consequence—the miners' strike of 1940. And even it was not entirely, or perhaps even mainly, a consequence of communist policy. The strike began on 11 March 1940 and was not settled until 15 May. Industrially it was a continuation of the 1938 strike which, as we have seen, had resulted in an award made by Mr Justice Drake-Brockman in June 1939, granting a 40-hour week for virtually all men employed in and about the mines, surface workers as well as miners. In addition, time pay rates were removed, so that men whose hours were reduced could continue to receive approximately the same weekly pay as previously. When the matter went before the full bench of the Arbitration Court, it decided that the forty hours should not apply to most of the surface workers, who were in the main skilled workers organised in craft unions such as the Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association (FEDFA) and the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU). The decision to strike for the restoration of the original award was made by mass meetings. Throughout the strike press comment was restrained. The *Sydney Morning Herald* (11 March) reported it as a continuation of the 1938 dispute. It was pained that the miners had taken the law into their own hands by striking against a decision of the court, but felt that the court decision was un-

fortunate. Towards the end of April the Prime Minister visited the northern coalfields, to find the Kurri Kurri picture theatre, where he proposed to address the miners, empty. The miners were attending a rally at the sports ground. Menzies went to the miners' rally and was granted leave to address them, but to no good effect. Following his address the meeting adopted unanimously a motion that:

this mass meeting of mineworkers in the Kurri Kurri area repudiates the threats of the Federal and State Governments and the Prime Minister, in his endeavours to break the loyalty of the workers to their elected leaders, and are determined to carry on this fight to a successful conclusion.<sup>17</sup>

Despite press reports that the miners' resolve was weakening, it was not until early May that any clear signs of this were evident. On 3 May the government announced its intention of opening the mines with volunteer labour. Five days later, but not necessarily as a result of the threat, the northern district decided by a small majority to return to work, but other districts voted against it. The deadlock was broken by Hitler. On 11 May the offensive against France began; the 'phoney war' was over. Within a few days secret talks involving the combined mining unions, the Commonwealth and state governments, and the ACTU resulted in an agreement to end the strike. The terms of settlement included the calling of an immediate conference to be presided over by the Chief Judge of the Arbitration Court, and an undertaking by the unions to abide by the decisions of the court for the duration of the war.<sup>18</sup> Although the attitude of the communists to the war was a factor in the strike, the prompt return to work immediately the war situation in Europe became serious suggests that communist control was far from complete.

Despite its bold front the morale of the Communist Party was low. Some members had rejected the turnabout of October 1939 and left the party, mostly unobtrusively, but in one case with a denunciation of the party and the Soviet Union in articles in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.<sup>19</sup> For most, the unease was lessened by the apparent rigour the Leninist theory brought to bear on their uncertainties and by the continuing belief that the government was pro-fascist and, given the least

opportunity, would support any moves to channel the war against the Soviet Union. The main efforts of the party were directed to preparing itself for the time when it would be declared unlawful. These took place at two levels. First there was the preparation of a party apparatus which could function illegally. Leading party members had to find places to live where they would be unlikely to be discovered. These were often in the homes of people whose sympathies were not widely known. Arrangements had to be made for the families of those most likely to be imprisoned or interned. All communists, except the most casual, hid their books in what they hoped were unlikely places, a not unreasonable precaution as, when the police raids started, books ranging from the works of Lenin to the works of Shakespeare were impounded by a police force which seemed to assume that everything in print was dangerous. At the second level the communists were both involved in and dependent on the continuing campaign in defence of civil liberties.

At the outbreak of war the Commonwealth government had assumed extensive powers to control people, organisations, and expressions of opinion. By the National Security Act passed on 8 September 1939 the government was empowered to make regulations 'on almost any subject which might plausibly be linked with the defence of the Commonwealth or the efficient prosecution of the war'.<sup>20</sup> Its powers did not extend to the imposition of military or industrial conscription, although a second Act of June 1940 permitted industrial conscription.

For the first nine months of the war there were few prosecutions, the regulations being used in the main to set up a system of censorship of the mails and the press. In the autumn of 1940, as opinion hardened against communists and as the coal strike aggravated antagonisms, the government adopted more stringent methods, under which all publications, even those minimally concerned with politics, were subject to censorship—a censorship which acted very unevenly. As Dorothy Fitzpatrick rightly says, censorship authorities 'often took it as their duty to stop all political criticism'.<sup>21</sup> The next step was to impose strict limits on the subject matter permitted to eight communist and trade union papers—they were forbidden to mention the war, strikes, or the Soviet



Union. Thus, the last number of the *Communist Review* issued legally, in May 1940, had as its first article the sermon on the mount printed in bold type. Although the coal strike, on which the hostility towards communists had focused for three months, ended on 16 May with a pledge to abide by arbitration awards for the duration of the war, the war itself had taken a new turn—the German march to the west had begun five days earlier.

On Saturday afternoon, 15 June, the government gazetted regulations giving it power to declare any organisation unlawful, confiscate its property, prevent its members from meeting, and prosecute anyone found in possession of any of its publications, even those which had been published legally and after censorship. The Communist Party, the League for Peace and Democracy, and a few other bodies were declared unlawful. In the early hours of the following morning and in the succeeding weeks police mounted raids on offices and houses, and great quantities of assorted literature were impounded. That these raids and the booty snared were indiscriminate is evidenced by the critical press comment—a criticism to which the government responded by temporarily imposing a licensing system on the whole press under the control of Sir Keith Murdoch—Baron Murdock, as the *Catholic Worker* dubbed him. For the next year numerous prosecutions occurred, with the usual penalty a term of six months imprisonment. For two men, Horace Ratliff and Max Thomas, imprisonment was followed by indefinite internment. (They were later released by the Labor government.)

While there was little sympathy in the community generally with the communist stand as such, there was some fear that the process of suppression, once begun, might extend indefinitely. Left intellectuals hid their books and guarded their words, and trade unionists and other people who had co-operated with communists in unions and other organisations feared for their freedom. The most effective group in opposing the consequences of the government's actions was the Council for Civil Liberties, centred on Melbourne—more precisely on Brian Fitzpatrick. Before the war, the council had represented a wide spectrum of political opinion held together by a common opposition to

illiberal policies in general and the banning of books in particular. A censorship policy which sought to protect Australians from perversion by Joyce, Lawrence, and Aldous Huxley as well as Palme Dutt, Lenin, and Marx gave the council plenty to bite on. The council divided acrimoniously in July 1939 over the attitude to be taken to the National Register, which had been boycotted by the ACTU. From then on its public figures were Fitzpatrick, Maurice Blackburn and E. J. Ward.

Fitzpatrick (whose life and work will, I hope, be accorded the attention they deserve by historians) was a left-wing intellectual, strongly influenced by Marxism but unprepared to accept the authoritarianism of the communists of his time. Maurice Blackburn was a civil libertarian in the classic mould, more influenced by Mill than Marx. Eddie Ward, who learned his politics in the back streets of Paddington long before it became the headquarters of Sydney's flagon and gallery culture, detested Menzies and all his works. Blackburn and Ward spoke and voted against the restrictive legislation in Parliament, Fitzpatrick and Blackburn wrote articles and pamphlets warning against the danger of by-passing the courts—for example, Fitzpatrick's pamphlet, 'National Security and Individual Insecurity'—and the council assisted in the defence of individuals before the courts. Not all members of the Council for Civil Liberties were untroubled by the role they were playing. It is clear from her diaries that Nettie Palmer, for one, was torn by conflicting pressures. Not in sympathy with Communist Party policy but often identified with it by its opponents, she was also deeply worried by the illiberal tendencies of the government, in particular by such reactionary ideological warriors as A. G. Cameron and Thorby.

The restrictive legislation did not destroy the Communist Party's organisation. It was far from a time of terror. But it did mute the voices of its members and send its leaders into hiding, where they polished up their theoretical arguments and issued illegal papers and pamphlets. They played little open part in politics from mid-1940 to mid-1941, their main efforts being devoted to surviving as an organisation.

The emphasis on divisions in the community and opposition to the war should not, however, be exaggerated. A large number of Aus-

tralian readily joined the armed services. In the first two years of the war about 150,000 men voluntarily joined the AIF, many of the enlistments occurring in mid-1940 in response to the critical war situation in Europe. In addition, by the end of 1941 the RAAF had a strength of 60,000 and the navy 20,000. The Citizen Military Force (CMF), trained for home defence, numbered more than 200,000. In total, Australians under arms bore a relationship to total population similar to that in Britain and USA.<sup>22</sup> The motives which actuated men to enlist voluntarily must remain a matter of speculation but they were certainly mixed and varied. Patriotism, empire loyalty, the chance of adventure and the chance of a job must be included amongst them. The last of these motives was incorporated in the wry language of the soldiers, early enlistments often being referred to (by themselves) as economic conscripts. Whatever reservations men had were removed in the second stage of the war—or, as some have suggested, the second war.

## 4 The Great Patriotic War

THE unity of will which Hasluck mistakenly attributed to the nation in 1939 became a fact by the end of 1941. The reasons are self-evident: the German invasion of Russia changed the nature of the war in the communist interpretation and lessened the hesitations of all anti-fascists; the Japanese attack in the Pacific placed Australia under immediate threat; and for the labour movement a Labor government in Canberra from October 1941 created confidence that the war was being fought for democratic ends. As Eric Lambert, in his splendid novel of *Australians at war*, puts it,

As the truck swung back on to the road and made for Tobruk, certain words of Henry Gilbertson's came to Dick: . . . a gigantic plot against democracy and the common man whose spearhead is Nazi Germany . . . but it's the real war all right now—the anti-fascist war! . . .<sup>1</sup>

But the change did not occur overnight.

The invasion of Russia caught the Communist Party on the wrong foot. Its surprise is encapsulated in an illegal *Communist Review* dated July 1941. Its front cover bears the slogan, "Forward to Victory" —Stalin', but its main political comment is a continued criticism of reformism as embodied in the ALP. In an article by 'McShane' commenting on the recent electoral victory of the ALP led by McKell in New South Wales, the Labor Party continues to be seen as the political means by which capitalist policies are made acceptable to workers.

The Curtin-McKell party stood on a platform planned to deceive the masses. These reformist fakirs made promises of good times and good things for everybody.

These deceivers promised that their program would be put into operation, not on the basis of workers' control and expropriation of the capitalists and the construction of Socialist society, but on the basis of capitalism and 'doubling the war effort'. (p. 12)

The article went on to say that the historic role of reformism in Aus-

tralia, as in other countries, had been to act as the 'physicians of ailing capitalism'. Leaders such as W. A. Holman, Hughes, and Lyons, in deserting the Labor Party at times of crisis, had strengthened 'the old firm of big bankers, factory owners and squatters' by giving a 'democratic facade' to their governments. Nevertheless it was in the interests of the working class for ALP governments to take office in the Commonwealth as well as the states, not so that they would govern in the interests of workers but so that they would more fully reveal themselves as agents of capitalism.

With reformism in office in the Federal parliament and a number of important States, its exposure as an agency of the capitalist class would be accelerated, (in the way Lenin pointed out in his famous advice to the British revolutionaries in 'Left Communism'.)

That is why the overwhelming majority of McKell in the N.S.W. Parliament is an advantage to the working-class, not because McKell and Co. can, or will even attempt, to solve any of the major problems, but will further expose reformist policy among the masses. (p. 16)

The article ends:

The main thing for the 'left' in the present situation is sternly to adhere to its principles, to stand unshakable, to remain irreconcilable in the struggle against the class enemy and his agents.

Perhaps the article had been completed before the Germans marched east, but it is clear evidence of the confusion into which the turn of events had thrown communists. At this stage, it seems, some communists at any rate were thinking of a political war on two fronts: full support for the military efforts of the Soviet Union and a political struggle against the government and the capitalist class at home.

The *Catholic Worker* (July 1941) was thrown into deep depression. It saw three possible outcomes of the new war which were almost equally terrible. The first was the possibility that the Russians would win against Hitler. Unlike those who had drawn the conclusion from the war in Finland that the Russian military capacity was insignificant, the *Catholic Worker*, with the communist threat at the heart of

its belief, never underestimated the military potential of the Soviet Union. If Stalin should win, the west would have to turn and fight Russian bolshevism—'For Bolshevism in the long run threatens everything for which the Allies say they stand. No Christian can wish to see Europe dominated by the Communist Party'. The second possibility was that Hitler would crush Russia. In this case the war would have to be continued by the Christians of the west against 'the efficient engine of Nazi tyranny', with the probable result that what was left of European civilisation (they did not think there was much) would collapse into anarchy. The third possibility was mutual destruction, a consummation less unpalatable than those previously considered. This might permit Christians in Germany and Russia to throw off the existing tyrannies and, with aid from the Christian west, re-establish the Christian tradition and social justice.

These were the possibilities, but where did the path of Christian duty lie in July 1941? Could they join in the nazi crusade against communism? If Hitler were to withdraw from all the countries he had overrun, restore Poland, and abandon his aim of world domination, it was a possibility; but, since this appeared to be most unlikely, the answer had to be 'we cannot aid Nazism'. Aid for Russia presented equally intractable problems. Pius XI had said, 'Communism is intrinsically wrong, and no one who would save Christian civilization may collaborate with it in any undertaking whatsoever!' If, however, communism changed its heart by fully restoring Poland, by withdrawing from all the lands it had conquered, and by establishing 'freedom of worship, education and organisation throughout the Soviet Lands', there was some possibility of a full-scale alliance. But since those conditions were no more likely than were those offered to Hitler as the price of support, the only thing to do was pray, for 'more things are wrought by prayer than Stalin dreams of . . .'. Whether in answer to prayer or by more mundane communications, a partial solution to the dilemma was found in the Russian people as distinct from Russian communism. The *Catholic Worker* reported in October that it had received a letter from E. A. Laurie, secretary of the Australia-Soviet Friendship League, seeking the co-operation of all people, irrespective of

their political opinions, who believe 'that the defeat of German Fascism and its allies requires the united effort of all the peoples of the world'. Catholics were warned to beware of such transparent attempts to extend communist influence, and were advised that all Christians who wished to save Australia from nazism and communism should 'seek, outside the League, other ways and means of assisting the Commonwealth Government to help the Russian people to resist German aggression'.

The communist war on two fronts soon settled on the single front of unqualified support for the Australian war effort. Three weeks after the German invasion of Russia, Sharkey was interviewed by the press. The interview was reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (17 July 1941).

Mr. Sharkey said he had been 'in smoke' since the Communist Party was declared illegal by the Federal Government in June last year because he did not want to be interned.

Newspaper representatives met him at a house in a Sydney suburb to which they were escorted by an official of the Communist Party. He said that he was merely spending an hour at the house for the purpose of the interview, and that he intended to go into 'smoke' again.

He said that his party whole-heartedly supported the Anglo-Soviet pact, as it meant a determined co-operative effort to fight Hitlerised Germany, and was a guarantee that Fascism would be annihilated.

The Communist Party was to remain illegal in a formal sense until December 1942, but its policy was projected through the State Labor Party and organisations such as the Australia-Soviet Friendship League. Nevertheless, the Communist Party's declaration of a cease-fire on the home front did not lead the Menzies government to immediate withdrawal from the positions it occupied. In July, Thomas Ratliff and Max Thomas, who had served terms of imprisonment for a national security offence, when due for release were indefinitely interned.

Protest against this injustice spread throughout the labour movement, the protest being given more emotional punch when the internees went on a hunger strike. Industrial action was supplemented by meetings and petitions, including one signed by thirty Labor members of the Commonwealth Parliament, men who in the main had not previously shown any particular compassion for the communist objects of government

hostility. The appointment in October of the Labor government, with Curtin as Prime Minister, ended the internal conflict. Ratchiff and Thomas were released, and the prosecution of communists under the National Security Act ended. The party went on urging the restoration of full legality, but until the end of 1942, when this was formally restored, communists were not seriously incommoded in carrying on their activities.

The Catholic political movement was in a more equivocal position. Communism was the main enemy, but communist Russia was now an ally. Capitalism would not go away. How to reconcile the antagonisms to capitalism and communism and at the same time take a firm position in relation to the war was the problem. As the possibility of Japan entering the war became more likely, with the consequent immediate threat to Australia, the problem became even more difficult of resolution. The generalised opposition to capitalism and communism could continue, but the *Catholic Worker* was at pains to distinguish between the Catholic and communist critique of capitalism.

We hold no brief for industrial capitalism, which in its present diseased and collapsing condition has earned only the most severe strictures of Christian leaders and Christian workers. But, just because Catholics and Communists happen to agree in condemning capitalism and its flagrant abuses, we have not the slightest intention of allowing ourselves to be hoodwinked into working for the establishment in Australia of a Communist dictatorship.<sup>2</sup>

Communism was the ultimate threat, communists were the contingent enemy, but capitalism was the present fact. It was easy to condemn strikes, threats of strikes, stoppages and lockouts. But was there not something behind them? It could be said that with the war there were jobs for all, but this was only a half truth. In some states unemployment was still high, despite enlistments and new war industries. Money wages were high, but so too was taxation. High wages were earned only by long hours of overtime, by not taking holidays, and by the self-destruction of overwork. At the same time many employers were making profits 'such as they have never before'. Accordingly, the *Catholic Worker* felt itself duty bound to point out that the proper solution to



real problems was not that presented by the communists. The 'countless millions of European and Asiatic workers, whose very lives have been sacrificed to the inhuman and unscientific theory of Marx and the crude and bloody revolutionary technique of Lenin',<sup>3</sup> were a clear warning of the consequences of communist practice. The tragic story of Russia was the living evidence of where it led. The alternative to capitalism was not communism but joint ownership.

Up to the moment of Japanese attack the *Catholic Worker* was hoping for the conciliation of Japan. In the December number Australia was urged to counsel for peace, and those who saw the war in the Pacific as imminent were 'militant ink-slingers'.

These warlike mutterings in high places have a special interest for Australians. Australia has as yet no direct quarrel with Japan. We sympathise with the Chinese people, but can 7,000,000 Australians defend 400,000,000 Chinese?

Our relations with Japan are not going to count for much alongside the tangling web of power politics. Both Britain and America may be able to find a just cause for war with Japan. If either do, then by pacts, counterpacts and alliances, we are all in together. This unfortunate state of affairs could have been prevented: it can still be prevented.

But when the die was cast and there was no alternative, no sacrifice was too great for victory.

In defeat every family in the community would in time be forced down to the most depressed Asiatic material and moral standards. We would be utterly undone by defeat for ever. Every worker, every Australian man, woman and child, shall from now on think no sacrifice too great or too small for the cause of God and Australia.<sup>4</sup>

The danger was immediate, military, and Asiatic.

Throughout 1942 the *Catholic Worker* maintained a critical stance towards the government. It called for increased taxation on higher incomes (January, February), was cool towards the employment of women in industry because of the need to maintain the sacred family unit and to go on populating Australia (August), and called for a referendum on conscription for military service overseas (December). Communism,

however, was the central concern. The danger was, as the *Catholic Worker* saw it, that the communists were exploiting the deeds of the Red Army to get a grip on Australia. Admiration for the gallantry of the Russian people should not be permitted to obscure the fact that the apparent patriotic fervour of the communists was not genuine, as shown by 'their twistings and turnings in the past two years' (Feb. 1942). The real plan of the communists was to use the crisis to gain control of trade unions and thus control key industries. In the armed forces they would form cells which, when the time was propitious, would enable them 'to isolate and bewilder their opponents by seizing radio stations, railways etc.' (February). The communist advocacy of a people's army, modelled on the 'red international brigade', was the clearest evidence that they really were preparing for armed insurrection at the end of the war (March). To what extent this was a valid interpretation of communist intentions will be considered later in this chapter.

The mainstream of labour opinion was given force by the wartime and post-war governments of J. Curtin and J. B. Chifley. They confronted the crisis and took advantage of the relative consensus produced by the immediate military threat to change both the perception of, and the approach to, a range of social problems which had been present but untreated for a generation. Within the limits imposed by their constitutional powers, much extended in wartime, they added another floor to the welfare state whose foundations had been laid at the beginning of the century. Both in legislation and administration they were guided by a set of assumptions which were quite different from those accepted by governments in the inter-war years. The twenty years between the wars had been bleak: the wartime labour governments canalised the aspirations for something better and sought, with some success, to make these aspirations a reality.

The government saw the task of organising Australia for war and planning for after the war as the two sides of the same coin. Effective organisation for war required the maximum utilisation of resources for war purposes, with the cost to be borne by those most able to bear it. In the post-war world, resources would still be directed to consciously deter-

mined purposes—the carrying out of social policies which would prevent a repetition of the great depression and its miserable aftermath. The government saw no conflict between these intentions. At the same time as it sought to apply the maximum of available resources to war, it not only planned for post-war Australia but also made some advance payments on the social security which was a prime objective of its policy.

From the time of taking office, but more emphatically when the Japanese forces began to roll south, the government made it clear that Australia could not be protected without sacrifice. As Chifley put it,

the Government is charged with the full responsibility of protecting Australia from invasion and of producing all the munitions of war which are required. It must be able to command the full resources of the nation, its revenue, manpower and efficiency.

. . . Effort and sacrifice of comfort by the civil population are the least part of the price. Many in the Forces, many of the Nation's sons, pay the supreme price of war. No financial price compares with that.<sup>5</sup>

Taxation reached a level far above and beyond anything that Australians had ever experienced before. As Crisp points out, between October 1941 and October 1943 the number of direct taxpayers increased from 800,000 to 2,000,000. The minimum taxable income was forced down to £104 and the rate of taxation steeply increased, reaching levels which were higher in some cases than those applying in Britain. When Chifley was criticised by the opposition for showing favouritism to people on lower incomes (and little enough favouritism was it possible to show), he denounced their hypocrisy, and at the same time revealed the sources of his own thinking. In reply to one such criticism he said:

I listened to such a discourse in 1930-31. The financial policy which it was then said would be good for the workers drove many of them into misery and degradation . . . The thought that the workers, after being starved for years, and being obliged to hang about the gates of factories seeking employment, are now making sufficient to enable them to purchase some of the necessaries and amenities of life, seems to cause some Honourable Members opposite to have a feeling almost of hatred towards them.<sup>6</sup>

The depression was an ever-present fact in the minds of the labour

leaders who made wartime policy and prepared for a time when it would occur again if steps were not taken to prevent it.

High rates of taxation were accompanied by basic changes in the taxation system. If taxation were to be one of the crucial means of controlling the economy, taxation power had to be centralised in the hands of the Commonwealth. When the states refused to hand over their powers of direct taxation for the duration of the war, the government passed legislation which gave it the powers it needed—with consequences more permanent than it had foreseen. When the states appealed against the legislation, the High Court found that the Acts were validly based, not merely on wartime powers but on permanent federal powers. Thus occurred one of the most important shifts in the location of power, from states to the federal government, in the history of the Commonwealth.

Taxation, however important, was only one of the means by which resources were mobilised in the war economy, and, as it proved, in the post-war economy as well. Direct controls were another. The Labor government inherited from its forerunner a wide range of controls and some administrative machinery to implement them. The Department of Labour and National Service had been formed in 1940 and the Department of War Organisation of Industry in June 1941. The Labor government extended the area of the controls and increased the activities of the departments involved. Controls spread very wide: over manpower, prices, rents, land, clothing, and other essential items. Men were directed from industries not immediately relevant for the war to those which were. Thus Western Australian goldminers found themselves building roads and airstrips; small branches of banks throughout the country were closed down and their staffs diverted to other occupations, in the services or civilian employment; quotas were placed on university students, to exclude the dull, the indolent, or those merely sheltering from war service. At the same time, scholarship allowances were provided so that poor but 'worthy' youth could go to universities. Tea, sugar, and meat were rationed, and an assault made on luxury food consumption. Early in 1942 the production of beer was cut by one-third, and even the types of cakes and icing permitted to be made

commercially were specified. Men's shirts lost their tails and their suits lost their waistcoats and trouser cuffs, with great saving of material but with no permanent damage, it would seem, to the *amour propre* of their wearers. Regulations were directed to the saving of manpower and materials on non-essentials, but in a sense they were also a levelling operation which appealed to the democratic and puritanical cast of labour thinking. In defending the Minister for War Organisation of Industry, J. J. Dedman, who was identified with the rigorous economies, Curtin said in late 1942:

The progress of the war effort in the past twelve months had been made possible only by the large-scale diversion of men and women and by restrictive measures aimed at the elimination of relatively unessential uses of resources . . . The choice is between profit-making and survival, between some innocent luxury today and victory to-morrow. If all Australians will see this choice as clearly and as disinterestedly as the Minister for War Organisation of Industry and his colleagues on the Production Executive, there will be fewer critics in Australia and fewer Japanese in the islands around us.<sup>7</sup>

From 1919 the nationalisation of banking had been a plank of the ALP platform. From 1937 there had been a blueprint in the form of the report of the Royal Commission on Banking on the practical measures necessary to bring the banking system under the substantial control of government without actual nationalisation. Chifley, who had played a leading part in the work of the commission, had signed the report, but had also brought down a minority report advocating nationalisation. As Treasurer he lost no time in putting into effect the main recommendations of the majority report. By national security regulations, despite resistance from the private banks and grudging support from the chairman of the Commonwealth Bank Board, Sir Claude Reading, he extended the authority of the government over banking policy and administration. Towards the end of the war these regulations, modified in some respects as a result of experience, were made permanent by legislation.

The Commonwealth Bank Bill and the Banking Bill became law in August 1945. By the first of these two Acts the extensive central banking

functions of the Commonwealth Bank, acquired during the war, were confirmed, and by the same measure the bank was restructured to enable it to compete more effectively with the private trading banks. By the second Act certain areas of policy of the private banks were brought under the control of the Commonwealth Bank. On matters of general banking policy immediate authority was placed in the hands of the governor of the Commonwealth Bank, assisted by an advisory committee composed of bank and government officers. But, in the event of a disagreement between the bank and the government, of the kind which had frustrated the attempts of the Scullin government to attack the great depression by financial means, final authority was to lie with the government.

The controls imposed on the banking system proved an effective instrument in organising the economy for war. In facing post-war problems, of which the most immediate was expected to be inflation, similar machinery was crucial if the economic and social objectives of the government were to be realised. In what Crisp has called the governor's 'sailing directions' the broad purposes of the bank were set out: stability of the Australian currency, maintenance of full employment, and the economic prosperity and welfare of the people of Australia.<sup>8</sup> In labour thinking banking was different from other business. If its rationale were simply the pursuit of profit, its functions were contrary to the interests of the majority of the people. If, on the other hand, banks were controlled, while not denying the private sector a reasonable profit, they could become one of the more important means of achieving defined social objectives.

Organisation for war and planning the directions for Australian society after the war became increasingly intertwined as the war proceeded. The establishment in December 1942 of the Department of Post-War Reconstruction with Chifley (the Treasurer, and hence primarily responsible for the economy in wartime) as Minister, was a recognition of this inter-relationship. Both ends and means of wartime government, so far as they applied, were to be extended into the peace.

In three articles published in the major newspapers late in 1943, Chifley set out in simple and direct terms the fruits of the government's

experience, the objectives it set itself, and the broad means to achieve them. The introduction to the first article contains the case:

Before the war, too many lives were dominated by the fear of unemployment, and too little real effort was made by Governments and administrators to banish it. During the war that fear has been absent. So far from its being difficult to find jobs, the problem has been to find people for the tasks waiting to be carried out. In winning the war we are learning ways of controlling our affairs by which we can put an end to fear and of enforced idleness. After the war we shall not willingly go back to conditions in which widespread unemployment is a commonplace.<sup>9</sup>

The war had enforced planning to utilise all available resources, including the capacity of people to work. This had not been done in the inter-war years, nor would it be done after the war if left to the free play of the market. There would be enormous needs—'housing, furniture, electrical goods, school and hospital buildings'—in the provision of which, 'Governments as well as private enterprise will be called on for leadership, initiative and imagination'. In meeting these needs the government had to determine the priorities and institute or retain controls to ensure that they prevailed.

To take our building example again, we shall have to regulate the competing demands for materials and skilled labour of housing, slum clearance, industrial and commercial building, hotels, schools, and general maintenance work. Unless these demands are sorted out in an orderly way and allotted broad priorities, costs of more essential building will be unnecessarily inflated and work on it delayed.

In this view there is a direct relationship between the maintenance of full employment as a prime social objective and the fulfilment of society's material needs. Nor is there any conflict between the social aims and the needs for personal expression. Full employment is the objective, but

This does not mean that the Government has no ideas beyond work for work's sake, although I believe that productive labour gives a real satisfaction, quite apart from the goods produced or the wages earned.

Wartime experience and Keynesian theory came together and fortified each other to provide a vision of a modified capitalism, the long-term aspiration of the labour movement, in which the best interests of all would be made a reality.

Chifley did not believe that these objectives could be achieved by one country in isolation. High levels of employment in other countries, modification of tariff policies, and a stable world monetary system were essential to the prosperity of a country as dependent on external trade as Australia was. Also, there were Australia's near neighbours.

Round the Indian and Pacific oceans, there are many countries whose economic productivity is extremely low; some of them have huge populations living, with few exceptions, at subsistence levels . . . Any moves to increase the productivity of their economies and the living standards of the masses of their people, as well as being good in themselves, offer expanding markets for our foodstuffs and our manufactures. The ordinary people of these countries have not been able to afford even our foodstuffs in the past.

Full employment, productivity, and the free movement of goods were self-interested aims, but simultaneously they served the interests of all, in this view.

Full employment, to be achieved by the determination of economic objectives and planning to implement them, was the road to social security, but there was a need also to plug the gaps in full employment by a social security scheme. The idea of a national welfare fund was advanced as an alternative to a system of national insurance previously proposed. To be paid for from income tax, it would initially meet the payments for maternity allowances and funeral benefits, but would ultimately meet the costs of unemployment and sickness benefits and comprehensive health and medical services.

Chifley's articles were a rare instance in Australian political history of a leading member of a government setting a policy of action into the context of some basic propositions about what constitutes a healthy society, and the way to achieve them. Although denying that he was outlining government policy, H. C. Coombs, Director-General of the Department of Post-War Reconstruction, in a lecture given in July



1944 made even more explicit the assumptions lying behind government policy.<sup>10</sup> Post-war production, or the bulk of it, would be carried on by private enterprise, but there would need to be a much closer relationship between the government and industry than before the war. During the war, he said, the problems had been mainly technical, after the war they would be economic and financial. As a result of the war both government and private enterprise had greatly increased their capital equipment, and skilled labour and managerial expertise had expanded. It was essential that these should not be wasted. The role of government was to ensure full employment, which could only be achieved by investment, with the consequent growth and development of the economy. To this end the government would need to invest to keep the economy growing. It would also need to know the extent of investment by private enterprise.

The objective of this partnership would be job security, a rising standard of living, and social security against unemployment, sickness, and old age. The physical environment, too, was a part of the standard of living, and could only be satisfactory to the extent that it was planned. There were costs to private enterprise if these objectives were to be achieved, but benefits also. The costs included limitation of the freedom of industrialists to determine the location of their industry, the possible need to modify the protective tariffs behind which industry had previously sheltered, and the possibility that full employment could result in a less tractable work force. On the other hand the government's contribution would include capital, technical training of the work force (including the training of ex-servicemen), the fostering of research of value to industry, the stabilisation of the market by full employment and social security, and the securing of overseas markets. There remained the question:

does industry accept the broad social objectives which the Government will set itself in the post-war period? If so, I believe it will be willing to accept the limitations on its complete freedom and to operate within the framework established by those objectives. (Coombs, *Industry . . .*, p. 16)

During the war the general objectives stated by Chifley and Coombs were worked out in considerable detail.

The Department of Post-War Reconstruction and the Treasury were the centres of post-war planning. Within the Department of Post-War Reconstruction strong commissions and committees were set up—the Secondary Industries, Rural Reconstruction, and Housing Commissions, the Office of Education, the Central Reconstruction Training Committee, and the Demobilisation Committee. From these emerged many of the plans to cope with problems which arose as the war effort declined and the transition to peace began. Treasury was mainly responsible for the social security program. As we have seen, Chifley saw the solution to this as a function of full employment and the progressive development of a National Welfare Fund. Until the Welfare Fund was fully operative, certain particular areas were seen as having a high priority for immediate action. Thus, as Crisp lists them, provision was made for widows' pensions (1942), maternity benefits for Aboriginal mothers (1942), reciprocity with New Zealand in old age and invalid pensions (1943), funeral benefits (1943), a second form of maternity benefit (1943), unemployment and sickness benefits (1944), pharmaceutical benefits (1944), hospital benefits (1945), tuberculosis benefits (1945), and the Commonwealth Employment Service (1945).

As the government saw it, full employment was the key to social security. The war had made it a reality, but how to continue it into the peace was the problem. This was a continuing preoccupation of Chifley and his economic advisers from his earliest days in office. In June 1944 in two lectures Coombs outlined the state of thinking reached by the government.<sup>11</sup> Then came help from Great Britain in the form of the British White Paper, *Post-War Employment Policy*. The Department of Post-War Reconstruction, the Treasury, and the Bureau of Statistics began intensive work. Ten months later, in May 1945, the White Paper, *Full Employment in Australia*,<sup>12</sup> was tabled in Parliament. Its significance is aptly described by Crisp:

by contrast with the 1931 Premiers' Plan of bitter memory for Labour men, the White Paper represented the authentic, forward-looking reformist tradition of the A.L.P. It was the product of Labour united and in the ascendancy. While it promised no overnight miracles and indeed warned against the inflationary and

other dangers of the times, it registered the acceptance by the Australian Government of the 'Keynesian revolution' in economics and public finance and its pledge to apply the Keynesian approach to the awkward and testing problems of a federal and primary-produce-exporting country in the years of transition from war to peace.<sup>13</sup>

Its central proposition was that if employment showed a tendency to decline it was the responsibility of government to spend on developmental works.

The Labor government fought the war successfully by regulating and controlling capitalism. It was able to do this by means of its wartime powers and a high degree of consensus produced by an awareness of common danger, but consensus wore thin as the danger receded and peace threatened. It approached the peace with social objectives and plans to achieve them intended to forestall a return to the dismal 1920s and 1930s. It did so, however, without the ability to enforce many of its policies directly, the 1944 referendum having failed to yield it the powers to do so. Lacking these powers it had to depend on a degree of consent which in many respects was to prove to be lacking.

The war policies of the Labor government involved greater invasion of personal freedom than any of the actions of its predecessor. These invasions in the first two years excited very little opposition or protest. In 1944 and 1945, as the immediate threat to Australia receded and war-weariness set in, restlessness increased under the pressures of controls and directions, usually taking the form of political criticism from the right and an increased propensity of some unionists to strike. The reasons for the existence of the consensus are clear enough. With the Japanese at the gates people were prepared to make sacrifices in the interests of unity and efficiency. The previous centres of dissent, in particular the Communist Party and those influenced by its policy, were amongst the most ardent in the call for unity. The government's emphasis on equality of sacrifice, its serious attempts to prevent war profiteering, its welfare policy, and its creative planning for the future gave confidence to the labour movement that the aims of the government were genuinely democratic. The uneasiness in the latter days of

the war was in the main a result of weariness, although two ideological influences contributed to it. These will be considered later in this chapter. Nevertheless, the libertarian strain in radical thinking was not entirely submerged. It lived on in the words and actions of a handful of men. Of these the most notable was Maurice Blackburn.

Expelled from the ALP by the Victorian Central Executive in October 1941 for his association with the Australian Soviet Friendship League, Blackburn, until his narrow defeat in the 1943 election, continued to be the voice of radical liberalism in the Commonwealth Parliament. Deeply disturbed by the readiness with which the government spawned regulations, he was obsessed with the conviction that it would move towards conscription for overseas military service. He was prepared to accept the idea that people could be properly conscripted for the immediate defence of their country, but he was so imbued with the attitudes adopted during World War I that he could not accept the legitimacy of conscription for military service beyond the borders of Australia. For him compulsion to fight abroad was unjust and indefensible.

It rests not merely on logic but on the instinct of man, which calls upon him to take up arms for the defence of his own countryside, for the defence of himself, his wife and children . . . But when a man voluntarily goes overseas as a soldier, he knows perfectly well that he may be required to make war against people who bear him no illwill and against whom he has none.<sup>14</sup>

Blackburn's attitude was rooted in the struggle against conscription in World War I. Then, as he saw it, opposition to conscription was a struggle for the maintenance of national democratic integrity. The preservation of democratic liberties was the cause to which he devoted his life. In the thirties, whatever the cost to his own political position, he had, more than any other member of the ALP, stood firm in defence of democratic values. If this meant conflict with the party, that was unfortunate but could not be avoided. So it was to be in the last two years of his political life. Conscription for military service beyond Australia was for him the destruction of personal freedom. He said:

Edmund Burke has told us that though we may use liberty as an abstract name, we cannot think of liberty without calling to mind some definite immunity which is for us and our people the core and centre of liberty . . . To the masses of the people of Australia the most glowing experience in the struggle for freedom is the defeat of overseas conscription in 1916 and 1917.<sup>15</sup>

This was the level of his conviction which was to be put to the test towards the end of 1942 when Curtin began the moves which would permit the deployment of the CMF, conscripted for the defence of Australia, to areas outside Australia and its territories. In the meantime he looked with a critical eye on various actions of government.

In June 1942 the Council for Civil Liberties, of which Blackburn was president, published a pamphlet, *Liberty and the Labour Government*. It spoke with approval of some of the actions of the government in redressing grievances against previous government regulations. Nevertheless it found the number of regulations made by the new government excessive, and some of them oppressive. It was particularly critical of the national security (mobilisation of services and property) regulations, statutory rule No. 77. These regulations gave a minister, or a person authorised by a minister, power to direct any Australian resident:

to perform such services as are specified in the direction;

to perform such duties in relation to his trade, business, calling or profession as are so specified;

to place his property, in accordance with the direction, at the service of the Commonwealth.

Gazetted in February, at a critical early stage in the Japanese war, the enormous power to direct citizens was not seriously opposed except by Blackburn and the Council for Civil Liberties. It fell to Blackburn also to be almost the lone voice in protest against the internment of fifteen members of the pro-fascist Australia First Movement. Although completely out of sympathy with their ideas, Blackburn let it be known they should have had the right to a fair trial.

Opposition to the imposition of conscription for military service beyond Australia was Blackburn's last great fight, for which he was once again expelled from the ALP, and subsequently lost his seat in the 1943 elections. Curtin, an active anti-conscriptionist in World War I, began his moves to amend the Defence Act at the November 1942 meeting of the federal conference of the ALP. Without consultation with his parliamentary colleagues, except Chifley and perhaps Scullin, he moved that the government be authorised to amend the Defence Act to allow Australian military forces to be sent to 'such other territories in the South-West Pacific area, as the Governor-General proclaims as being territories associated with the defence of Australia'. For technical reasons, the resolution was referred to the branches, after which it was to be reconsidered at a special federal conference in January 1943. Curtin's motives have been variously explained, but it seems likely that the need for flexibility in deploying all troops (the volunteer AIF could already be sent anywhere) and a desire to meet American demands were strong enough to override the traditional labour opposition to conscription.

Between November and January the New South Wales executive declared in favour of Curtin's proposal and the Victorian executive against. In Parliament Blackburn moved that the House of Representatives,

reaffirming the policy upon which the majority of its members were elected, opposes the imposition of any form of compulsory service outside Australia and the Territories of the Commonwealth.<sup>18</sup>

Although A. A. Calwell, Brennan and Ward either directly supported the motion in the debate or criticised the Prime Minister, Blackburn was alone when it came to the vote.

Outside Parliament, Blackburn with a handful of supporters called a public meeting to launch a 'no conscription' campaign. In Sydney Lang beat the anti-conscription drum. But in neither Melbourne nor Sydney were more than a tiny minority roused. When the reconvened federal conference of the ALP accepted Curtin's proposal with only

Victoria and Queensland voting against it, the issue was settled. The passions of 1916-17 could not be re-kindled under the circumstances of 1942-3. Blackburn resisted to the end, speaking against the Bill and moving amendments. With verbal support from Calwell and Brennan, he voted alone. In the debate on the Bill he stated his unshakable position. Referring to the anti-conscription tradition, he said:

I am not wedded to it merely because it is a tradition, but when I find a tradition in favour of liberty, I am firmly of the opinion that it is based on human nature, on human reason, and on human instinct. I believe that this tradition is so based—that it is based on the natural repugnance of men to the taking of human life . . . But a man may have to choose between the alternative of taking another man's life and of not merely surrendering his own life, but also ceasing to protect those who have a claim upon him for protection. That is why there is a distinction between taking up arms for the defence of one's home and kindred and going abroad to foreign lands to fight.<sup>17</sup>

Opposition to conscription to fight outside the homeland brought together a love of liberty, a hatred of war, a belief in the justice of fighting to defend one's own country on its soil and a healthy tradition founded in World War I. But there were very few who saw it as Blackburn did in 1942-3.

Members of the Communist Party were not worried by any libertarian qualms. They had sheltered under the liberal umbrella in 1940-1, but by 1942 they were committed, without qualification, to almost anything which would make the war effort more efficient. As the war proceeded they became increasingly authoritarian, both in their policy on the organisation of the country for war and in their attitude to political opponents. While in the exposition of policy communists differed widely from the ALP in most respects, in practice their policies converged with or became dependent on those of the ALP. The greatest difference remained in attitudes to the USSR. For communists the achievements of the Red Army were a justification, an inspiration, and a source of strength. They seemed to show that 'the new civilisation' had been built well—that it alone had the moral strength to resist effectively the military might of nazism.

The growing authority of the communists depended heavily on the new perception of the USSR. Press reporting of the Soviet changed almost overnight, following the invasion of Russia. For example the *Argus* (9 Aug. 1941):

Russia's magnificent fight has not only given Britain a precious breathing space and greatly altered the odds against us, but has also made it imperative that we should review our general attitude to the U.S.S.R. The question of ideology is irrelevant in the case of such a staunch Ally, and if we let this question stand between us and the generosity of our judgment we shall be guilty of a negative and obstructive form of ideology ourselves.

The editorial went on to accept the argument that the non-aggression pact had been an act of political realism, and to surmise that 'Russia has been Hitler's secret adversary all along'. Even the attack on Finland could be forgiven, or at least one should 'wait for the dispassionate judgment of history on this tragic episode'. The *Argus* (18 Sept. 1941) saw Russian resistance as an example to be followed.

While Russia holds fast, let us spare no effort to strengthen her, so that strength may become a contagion and effort a habit. This is a total war, and it leaves no breathing spaces.

A month later (17 Oct.) the *Sydney Morning Herald*, speaking of our debt to Russia, said:

Russia is bearing the brunt of the life and death struggle with Nazism. Millions of her people have been wounded in battle, and millions more have been driven from their homes by the invaders. In spite of untold suffering, which will become even greater in the rigours of the coming winter, the nation fights on with a stubborn will to victory which at present is one of our best hopes of the ultimate deliverance of the world from the menace of Nazi tyranny.

On 7 January 1942, in the hour of Australia's greatest trial, it saw Russia's example as being the one which must be followed. Australians must be prepared for the same kind of sacrifices that the Russians were making. If necessary the Australian earth must be scorched as the Russian earth had been. By 16 May the *Argus* saw a similarity between



Australia and Russia in that they both had social systems worth fighting to defend.

And what remains is to face the present with the same unity of national determination as Russia. And to make that unity more spontaneous and complete, we have, as Russia had, a social system to defend which is the greatest part of our heritage.

The Anglo-Soviet Twenty Years Alliance, a statement in general terms of the intention of Britain and the USSR to co-operate in war and peace, was signed in London on 26 May. It was greeted with enthusiasm by the Australian press. The *Sydney Morning Herald* commented (13 June 1942):

There is no question of the momentous importance for the future of mankind of the new accord reached between Great Britain, Soviet Russia, and the United States. It not only re-affirms their joint determination to fight Germany until Hitlerism is crushed, but also secures their co-operation in post-war problems. The most striking part of this accord is the twenty-year treaty of alliance between Britain and the Soviet.

Russia went from strength to strength in the eyes of the press. The appointment of an ambassador to Russia was seen as a decision of great significance. There were good geographical reasons, as Russia was a Pacific power: there were trade possibilities now that Russia was industrialised; and, most important, co-operation in the stern years of war was the best guarantee of good relations in the softer years of the peace to come.<sup>18</sup> In the generous mood of late 1942 a *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial (7 Nov.) was a panegyric directed to Russia, to the revolution and to Stalin.

In the travail of defeat in the first world war, on November 7, 1917, the Union of Socialist Soviet [sic] Republics was born. The fact that it survives to-day, after 18 months of fearful struggle with the mechanised might of Germany, is vindication both of the constructive strength of the Stalinist regime and of the inexhaustible patriotism and courage of the Russian people . . . Had the Revolution taken the course that the fiery genius Trotsky planned for it, and sought by propaganda and the sword the communist evangelisation of the rest of the world,

Russia's strength, like that of revolutionary France, would have been consumed in a series of wars. Stalin had other ideas. He foresaw that Russia would some day have to fight again the Germany whose greed the terrible Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had revealed, and he bent his iron will to the task of industrialising the most backward of the great nations and organising its military resources for the day of trial. How well his work was done the world never learned until that red day dawned.

The summit of international goodwill was reached with the Moscow agreement of the foreign ministers of Britain, Russia, the United States and China, which was followed shortly by the Teheran conference of Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin. In Moscow it was agreed that hostilities would continue until all enemies surrendered unconditionally; that the allies would act jointly in all matters relating to the surrender of the enemy; that a European advisory committee would be set up in London to study and make recommendations on European questions as they arose during the war; that all remnants of fascism would be destroyed in Italy and democracy would be restored to the Italian people; that all war criminals would be returned for trial to the country of their alleged crimes; that regulation of armaments after the war should be achieved by international conference; and that an international organisation should be formed as soon as possible to maintain peace. At Teheran a firm date was set for the opening of the second front in western Europe. Stalin promised to enter the war against Japan after the capitulation of Germany, and partial agreements were reached on matters such as the future frontiers of Poland and Russian treatment of Finland. The details of the horse-trading at Teheran were naturally not made public; that had to remain for the spate of memoirs which came with the end of the war. The announcement was simply that plans had been concerted for the destruction of the German forces; 'our offensive will be merciless and cumulative'.

In surveying the stance of the Australian press in regard to the USSR no account has been taken of the tensions that continued to exist, varying in intensity from time to time, between Britain and the USSR, and indeed between Britain and the USA. Some evidence of conflict of interest and opinion appeared from time to time, but the

extent and the detail had to wait for the end of the war, when their revelation contributed to the climate of hostility of the cold war which quickly replaced the real and apparent unity of the war years.

Differences in strategic appreciations and the desirable allocation of resources which flowed from them were the substance of the politics of war. Differences between individuals, between the civilian and military sectors, between the fighting services and between governments constituted a vast network of lines of influence from which lines of action were drawn. Millions of words have been written about the relationships between Churchill and Roosevelt and their staffs and the differing priorities they pressed from time to time: the war in the Pacific versus the war in Europe; India and Burma versus the south-west Pacific; the weight to be given to the war in Africa, the Balkans, Italy, and so on. The questions of high policy were numerous, the questions of detail innumerable. Of the questions of high policy one of the most important and persistent was the second front in Europe.

From the beginning of the invasion which in four months took the Germans to the gates of Moscow, Stalin had called for a second front in the west to relieve the pressure. It was not to be opened until June 1944, and in the meantime was to be always an irritant, and at times a source of great bitterness and suspicion, in the relations between Britain and Russia, and at some times a cause of sharp differences between Britain and the USA. The lowest point in Soviet-British relations coincided with Churchill's visit to Moscow in August 1942. For Russia the war had reached a critical stage. The preliminary skirmishes which were to lead into the crucial battle of Stalingrad had just begun, and the outcome was still uncertain. Churchill came to explain why there would be no second front in 1942. He has described the extreme unpleasantness of his meetings with Stalin and Molotov, and the confrontation between his military advisers and the Russian generals—"The only Soviet demand was for "A Second Front NOW".<sup>19</sup> The second front remained as the main source of contention until it happened, but with the victory at Stalingrad, the beginning of the steady advance of the Red Army towards Germany, the allied victories in Africa and Italy, and finally the agreement at Teheran that the front would be

opened in May 1944, it progressively diminished as a divisive political issue.

In Australia the Communist Party put the second front at the top of its propagandist banner and kept it there, although with the outbreak of the Pacific war it had to jostle for a place with the urgency of an all-out war effort against Japan. The demand that a second front should be launched as soon as possible, however, was regarded sympathetically by many others besides communists. As early as 17 September 1941 the *Sydney Morning Herald* editorialised that:

The deterioration of the military position in Russia raises in an increasingly insistent form the question of what can be done to relieve the terrific pressure on our ally. British peoples have bitter memories of the immobility of General Gamelin's armies during the destruction of Poland. We see now that it was the Allies who 'missed the bus', by not forcing Hitler to fight on two fronts. The uneasy feeling that another such opportunity was being missed has been prevalent throughout the past three months, and it must be heightened by present fears of a weakening of Russian resistance.

But as the Russian line began to hold and the possibility of a Russian collapse seemed less likely, references to the second front became more circumspect. In June 1942 in commenting on the Anglo-Soviet treaty the same paper noted that a communique accompanying the treaty referred to the urgency of a second front in 1942, but was qualified in its certainty that it would or should occur in 1942.<sup>20</sup> The cooling towards a second front in the Australian press was probably a result of a number of factors. The Japanese had focused Australian eyes on the Pacific. The Russians, despite their losses of space and people, were doing better against the Germans than anyone had expected. And then there was the attitude of the communists themselves—their demand for a second front, which in Australia was an abstract proposition anyway, was counter-productive. The *Bulletin* (27 Aug. 1941) spoke of 'Moscowmania' and the *Sydney Morning Herald* later warned that

There is much to be appreciated yet about Russia, even by those ardent left-wingers in this country who remained almost unmoved by the war against Hitlerism until Russia became involved in it. (3 Nov. 1942)

There was enthusiasm and admiration for Russian soldiers and civilians, but still deep suspicion of Australian communists.

With Russia fighting for her life and Australia directly menaced, communists sought to legitimise themselves as the most conscious and active opponents of fascism, nazism, and Japanese militarism. Between February and June 1942, with the fall of Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies, the landings in New Guinea, the bombing of Darwin beginning on 19 February and continuing through March and April, together with air attacks on other towns in the north of Western Australia, it was not unreasonable to believe that the invasion of Australia was imminent. The government certainly thought so, and the movement from the coast of people who could get away was evidence of nervousness on the part of at least some people. In his generally unsympathetic account of the Labor government's conduct of the war, Hasluck suggests that the government helped to induce uncertainty. In attacking complacency they sought to inspire fear, and, having done so, then attempted to pacify the public:

the Curtin Government consistently acted as though it expected Australians to be scared. When a newspaper correspondent wrote an article referring to the laying of barbed wire on beaches, the Minister for the Army thought it necessary to make a public statement telling people not to be 'alarmed', to 'reassure' them that the preparations were being made to protect them and to counsel them 'not to imagine' that their particular beach was the most likely point of attack. The War Cabinet thought it necessary to minimise the losses in an air raid on Darwin for fear that the truth might cause a panic.<sup>21</sup>

Whether or not the government contributed to the sense of danger, it was widely believed that an attack was imminent, and people responded to it in different ways according to their beliefs, temperaments, and physiology.

Although the full facts as to the lack of defences were not known by the general public, it was known that the main body of the AIF was in the Middle East or prisoners of war of the Japanese. Communists and the anti-fascists of the thirties believed that they had the methods and the myths by which civilians could resist an invading army. In the absence of a legal press the main outlet for the propaganda of the

Communist Party from early in 1942 was *Progress*, the organ of the New South Wales State Labor Party. It called (16 Jan. 1942) for the creation of a people's army.

so that, if necessary, Australia could be defended as London, Leningrad, and Moscow were defended—not by its gallant soldiers only, but by every civilian—man, woman, or child—who could hold a gun or throw a grenade.

The examples were the republican army in Spain, the people's army of China, and the Russian partisans. An article by Len Fox brings them together.

If you talk with the Aussies who helped to save Madrid in the 'hopeless' days of November, 1936—if you read Edgar Snow's story of China's resistance to Japan in the 'hopeless' days of November, 1937—or Russia's relentless battle in the 'hopeless' days of November, 1941—you will suddenly realise that Australia's 'hopeless' position to-day is not hopeless—that we will win if we become guerilla-minded!<sup>22</sup>

The main political models were remote from Australia, but Australia too had its legends: Eureka, the men of the bush, and even Anzac. They were of the same kind as the spirit which made heroes of the men of the International Brigade. Under the heading, 'The Eureka spirit will conquer', *Progress* (30 Jan. 1942) published the following story:

On February 13, 1937, Ted Dickenson, from Australia, second-in-command of No. 2 Company of the Anglo-Irish Battalion of the International Brigade, was captured by the Spanish Fascists.

**'IF WE HAD TEN THOUSAND AUSTRALIAN BUSHMEN HERE,' HE SAID, 'WE'D DRIVE THESE DOGS INTO THE SEA.'**

The Fascists heard him. They ordered him to fall out, back to a tree. Three Moorish hirelings of Franco advanced to within ten feet of him, and blew the top of his head off.

But before they murdered him he turned his head towards the other prisoners, gave the clenched fist anti-fascist salute, and said:

**'SALUD, BOYS, KEEP YOUR CHINS UP!'**

Ted Dickenson had lived and died in the spirit of Eureka—the spirit of the miners who took the oath in 1854 under the blue flag of freedom with silver stars:—

The spirit of Eureka was called on, but so too was the spirit 'of the men of Anzac and Tobruk'.

Under the conditions of threat, when the aim was to whip up a spirit of determination, there was a clear temptation to play on deep-seated prejudices as well as to appeal to heroic symbols. *Progress* went some way towards calling up the passions of racial prejudice, but seems to have been uneasy about it. Expressions such as 'Japanese barbarism', fuelled by reports seeping through of the murder of civilians and prisoners of war in New Guinea, were the common coin of language. 'Yellow fascist barbarism' (30 Jan. 1942) occasionally slipped in, but this was balanced by admiration for the Chinese. The dangers of racial prejudice were recognised by a letter printed by *Progress* on 3 April 1942. Under the heading, 'workers protest at yellow peril talk', a munitions worker wrote:

On Friday, March 27, a speaker engaged in the campaign for increasing sale of War Savings Certificates spoke of the 'Yellow Peril' and the need for keeping Australia 'White!'

We realise that 400,000,000 yellow people have refused to follow Japan's leadership and are fighting for democracy. We workers think that less dangerous men should be chosen to sell War Savings Certificates.

Stoking the fires of racial prejudice was a serious temptation, but generally was resisted by the left.

The people's army idea was no more than a flash in the pan. The *Bulletin* (4 Feb. 1942) ridiculed it as the 'Barmy Army', which

is, it seems, to be composed of people of both sexes who will undertake to blow up tanks with Molotov cocktails, smash them with mattocks, pick off their crews with rifles, pot infantry from behind boulders, demolish bridges, block roads and in all things behave like the 'dynamiteros' of Madrid, the Asturias and other places dear to the hearts of Reds and Parlor Pinks.

Such an 'army' would be at best a nuisance to the regular military forces and at worst a communist instrument to be used later. The *Catholic Worker* (Feb. 1942) had no doubt that the real purpose was

to create a communist-led force which would try to carry out a violent revolution at the end of the war.

There may have been some communists who nurtured the hope that if the invasion happened, in the succeeding chaos and the war of resistance to follow, a people's army in which they would achieve leadership might finally emerge as a powerful political force. China was the example. There the communist-led armies were fighting the Japanese and achieving the leadership of the nation in the struggle, while Chiang Kai-shek was compromising with the Japanese and reserving his forces to oppose them to the growing communist strength. This was a reasonable interpretation of events in China, documented in *Red Star Over China* by Edgar Snow, whose writings were well known to the Australian left but had little relevance for Australia. The greatest significance to be attached to the idea of the 'people's army', and the propaganda surrounding it, is that it was an incident in the growing claim of communists to express the genuine interests of the Australian nation. Menzies, the UAP, and Australian capitalism had supported the appeasement of Hitler. Curtin and the Labor Party had acquiesced in the conciliation so long as it was possible. Menzies had sent pig-iron to Japan. It was the waterside workers who had made the protest. Was it not reasonable to assume that those who had conciliated before would do so again? Therefore it was the responsibility of communists and anti-fascists to rouse the nation in the face of deadly danger, to prepare them to fight, and to warn them against potential quislings in high places. Thus 'the U.A.P. must not be allowed to smash national unity' was a *Progress* headline (24 April 1942). A policy article (8 May) spoke of the responsibility of the workers to secure the co-operation of the capitalists.

The sharpest expression of the class struggle to-day is the struggle of the workers to secure the co-operation of the property-owning classes in destroying the spearhead of their own system—Nazi Germany and Fascist Japan.

The idea of the 'people's army' flowed directly from this interpretation. As the possibility of invasion decreased, as American troops arrived ('tough fighters for democracy', as *Progress*, 17 April 1942, greeted



them) and the government demonstrated its determination, the Communist Party quickly assumed the posture it was to maintain for the duration of the war. It became the most aggressive and vocally nationalistic ginger group behind the government and its policies. The 'people's army' was forgotten, communists joined the armed forces, and many of those who were too old or unable for other reasons to join the army, navy, or air force became members of the Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC), which had been formed originally in 1940 by the Returned Soldiers' League. In 1941 it had been brought under the control of army headquarters, and in February 1942 its strength was expanded from 50,000 to 80,000 as a move to counteract the demand for the creation of a people's army.<sup>23</sup> The positive consequence of the agitation may have been to make the VDC more susceptible to the techniques of guerilla warfare developed in Russia and China. Politically, it was a brief transitional phase from being opposed to being in complete support of the war.

The overall strategy which guided the activities of the Communist Party after the invasion of Russia, and more especially from the outbreak of the war with Japan, was that of the united front. This was a return to the position which they had occupied before the change of policy in 1939. In brief, the aim was, while retaining the separate organisation of the party, to achieve the greatest co-operation with all sections of the labour movement whose policies were acceptable. In practice this meant making common cause with, and trying to influence, trade unionists and members of the Labor Party, and also attempting to establish a formal relationship with the ALP.

Throughout 1942, though formally still illegal, the party pursued this strategy. It was committed to full support for the war, and was satisfied that the Curtin government was both dedicated and efficient. There were therefore no policy barriers to the pursuit of the strategy. So far as there were differences they were of degree, not of kind: for example, whether or not the government was pressing heavily enough on those who were putting personal profit or advantage before the common effort. At the same time the party was pressing for the lifting of the ban. Reluctant to give ammunition to its political opponents, the govern-

ment moved slowly in restoring legality. When it did so, H. V. Evatt, the Attorney-General, stated that the communists had given satisfactory undertakings of maximum support for the war effort. He went on to dissociate the Labor Party from them:

'I make it clear', Dr Evatt said, 'that the decision evidences no sympathy by the Government with any Communist views or doctrine. As is well known, the doctrines of communism are opposed to those of the Labor Movement of Australia, [the] rules of which absolutely forbid the admittance of any Communist.'<sup>24</sup>

True in all details, Evatt's statement slid over the fact that the government was already heavily relying on communist union officials to maintain industrial peace.

With its legality re-established at the end of 1942, the Communist Party began immediately to seek an agreed relationship with the ALP. The first step was through the State Labor Party, whose machinery and policy were controlled by communists. In March 1943 there were reports that the State Labor Party was to discuss common action with the Communist Party. *Progress* (12 March) carried a letter from J. B. Miles, general-secretary of the Communist Party, to the executive of the State Labor Party.

The need for united action on the part of the working class is most pressing. There already exists agreement on the major issues of the war in the Labor movement, all sections of which are resolved on a maximum war effort to defeat fascism, and on support for the Curtin Government.

It was no surprise to anyone when a united front agreement was carried by the Easter conference. *Progress* (30 April 1943) reported it as beginning a new era in labour history.

The agreement for unity of action between the State Labor Party and the Communist Party was carried by the State Labor Party Easter Conference amidst scenes of enthusiasm unequalled in conference history.

Nine months later the State Labor Party amalgamated with the Communist Party, thus making public the issue of the united front. In the

meantime the New South Wales Labor Council had narrowly approved the united front, and the ACTU by 130 votes to 120, after a violent debate at its June conference, had decided likewise. But the ALP federal conference had turned down the proposal.<sup>25</sup>

The united front from above was not legitimised by affiliation with the ALP, but the Communist Party itself (during the war) reached the highest membership it ever achieved. Using official figures issued by the party, which it is not possible to check against current records but which are likely to be approximately correct, Davidson says that at the time it was banned in 1940 there were 4000 members.<sup>26</sup> By May 1942 it had risen to 7200 and by September to 11,000—these increases taking place while it was still officially illegal. In September 1943 there were 20,000 members, rising to a peak a year later of 23,000. Three things need to be said about these figures. While the maximum figure was only a tiny proportion of the total population, the members of the party were much more active in political matters than is usual for members of political parties. Second, a high proportion of the members occupied key positions, or were influential in other organisations, in particular the trade unions. Communists held dominant positions of leadership in key unions such as the Miners' Federation, the WWF, and the Federated Seamen's Union, and significant influence in others, such as the AEU. Overall it has been estimated that by 1945 communists held controlling positions in unions with a membership of 275,000 and influence in unions with a membership of 480,000, or 40 per cent of all unionists.<sup>27</sup> Third, an unknown but probably quite significant number of the new members who joined the party at this time did so from an admiration for the Red Army or because the communists were the most consciously committed anti-fascists, rather than because they had any basic understanding of the ideology with which the party identified.

The refusal of affiliation or other recognition by the ALP did not divert the Communist Party from its unqualified support of the war effort. Communist trade union leaders accepted positions on government instrumentalities. Healy and Roach, general secretary and assistant general secretary of the WWF, joined the Stevedoring Industry Commission, and E. V. Elliott, secretary of the Seamen's Union, joined the

Maritime Industry Commission. These covered vital areas of industry in the conduct of the war. Even more important was coal. Here, the substantially communist leadership applied itself to conciliating militant miners, soothing their grievances, avoiding strikes, and getting the maximum amount of coal. In this they co-operated closely with the government, which was determined to remove causes of friction likely to result in stoppages. The Miners' Federation was given representation on the Commonwealth Coal Commission, whose responsibility it was to control the production and distribution of coal. By regulations under the National Security Act or by decisions of the Central Reference Board (the industrial tribunal which handled disputes in the industry), a number of long-standing grievances were redressed. At the same time as it made concessions, the Commonwealth assumed powers to take disciplinary action if all else failed. Thus in March 1942 the regulations were amended to allow the government to call up strikers for military or labour service. In May, when, although production was at a high level, there were still stoppages, a conference presided over by the Prime Minister met in Canberra, and reached an agreement which became known as the 'Canberra code'.

The Canberra code consisted of agreed procedures to short-circuit strikes and to settle disputes before they became serious.<sup>28</sup> The leadership of the union did everything in its power to make the agreement work and to avoid stoppages. But a section of the membership accepted the policy very uneasily. In April 1943 an extraordinary convention of the Miners' Federation was called, 'because of the disquieting increase in stoppages throughout the industry, linked to a definite challenge to the leadership of the union and the union's policy'. The convention adopted eight resolutions: a declaration of the need for the fullest mobilisation of resources to defeat the Axis powers, and a call to open a second front in Europe; congratulations to the government for its effective administration; support for the Canberra code; agreement to enforce penalties on members who departed from the procedures laid down in the Canberra code, and acceptance of disciplinary measures by the government in cases where the union failed to discipline its own members; a request for the easing of wage-freezing regulations and to

permit adjustment of a number of sectional demands, together with a claim for a Commonwealth pensions scheme; the establishment of a committee to prepare a post-war program; a call for the unity of all working class political parties; and a resolution that aggregate meetings attended by members of the central executive be held to popularise the decisions of the convention.<sup>29</sup> The majority of the delegates supported all the resolutions, but there were some dissident voices. Some of the delegates pointed out that the miners resented the Federation agreeing to the government-imposed penalties; some of them argued that the penalties were a cause of stoppages; but a majority believed that there was no alternative. The criticism was partly due to political opposition to communist officials, but it was also in part a simple protest against irritations, shortages, and the exercise of any kind of discipline.

Although the Miners' Federation retained its policy of full co-operation with the government until the end of the war, coal production, which reached a peak in 1942, steadily declined. From the twelve and a quarter million tons of 1942 it fell to eleven million in 1944 and just over ten million in 1945. Stoppages were partly responsible for the decline. In 1942 only 177,656 working days were lost through strikes, but in 1943 losses rose to 326,231 days and in 1944 they were again over 300,000.

The leaders, meanwhile, fought to keep the miners at work; indeed, reports of the central executive began to sound like the exhortations of the daily press to the miners to produce more coal. The general president, Harry Wells, listed days lost because of strikes, tonnages lost by trivial disputes, and made critical analyses of absenteeism. The president harangued, cajoled, and threatened those recalcitrant members who stopped work contrary to Miners' Federation policy.<sup>30</sup> By 1945 the leadership was regarded by many miners as a bureaucracy which was failing to protect the interests of miners.

The process by which power was concentrated in the hands of union officials was not confined to the Miners' Federation. Communists were leaders of this trend, because they believed it led to greater efficiency and also for ideological reasons. In the Soviet Union power was highly centralised, so did it not follow that an objective of communist policy

should be to centralise authority in the unions? At the ACTU congress in 1943 two important moves were made by the left to centralise control of the trade unions and simultaneously place the movement more effectively under the control of the communists. The first of these, which was successful, was to transfer the secretariat of the ACTU to Sydney, where the strongest unions with communist leadership had their headquarters. The second move was to amend the constitution of the national body so that the affiliated Labor Councils would be unable to veto decisions of congress. This was aimed at tightening the central control of the trade union movement and simultaneously weakening the influence of the Labor Councils, the majority of which were controlled by moderates. This proposal was not pushed to a conclusion, the matter being deferred to the next congress in 1945.

The 1945 congress was a high point of communist influence in the trade union movement. Their constitutional amendment provided that five of the ten members of the executive (all previously elected by Labor Councils) should be elected by congress. It was carried by a large majority.<sup>31</sup> In the subsequent ballot the full communist ticket was elected. The *Sydney Morning Herald* (15 June 1945) noted with alarm:

In carrying by a vote of nearly two to one their constitutional amendment providing for greater centralisation of control in the Australasian Council of Trades Unions, the militants under Communist leadership have taken command of that organisation, after years of intensive effort . . . By a series of union amalgamations, by shrewd political tactics, and by sheer physical intimidation, they have been hammering the unions into a single great combine whose prime purpose is clearly political rather than industrial.

In addition to changing the method of election of the executive, the congress also resurrected and passed the 1943 resolution, which sought to delete the requirement that decisions of congress required their acceptance by a majority of Labor Councils. On the international scene the congress affiliated with the World Trade Union Federation (later the World Federation of Trade Unions) and elected Thornton as the first delegate.

As communist strength increased, the drive for centralised bureau-

cratic control in the unions was accompanied by a growth of intellectual authoritarianism, most fully expressed in the attack by the Communist Party on the Workers' Education Association (WEA) in 1944. Bureaucratic centralisation and intellectual arrogance were joined in the attempt of the federal executive of the Federated Ironworkers' Association, the Federal Committee of Management (FCM), to suppress the revolt of the Balmain branch of the union. The common element in both was the communist fear and hatred of Trotskyism.

The attack on the WEA was centred on a study course prepared by P. H. Partridge, a lecturer in philosophy in the University of Sydney, a student of John Anderson, and later to be a professor of politics and political philosophy in Melbourne and Canberra. Partridge's course, which became widely known as course B40, contained a critical examination of the USSR. Its sources were the line of criticism which stemmed from Trotsky but which by 1943-4 had largely abandoned the revolutionary position which Trotsky retained until his death. From Trotsky's critique of Stalin's Russia as a deformed and bureaucratic form of socialism but still in important respects a workers' state, those influenced by Trotsky's criticisms were seeing it as a totalitarian state little if at all preferable to Hitler's Germany. On the other hand, for communists any criticism of the Soviet Union was Trotskyist, inspired by people who had been proved in the Moscow trials to be traitors and saboteurs, fellow-conspirators with the nazis in attempts to overthrow the government of Russia. A reference to the 'Labor Socialist' group, which the *Tribune* (13 Jan. 1943) anathematised as Trotskyist, gives an example of the language in common use.

These fascist rats are doing a nice job for the Axis masters of the unlamented Trotsky, and would be on the reception committee if the Japs invaded Australia. These traitors are blood-brothers of the P.O.U.M., which, in co-operation with France [Franco], caused 'rebellions' in the rear of the Spanish Republicans, and for which they were punished by the people's government. In China they denounced the fighters for liberty to the Japs. For this the Trotskyists were shot by the 8th Route Army.

In the Soviet the Trotskyites were tried and executed for murder, sabotage and espionage, which was paid for by the Nazis. Their line of disruption of the people's war in Australia is identical with that of the Trotskyite criminals in other countries.

The language of the denunciation of WEA course B40 was marginally less violent but contained the same moral—'This course is a wholesale attack on our Ally, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.'<sup>32</sup> In some eighty pages L. L. Sharkey denounced the course, poured scorn on Partridge and the WEA, and demanded the withdrawal of the course. The Communist Party went further, using its influence with affiliated unions to get them to withdraw the financial support on which the WEA depended heavily.

The details of Sharkey's onslaught need not detain us, but the lines of argument are of some importance. He first attacked Partridge for being un-Marxist in his assertion that the revolution, instead of abolishing classes, had created a new privileged class. This proposition, according to Sharkey, incorporated two errors in terms of Marxist theory. First, Marx had not assumed that equality would immediately follow a socialist revolution but that there would be a period of transition in which inequalities would remain, only to be removed by time. Second, while it was true that inequalities remained, it was not possible to speak of a new privileged class. Since classes were a product of the ownership of the means of production, and since individual ownership had been abolished, there was no economic base for the existence of classes. 'All that M<sup>r</sup> Partridge has proved', wrote Sharkey, 'is his own colossal ignorance of such matters.' Having found Partridge guilty of ignorance of Marxist theory, Sharkey then turned to the facts of 'Soviet democracy'. They were not as Partridge alleged.

Against the statement that the workers possessed no rights to opposition and were subject to a bureaucratic tyranny as complete as were the people of Germany and differing only from pre-revolutionary conditions by its greater efficiency and ruthlessness, Sharkey advanced the usual communist reply. The Moscow trials and the physical suppression of the opposition, the extent and savagery of which were not so well known as they later became, were dismissed as being simply the cleansing of the nation of its quislings and traitors. It had been done, he asserted, with the support of the majority of the people. As for democracy, it was not that it was absent, but that the institutions were different. Democratic rights were exercised through the mass Communist



Party and by other means unknown in capitalist societies. The absence of opposition parties was not evidence of the lack of means to express opposition, but of the absence of opposition classes—a circular argument based on the assumption that parties were simply the expression of class interests.

The importance of the incident lies not in Partridge's picture of the Soviet Union or of Sharkey's abusive attempt to rebut it, but in the action that the Communist Party took, first to have the course withdrawn<sup>33</sup> and, having failed in that, to boycott the WEA. In the eyes of the Communist Party the WEA had become an accomplice of the enemy, the Trotskyists. The same interpretation was placed on a long-drawn-out struggle in the Balmain branch of the FIA, which resulted in a long stoppage of work in 1945.

The Balmain dispute, which began in 1942, was designated by the communists as Trotskyist disruption. A close study has shown that, while it contained a Trotskyist element, it was much besides.<sup>34</sup> In the first instance it was opposition to the centralising tendency of the communist-led FCM. Under the leadership of Thornton the organisation of the FIA had been streamlined in the four years up to 1942. In the interests of efficiency the FCM had acquired power to reorganise branches. Using these powers they moved in on a number of branches and replaced inactive and faction-ridden executives by more efficient officers, who were also generally communists. By 1941 all branches, with the exception of Balmain, were led by communists.

Thornton's view of the role of branch officers was an extrapolation from the idea of democratic centralism as incorporated in the rules and practice of the Communist Party. In a speech to the federal council in December 1942 he spoke of the duty of branch officers to put into effect the policy decided on by the federal council and approved by branches. The function of the officials was not to express branch policy but to carry to the branches the policy of the centre and to see that it was implemented. This was not acceptable in Balmain for a number of reasons. The first of these was deep-rooted in the character of the place and the industry. It has been well described:

Balmain had been the union's founding branch at the turn of the century. It covered mainly waterfront industries, particularly ship building and repair. The area was one of old working-class suburbs close to, but isolated from, the city. A large number of the branch members lived and worked in Balmain or neighbouring suburbs. During the Second World War Balmain became the largest ship-repairing centre in Australia. Cockatoo Island Dockyard and Mort's Dock employed respectively almost 3000 and 2000 men at the height of wartime activity . . . The great increase in the numbers employed during the war was not matched by improvements in facilities. There was not only no canteen at the dock but for many of the workers nowhere to eat but on the job. Changing, washing, toilet facilities varied from inadequate to very bad and were the source of constant complaints from the employees.<sup>85</sup>

Balmain was an integrated, isolated and, in a sense, parochial community, sharing this quality with mining towns and sharing with them also a long tradition of industrial militancy and proud independence in which the men struck first and reported to the union later. They were not good material for centralised control. Under the strains of the war it was to be expected that they would find themselves in conflict with a central leadership determined to use every form of coercion to keep the members at work. A series of minor stoppages, called on the job, caused the central leadership to decide to get control of the branch, but this proved impossible by legitimate means. In the branch elections early in 1943 the communist ticket was defeated by a two-to-one majority. Trotskyism then began to rear its ugly head.

Although few in numbers, a small group of Trotskyists, of whom the principal spokesmen were N. Origlass at Mort's Dock and L. Short at Cockatoo, began to be heard. In union meetings, on the shop floor and through a roneoed sheet, the *Socialist*, they began to voice a consistent opposition to the communists. The Trotskyist tendency which they represented accepted the necessity to defend the USSR which, although bureaucratically deformed, was still a workers' state. But it did not follow from this that workers in capitalist countries should submerge their own class interests as against their own capitalist class in the way they believed the Communist Party was doing. While they did not openly oppose participation in the war, they attempted to put forward a transitional program which would lead the workers, within

the context of the war, to defend their own interests, in confrontation with employers and government.<sup>36</sup> Naturally it also brought them into confrontation with the communist national leaders of the union and the communist faction within the branch.

In a long struggle the details of which are too complex to be repeated here, but which may be followed in Daphne Gollan's 'The Balmain Ironworkers' Strike', the workers of the Balmain branch were polarised between the majority of the rank and file, amongst whom the authority of Origlass grew steadily, and the federal officers. The first round of the fight went to the federal officers, whose faction won all positions at the branch elections at the end of 1943—a quite extraordinary result in the circumstances, and one not accepted by most of the rank and file. Throughout 1944 there was constant friction between the majority of the workers and the branch officers, officers who owed their positions to that election, not to the support of the members. The causes of friction were clear enough: on the part of the workers an accumulating dissatisfaction with union officers who failed to deal with their grievances; on the part of the officials a policy of keeping the workers at work at all costs.

The branch elections at the end of 1944 again resulted in a victory for the federal officers' faction, a result even more unlikely than that of 1943. Moves against Origlass, centre of disaffection and Trotskyist disruptor in communist eyes, followed immediately. His removal from the position of delegate was the proximate cause of a 6-weeks' strike involving 3000 men, which began late in April 1945. The proximate cause was real enough, but behind it lay two years of unease under the heavy hand of the central union bureaucracy. Its outcome was the establishment of two branch organisations, one representing the majority of the workers, and the other, the rump, giving its allegiance to the nominees of the national office. The majority were excluded from the national union, being re-admitted (in October 1947) after protracted court proceedings and political battles.

The battle of Balmain is significant in more than one respect. It is clearly a case of a communist trade union bureaucracy, convinced of the verity of its own policy and arrogant with power, attempting to impose

its policy and its authority on a reluctant rank and file. It is a case of a principled militant minority emerging as the leadership of relatively unpolitical workers driven to revolt by what they saw as the oppression of employers, government, and their own union officials. Finally, it is the case of the anti-communist impetus leading to common action by the anti-communist militant left and the militant right.

Throughout the war radical Catholic social policy, as manifested in the columns of the *Catholic Worker* and in social justice statements, focused on three things: support for the war effort, qualified by the need to maintain standards of living and personal freedom; the formulation of an alternative set of social priorities; and the threat of communism at home and abroad. The three aspects of policy overlapped, but for the sake of clarity may be considered separately.

The *Catholic Worker* was critical of conscription for overseas military service, demanding a referendum. In general it considered that unnecessary sacrifices were being demanded by the government. For example, the introduction of meat rationing immediately after the 1943 elections was castigated as the repudiation of an election promise. Its introduction after Parliament rose was an act of hypocrisy.

The arch-hypocrites of Cabinet maintained a discreet political silence, for the Parliament was sitting, the rank and file of the party was in Canberra and protest was still possible. But no sooner had the Parliament adjourned for a period of months and the politicians dispersed than the Government's pack of over-salaried and sycophantic publicity experts, acting in collusion with the capitalist press, launched a campaign to deprive the Australian people of meat and put the nation on an Asiatic diet. (Nov. 1943)

Labor proposals to increase Commonwealth powers over industrial matters by amendment to the constitution were seen as threatening to produce a city-dominated totalitarian state.

The capitalists and socialists of Sydney and Melbourne have been the principal source of social corruption within Australia. A continent dominated by the secret interests of those two swollen cities is a continent doomed to decay. It is now up to Dr Evatt to forsake his totalitarian will-of-the-wisp and formulate for the people of Australia a new Magna Carta, not in the airy phrases of the Atlantic Declaration

but in the precise and exact language that marked his own decisions as a Judge. (Nov. 1942)

At the 1944 powers referendum the *Catholic Worker* claimed to be neutral, but it was a very peculiar neutrality. Its main complaint was that the powers sought would permit industrial conscription. Under the headline, 'Still time for guarantee against conscription!', the argument ran that if planning was necessary, it should be by encouragement rather than 'ruthless' direction. The paper did not direct its readers how to vote, but its urgings were clear enough. Behind the tacit or overt opposition to the extension of the powers of the Commonwealth was the policy of decentralisation, important to those who considered that a return to the land was the way to a healthy society. Opposition to centralisation of power was also related to the fear of communism—a centralised state would be more easily taken over by a communist dictatorship.

Catholic social policy for post-war reconstruction, with its implications for wartime, was set out in a number of statements produced during the war, such as *Justice Now* and *Pattern for Peace*.<sup>37</sup> The first was issued over the names of the Most Reverend D. Mannix, the Most Reverend J. Simonds, and the Most Reverend E. Gleeson. The second claimed that it did not speak officially for the Catholic Church but that it had been submitted to the appropriate authorities, who had found that it was not in any way in conflict with Catholic teaching. The statements were intended to provide a 'middle way' between capitalism and socialism. They contained a number of basic propositions and some proposals for the re-structuring of society, at the centre of which was the need to strengthen the family.

The family is the primary society; it existed before the State and its rights come before those of the State. The State can never enjoy a stable existence unless the family is preserved.

The most immediate need for the preservation of the family was the institution of the family wage. Such a wage would secure sustenance for the worker and his family, would provide the opportunity for him to

acquire a moderate amount of property, would permit him to make provision for old age, illness, and unemployment, and would enable him to improve the cultural condition in which he and his family lived. The wage should be related to the number of children and should be determined not by the profitability of the enterprise but by need. After the employer had obtained a family wage for himself, the next claim on the business should be a family wage for the employees; any balance could accrue as profit to the employer. The family wage idea was seen as both an immediate demand and also an element in what was conceived as a better order of society.

The better society was one in which ownership of property was more widely dispersed than in modern capitalism. This led immediately to the need for public control of monopolies and big business generally, and in particular of the banking system. Price control and profit control were necessary to protect the small man. Home ownership was essential for healthy family life, and a plot of land on which the family could produce some of its own products was desirable. Rural reconstruction figured large in the policy, and emphasised such things as decentralisation of government, with representative bodies of farmers, making the land more readily available to small farmers, and the improvement of rural facilities by irrigation and electrification schemes and so on. The emphasis, as for secondary industry, was on giving the workers a stake in the enterprises in which they worked.

One method proposed was the establishment of industrial councils composed of representatives of employers and employees,<sup>38</sup> remarkably similar to the blueprint of Mussolini's corporate state. These councils would control industry. Their functions would be the determination of wages and conditions, the fixing of prices and dividends, the planning of production and marketing, and the provision of social insurance and pensions. The councils would be arranged in a pyramid, from local and regional to national councils, subordinate only to the ultimate authority of the state. By contrast with nationalised industries, it was believed that this arrangement would minimise bureaucracy and maximise worker participation at all levels of the productive process. This kind

of organisation referred in the main to large-scale industry, but the aim was to encourage small-scale industry as well.

Large scale, it was argued, was probably necessary for heavy industry, but the general aim should be to reduce the size of the industrial unit. How this was to be achieved is unclear, but the purpose was quite explicit.

Here we confront two problems—in the first place, the desirability of so ordering the Australian economy that the largest possible number of workers should be independent owners, rather than the paid employees of either capitalist or State enterprise, and in the second, of restoring as far as possible, the sense of creative workmanship, a fundamental deficiency of the present industrial system. . . .<sup>39</sup>

The general aim, so far as it was consistent with the facts of modern technology, was an economy consisting of small producers in both secondary and primary industry. The society of small owners, it was believed, was morally superior. It would help to preserve the family, would counteract the fall in the birthrate, and, in conjunction with an immigration scheme to attract European migrants, would fill the vacuum which would otherwise be filled by 'Asiatic peoples'.<sup>40</sup>

The plans put forward were consistent with the Papal encyclicals, *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, and the exhortations of Chesterton, Belloc and the other ideologues whose ideas had been influential in the twenties and thirties.<sup>41</sup> It was believed that they constituted the necessary social matrix for the restoration of a truly Christian society. Simultaneously they would pre-empt the further growth of communism, which depended on the existence of a proletariat, and which was causing growing apprehension by its relative success. Throughout the war Catholics were constantly warned to beware of the communist drive to control the unions. In May 1943 the *Catholic Worker* explained the communist technique in the unions. Although the article uses two texts by Australian communists, Thornton and L. H. Gould, it consists mainly of quotations from the writings of Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. The emphasis is on the violence and deviousness approved by communist theory. Stalin is quoted:

The Revolutionary will accept a reform in order to use it as a means to link legal work with illegal, in order to use it as a screen behind which his illegal activities for the revolutionary preparation of the masses for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie may be intensified.

Stalin urges violence and Lenin trickery. Communists must be prepared, Lenin is quoted as saying,

if needs be, to resort to all sorts of devices, manoeuvres and illegal methods, to evasion and subterfuge, in order to penetrate into the trade unions, to remain in them, and to carry on Communist work in them at all costs.

Thornton's control of the FIA was seen as epitomising communist methods, which ranged from suppression of information to subversion of democratic processes in the union. The Balmain dispute was seen as a clear demonstration of the truth of the Catholic position.

The Balmain workers are fighting for an elementary principle of justice—the right to elect their own shop delegates. The fight is one in which every Australian worker should be interested. It shows the grave danger that confronts unionists when a minority gain control of union affairs. The Communist press has branded Origlass and those supporting him as saboteurs of the war effort, but the Balmain workers have struck a blow for freedom and democratic control of unions. (June 1945)

The war of words went on continually, but from 1942 there was organisation as well, in the form of 'the Movement', which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The immediate post-war years were notable for the bitter contest between the Communist Party and the Movement, a contest in which both communists and the Movement won battles and both lost the war.



## 5 The Interlude of Hope, 1945-7

THE war ended suddenly in the Pacific. Three months after the collapse of Germany, Japan capitulated, worn down by the war of attrition in the islands and knocked out by the atomic bombs on Japan itself and the Russian invasion of Manchuria. When Japan surrendered in August 1945 Australia still had almost 600,000 men and women in the armed services, of whom about half were outside Australia: in New Guinea, Borneo, and in Europe. The rest were scattered around the continent. But for a year the military effort had been running down. From late in 1944 Australia's military role became less important for the American military command. Although Australian forces were extensively employed in driving the Japanese out of New Guinea and in the occupation of Borneo, in the American scheme Australia became increasingly a source of food and other supplies. Thus from late in 1944 a planned program of returning men and women to civilian occupations was put into operation. This was accelerated when Japan collapsed, some 250,000 being demobilised in the six months between August 1945 and January 1946.<sup>1</sup>

1945 was both the last year of the war and the first year of the peace. As seen by the government, there was still a major military commitment, but it was also necessary to begin the transition to peace. In the army the urgency had gone out of the task, except for those involved in the dispiriting work of pursuing a defeated but still dangerous enemy. In the community generally the hopes forgone, the fears suppressed, and the tensions subdued began to rise to the surface. In the absence of immediate threat and the certainty of ultimate victory, war-weariness set in. In addition there was the question: what kind of place would post-war Australia be?

By examining the changing tone of a conservative newspaper it is possible to see at least some of the worries and fears that the war experience

had generated. The Melbourne *Argus* was the newspaper which most consistently expounded the idea of empire loyalty, qualified only by a pale Australian nationalism. The bedrock of its conservatism was the attachment to Britain. During the war the close association of Australia with the United States and the alliance with Russia may have been a cause for concern, but if so it rarely reached the surface. But during 1945, and increasingly in 1946, the new alignments resulting from the war and the pressures of the immediate post-war world seemed to be endangering the future of the Commonwealth and Empire and Australia's place in it.

Even before the war in Europe had ended, the San Francisco conference to establish the United Nations Organisation posed the question in the mind of the *Argus* as to what the future of the Empire was to be. It was deeply distressed that the Empire was not going to the conference as a united whole. Its stance may be gauged from an editorial comment (23 April 1945):

That conference will doubtless be the greatest landmark in the history of organised peace; but its very greatness gives additional poignancy to the regrets that one feels when one thinks of what might have been. We of the British Commonwealth and Empire are coming out of the conflict even more consciously united than ever before; yet we move into peace without any unison of voices . . . As a Commonwealth and Empire, as an organic whole made up of many closely connected parts, we would have had to be admitted to the councils of the nations as a great confederacy of nations, like the Union of Soviet Republics and the United States of America; and it is universally admitted that the British Commonwealth and Empire is the best nucleus of that strong world organisation which alone can guarantee peace by protecting it.

The separate representation of the states of the Commonwealth was a pity in the eyes of the *Argus*, but Evatt's policy, as it unfolded, became the target of scorn and anger. When Evatt protested against the publication of the Potsdam ultimatum to Japan without previous reference to, let alone consultation with, Australia, the *Argus* (31 July 1945) was both amused and incensed. Evatt did not represent the opinion of Australia, any more than the three tailors of Tooley Street represented the people of England on an occasion long ago! Britain spoke for the Common-

wealth, and Evatt's protest was in the worst of taste. It merely confirmed the impression that he had made at San Francisco.

Dr Evatt's pose as the self-appointed leader of the small nations at the UNCIO Conference, involving frequent opposition to the British delegation, offended the sense of propriety of many Australians. His latest attitude will confirm the unfavourable impression then formed.

This was a continuing complaint, taken up and reiterated by Menzies as spokesman of the new Liberal Party he had created.

The *Argus* (10 Sept. 1945) saw Evatt as a dangerous exponent of bad Australianism. As the self-appointed champion of small nations he was contributing to the disintegration of the British Commonwealth, whose continued survival was dear to the hearts of people of British stock and also a necessary condition for the creation of a peaceful world. The *Argus* reported the doings of the Royal Duke of Gloucester, who was Governor-General of Australia, and lamented the failure of the government to recommend Royal Honours in the New Year's list. On the other hand it had words of praise for Ernest Bevin, Minister for Foreign Affairs in the British Labour government, who spoke with the authentic voice of Empire. It warmed the heart to report him as saying (16 April 1946) that the Empire 'has emerged from the war reborn, with a mission to establish a world federation. And what body of nations has a better right, a riper experience for carrying out such a mission than the British Commonwealth and Empire'.

The Labor government, and Evatt in particular, were seen as pursuing policies of parochial nationalism which were draining the blood of the Empire and making it less able to stand as an equal with the other great powers, the USSR and the USA. The attitude of the *Argus* to the Soviet Union, which at the height of the war had been one of deep admiration, changed only slowly. The Yalta agreement of March 1945, which amongst other things accepted the Russian claim to that part of Poland east of the Curzon line—broadly the region occupied by the Red Army in 1939—was declared by the *Argus* to be quite reasonable. It quoted (1 March 1945) with approval the words of Churchill that:

but for the Russians' prodigious efforts and sacrifices the Poles as a nation and race would have been destroyed or reduced to a servile state; . . . Poland's freedom, independence, integrity, and sovereignty have always seemed to the British Government more important than the actual frontier.

The *Argus* admired powerful nations and political realism. In retrospect the invasion of Finland was justifiable; Russia 'was taking a long view of events in Europe'. Similarly it was reasonable that Russia should seek an extension of her sovereignty over areas which would otherwise be broken up and become a threat to future peace. A powerful USSR and a powerful British Empire were necessary to world stability, contrary to the puerile arguments of Evatt. The Russian government was realistic, and its realism could be approved by Australians: the Evatt course led to the Balkanisation of the world, the manipulation of small states, and increased dangers of another war. But this attitude was to change, and the change came decisively with Churchill's speech at Fulton, Missouri on 5 March 1946, in which he spoke of the iron curtain which Russia had rung down across Europe from the Baltic to the Adriatic. Menzies sang the chorus:

Russia has only herself to blame. A year ago she had the world of friendship at her feet, for all were ready to acknowledge her magnificent battle side by side with her Allies . . . Russia must be told, as Mr Churchill has told her in such ringing tones, that the world's democracies are not dead or dying, that they really desire peace upon a basis of international justice and respect for the independence of all nations, that they will defend their liberties with all their strength, and that they are not disposed today to look on while a progress of Imperialist expansion, so similar in many of its features to the Nazi expansion of the 1930s, passes to its unhappy conclusion.<sup>2</sup>

The cold war had not yet been declared but it was on the horizon. The opinions expressed by the *Argus*, and the community attitudes it reflected, still placed great emphasis on the Commonwealth as a powerful political and moral entity. War exhaustion and economic difficulties had brought Britain low. Australia was feeling the urge to assert herself but she could never be great except as a part of a larger whole and this involved teamwork which would also contribute to the rehabilitation of Britain itself.

Watchful friendship was the *Argus's* stand towards the USA, which had emerged from the war as the most powerful nation. It was important that this power should not be minimised, and it was essential that a regenerated Empire should be the watchdog. Thus within six weeks of the Japanese surrender the *Argus* (20 Sept. 1945) was worried by the report that General MacArthur proposed to reduce the forces occupying Japan. Reports of an American proposal that Britain should abandon Empire preference were greeted with an exposition of the mystique of Empire (9 Nov. 1945):

There was always something elusive, something illogical, something that baffled analysis, about the Imperial link . . . It is the fear of losing that vague but splendid thing, not a fear of losing any trade advantages, that causes Australians to regard with misgivings any draft agreement which seems to treat daughter members of the great British family as pawns in an international game.

If there were to be such an agreement it should be between the USA and the whole British Empire. The same uncertainty about the motives of America is evident in a different context.

Early in 1947 the *Argus* carried an article on the recently published book of James Burnham, *The Struggle for the World*. Burnham had been a leading Trotskyist who broke with Trotsky in 1940, and in breaking anathematised his earlier public statements of belief, rejecting Marxism in any of its variants.<sup>3</sup> His intellectual road thereafter was marked by the increasing vehemence of his anti-communism, directed primarily at the Soviet Union and secondarily at the communist parties, which he saw as hands of a conspiracy whose head was in Moscow. The principal fact of world politics as he saw it was a struggle for world power between the USA and communism based in the USSR. To win this struggle the USA had to become the centre of a world bloc directed against the Soviet Union; other powers, including the British Commonwealth, would be junior partners in this bloc. As reported to the *Argus* readers:

He says that USA, as the world political leader, must dominate Latin America, and after having united with the British Empire must lead a European federation,

exercise a firm patriarchal control over most of Asia, and 'penetrate' the Communist fortress, winning back from Communist rule those areas and people, including the pre-eminently Russian people, now subject to the Communist monopoly. (26 March 1947)

The means he proposed for the achievement of these ends were the suppression of communist organisations in all countries and, implicitly, a pre-emptive nuclear war against the Soviet Union. The *Argus* (29 March 1947) conceded that the aim was worthy but baulked at the method. Dr Burnham's strategy was too much like that of Hitler, and his had failed.

He thinks that America can get rid of Communism locally and in other democracies by threatening Russia or even, if necessary, attacking her. Peace does not lie in that direction; and peace, real, stable, enduring peace, is the best cure for Communism.

Burnham's methods were too violent to be stomached, but there was also an implicit fear that an American world might not be an undivided blessing, in particular for those who still held out hopes for a new *pax Britannica* to be won through Commonwealth unity and a world organisation.

The internal tensions, kept under control while the war was at its height, began to break the surface in 1945. Reports of strikes and threat of strikes became more frequent. Coalminers were the ever-present problem—for conservatives, who regarded strikes as unjustified at any time, for the government, which needed coal and was politically embarrassed by industrial disturbances, and for communist officials, who were committed to keeping men at work in the interests of the war effort. The union discipline, accepted by miners and imposed by officials, which had made 1942 a year of record production, was gradually eroded, so that by 1944 there were frequent stoppages in the coal industry. By mid-1945 the coalminers were the main source of texts for sermons about industrial anarchy and lawlessness, an attribution which was not new to them. There was no major strike, but when there was a general shortage of coal resulting in rationing of coal, gas, and electricity, reports of even minor and localised stoppages all con-

tributed to an atmosphere of crisis for which industrial militancy was regarded as the single cause. That the miners were holding the country to ransom became a part of the language of the time. In an editorial curious because it was not a response to any particular industrial conflict, the *Argus* passionately condemned industrial anarchy. Having dismissed the miners, who, it said, were known to be a law unto themselves, it worried about a more general lawlessness (15 Oct. 1945):

It is bad enough for the community to have to put up with the many inconveniences and anxieties caused by the current wave of industrial anarchy; it is intolerable when one reflects that this anarchy is due to a policy which is spurned by the vast majority of the community. The fighting forces of Australia have been risking their lives and spending their precious youth in contending for the democratic rights of peoples, constitutionally and lawfully expressed. They came back to find militant minorities trampling on the rights of the great majority of Australians, in defiance alike of law, of established policy, and of the rights of their fellows.

In the absence of any large-scale industrial disputes, how is the attitude of the *Argus* to be explained? In the most general sense it was probably due to the fear that as a result of the war ending there would be a general move to the left. Three months earlier (14 July) it had published a long article by Harold Laski, chairman of the British Labour Party and Professor of Political Science at the London School of Economics, entitled, 'Is the World Going Left?' Answering his own question, Laski said:

The world is going left, and it is going left irresistibly. I am not concerned to deny the possibility of temporary halts on the march—of revolution here, of counter-revolution there. But the conviction grows everywhere that the issues we confront are not capable of being met in terms of the traditional order . . . 'Freedom', wrote Heine just a hundred years ago, 'which has hitherto only become man here and there, must pass into the mass itself, into the lower strata of society and become people.' This is the central problem of the next generation.

The left was full of hope; the right, of foreboding.

Nothing was more immediate for both left and right than the chaos in which the war left South-east Asia. Conservatives looked to a restoration of old authority, the left to some kind of new order in which Aus-

tralia would have different relations with its close neighbours. Within weeks of the Japanese surrender Australia was involved in events which were to determine the future of the Netherlands East Indies, or as it was to be, Indonesia. Only vague reports of what was happening in Indonesia reached Australia, but it was evident that the Indonesian nationalist movement was opposed to the restoration of Dutch authority. Australian military involvement in the policing of the Indies was limited to the fringes, Borneo and the islands to the south-east. British forces were responsible for the main island of Java, and later replaced the Australians in their areas of responsibility. For some months the Japanese army remained in effective control. Thus at the end of November, according to the information available to the Australian army, there were in Java 50,000 Japanese troops, of whom less than 1000 had been disarmed. There were also 100,000 Indonesian troops, of whom 25,000 had been trained by the Japanese. The British forces allocated to disarm and concentrate the Japanese consisted of only two divisions of infantry and one armoured regiment. In addition there were 120,000 allied prisoners of war and internees.<sup>4</sup> The short-term aim was to establish British military control with a view to restoring the authority of the Dutch. The Dutch gradually returned, but were met by a nationalist movement which turned into a war of independence, lasting for four years on and off, and ending in the establishment of an independent Indonesia.

The official policy of the Australian government was one of non-intervention. Australian troops were withdrawn from Borneo and the other islands as soon as they could be replaced, the last of them being withdrawn from Timor in March 1946. But unofficially Australia was involved, and the issues raised became a cause of bitter dissension. In September 1945 Indonesian seamen began walking off Dutch ships, Indonesians working for Dutch establishments in Melbourne resigned, and Indonesian soldiers in Australia mutinied. The WWF, supported by the Seamen's Union, placed a ban on Dutch ships carrying arms to Indonesia. Conservative opinion was outraged and the question, which was to ring through Parliament and the press for the next three years,



was asked: who is governing Australia? As seen by the *Argus* (27 Sept. 1945):

Apart altogether from the rights or wrongs of the policy formulated in NEI by the advocates of an Indonesian republic, the hold-up of Dutch mercy ships by waterside workers in Sydney, whose attitude has already been imitated by workers on the Brisbane wharves, raises a question that directly concerns the citizens of the Australian Commonwealth. If our foreign policy is to be dictated by the Waterside Workers' executive, we are simply compelled to ask: Who is governing Australia?

The maritime unions maintained their bans and the conservatives, of whom Menzies was the most consistently vocal, their attacks.

Communism and the Australian communists became progressively the single enemy of conservatives. At the end of the war Russia was still an ally, but from Churchill's Fulton speech in March 1946 it was in process of becoming the enemy, until by the end of 1947 it was the enemy. Communists in Australia were not held responsible exclusively for industrial anarchy, real or imagined, but by the middle of 1946 they had been isolated as the greatest single cause. The movement against communist influence in the trade unions and the ALP was reported with approval. The ban on Dutch ships became a communist ban. So by the eve of the September 1946 election the *Argus* (6 August) was persuaded that the Communist Party, by clandestine means, was on the verge of taking control of the ALP and hence of the country.

Hoping that Labour will be returned again at the coming election with their covert support, their end is to achieve such domination over the Labour party and the trade unions in the next three years that the completion of that period will see them in full control of this country's political, economic, and industrial affairs. Communism has no designs upon the Liberal party. It is upon the Labour party that it will concentrate the whole of its cunning. Thus a vote for Labour is a vote for communism.

The communists had become the essential enemy and they were to remain so for the next ten years, but not because a vote for Labor was a vote for communism.

In the transition years the Labor government was under constant at-

tack by the conservative press and the parliamentary opposition, but not simply because it is the function of the opposition to be critical; the Labor government brought to a range of new problems, which the war and its termination threw up, assumptions which differed greatly from those accepted by conservatives. One of the areas of most constant criticism was that of foreign policy and of Australia's role in the Empire. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that for the first time in its history Australia had a foreign policy—previously with minor deviations it had simply followed Britain.

The focus of foreign policy, largely designed and executed by Evatt but with the general support of the government, was the United Nations Organisation. This involved a big shift from traditional ways. It meant a questioning of the unqualified right of the great powers to determine world events; it also meant for Australia a greater degree of independence from Great Britain, although it did not mean, as the critics complained, the destruction of the old association with London. The shape which Evatt sought to give to world affairs first became evident at the inaugural meeting of the United Nations (UN) at San Francisco in April and May 1945. The conference had before it the Dumbarton Oaks proposals and understandings reached at Yalta by the USA, Britain, and the USSR. Under these proposals the world organisation was to be dominated by the five great powers, which for this purpose included France and China in addition to the big three. The domination was to be exercised through the Security Council consisting of the Big Five as permanent members and six non-permanent members, with each member of the Big Five possessing the power of veto. The case for it was summarised by the US delegate, Edward Stettinius:

The Council is the enforcement agency of the world organization. And hence it must be the repository of its power to prevent aggression. The five permanent powers have at their disposal an overwhelming proportion of the men and material necessary to enforce peace . . . And it must be remembered that any action taken by the Council to settle a dispute may ultimately lead to the necessity for enforcement action if peaceful methods fail.<sup>5</sup>

Evatt was the most consistent opponent of the veto power, thus coming

into conflict with the USA, Britain, and most violently the USSR. He saw himself and was seen by others as the spokesman of the small nations. The fight was not entirely in vain, in that the big powers agreed not to exclude by veto the *discussion* of international disagreements, but the veto would apply to proposed actions flowing from the discussion. It was a very little victory, but at least the implications of the veto had an extensive public airing. Evatt had greater success in writing into the charter propositions about social policy, including full employment and desirable standards to be maintained in trust territories. Colonial powers, including Britain, were less than lukewarm about anything which would mean external supervision of their colonies. At home in Australia Evatt was painted by the conservative press as a showman posturing on the world stage. Menzies saw him as disloyal to the Empire; the communists saw him as disloyal to the Soviet Union:

Although the Soviet Union has made a big sacrifice in its Big Power veto modifications . . . Australia's delegate, Dr. Evatt, is still attacking the new veto agreement and accusing the Big Five of 'steam-rolling' their proposals. Dr. Evatt has now moved to the Right of such Tory and jingo organs as the *London Observer* and *Daily Mail*.<sup>6</sup>

No one is likely to claim that the UN lived up to the brave expectations held out for it in 1945. It soon became one of the arenas in which the cold war was fought, in words. But as a forum, as setting a standard of behaviour in international relations, and with its objectives for social policy, particularly in the dependent nations, it had some civilising influence in the post-war world. How far, then, was the criticism valid that Evatt and Labor generally were undermining the Empire by their adherence to the UN?

Quite independent of anything done by Australia, empires of the old style were on the way out. In Asia nationalist movements were making the restoration of old colonial forms of rule difficult and, in the long run, impossible. India and Burma were soon to be granted independence. Forward-looking colonial administrators and policy-makers recognised the inevitability that the African colonies would seek independence in due course—how, and how soon, were the only questions.

Labor was sympathetic to these trends, and in some cases played some part in forwarding them. Indonesia was on the doorstep, and a problem for the government, which solved its dilemma by a careful policy of non-intervention, while not actively impeding the forces in the community who were giving positive assistance to the nationalist movement. Finally in 1949 Australia provided one of the UN mediators who negotiated Indonesian independence from Holland. But there still remains the question of Labor's relations with Britain. For those to whom the mystique of Empire was a quasi-religious experience Labor was far from satisfactory. The government's refusal to recommend titles caused a drought of imperial symbols. It did not break until the flood that followed the return of the Menzies government in 1949; in turn, it showed no signs of easing until it was dried up overnight by Whitlam in December 1972. The appointment in 1947 of W. J. McKell, Labor Premier of New South Wales, to succeed a Royal Duke as Governor-General was interpreted by conservatives as a thrust at the very vitals of the Empire. In matters of appearance, such as participation in imperial social frolics, Chifley's cool indifference aroused anger in the hearts of those for whom imperial panoply was the delicious stuff of life. In more substantial matters the position was otherwise. At great cost, including political cost, the Labor government buttressed the ailing economy of Britain in the post-war years. In particular it adhered faithfully to the restrictions imposed by the necessities of the sterling area.

Chifley attended the Prime Ministers' conference in London in 1946. Later he was accused of having been unduly influenced by the British socialist high-priests, Attlee, Bevin, and Sir Stafford Cripps. Crisp comments:

The simple fact of the matter is that the attitudes towards Britain of this Irish-Australian son of Bathurst before his first visit to Britain are entirely consistent with those to be traced subsequently. In the year before he made his first London visit he told Parliament, for instance, of the dollar difficulties immediately arising for the future from the sudden cessation of Lend-Lease; 'Countries of the British Empire', he concluded, 'including the United Kingdom, will be obliged to confine themselves to purchasing the barest necessities within the dollar area, and wherever possible requirements which formerly were obtained from the U.S.A. must be obtained in the sterling area'.<sup>7</sup>

Crisp refers to this attitude as an Australian self-denying ordinance. While the government did not accede automatically to every request made by Britain, in economic policy and in direct economic assistance it was prepared to make sacrifices to assist Britain. Crisp quotes Chifley (p. 282):

Australia is one of the countries which made the least economic sacrifice, and suffered least in World War II. Are we to deny to the United Kingdom . . . which bore the brunt . . . wheat, butter and other goods which our kinsfolk urgently need because they can pay us only in sterling? . . . The Australian Government is not prepared to do that.

There was also, of course, self-interest in the policy followed. The British market was of primary importance to Australia and Australia could not afford to contribute to its collapse. The continuation of meat and butter rationing, the latter in particular a cause of increasing electoral unpopularity, was a result at least in part of a faithful adherence to policies intended to protect the solvency of the sterling bloc.

Within Australia the administration of the Labor government made a decisive contribution to the remarkably smooth transition from war to peace. Planning for the end of the war began while the war was still at its height. The planning and the implementation of plans proceeded steadily with the result that, although the years 1945-7 were a period of comparative austerity, they were not marked by the disruptions of economic and social life which followed the end of World War I. The banner under which the government sailed was the maintenance of full employment; the agonies of the depression and the slow grind of the dreary thirties must not be allowed to return. There was also an attempt to implement a social welfare scheme with substantial benefits and widespread ramifications. In addition, the most extensive immigration scheme ever attempted was put into effect.

The greatest danger apprehended by the government was the probability of a runaway inflation caused by the shortage of goods and the build-up of buying power, and likely to be encouraged by external factors. By monetary measures such as maintaining taxation at a high level, and by price and wage control, however unpopular, inflationary pres-

asures were dampened down. By stabilising the marketing of primary products and taking steps to diversify secondary industry, employment was maintained and expanded, and at the same time some of the inflationary pressure reduced. Probably the most important element of the program, however, was the control of banking.

Under wartime powers the government had exercised substantial control over the operations of the banking system. The policy of the party was to nationalise the private banks, and this was urged by sections of the party from 1942 onwards. The decision, however, was to continue by legislative reform the control which had operated under wartime regulations. After careful preparation, two Bills were submitted to Parliament in March 1945. The first, the Commonwealth Bank Bill, provided for a re-structuring of the Commonwealth Bank; the second, the Banking Bill, set out the means by which the relations between the private banks and the Commonwealth Bank were to be regulated. Without going into the details of these measures, which became law in August 1945, it may be said that they greatly increased the authority of the Commonwealth Bank as a central bank, thus giving to the government much greater control over the level of credit available in the economy than had existed before the war. Although these Bills were bitterly opposed by the private banks, and savagely criticised by the parliamentary opposition as the first instalment of socialism, the financial powers which they put into the hands of the government were essential for its post-war policies. When one of the powers conferred by the Acts was later successfully challenged in the High Court, the government was presented with its first great post-war crisis. It decided to nationalise the private banks, with consequences which will be considered in the next chapter.

An adventurous immigration program was an important part of the post-war plans of the government. It was in part a humanitarian response to the problems of war-devastated Europe, in part a response to the perennial demand for more people to defend Australia, and not least it was due to an awareness that a policy of economic expansion could only be sustained if the labour force was increased. When first broached at the end of the war, the immigration program was attacked

from different angles: at one end of the spectrum it was not adventurous enough, a target of twenty million in twenty years being demanded by the managing director of the *Argus* (1 Nov. 1945); at the other end of the spectrum it was widely believed that there should be no immigration until the present population was employed and housed. The target figure decided upon by Calwell, the Minister for Immigration, was 70,000 a year, to be achieved when people and shipping were available. But for some time shipping, exhausted by wartime sinkings, was the stumbling block.

Early in 1946 the Australian and British governments reached an agreement for free and assisted migration from Britain and it was hoped that the scheme could begin to be implemented during 1947, with a probable 35,000 migrants in the first year.<sup>8</sup> At the beginning of 1947, after a meeting of Commonwealth and state immigration ministers, it was announced that the target could not be met because of shipping shortages—the most that could be expected was 6000 for the year. The scheme was to move into high gear in 1948 when not only British migrants but displaced persons from Europe began to arrive in large numbers. In the meantime the arrival of small numbers of Jewish refugees from late in 1946 sparked a virulent and discreditable campaign against the government, and in particular the Minister for Immigration.<sup>9</sup>

From the capture by allied troops of the German concentration camps until the end of 1946 the press of the world, including that of Australia, was heavy with the story and pictures of the great nazi crime against European Jewry. But what was to happen to the survivors? By the end of 1946 there were over 200,000 displaced Jews in the western zone of Germany and Austria. Following discussions between Calwell and Jewish leaders in Australia, it was agreed that permits of entry would be granted to 2000 Jewish people, the financing and arrangements for transport being left to Jewish organisations. When they began to arrive in Australia a babel of voices was raised against the government and them.

The nub of the argument against the Jewish refugees was that they must be getting preferential treatment. If the immigration program for British migrants was being held up by lack of shipping, how could the

Jewish organisations obtain shipping? J. T. Lang, the *Bulletin*, *Smith's Weekly* and the New South Wales president of the RSL led the attack. There were charges by Lang of a racket in landing permits. The RSL complained that 'refugee aliens' were getting homes, businesses, and cars ahead of Australian ex-servicemen. The critics alleged that, far from being the destitute victims of the Nazi terror, the Jewish migrants were wealthy people who used their money to gain advantages for themselves in Australia. The *Bulletin* and Lang saw no conflict between this view and their claim that many of them were communists. Lang asked, in the *Century*, if Calwell had 'become the unwitting instrument whereby the Communist International can dump its agents in Australia?'<sup>10</sup>

At first the anti-semitism of the opposition was implied rather than explicit, although cartoons in the *Bulletin* gave Calwell an even larger and more racially distinct nose than that with which nature had endowed him. Crowds of Jewish caricatures poured through the gates of Australia, led or welcomed by Calwell, who had become 'Calvell'. In one such cartoon (*Bulletin*, 19 Feb. 1947) he led a column of flamboyantly dressed and bejewelled Hebrews into 'Australia, The Promised Land (no digger need apply)' over the caption, 'And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it'. It remained for a Liberal member of the House of Representatives, H. H. Gullett, to apply the full anti-semitic treatment. In a letter to the *Argus* he made the usual attack on Calwell, and then went on:

It is time to consider these refugees arriving from Poland and elsewhere purely on their merits as migrants and in an unsentimental light. In the last 50 years these people have swarmed all over Europe, coming principally from America, Russia and the Balkans. We should remember that they are European neither by race, standards, nor culture. They are, in fact, an Eastern people. In 2000 years no one but Britain has been successfully able to absorb them, and for the most part they owe loyalty and allegiance to none. They secured a strangle hold on Germany after the last war during the inflation period, and in very large part, brought upon themselves the persecution which they subsequently suffered.<sup>11</sup>

This was followed by a sharp and open debate about anti-semitism,





The Pied Harper.

—By courtesy of *The Bulletin*

given edge by the Jewish insurgency in Palestine. It left no doubt that for a section of Australians anti-semitism was not far below the surface and could be made public by events such as have been described: equally it demonstrated that there were strong currents of opinion shocked and angered by the overt expression of attitudes against which they believed that the recent war had been fought.

The clamour died down in the second half of 1947, in part because the number of Jewish refugees arriving proved to be much fewer than the exaggerated forecasts of the opponents, partly because in November the UN approved the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, and partly because the migration program from Britain proved more successful than had been foreseen early in the year. The immigration program was to be one of the great achievements of the Chifley government. During 1948 large numbers of migrants, both British and European, began to arrive, the total almost reaching the target of 70,000. But in troubled 1947 immigration had proved politically embarrassing to the government, under the attacks of bigots and people who refused to look at the practical difficulties in its implementation.

Social welfare was another area in which constructive government moves were met with conservative opposition. A large instalment of social security had been provided between 1942 and 1944: widows' pensions, funeral benefits, maternity benefits, unemployment and sickness benefits, and pharmaceutical benefits, although the provision of the latter was declared unconstitutional by the High Court. In 1945 hospital benefits, a scheme to attack tuberculosis, and the establishment of a Commonwealth Employment Service were further steps towards social security. Following the elections in 1946, which returned the government with a small reduction in seats but no reduction of votes, and the simultaneous grant by referendum of further powers over social service, Chifley sought to extend his social program in the field of health and medical benefits. Crisp describes Chifley's ideal:

His ideal was a national health and medical scheme which was 'free, comprehensive, and of the highest technical excellence', covering all who wished to come within its scope for both preventive and curative medicine, both general and

specialist, but voluntary in the sense that particular doctors or patients need not participate. (p. 315)

In 1944-5 Acts were adopted for hospital benefits and free medicine. The hospital benefits went into operation, but free medicine failed, because of the opposition of the medical profession. Despite a series of measures which attempted to meet the complaints of the British Medical Association (BMA), a successful opposition was maintained by the BMA until the defeat of the Labor government in 1949. The method was boycott: the argument was that the government measures created barriers between the doctor and his patient. They were anathematised as 'socialised medicine'. The main open struggle occurred in 1948 and 1949, but it was already clearly in view by the end of 1947.

Thus by the end of 1947, while much had been achieved, the Labor government was under heavy conservative and other pressures. Its foreign policy, nationalist and internationalist oriented, was under heavy fire from those who looked either to London or Moscow for their guiding light. The banking structure, essential to carry out the economic policy of the government, was under attack. The immigration program, which was about to take off, was still a focus of criticism and cynical comment. The medical profession was firing the first shots in what became a war against the government. Finally, within the labour movement the conflict between left and right had steadily become more acute.

The war from 1941 onwards was harvest time for the Communist Party. It had the best of all possible worlds. It gave full and loyal support to the government in the conduct of the war. It gained prestige from the successes of the Red Army, whose achievements gave legitimacy to the communist description of the Soviet Union. In the unions where communists held positions of authority they generally had the best of two worlds: They were loyal adherents of a maximum war effort, but at the same time they retained the aura of militancy. While the latter was becoming tarnished by 1945, it was only amongst the Balmain ironworkers and to a lesser extent amongst coalminers that there was any significant revolt against the dual role of communist trade union officials.

So long as the war lasted there were no problems of policy, even though tactical issues began to press on union officials as the war began to run down. The Balmain rebels could be dismissed as Trotskyist wreckers, who had been proved in the Soviet Union to be creatures of the nazis. The perennially strike-prone coalminers had to be handled more carefully, but they could be handled. The war made black and white stark in their opposition—the war must be won. In addition there was the fact that the Labor government, while not socialist, was putting into practice progressive policies. On the larger world stage the apparent unshakable unity of Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin, pledged at Teheran to continue after the war, seemed to promise a post-war world in which the last elements of fascism would be extirpated, thus making possible a steady progress towards socialism on a world scale. The world was moving left. This was an opinion not exclusive to the Communist Party. It was held also by the Labor government, by radical members of the Labor Party, and by many uncommitted intellectuals who did not want to see a return of the pre-war conditions.

Nevertheless the Communist Party had problems of theory. The fall guy was Earl Browder, leader of the Communist Party of the United States, who made the mistake of expounding a general political strategy which would continue the wartime alliances into the peace. Browder's writing, in particular *Teheran: Our Path in War and Peace*, circulated widely in the Australian party. For a time his ideas received sympathetic attention by both leaders and rank and file. Following a denunciation by the French communist leader, Jacques Duclos, who was widely believed to be speaking on behalf of the CPSU, Browder was attacked by the leaders of the Australian party. An article by L. L. Sharkey in the *Communist Review* (Aug. 1945) is important in both its interpretation of Browder and the conclusions drawn for Australia.

As a result of the unity achieved by the great powers during the war, and confirmed at Teheran, the world, according to Browder, could look forward to an extended period of peace and international co-operation. This co-operation should be reflected on the national stage by a willingness on the part of the workers to co-operate with their own capitalist class. This would provide the conditions for very rapid eco-

conomic development, in which the living standards of the workers would be raised, even doubled. To facilitate this process the issue of socialism should not be raised by the workers, nor should they even demand the nationalisation of key monopolies. As for the communist parties, they should reduce the sources of potential friction and dissolve themselves, to be replaced by educational bodies which would study and teach the principles of Marxism and humanism. In line with this proposition, the Communist Party in the United States was dissolved and replaced for a time by the Communist Political Association.

Sharkey accepted Duclos's opinion, which had subsequently been agreed to by the American communist leaders, that Browder's views expressed a 'false theory of social evolution in general' and resulted in a revision of Marxism-Leninism, 'revision' here meaning a departure from basic principle. Having rejected Browder's interpretation, what were the conclusions to be drawn? Sharkey answered:

The question arises whether, in rejecting the false concepts of Earl Browder, the Communists reject the decisions of the Teheran Conference, the world organisation for peace established at the San Francisco conference, the rehabilitation of devastated areas, industrialisation of backward countries, the application of the Atlantic Charter in regard to independence of nations and participation in post-war reconstruction plans while capitalism is still in existence over a large part of the world? Have the Communists, in rejecting Earl Browder's false theory of social evolution, gone over to a standpoint of the inevitability of war? Will they cease to participate in plans to cushion or avert economic breakdown, and see the future as merely a new depression followed by a new world war, which should be accepted fatalistically, as inevitable?

The questions imply their own negative answer, but they don't imply any positive answer.

The positive answer proposed by Sharkey to guide Australian communists was in four parts. The immediate program should be to support all measures designed to maintain world peace and to provide better living standards for the people. This, however, could be achieved not, as Browder had argued, by collaboration with the capitalists, but by the struggle of the labour movement.

We believe that the post-war reconstruction can be achieved by means of serious political struggle against the most powerful and reactionary monopoly capital groups, by the nationalisation of key industries and strict control of prices and profiteers, raw materials and essential public utilities and services, whereas Browder rejected not only nationalisation, but any form of control of monopolies.

All of this demands a strong, independent Communist Party, a united labor movement and a genuine national unity of the workers, soldiers, middle-class and the toiling farmers.

The prospects of success of the labour movement in this struggle, Sharkey considered, were strengthened by two facts: first, that world imperialism had been severely shaken by the defeat of Germany and Italy and the impending defeat of Japan; second, that the increased strength and prestige of the Soviet Union had weakened the foundations of capitalism on a global scale.

In this scheme socialism still had a place; not where Browder had put it, according to Sharkey—to 'coincide with the Second Coming'—but in the foreseeable future. The struggle for the immediate program is itself a struggle for socialism since it unites the masses and raises their political level. In the long run capitalist economies were not capable of meeting the economic needs of the majority of the people; economic crises would occur:

There can be no doubt that the capitalist countries will experience economic crises in the future as in the past. No 'diplomatic document' between States can overcome that fundamental feature of capitalism; while international efforts may cushion, mitigate, or delay it, eventually the basic laws of capitalist production and the market will assert themselves. No Marxist could ever believe otherwise and remain a Marxist.

Thus the total analysis was pruned to three things: political struggle by a united labour movement led ultimately to socialism; the Soviet Union was a bastion of peace and an influence towards socialism; and economic crises were still a fundamental feature of capitalist economies, and their occurrence would be the occasion for socialist solutions.

Despite the confidence with which the inevitability of economic crises was asserted, there were niggling doubts. The evidence for this is

the sustained, if not well informed, interest in Keynes and his economic theory. In an article on the White Paper on full employment, Dixon, who was regarded as the expert in political economy amongst the leaders of the Communist Party, approved of the Keynesian concepts incorporated in the paper.<sup>12</sup> He considered that the policies were far in advance of any proposed by any previous government, and could ensure full employment and rising living standards for a time, but in long term they could not resolve the basic contradictions of capitalism. As quoted by Dixon, Stalin had the last word, in a speech made in 1930:

If capitalism could adapt production, not to the acquisition of the maximum of profit, but to the systematic improvement of the material conditions of the mass of the people, if it could employ its profits, not in satisfying the whims of the parasitic classes, not in perfecting methods of exploitation, not in exporting capital, but in the systematic improvement of the material conditions of the workers and peasants, then there would be no crisis. But then, also, capitalism would not be capitalism. In order to abolish crisis, capitalism must be abolished.

But despite this the plan for full employment was a good thing: it involved national planning in peacetime and must result in strengthening the influence of socialism.

The partial acceptance of Keynesian theory was not, however, universal in the Communist Party. G. P. O'Day, a rumbustious Melbourne medical practitioner and communist propagandist, felt that Keynes was totally dangerous for the labour movement. He pointed out that Lord Keynes was a director of the Midland Bank,<sup>13</sup> and that he was a Tory and a member of the upper class. Was it likely that such a man, whose theories had been seized on and applied by Dr Schacht, the economic wizard of Hitler's Germany, would provide the working class with a theory that was in their interest? He wound up:

Do not underestimate the danger of the Keynesian bait. It has been carefully prepared by the ablest of England's ruling class. Its objective is to lull the working class with apathy, to give the ruling class time to firmly seize the reins again. Menzies aids the trick by 'vehement' opposition. At every opportunity he labels the bait as socialism. . . . The whole business is as genuine as a wrestling match at the old stadium.

The fact that this opinion was published in the communist theoretical journal suggests that there was conflict of opinion about the weight to be attached to the Keynesian position within the Communist Party.

The Russian economist, Professor E. Varga, was extensively published in the Australian communist press. He would have nothing to do with the idea that new policies could even mitigate what he regarded as the necessary cycle of capitalism. He predicted that in the countries which had not been devastated, the war would be followed immediately by a period of rapid economic expansion for two to four years.<sup>14</sup> But this would be the limit, the first period being followed by a long stage of depressed economic conditions. This was simply a variation of 1918 to 1929, with the boom of the late 1920s removed. Varga was the authority and, although his views were questioned obliquely, his was the strongest voice to be heard from overseas by the Australian Communist Party leaders.

In January 1946, Sharkey spoke on the tasks of the party in the present situation.<sup>15</sup> He commented on international events, in particular the disagreements between the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union over China, Indo-China, Greece, and Persia. In all of these the Soviet Union sustained the truly democratic forces, whereas the British and American governments were interested only in preserving imperialist interests. This could lead to a third world war, but it had to be resisted. As for the more general perspectives, he accepted Varga's assertions; 'The general crisis of capitalism which Lenin revealed even before the last war has been deepened and widened by the Second World War'. The conclusion to be drawn from this, however, was not that communists should wait for the inevitable economic crisis to press their alternatives. They should take the lead in forcing the Labor government to carry out its policies, and in leading the people in struggles against the monopolists and reactionary forces generally. The communists should see themselves as the most genuine representatives of the majority of the Australian people; they should support the government where possible, they should assert the peaceful and democratic intentions of the Soviet Union, but they should not be deterred from militant action against the reactionary capitalist class or, if necessary,



against the government if it took the side of the monopolists against the people.

The attempt to identify the party with the national interest was not confined to simple statements of policy. The attempt was made, and it was not a hypocritical manoeuvre, to picture the Communist Party as the legitimate heir to the Australian (democratic) tradition. A booklet issued to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the formation of the party in October 1945 seized on historic symbols of the struggle for democracy in Australia. The foreword, over the signature of the general secretary, J. B. Miles, announced that 'the Communist Party inherits the Australian democratic traditions and takes a leading part in the struggle to defend every democratic gain and for a more complete democracy'. This was followed by a quick skip through Australian history in twenty illustrated pages.<sup>16</sup> The tyrants were there, but Eureka, the 8-hour day, the maritime strike, William Lane, the early socialists, the IWW, the anti-conscription movement, the great depression, and the people's war had pride of place. They led into the Communist Party, which in contemporary society incorporated the values for which these events had stood in the past. The peroration ran:

The Australian Communist Party stands for a strong, free and independent Australia. Post-war policy should aim at the progressive expansion of industry and agriculture and an increasing population. Australia, as a self-governing member of the British Commonwealth of Nations, must have a foreign policy that will help strengthen international collaboration for peace and the expansion of world trade, a policy that aims at close friendship with our Pacific neighbours. Democracy must be broadened and strengthened in keeping with the best traditions of Australia, and our social services must be expanded to ensure social security for all citizens . . . The way forward to Socialism lies through the struggle for Jobs! Freedom! and Progress.

This was a glossy publicity document aimed at popularising the Communist Party amongst people whose interest in politics was marginal. At the same time it expounded one aspect of communist aspiration at this time. Despite the disavowal of Browderism, there was a strong current of opinion within the party that was represented by exactly the values presented. But this current of opinion was held in tension with an

adherence to the Soviet Union and an ultimate belief that economic crisis would render superfluous the hopes for a peaceful and steady progress to the good society: the Leninist model for revolution was in the background, but not buried.

To the men who organised the main counter-thrust to communism in the community generally and the labour movement in particular any conflicts within communist thinking were mere window-dressing intended to delude the naïve. The Catholic social movement was launched in the last years of the war to forestall an impending red revolution, in which the parish churches would burn like those of Barcelona ten years before. Probably some communists dreamed of such a conflagration. Anti-clericalism was one of the strains that led into communist ideology—strongest for those who had been born into the Catholic Church and had broken from it, of whom there were many in the Communist Party. But in the main communists in 1945 were neither preparing for nor expecting a violent revolution in Australia. They were hopefully looking towards a peaceful transition to a socialist society in response to the felt needs of Australians, but also influenced by what they believed to be the development towards an ordered and just society in the Soviet Union. The cold war, itself a response both to the performance of Russia following World War II and to the aggressive posture of capitalist countries, changed this. American imperialism showed its teeth, and the polarisation of the world proceeded apace. Within Australia, the Movement forced a similar polarisation, and ten years of hostilities in which there were many bloody battles of words and votes.

There is now a substantial literature of the history of the Catholic Social Studies Movement, or, as it became in common usage, and for purposes of concealment, the Movement.<sup>17</sup> The Movement was born of Catholic Action but delivered—as many Catholics then, and more later, saw it—as a bastard child, by B. A. Santamaria. Without any of the distinctively radical elements which have been noted in the Catholic social position, it was specifically an anti-communist organisation. Its other distinguishing characteristic was its secrecy—so secret, indeed, that it was not until 1954 that even the *Catholic Worker*, which was

opposed to the methods of the Movement, mentioned it publicly.<sup>18</sup> The publicity organ of the Movement was *Freedom*, first published in September 1943 and renamed *News-Weekly* in 1947, though neither revealed that it was the organ of a political organisation with close connections with the Catholic Church. In 1944 *Freedom* announced that it was published 'by a group of laymen independent of all church bodies'.<sup>19</sup> Eight years later, in 1952, *News-Weekly* published the names of some of its staff. Ormonde has analysed the main emphasis of its propaganda. In 1945 it was striking a note of wild alarm.

The 20 June 1945 issue of *Freedom*, describing the Communist and militant leaders' successes in the elections for the ACTU executive, declared: 'The past week in Sydney has brought not only this State, but the whole of Australia one step nearer revolution and the achievement of the full aim of the Communist Party . . . The fact is that the Communist Party is now in supreme control of the Australian trade union movement. This means that the Communist Party is in a position to mobilise the weight of the entire trade union movement:

1. To compel the expulsion of any individual from any trade union which it controls. It will do this if the individual is sufficiently dangerous to its cause.
2. To bring the whole union movement into a general strike.
3. Decisively to influence the character of elected Labor candidates, for it is the unions which largely finance the Labor Party.

'Australia stands one step from revolution. The task of those who have set themselves out to defeat the Communist conspiracy is definitely harder than ever.'<sup>20</sup>

From then on the alarm was muffled, and the paper concentrated on the organisation of anti-communist forces within the labour movement. The strident note returned again in 1949, when a front-page article was headlined: 'The Reds Have Got The Guns'. But by 1950 the origins of the red threat were transferred to the north. Thus:

Our own Reds realise that the prospects of achieving power by internal action are hopeless. But they believe firmly, and with some justification, that soon all Asia will be theirs and then resistance by Australia's few to Asia's Red many will be hopeless.<sup>21</sup>

In the meantime the Movement had mounted a massive organisation in the trade unions and Labor Party to resist communists and those whom they chose to believe were as bad as communists.

The form the anti-communist organisation took was that of the Industrial Groups. In the pre-war years the contest between politically oriented Catholics and communists had been primarily one of words. With the formation of the Industrial Groups it became one of organisation, of getting the numbers to win and maintain positions in the labour movement. In the course of this struggle the two machines fought each other with the single determination to win at almost any cost to principle. This trend had opponents in both the communist and Catholic camps. The Communist Party declined steadily in numbers from 1945 to 1947, a decline which continued during the next few years. In 1945 the membership was 16,280; in 1947 it was 12,108; falling to about 6000 in 1952.<sup>22</sup> There were many reasons for this decline, the overriding one being the cold war and the identification of the party with the Soviet Union. But the methods of secrecy and ruthless machine action repelled many, who felt that the means adopted were in conflict with the social objectives of the party. The hard core of the party, which carried on this battle, consisted of people who either were not afflicted by moral scruples or had persuaded themselves that in warfare secrecy and deception are essential to success. Others became inactive or left the party—not always with the highest motives. Weariness and uneasiness about methods often went with a fear of the consequences of continued association—as the cold war froze over, to be a communist was to invite great hostility, suspicion, social ostracism, and victimisation. Sometimes this had the opposite effect. Disapproval by the defenders of what was seen to be an unjust and unequal society strengthened the conviction of some communists that they were in the right, and blunted their awareness of the consequences of some of the types of action in which they were engaged.

Communists are made by the experience of their lives, by intellectual conviction, by psychological pre-disposition, or by a combination of these and other factors. Catholics are in the main born into their faith, and act according to belief and the discipline of the Church. The establishment of the Movement and its operations within the Industrial Groups was not universally acceptable to Catholics. Some who objected to the methods of the Movement wrapped their Catholic faith around them-

selves, avoided political involvement or, if their political convictions were deep-seated, eschewed the practices of the Movement, or in some cases fought against it. This was particularly true of some Catholic members of the labour movement, who sacrificed the apparent immediate political advantage to be gained from co-operation with the Movement because they rejected its methods.

The Movement was a specifically Catholic organisation: the Industrial Groups were not, although it was the Movement which provided the drive and the numbers within the groups. The Movement was secret: the Industrial Groups were not, being official formations of the ALP established at different times in the several states from 1945 onwards. In 1945 the New South Wales ALP began to set up party organisations within the trade unions which soon described themselves as ALP Industrial Groups. Their stated purpose, initially, was to provide propaganda in the interests of the Labor Party, and not to conduct 'a guerilla warfare with the Communists for official positions in the unions'.<sup>23</sup> But whether intended or not, guerilla warfare for official positions soon became the main activity of the Groups. In Victoria Groups were established by the ALP conference in 1946 with, amongst other objectives, support for 'those candidates in trade union ballots who are loyal supporters of the Australian Labor Party's platform and Policy'.<sup>24</sup> Simultaneously Industrial Groups were formed in South Australia, and two years later, in 1948, in Queensland.

Rawson has pointed out the uniqueness of the Industrial Groups, Australia being the only country where for a time (1945-54) the political party which had grown out of the trade unions, and whose organisation continued to be based on them, attempted to influence the policy and the controllers of the unions. He says:

In countries with Labor parties the trade unions have come first and the parties have followed, both historically and nationally. Whether relations between the trade union officials and other sections of the party have been harmonious or strained, the normal tendency has been for the party as such to keep out of the internal affairs of the unions. If the union officials and the politicians are satisfied with each other, there is no cause for intervention; if, as has often been the case in Australia, the union officials are highly dissatisfied with the politicians, they will

resist all the more fiercely any attempt at intervention in union matters. For many years it was accepted almost without question, at least by the more active unionists, that while it was legitimate and desirable for unions to control Labor parties it was highly improper for Labor parties to control unions.<sup>25</sup>

He goes on to say that the reason for this unusual state of affairs was that another political party, the Communist Party, was by means of its strength in the unions not only influencing union strategy and tactics but also influencing the Labor Party through its affiliated unions. But by what policies could the ALP counter this influence since it was far from being a homogeneous body itself? As a political institution it was a complex of forces and strands of ideology. So far as there was a common Labor position it was the highest common denominator of conflicting pressures and ideas; pressures which ranged from a determination to carry on militant industrial action against employers to complete acceptance of industrial conciliation and arbitration; ideas which ranged from the acceptance of socialism as a possible, just, and equitable organisation of society to a complete rejection of socialism. The highest common denominator was a belief in the idea of a capitalism modified by legislation and industrial struggle conciliated by the state. That such a party was able for a time to have officially recognised institutions directed to influencing the Movement as a whole was due, as has been suggested, to their single-minded anti-communism.

There were many trade union officials and members of the Labor Party who were opposed to communism, who were striving for positions against communists or were merely seeking votes, and who, while not members of the Movement themselves, were glad to receive the backing of a dedicated division—a division because the Movement was never large enough to constitute an army. Such alliances of convenience, or sometimes of conviction, were often temporary, breaking up when the Movement leaned too heavily, when the allies were no longer needed, or when the methods employed became unacceptable. Anti-communism gave the Groups a fragile unity; the sterner stuff was provided by the Catholicism of the Movement.

Catholic writers, both favourable and unfavourable to the Movement, have argued the question of whether it was a part of Catholic

Action.<sup>26</sup> For those Catholics who opposed the Movement, the legitimacy of the authority claimed for it was of the greatest significance, but for those who were part of it, legitimacy was a matter of only academic interest, the concern of those to whom Bishop Fox referred contemptuously as 'so-called intellectuals'.<sup>27</sup> To the members of the Movement the immediate and deadly threat of communism, as they saw it, was the only matter that was relevant. Ormonde speaks of the 'climate of fear' in which the Movement lived, a climate encouraged by the method of organisation. Most Catholics did not know officially of the Movement's existence, but were aware of a shadowy Catholic organisation which fought the communists in the labour movement. The basic unit was the parish cell, in which the members organised their political and industrial activities. Admission to the cell was by invitation after careful scrutiny for reliability. At its height Ormonde thinks there may have been about 5000 such members.<sup>28</sup> A somewhat more public activity, but still strictly within the Catholic community, was directed towards arousing fear, determination, and money. Meetings held for this purpose were usually addressed by leading Movement organisers, such as Santamaria or Father Harold Lalor, SJ, who has been described as a dramatic orator. The recollections of a country priest who was opposed to the Movement vividly picture the purpose and the atmosphere of such a meeting.

I received a confidential letter from my bishop saying that Father Lalor would be coming to the parish to speak to selected Catholic men concerning 'an existing peril to the things we hold most dear'. Admission to the meeting was by production of a letter of invitation. The meeting had the atmosphere of a conspiratorial gathering rather than a gathering of the saviours of the Commonwealth. The secrecy at this distance seems so ridiculous. Father Lalor's thesis was the danger of the imminent take-over of Australia by the Communists. He had possession of the plans and he was aware of the location of Communist arsenals, machine-guns and ammunition. The immediate aim of the meeting was to raise finance for the Movement. Those poor sheep-cockies, whose fear was not the loss of the faith, but the loss of farms and fleeces, took out their cheque books and gave the Movement £800. A neighbouring parish where a similar meeting was held raised £1300.<sup>29</sup>

The financial sinews of war were stiffened by appeals to the faithful

Catholic laity, but they also benefited from direct support from Church funds, especially in Victoria, where Archbishop Mannix gave unqualified support to the Movement. The atmosphere of crisis was encouraged in other ways, depending on the convictions or eccentricities of those who encouraged them. Schoolboys were taught unarmed combat to prepare them for the fight against communism. Nuns were encouraged to equip themselves with civilian clothes in which to escape when the time came. Keeping watch on communists or suspected communists provided information to the Movement—it also gave a sense of purpose and achievement to those who engaged in it.<sup>30</sup>

The Movement, operating through the Industrial Groups or, when necessary, independently, but retaining the Groups as a cover, organised within the Labor Party and the trade unions to win positions from communists or those whom they considered were co-operating with communists. Santamaria, commenting retrospectively on the people opposed by the Industrial Groups, says they were of four types.

Firstly, they opposed Communists. Secondly, they opposed men who helped the Communists, even though they might call themselves 'good Labor men'. Thirdly, they opposed men who considered themselves anti-Communist but who, for their own various reasons, wished to destroy the ALP Group organization by withdrawing ALP endorsement from the Groups—which those who had really fought communism knew to be the *only* effective weapon in the anti-Communist fight. At a later stage a fourth issue developed. There were trade union and political leaders whose attitude to Communism was one of stern opposition. Unfortunately, the methods by which they controlled their unions were no less corrupt than those of some of the Communists.<sup>31</sup>

This was a wide spread of typical members of the unions and the Labor Party. Almost anyone who was not a member of the Movement could be caught in the net. On the other hand, who was to be supported? Not all Catholics within the labour movement favoured the Movement or were prepared to co-operate with it. Catholics such as Calwell and James Ormonde, with lifelong careers in the Labor Party and a belief that it should be wide enough to hold anyone except communists, were unprepared to collaborate with it. Calwell pithily stated the text which he believed the Movement applied. In a memorandum written in 1956



he said: 'The test was simple. Only those who accepted the Movement's directives were genuine anti-communists. All others were at least suspect and were to be so regarded by readers of *News-Weekly*. . . .'<sup>32</sup> Behind this designation lay the conviction that the Movement seized on anti-communism as a device by means of which Catholics could be tempted to harm Labor. Late in his life Calwell wrote that

an inordinately large number of my fellow Catholics are fear stricken, communist-hating, money-making, social-climbing, status-seeking, brainwashed, ghetto-minded people to whom the Pope is too venturesome, and not sufficiently prudent in his dealings with the non-Catholic world on the one hand and the Communist one-sixth of the world on the other.<sup>33</sup>

Calwell's was the voice of those members of the Labor Party who instinctively and from experience saw it as the party of the Australian working class, not to be diverted from its proper course by religious sectarianism or communist ideology, but equally not to be subverted by the rich, whether Catholic or not. The Movement was alien to the way in which he knew in his bones that the affairs of Labor should be conducted. One-time communists and Trotskyists such as Lloyd Ross, Laurence Short, and Dinny Lovegrove saw the matter differently. Seeking a new or a stronger power base in union or Labor Party, they were glad to accept the assistance of the Movement, and joined themselves with it in the Industrial Groups. The particular people whom the Movement put forward were of widely different background and ideas; what they had in common was that they were prepared to be part of the machine.

What the machine offered was organised voting support. By canvassing the tight-knit Catholic community, the activists were able to stack meetings of ALP branches and unions to support selected candidates and vote for particular motions. Ormonde explains how it was done. Summarising the evidence contained in an appendix to his book he says:

As Robert Corcoran points out later in this book, the Movement could easily swamp a local ALP ballot to achieve an unrepresentative result. He gives the example of an electorate of 40,000 voters. About 10,000 of these people would be members of affiliated unions, of whom 2000 to 3000 would be Catholics. As the

vast majority of unionists did not normally bother to vote in ALP ballots, and since the branch membership in an electorate would be only a few hundred, it can be seen that the Movement, by mobilising only a relatively small proportion of Catholic unionists, could dominate a ballot with ease. In practice, there was sometimes sporadic resistance within the Labor Party by people aware of the Movement's tactics, but they could rarely match the Movement's disciplined bloc voting. (pp. 34-5)

Up to 1947 the success of the Movement was much less than suggested by this description of the methods which it perfected with experience. It had early success in ALP branches and in annual conferences of the ALP in Victoria and New South Wales, but, by the end of 1947, in the majority of unions in which communists held leading positions, it had little success—the successes were to come later. But the intervention of the Movement meant progressively that in key unions, where the Movement sought to win positions from communists or simply from people who were not prepared to identify with the Movement, elections became simply a contest to get a majority of voters, however ignorant they may have been of what they were voting for.

The political circumstances in which the Industrial Groups became a part of political life must now be looked at in more detail, or at least some cases must be examined. Santamaria and the men who organised the Movement were correct in thinking that at the end of the war the Communist Party was more influential than it had ever been before. But they were profoundly wrong if they ever really believed that there was any possibility of an armed insurrection. As we have seen, communist policy was based on the concept of the united front, of co-operation with the Labor government to carry through reforms of the capitalist system. In long term there was the prospect of economic depression in which more revolutionary action would be needed, but in the meantime modification of capitalism was a step towards an ultimate socialist society. There was a conviction that the historical movement of society was towards socialism, but it was a long-term process in which the details could not be foreseen. Was this stated position merely a verbal smoke-screen to conceal more malign purposes? The evidence of communist

duplicity was seen mainly in the series of industrial disputes with which the war ended and which continued in 1946 and 1947.

Menzies had never ceased throughout the war to attack communists, taking care at the height of Russian popularity to distinguish them from Russian patriots. In May 1945 he moved to censure the government for its failure to deal with the communists. The motion read in part:

That this House is of the opinion that the Government is deserving of censure for:

1. Its failure to deal adequately with the rising tide of industrial lawlessness;
2. Its encouragement of Communist activities in Australia.<sup>34</sup>

Menzies spoke of the rise to power of the Communist Party despite its proscription at the beginning of the war, referred to its shameful record of sabotage before July 1941, and pointed out the communist controlled FIA as a cause of the 'rising tide of industrial lawlessness'. The motion was defeated, but it was an augury of things to come. The Liberal Party declared a state of industrial lawlessness, held the communists responsible, and castigated the government for its failure to deal with them. Scattered strikes occurred throughout 1945 and were extensively reported. But it was not until the last quarter of the year that any large-scale industrial conflict occurred. The steel strike was the first big industrial dispute following the war. At the same time black bans on Dutch shipping bound for Indonesia, which were to apply for the next four years, unsettled the waterfront.

The steel strike began over a question of seniority and victimisation of a worker at Australian Iron and Steel (a subsidiary of the industrial giant, Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited (BHP)), at Port Kembla. It spread to the BHP works at Newcastle, and towards the end of the three months' stoppage coalminers and seamen went out in support of the steelworkers.<sup>35</sup> In the course of the strike the issues broadened to include a demand for the 40-hour week. It was settled by reference of the matters in dispute to the Arbitration Court. The strike is important because of the interpretations placed on it and the reactions of the community to it. It was widely represented as an attack on the arbitration system by a communist-led union which had caused great suffering in the community. 'Lawlessness' and 'the law of the jungle'

were the common terms of press comment. The agreement by the FIA to refer the matter to the court was seen as capitulation by the union. How far this represented general opinion it is impossible to say, but there is some evidence to suggest that the strike had a cathartic effect in a community which had bottled its grievances for too long. For example, a union official, K. McKeon, recalled the extraordinary financial support gained from public collections. As reported to Merritt:

The Port Kembla steelworkers' band (the members dressed in ordinary clothes) would play in working class suburbs on Saturday mornings, after race meetings on Saturday afternoons, and on the Bondi Beach promenade on Sunday mornings, to raise money for the strikers. After one Canterbury (Sydney) race meeting the band took over £3,000, and about £1,000 was usual for other meetings. Prominent among the donors were men still in uniform. McKeon claims that the contributions were a revelation to him: 'I never knew until then how much the people hated B.H.P.'<sup>36</sup>

The union considered the strike a victory, and so did the Communist Party. The reasons for this interpretation are important for the understanding of all communist post-war industrial strategy.

Within a general policy of support for the Labor government in Canberra and qualified support for Labor governments in the states, the Communist Party saw its role as that of a ginger group for the government and as a prime mover in direct struggle against the most reactionary forces in the community. In their understanding, reaction was centred on the powerful economic interests, of which the most powerful was the BHP. The steel strike was seen as a defensive action against anti-union provocation by the most powerful monopoly group, with the intention of weakening the FIA in particular and the metal unions generally. In the strike struggle the workers directly involved, and those who came to their support, the coalminers, seamen, and the FEDFA, demonstrated a remarkable solidarity. On the other hand, right-wing union officials concentrated in the New South Wales Labor Council, some members of the ACTU executive, and right-wing Labor politicians had exposed themselves as defenders of monopoly. As put by Sharkey:

The B.H.P. is hated by the working-class as the worst exploiter of the labor of the

toilers and the avowed enemy of the labor movement. The solidarity of the labor movement should have been assured, and in that case a comparatively easy victory over the B.H.P. could have been secured by the Unions. But here a new factor presented itself in the shape of widespread betrayal on the part of the dominant clique of the N.S.W. Labor Council and among the reformist officials of a number of important unions.

The right wing clique controlling the N.S.W. Labor Council is composed of rabid redbaiting representatives of the A.W.U. bureaucracy and political 'Catholic Action'. These gentry thought they saw an opportunity to smash the Ironworkers' Union and hoped thereby to deal a blow at the Communists.<sup>37</sup>

The evidence of the apostasy of the right wing, said Sharkey, was that they insisted that the FIA call off the strike and refer the matter to the Arbitration Court. This was what BHP wanted, and therefore they were adopting the position of the monopolists. The final conclusion to be drawn was that the strength of the communist leadership of the strike had demonstrated who were prepared to lead in industrial struggles, namely the communists. In a world-wide perspective there was a general offensive of 'reaction against the progressive forces', in which BHP's provocation was one incident. It had to be resisted nationally and internationally.<sup>38</sup> Dixon, president of the Communist Party, expounded his view of the correct attitude towards the ALP in a comment on the federal conference of the ALP held in November 1945.<sup>39</sup> He approved of most of the policy, but declared that its statement against the continuation of the steel strike was contrary to the interests of Labor. In summary, then, the policy was to lend general support to the Labor government, oppose the machinations of the right wing of the labour movement, which was under the influence of Catholic Action, and at the same time carry on militant industrial struggle against the capitalist class. If the latter was interpreted as being directed at the government, then the solution was in the government's hands.

The old cry, 'don't embarrass Labor Governments', which is always raised when workers insist on Labor Governments recognising their just demands, won't wash any longer. The Labor Party, which controls five State Governments as well as the Federal Government, is in a position radically to improve living standards and working conditions, and must do so. The workers are not in the mood to be trifled

with. They expect results and have the organisation and power to enforce their demands.<sup>40</sup>

The communist estimate of the mood of the workers was borne out by events. In the three years 1945-7 almost 5½ million working days were lost as a result of industrial disputes. This was more than twice as many as in the three years immediately before the war. Many particular demands were involved in these disputes, but the most common ones were for the introduction of a 40-hour week, the lifting of wage-pegging regulations, and an increase in the basic wage and margins for skill. Government policy, based on the fear of inflation, was to brake as heavily as possible any increase in wages or reduction of hours, but if they had to occur they should come slowly and by decisions of the Arbitration Court. A hearing on the 40-hours case, begun in May 1946, seemed to promise something; but it was to drag on for more than a year. Chifley was even more reluctant to open any door to an increase in wages, and it was not until the last day of October that the court announced that it was prepared to reopen the basic wage inquiry which had lain dormant since 1941.

Until the elections, held at the end of September 1946, and the associated constitutional referendum asking for government power to legislate on hours and wages, most unions showed restraint. In the election the Labor government was returned, but the referendum failed. This seemed to open the floodgates. Within a few weeks there were transport strikes in Victoria, coal strikes in New South Wales, and the beginning of a strike in the engineering industry which was to last six months, and, although centred in Victoria, affect New South Wales and South Australia as well. Involved in it were the AEU at the centre, but at different times and places most other metal unions: the Blacksmiths' Society, Boilermakers, Moulders, Sheet Metal Workers, and the FIA. In addition the Electrical Workers, the FEDFA and the ARU gave support. It began as a lockout but after two months, when the AEU refused to return on terms offered by the employers, it became a strike. The issue was a demand for the 40-hour week, a £1 increase in the basic wage, and an increase in margins for skill.

The strike, or the complex of industrial disturbances, was attacked as a part of a communist conspiracy. A typical letter to the editor of the *Argus* reads (16 Jan. 1947):

How long are we, the public, to remain just 'dumb, driven cattle', meekly and complacently putting up with no end of inconvenience, loss, and mental and physical suffering instead of rising, in our justifiable wrath and indignation, and sweeping from our land anti-God, anti-Church, anti-State, anti-democratic, anti-social,—and—yes—anti-trades unionist Communist element?

The government was attacked for its failure to deal with the communists, and there were calls for a royal commission on communism. However, Sheridan has shown in an exhaustive article that the metal trades dispute was an extremely complex phenomenon.<sup>41</sup> Communists had a part in it, but its most distinctive characteristic was the unique conception of their own rights held by the skilled tradesmen of the AEU. The fact is that communists and members of the Groups co-operated in the struggle. Even *News Weekly* found it impolitic to criticise too severely. The main features of the strike were the solidarity of the union members throughout the 6-month conflict; the difficulties of the right-wing leaders in the ACTU, anxious not to embarrass the government but finally forced into open opposition to it; and the steady retreat of Chifley in the face of such powerful opposition. The outcome was a substantial increase in the wage rates of both skilled and unskilled workers in the metal industry. It marked the effective end of wage-pegging, and was a triumph for direct action. Sheridan sums up:

As in the lesser contemporaneous stoppages, direct action had been shown to wrest concessions from a government and arbitration system which had rejected the arguments and pleas of 'moderate' union leaders. As for Chifley, the dispute finally brought an end to his wage freeze policy, but though never one to take any defeat lightly, he could hardly have been too displeased with the overall result of his delaying tactics. (p. 224)

The strike was not a communist conspiracy, but because communists were more overtly identified with direct action as a strategy than anyone else, they probably gained in prestige within the labour movement.

The most extended industrial dispute in the immediate post-war years was the ban on Dutch shipping for Indonesia. Its causes were political. On 17 August 1945, two days after the Japanese capitulation, the nationalist leaders, Sukarno and Hatta, declared the independence of Indonesia from Dutch rule and proclaimed the Indonesian archipelago to be the Republic of Indonesia. The matter was not to end there. For more than four years there was war between the Dutch colonial power, attempting to reassert itself, and the Indonesians, punctuated by negotiations which resulted in temporary settlements, before the United States of Indonesia (under the presidency of Sukarno) became the unquestioned government. The governments of Britain, the USA and Australia took part in the negotiations; and the UN Security Council struggled with its first big problem.<sup>42</sup> For four years also, the Australian trade union movement took an honourable part in the process from which Indonesian independence finally emerged. Their part, with the WWF in the van, was the most decisive act of international solidarity ever performed by Australian trade unions.

In the first phase a ban on Dutch goods for Indonesia was maintained from 24 September 1945 to 6 June 1947. The manner in which the ban was interpreted and applied from time to time varied in response to changes in the political and military situation, the tactics of the Dutch authorities in Australia, the actions of the Australian government, and the practical problems confronting the trade unions. From the first lifting of the ban in 1947 till independence the ban was replaced and lifted twice, the intervals between the bans being short and the extent of their withdrawal uncertain.

In the first months what was happening in Indonesia was unclear, although it was apparent that the Dutch government aimed to restore its authority. The unions took a stand on union ground, but behind it was a determination to co-operate in resisting the re-establishment of authority of the colonial power. The initiative in Australia was taken by the Indonesian Seamen's Union, which had been fostered during the war by the Australian Seamen's Union amongst Indonesians working on Dutch ships on the Australian coast. Together with a small Aus-



tralian Indonesian community, they sought the assistance of the WWF. In a letter to branches Healy explained that the WWF had been approached by the Indonesian Seamen's Union for support in their struggle to obtain recognition of their union, the provision of better wages and conditions, and support for the new Indonesian government. They explained that their members had been able to improve their conditions with the assistance of the Australian Seamen's Union, but these conditions had disappeared when they moved out from the protection of the Australian union movement. They added that under Dutch law, as it applied in the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) before the war, strike action was punishable by heavy penalties. What was in the mind of the WWF executive was set out in the resolution which they circulated to branches.

Federal Executive unanimously decided that it be a recommendation to the Federal Council that in view of the representations made to us by the Seamen's Union of Indonesia that our members should be directed not to work any vessels involved in the strike by the Indonesian Seamen's Union and not to handle any munitions or military stores being loaded for Indonesian Ports which might be used against the new Indonesian Republic.<sup>43</sup>

The Indonesian seamen who walked off all Dutch ships intended for Indonesia were treated as deserters by the Australian authorities, and many of them were arrested and fined, and in some cases gaoled when they refused to pay fines.<sup>44</sup> Support for the Republic also came from Indonesian servicemen who mutinied in Melbourne, and from Indonesians in Dutch camps at Casino, New South Wales, and in Brisbane. All these separate actions indicated a common expression of support for the new government, and a common refusal to work any longer for the Dutch.

The Australian government was faced by a dilemma. Its official relations were with the Dutch government and its representatives in Australia, but it also had sympathy for the anti-colonial movement. This led for a time to some uncertainty of direction, one expression of which was three broadcasts made by the Department of Information, Short-wave Broadcasting Division, between 5 and 8 November. The scripts,

prepared by Michael Keon and Geoffrey Sawer, accused all the great powers of hypocrisy, and suggested that the Indonesians were far more likely to be important to Australia than were the Dutch. The broadcasts were repudiated by Chifley as not being an expression of government policy,<sup>45</sup> which had settled into uneasy co-operation with the NEI authorities, with the long-term aim of encouraging greater autonomy for the NEI. In practice this meant support for the restoration of Dutch authority, which was precisely what the rebelling Indonesians and the Australian unions supporting them did not want.<sup>46</sup> So the union boycott, in one of its aspects, developed into a long drawn out conflict between the militant unions applying communist policy (but with support that extended far beyond the Communist Party) and a somewhat reluctant government. At the outset in reply to the taunt, repeated *ad nauseam* during the next few years, that the government had abdicated its responsibility and was allowing the WWF to determine foreign policy, Chifley replied tartly that he was not going to join in a crusade to crucify the workers of the country to which he belonged. The government also refused to send military forces for occupation duties.<sup>47</sup>

The Indonesians in Australia were fairly quickly repatriated on Australian ships, the majority by early in 1946. The Indonesia to which they returned was in a state of great confusion. The *de facto* government was the Republic, with Sukarno as President and Sjahrir as Prime Minister. British troops in small numbers occupied the major cities, in some cases, such as Surabaya, after heavy fighting in which some hundreds of British-Indian troops and several thousand Indonesian nationalists were killed.<sup>48</sup> The British government was anxious to withdraw its troops as soon as possible: the Dutch were anxious to reassert their authority. This they attempted to do by building up their military forces, and at the same time negotiating with the republicans. In the course of the negotiations the Dutch were forced to move some distance towards agreeing to independence, and the nationalists to retreat from their demand for full independence. The compromise was a draft agreement, known as the Linggadjati agreement, which was initialled on 15 November 1946. It recognised the Republic as exercising *de facto* authority over Java, Madura, and Sumatra, and also that areas occupied by

British or Dutch forces would gradually be included in the Republic. In the long term it was agreed that the two governments would cooperate in the formation of a federal state within the Dutch constitutional system. And, very important for the Dutch, the Republic was to recognise immediately the claims of non-Indonesians for the restoration of their rights and property.<sup>49</sup> The agreement was strongly criticised in Holland from the right and in Indonesia from the left. It was not signed until 25 March 1947, and then only on the basis of different interpretations of its meaning by the two sides. Within a few weeks of signing, the Republic's *de facto* status was recognised by Britain, the USA, Australia and a number of other countries.

Throughout the fighting and negotiations the WWF maintained its ban, but found many difficulties in implementing it. The aim was to hamper the build-up of Dutch strength. The problems were to determine what cargoes were of military potential and what cargoes were bound for Indonesia, the latter becoming harder to determine as the Dutch authorities took counter action by shipping indirectly. The difficulty of deciding which cargoes were of military significance led to the blunt solution of banning all cargoes to Indonesia.<sup>50</sup> This gave ammunition to opponents of the ban, who were able to assert that the union was depriving Indonesians of food supplies available in Australia. The press made much of this point, and it also opened a breach between the WWF, the ACTU executive and the New South Wales TLC.<sup>51</sup> Roach, the assistant general secretary of the WWF, who had the main responsibility for Indonesian affairs, replied that until the Indonesian government asked for the ban to be lifted it would be retained.<sup>52</sup> Indirect cargoes were more difficult to stop, as Roach reported to the branches in October 1946. He said that the Dutch were shipping supplies to Singapore, after which they were trans-shipped to Java. Closer to home, goods were being carried on Australian vessels to Fremantle, where there was a Dutch naval base, and then loaded on to Dutch ships by Dutch personnel. There were also some cases, he said, where 'scab' labour had been used on Dutch vessels.<sup>53</sup>

As reports of the negotiations which led to the Linggadjati agreement, and the initialling of the agreement itself, came through, there was

some uneasiness within the union. Roach advised that this should not weaken the resolve of the members, as it was the opinion of the executive that the Dutch were using the negotiations to give themselves time to prepare for future attacks on the Republic. The union leadership maintained this attitude until June 1947, two months after the agreement was formally signed. In the meantime Healy and Roach had attended a meeting of SOBSI (All Indonesian Central Organisation of Trade Unions) in May. The SOBSI conference had adopted a resolution recommending that the Australian ban should continue until the last Dutch soldier left Indonesia—the trade union centre being opposed to Sjahrir's conciliatory attitude to the Dutch.<sup>54</sup> On returning from the SOBSI conference Roach reported to the central executive of the WWF, and proposed a delegation to Canberra to discuss the ban with the government. On 6 June Healy announced a modification of the ban, to allow the shipment of 40,000 tons of non-military supplies to Java. Very little, if any, of this cargo was moved, however, because within less than two months an even more rigorous ban was applied in response to the first Dutch 'police action'. The effect of this on Australia will be discussed in the next chapter.

The war gave a new urgency to the need for national self-identification, a task into which writers had thrown themselves during the war itself, but more extensively in the early years of peace. Common ground was the belief that war had forced reappraisal of the values of the inter-war society. There must be no return to the dismal thirties. Democracy had permitted itself to be undermined by fascism and cynicism. Now it was standing up again, but what should be the objective it carried into the peace? Democratic capitalism had proved fragile, but was socialism the answer? Where did the interests of the common man lie? Was he the representative Australian? For socialists the answers were self-evident, but the questions had to be asked by all thinking people. Two writers who did not find socialist answers may be looked at: C. E. W. Bean and Brian Penton.<sup>55</sup>

In a pamphlet, *The Old AIF and the New*, and a book, *War Aims of a Plain Australian*, Bean gave immediacy to the values which he had

found in the Australian soldier and already expounded in his great history of Australia in World War I. Penton had his say in *Advance Australia Where?* Bean found in the men of the Second AIF essentially the same qualities he had pictured in the first. He wrote of the democratic roots and the labour principle of solidarity which, when translated to a military situation, made Australians amongst the best soldiers in the world. The theme of his *War Aims* was the failure in the inter-war years to make actual the democratic potential he believed was expressed by Australians in World War I. After that war he had written a book, *In Your Hands Australians*. Looking back from 1943 he considered that they had not seized the opportunities to build a good society, but now they were offered a new chance. A great depression must never be allowed to occur again, but it could only be avoided by planning on the basis of the proper social priorities. These included equality of educational opportunity, security in employment, a greater equality of income, and the preservation of democratic institutions. These would only be possible within a secure world order, the urgent necessity of which had been pressed on Australians for the first time by the direct threat to its independent existence. Bean could scarcely be called a radical, but from his belief in the virtue of democracy and his reflections on the need for security, he had to ask himself whether his ideals could be realised in a capitalist society. His answer was a planned capitalism in which education would prepare people to live up to the demands of democracy. In reaching his conclusion he found it necessary to discuss socialism and communism. He could see nothing in principle against socialism or communism, but felt that only by a slow process of education would it be possible to prepare people to live in a socialist society without great inefficiency and loss of freedom. He admired Soviet communism for the self-sacrifice and co-operation which it had fostered in the Russian people. But the price of revolution in the loss of freedom was too high to be paid. As for Australian communists, he abhorred their responsiveness to Russian policy, but acquitted them of being identical with fascists, and saw much that was acceptable in their objectives.

The communists, except where they work for the interests of Russia to the exclusion of other states, are co-operators, trying to march towards a more co-operative future; the fascists march backwards towards the dark ages. Most of us are intensely sympathetic towards the Russian experiment.<sup>56</sup>

The failures of the 1930s and the war itself had brought all things into question, and all alternative social orders had to be looked at.

Penton, a sophisticated man, a good novelist, and brilliant journalist, was a curious amalgam of cynic and patriot. In his *Advance Australia Where?* he surveyed the sad story of Australia in the 1930s. He saw it as one of small-mindedness, of refusal to think about the great issues of the world. Acquiescence in a censorship which shielded Australians from disturbing ideas had produced an atmosphere of creeping fascism. He quotes a clergyman:

Small wonder that H. G. Wells, on his return from this country, reported that suppression hung like a malaise all over Australia and that 'a barrier of illiterate policemen stood between the tender Australian conscience and what the rulers believed to be subversive literature . . .' In keeping with this high-handed and dictatorial attitude is the blindness to social injustice which has long disgraced Australian political leadership. (p. 55)

His was a pessimistic view of an Australia in which he saw no force really committed to lifting the society out of the slough into which it had fallen. The clergyman again:

The greatest tragedy of the present situation is that so many of our former 'liberals' and idealists have become double-dyed conservatives. Men in the Labor Movement, in the trades unions, who formerly showed something of the pioneering spirit, are to-day extinct volcanoes, dull craters without a single spark of the old creative fire . . . The Labor Movement itself, which might have done so much for liberty and progress, is largely to blame for this soul-less acquiescence in things as they are, for it has never sponsored a clearly thought out, far-reaching scheme of social reconstruction. (pp. 56-7)

Penton was not tempted to find in the Soviet Union any lesson for Australia. But he, too, saw hope in planning for a more equitable but also more open society, one which would have to shed its parochialism

and xenophobia and assume the responsibility of being a bridge between the only European community in the area and the people of Asia.

Bean and Penton, men of very different assumptions and predilections, are quoted as evidence of the feeling that things had been wrong and that positive action had to be taken to right them. However, of all the books published during the war, by far the most important for the left were those of Brian Fitzpatrick. In 1939 came *British Imperialism and Australia*, followed in the next year by *A Short History of the Australian Labor Movement*, and then in 1941 *The British Empire in Australia*. The importance of Fitzpatrick's works lies not only in the depth of their scholarship but also in their political impact. They came at a time when the left was seeking an Australian identity. Fitzpatrick's own description of the viewpoint from which he saw Australian history is both fair and accurate.

I have taken the view that the history of the Australian people is amongst other things the history of a struggle between the organised rich and the organised poor, and that the usual aim of the belligerents has been to keep or win political and economic power in order to use it in what they have considered to be their own interests. And I suppose no sensible person, whether on the Right or Left, will quarrel with me on that score. But I discriminate between the belligerents. I take the view that the effort of the organised working class has been—perhaps could not but have been—beyond its class ends an effort to achieve social justice, whereas the possessing classes that have opposed Labor have not, according to my reading, attempted to reform society, or to redistribute wealth in the interests of social justice. Not that I blame them. My belief is simply that the Labor effort, impelled by motives similar in kind to those of the owning classes, happens to coincide with an effort towards social justice, whereas the effort against Labor, the effort to retain privilege, has been in opposition to the advancement of society; at least that is how history has worked out during the last fifty years.<sup>57</sup>

His work provided a coherent historical justification for the belief that the labour movement was the bearer of the highest moral values in Australian society. It had already changed Australia in the interests of the majority of the people. While his interpretation was far from unchallenged—indeed a succeeding generation of academics lived by proving him wrong—his interpretation was a most powerful impetus and

weapon for those who sought to forward the processes he had identified in the past. Fitzpatrick's version of Australian history, despite the avalanche of criticism it has attracted, remains one of the great seminal works of Australian history and literature. How great his contribution was remains to be put in perspective by a scholar who will look at him as historian, journalist, civil libertarian, and victim of the oppressive intolerance of the times he graced.

Fitzpatrick did more than anyone else to provide an intellectual context for the brief flowering of radical nationalism which the war brought forth and which continued into the first years of peace. The contributors to it were communists, socialists, labour men, democrats. *Australian New Writing*,<sup>58</sup> the title and the inspiration coming from John Lehmann's *New Writing*, was one of the earliest literary vehicles of this new radical nationalism. A collection of short stories, poetry and criticism, it ran to only four numbers, the first appearing in 1943 and the last in 1946. Its editors, Katharine Susannah Prichard, George Farwell, and Bernard Smith, stated their assumptions and intentions in the first number. The problem for writers, they said in a foreword, was that, unless they restricted themselves to 'sentimental falsehoods', they could not find a publisher. True art was a means of coming to grips with reality in its complexity and its truth. The outstanding fact of the time was the war against fascism.

We are confronted with the most brutish, despicable and destructive force mankind has ever known—fascism. We have been plunged into the most devastating of all wars—and let us determine it shall be the last; a war that has to be fought with every weapon we possess, both material and intellectual, so that fascism may be destroyed.

Writers should dedicate themselves to freedom as have the great writers of the past, from Shakespeare to Lawson, Euripides to Gorki! The foundations of the Australian literary tradition had been laid in a period of intellectual ferment in the 1890s when, to quote Hartley Grattan commenting on the writers of the period,

Pride of country, revolt against the status quo, glorification of the common man, high hope for the future, run through all of them. These writers were critical of



the world in which they found themselves, but they believed in the possibility of fruitful change—change, moreover, that was to be directed by and for the benefit of the Australian common man.

The occasion was propitious, the editors believed, for a new creative burst thrown up by the ferment of the times. They claimed no monopoly of literary talent, but saw the purpose of the journal as being to provide an outlet for people who had something to say about reality as they saw it. They took pride in the fact that in the first number only five of the contributors were professional writers. The rest were a coal-miner, three schoolteachers, a typist, a working journalist, and three soldiers.

*Australian New Writing* is not a rich literary quarry but it is an important historical document—important for the values it carried. Most of these are contained in a short passage by John Morrison, who was to become one of Australia's best short story writers. It is a story about work on the docks and is a description of Joe, a waterside worker, and the feeling for him of a young friend.

Joe's a good Christian, whether he knows it or not. There's a word for him—'Nature's Gentleman'. A hard doer and a bit of a pagan, that's all. Three convictions, one for stealing firewood during the depression, one for punching a policeman during the '28 strike, and one for carrying a load of workmates in an old rattletrap of a car he used to drive down in (it wasn't licensed). Across one cheek the scar of a wound received on Gallipoli. A limp in his right leg from an old waterside accident. 'Screwy' arms and shoulders from too much freezer work in the days when every possible job had to be stood up for. 'Sailor Joe.' Dick loves him as any healthy youth will love a faithful guide and mentor. They work together, ship after ship, travel together, live near each other.<sup>59</sup>

Disrespect for the law which bears unequally on the poor, pride in the physical evidence of a life of hard work, the heroism of ANZAC, and mateship are the admired qualities and experiences. The experience of the common man in the workplace and in the army is the stuff of the writing. The subjects range from men at work, snippets of life in the army and on leave, the pathos of the lives of New Guineans as seen through the eyes of sympathetic soldiers, to a story told in pidgin of

the massacre of the crew of a Japanese pearling lugger by Aborigines they had swindled. The stated purpose of encouraging the 'tendency toward realism, toward an art compatible with democratic living' was modestly achieved. Naturally it was well received by left-oriented reviewers, and equally naturally it was treated coolly and ironically by those who felt that there was an inherent conflict between 'social content' and art.<sup>60</sup>

The most important literary journal in Australia, with the possible exception of the *Bulletin* in its prime, was *Meanjin*. Started in Brisbane in 1940 as *Meanjin Papers*, it moved to Melbourne in 1945, where it gained some assistance from the University of Melbourne and settled down in the midst of the most socially conscious writers in Australia. Its moving spirit was then, as he is at the time of writing, Clem Christesen. In its life of more than thirty years it has published work by the majority of the leading Australian creative writers, as well as that of numerous writers from overseas. Looked at in the perspective of thirty years, it is remarkable for its diversity, both in the literary assumptions of its contributors and in the focus of its interests. Few journals have published writers so different, to mention only a few, as Vance Palmer, John Morrison, David Martin, A. D. Hope, James McAuley, and Jack Lindsay. Its interests have ranged widely also, but the persistent focus has been Australia; an Australia which has not remained static and whose changes have been filtered through the works of writers who perceived it differently.

Commenting on the journal's achievement in 1961, Ian Maxwell, Professor of English at Melbourne University, remarked that it was more than a literary quarterly. He pointed to its encouragement of young writers, its stimulation of thought on important public questions, and its Australianism—'at once so deeply Australian and so much alive to the world of ideas'. In 1945 the Australianism was radical. The editorial of the spring number was a passionate statement of social commitment. It looked back on dramatic recent events: the collapse of Germany, the San Francisco conference, the election of the Labour government in Britain, the exposure of Belsen, Buchenwald and Auschwitz, the bomb, and the end of the six years war. It was a time for

decision about the future in the light of the past. *Meanjin* was certain that writers had great responsibility in this situation. They had a primary responsibility to their art, but their art was not separate from society.

Since by their very existence writers influence their time, they must decide, deliberately, how this influence is to be used. What will be the pattern of life in post-war Australia? What reforms must be effected? What will be our relationship with other countries, particularly East Asia and in the Pacific Basin? The writer today must be informed on external as well as domestic affairs, and must use his powers deliberately to influence public opinion. No longer can he sneak off to some frangipani-scented gazebo, remaining aloof from the mounting postwar problems. He must identify himself with the aspirations of the people towards community and national reform.

*Meanjin* was to be directly engaged in the social and political problems of the immediate future, and it was to be engagement on the left.

The editorial policy did not go unquestioned. A. A. Phillips, who was of *Meanjin* almost as much as the editor himself, asked 'what happens if his [the artist's] artistic integrity does not happen to permit him the discussion of contemporary social problems?' He believed that the options for the artist had been wrongly stated: 'the alternative to "Art for Art's sake" is not necessarily "Art for society's sake"; it is "Art for life's sake".' Yet that distinction was not very clear at the end of the war. In 1945 it seemed inevitable that a new society must come into existence. The most inhuman social order known to history had finally expired in a bunker in Berlin. That the means by which Japan had been given its quietus were more barbaric than anything it had perpetrated had not yet sunk in. The old order with which a generation had lived had been destroyed. The building of a new world—that was the future. A new society, whether it was the one seen by communists, still bathing in the afterglow of the triumphs of the Red Army and not yet forced to face the facts of Stalin's Russia, or that seen by more modest reformers who fixed their hopes on Attlee or Chifley, seemed inevitable. Those who believed in life, in a world in which so recently twenty or thirty million people had died prematurely and violently, knew that life and a new society were an equation.

But a new society needed to be built on the foundations of something already existing. What were available were the symbols of the 1890s: mateship as a way of life and a virtue, the manly independence of the common man, aversion to the English upper classes and their Australian epigones, the harshness of the bush and idealisation of those who, by coming to terms with it, had conquered it. In their search for a national identity in the 1920s Vance Palmer and his circle had rediscovered the nineties. In the 1940s they were resurrected again. Lawson and Furphy were the subjects of frequent critical reappraisal in *Meanjin*, and writers who had in the main moved their characters from the bush to the city in response to changes in Australian society expounded and approved the same moral values. The common man was the legatee and bearer of Australian democracy.

Amongst the most uncritical of the proponents of the Australian democratic myth were the communists, as uncritical as all new converts. Before the war, while arguing and believing that their policy was in the interests of the Australian people, they saw it in a world context. As one writer has put it, for communists in the 1930s,

the worker had no fatherland, patriotism was the last refuge of the munitions maker, Prague and Madrid were closer to Melbourne than were Sydney and Adelaide. Collective security was the watchword: all men were brothers, and nationalism stood on the lunatic fringe of politics, spawned in the diseased minds of Hitler, Sir Oswald Mosley and [the] Australia First [Movement].<sup>61</sup>

The war changed this, and communists sought not only to identify with what they believed to be the consensual Australian attitudes but to become the most articulate in expounding them. Their part in the war as organisers in the factories and unions and as political soldiers, more consciously anti-fascist than the generality of the troops, was the first cause of this change. Second, there was the example of the Soviet Union. In the Great Patriotic War (the name is significant) the Russian communists sought strength in their historical tradition. The most characteristic wartime and post-war Russian literature was the historical novel and the historical film. They were in an approved tradition broad enough to include as heroes Pugachev and Kutusov, a hero of peasant

revolt and a general who led the defence against Bonaparte. The nationalising of communism was a negative consequence of the abandonment of all but verbal internationalism by the Soviet Union, and a positive consequence of the elevation of patriotism in Russia. Under these conditions it seemed natural to Australian communists that they should be the leading proponents of an aggressive, militant, democratic stance which was believed to be the most characteristic quality of Australian workers. Thus they looked for origins in those who had resisted the authority of the upper classes: convicts, bushrangers, gold-diggers, and the unionists who had fought the bitter battles of the 1890s. In doing so they idealised the past and censored out or muted those parts of it, in particular the xenophobia and racism which were inherent in the Australian working-class outlook, which were in conflict with basic communist ideology.<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, while they filtered the racism from the historic Australian democrat, communists rejected contemporary attitudes and policies based on racial hatred or exclusivism. Thus the most powerful attack on anti-semitism was written by a communist.<sup>63</sup> At the height of the war against Japan communists did not foster racial prejudice in their propaganda for the war—when it occurred, as it occasionally did, it was an individual aberration. Official communist policy was opposed to white Australia. In a pamphlet published in 1945, a party spokesman argued the case for a controlled immigration scheme, one which would not discriminate between the races. This stand was generally accepted within the party.<sup>64</sup>

Melbourne was the centre of the post-war intellectual radicalism which spread wide across the borders of party. Until the cold war threw up barriers between the communists and others, built by the adherence of the communists to the Soviet Union, there was a left community whose ideology comprised an amalgam of socialism and radical nationalism. While there were differences of method and emphasis, these were less important than the areas of agreement. One of the main centres of this community was the University of Melbourne.

The social composition of the university was substantially changed by the introduction in 1944 of Commonwealth scholarships, followed by

scholarships under the Reconstruction Training Scheme. Between them they opened the door of what, except for the handful of previous scholarship students, had been the preserve of the children of the rich to some of the more able of the children of the poor and to large numbers of ex-servicemen, who would not otherwise have had any chance of entering a university. In the immediate post-war years it was the ex-service men and women who put their stamp on the university. They were older, more experienced, and with more fully formed outlooks and prejudices than their predecessors. As one writer puts it, they arrived at the university 'via routes which lay through the Kokoda Trail, Borneo, Timor, Burma, London and Tokyo'.<sup>65</sup> They leavened the whole student lump, and in particular they provided the leadership and much of the rank and file of the Labour Club which dominated student politics from 1945 to 1948, with the pinnacle of its influence in 1947. Within the Labour Club and overlapping with its membership was the university branch of the Communist Party. Ken Gott, who was a member of it, in his retrospective article, describes how it worked. The branch itself met off the campus with a degree of secrecy. At its downtown meetings, the branch acted as a kind of caucus, arranging the party's hand in a wide range of student activities: tickets for elections, motions to go before the Students' Representative Council, friends to be encouraged and enemies to be undermined, factions to be convened and factions to be formed in the main student societies. Between branch meetings, smaller Marxist study circles were held, mainly for new members.<sup>66</sup>

What happened in the post-war years was a continuation of the strong pre-war radical tradition in the university. From the late 1920s Melbourne had had a labour club which, while much smaller than it was to become after the war, was much stronger than the equivalents in other universities. Between 1932 and 1935 the club published a first-rate journal with articles by some of the most able students and recent ex-students of the time, as well as occasional staff members. Called *Proletariat*, it began as an eclectic journal of socialist opinion but by 1935, when it ceased publication, it was expressing almost exclusively the opinions of the Communist Party and those whose opinions were acceptable to the party in terms of the popular front strategy. Until the out-

break of war the club continued to be, as it was during and after the war, the centre of communist activity in the university.

The communists saw themselves as an élite with a superior ideology and a superior form of organisation. The branch reached decisions about candidates they would push for positions and policies that they would press for in the Labour Club and in other student organisations. In the Labour Club the communists were always a minority—between 110 and 120 in a club that had about 400 members between 1945 and 1947. The majority included some members of the ALP, but most of the members did not belong to any political party, although some of them were members of the Student Christian Movement. The aim of the communists was to control the larger group by organisation and to influence the ideas of its members by the superior ideology of which they were custodians. Since decisions made in the communist branch usually prevailed, did this mean that those who co-operated with them were simply dupes of the Communist Party? In later years and in other places people were used by the Communist Party literally as 'fronts' to give respectability to that part of communist policy which they sought to have adopted by a particular organisation. Such methods were evidence of weakness on the part of communists, and contributed significantly in the long run to their decline. But in Melbourne in 1945-7 it was not the case. Those who worked with the communists knew of the existence of the organisation, often were invited to join it, and quite consciously co-operated with people whom they knew to be leading members of it. The reasons have been put correctly by Gott:

the war had brought about an unprecedented fervour for social change which was not confined to members of political parties . . . We were all socialists and in terms of practical co-operation there were few if any differences which could arise between Communist student leaders and those whose reforming zeal derived from the A.L.P. or Christianity. (p. 25)

The details of student politics cannot be followed here, but the substance of the guiding ideology is important.

The Labour Club was the focal point of a subculture which lived and propagated what it believed to be the true democratic Australian way

of life. Socialism was the objective, and to live and testify to the assumed values of Australian militant democracy was the way to achieve it. Communists saw no conflict between this and their adherence to the Soviet Union as the source of truth: this is what divided them from those who agreed with them in most respects but who could not accept Russia on trust and who found the method of political organisation, itself derived from the bolshevik model, unacceptable. Beer, jazz, all-night parties, and the rediscovery of Australian popular culture of the nineteenth century were the cohesive elements in social life. Marriage as an institution was not highly regarded, but neither was promiscuity; attachments between men and women were regarded as permanent, and in some cases proved to be so.

By 1947 student societies and publications were dominated by members of the Labour Club, many of whom have continued to make important contributions to Australian public life, literature, and scholarship. The *Melbourne University Magazine*, an outstanding annual publication, was edited by two of them, one now a journalist, the other a distinguished historian. Its foreword, ostentatiously labelled 'Manifesto', announced the arrival of Australia. It declared the intention of making a radical departure from previous policy.

This issue deliberately and consciously has an Australian orientation. We would be among the last people to decry the internationalist outlook, but it seemed to us remarkable that recent issues had so little to say about things Australian.

The contents accorded with the declaration. The articles included 'Science and Responsibility', 'Australian Literature', 'Melbourne University 1926-1946', 'Australian Farming as a Way of Life', 'Reflections on University Education', 'Tolerance in The Catholic Church', 'Victor Daley—Poetry or Polemics?', 'The Novels of Kylie Tennant', and 'A Road to Full Employment?' Amongst the writers were Sir David Rivett, A. G. Serle, S. Murray-Smith, O. A. Oeser, Max Charlesworth, Peter Ryan, A. F. Davies, J. F. Cairns, Ian Turner, and A. D. Hope. With the exception of Hope's work, his eccentricity no doubt forgiven because of the quality of his writing and the fact that he was a Sydney interloper,



the magazine carried the full charge of the contemporary Australian radical nationalism.

Sydney University was different. Like Melbourne, it was transformed by ex-servicemen, but the radical component of its student life was not the same. The radical consensus that blossomed in Melbourne did not occur in Sydney. The reason for the difference, as with all differences between Sydney and Melbourne, remains to be examined with imagination and in depth, but some suggestions can be made. Student radicalism in Melbourne was stimulated and reinforced by a tradition of intellectual radicalism which dates back to the brawling bursting city that grew like a hothouse plant out of the goldrushes in the second half of the nineteenth century. The search for a national identity, and the attempt to expound it in literary terms, had been the persistent goal of Melbourne writers. *Meanjin* became the focal point in this endeavour, and there was a close overlap between it and the student radicals. Sydney intellectual life was more cosmopolitan, less given to enthusiasm, and more atomistic. Vance Palmer was the representative Melbourne writer, Norman Lindsay had greater stature in Sydney. There was no Sydney school, but there were many talented people. In Sydney University the towering figure from the early 1930s onward, somewhat shrunken by 1945 but his ideas carried on by those he had taught, was John Anderson, Professor of Philosophy. His influence had made the Trotskyist critique of Stalin and the communist parties an active part of Sydney intellectual life. Andersonianism, however it may be defined—empiricist, pluralist, realist<sup>67</sup>—was a complex philosophical position which produced in most of those it influenced an overwhelming scepticism and a powerful critical capacity. This, more than anything else, made the university and the circles that spilled out from it much less fertile ground for the radical nationalism, the undifferentiated socialism, and (for the communists) the attachment to the Soviet Union, than was Melbourne. Thus the Sydney communist students took to themselves the advice of Stalin and placed their faith in organisation.<sup>68</sup> In Melbourne there was a vital intellectual life on the left: in Sydney left-wing students organised, won positions in student societies, but never contributed significantly to the intellectual life of the community. They made a virtue of

this, and saw themselves as tough political operators with a contempt for intellectual values. One incidental consequence was that when the Movement arrived in Sydney University, using the same rough and secret organisational methods as the communists, but with more of the faithful to call on to vote, they easily gained control of most student societies, previously dominated by communists or their allies.<sup>69</sup> By contrast in Melbourne, which was the home of the Movement, it was relatively unsuccessful in the university. This was due to many factors, including the influence of Catholics who were opposed to the methods of the Movement. It is at least reasonable to speculate that the opposition of some Catholics to the Movement's methods would have been less firm had they been confronted with a situation such as existed in Sydney, where the communists organised but didn't argue—and the Movement did likewise.

Between 1945 and 1947 the influence won by the communists in the unions during the war was maintained, but signs of decline were already present. At the ACTU congress in September 1947 most of the policies supported by the communists were adopted, including a change of the constitution to give increased power to the ACTU over the affiliated unions. In a close vote, the congress agreed that the ACTU would be the supreme governing body of the trade unions, and that its decisions would be binding on affiliated unions. This removed the previous proviso that decisions of the ACTU were subject to ratification by the Labor Councils—a proviso which had been retained in an equally close vote in 1945. The congress adopted a wide-ranging policy on education, moved by representatives of the communist-led New South Wales Teachers' Federation. It decided on direct action in support of the 40-hour week if it were not introduced within a month. Nationalisation of banking was supported, and anti-semitism denounced. On the international scene the congress passed several resolutions emanating from the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). It criticised the anti-trade union moves in the United States. It expressed concern 'at the suppression of the Trade Union Movement and the mass arrests of democrats in Greece', and protested against the suppression of trade

unions in Malaya. In all questions of policy the congress was a triumph for the left. It was dominated by the leading communist spokesmen, Thornton and T. Wright. But they were not so successful in securing positions. Until this conference the communists had been content to push policy matters; they had not attempted to have themselves elected to the most senior positions in the organisation. In 1947 they made the attempt and failed, P. Cleary retaining the presidency against a challenge by Wright by 176 votes to 138. Thornton attributed the failure to 'twisters' who had taken advantage of the secrecy of the ballot box. At a public meeting he declared that the left would soon completely control the trade union movement. It had determined policy at the ACTU congress and would, he believed, soon control the organisation. As reported in the *Argus* (8 Sept. 1947):

But for a number of 'twisters' the Left wing would have completely dominated proceedings at last week's ACTU Congress, M<sup>R</sup> E. Thornton, national secretary of the Ironworkers' Union, told 1,000 people at a Communist Party meeting in the Princess Theatre yesterday. 'Every issue, except those decided by secret ballot, was favourable to Communist policy', he said. 'Those who strayed in the secret ballot voting will walk to Melbourne for the next ACTU congress.'

The 1947 congress was the zenith of communist influence in the central councils of the trade union movement. The pedestrians to the next congress, in 1949, were the communists rather than those whom Thornton singled out in 1947.

The communist policy which dominated the 1947 ACTU congress may be seen as having two parts. First, it was a more militant exposition of the aims of the federal Labor government, with at the same time an implicit threat that if the government did not carry through its stated policies it would be faced by trade union opposition. Second, it was a statement of international positions deriving from the Soviet-dominated international organisations such as the WFTU, which were opposed to the present policies of the Australian government. J. D. Blake, a man of great intellectual strength, the clarity of whose statements often proved embarrassing to his colleagues, who preferred an obfuscation from which it was easier to escape, put the matter clearly, shortly after the ACTU

congress. Referring to policies so far as they applied within Australia, he said:

We must note in this regard that the platform of the Labor Party itself and the programme decided upon, for instance, in 1943 at the Labor Party Conference, sets forth the demands, at least in words, for the socialisation of industry, production and exchange, for nationalisation of banks, credit, insurance and the big monopolies. They called for the implementation of the 40 hour week and a progressive reduction to 30 hour week. Only the Communist Party is fighting for this programme. This is the basis upon which we can in a practical way make direct approaches to the Labor Party workers themselves for the establishment of a united front in the struggle for these demands.<sup>70</sup>

In other words, the Communist Party saw itself primarily at this point as a pressure group seeking to press the Labor Party to implement its nominal policy. It could do this through the trade unions, but also by direct association with the membership of the Labor Party and possibly with the leadership of the party.

On international issues the function was significantly different. The Australian government, it was believed, had taken an imperialist stance in support of the United States. Britain's role was that of junior partner to America. Blake again:

Having taken an open anti-Soviet path, Bevin and Attlee had no alternative but to fall right into the lap of United States imperialism. Similarly, there can be no doubt that the anti-Soviet position taken by Evatt and Chifley tends to place Australia in the United States' imperialist league.<sup>71</sup>

The response of the Australian labour movement must be to criticise the alignment of the Australian government in general, and support, as in the resolutions of the ACTU, those initiatives against particular policies of the imperialists.

The contradictions within this general analysis were to become acutely evident during the next two years. A general support for the government, combined with a fundamental criticism of its foreign policy, could not continue to co-exist. More contradictions had been consistently criticised from the left. To those of Trotskyist persuasion the Communist Party

had erred in all respects. Its support for the Labor government was suspect as a reformist tactic which deprived it of any claim to be a revolutionary organisation. Its blind acceptance of the leadership of the Soviet Union was continuing evidence of its abandonment of any credible internationalist alignment. For example, the nationalism of the communist parties, whether in France, the Soviet Union or Australia, was seen as compromising any genuine internationalism.<sup>72</sup> At the same time the Trotskyists in their several manifestations considered that world imperialism, led by the United States, was preparing for an attack on the Soviet Union. They maintained an allegiance to the Russian revolution. They considered that it had been betrayed by Stalin and the Stalinists, but it still had to be defended against the aggressive intentions of imperialism. Because of the nationalist orientation of the communists, they were contributing to a bloc against Russia.

In the present world situation with the 'communist' parties of various countries pursuing bourgeois nationalist policies, with a swing towards an anti-Soviet bloc on the Anglo-American front; that International formed by Lenin and Trotsky for the bringing about of World Socialism has now degenerated to the stage where, if not checked by the rank and file, will become an ally of world reaction.<sup>73</sup>

Seen in this light the contradictory stance of the Communist Party led to their occupying a position which, contrary to their protestations, was opposed to the security and the best interests of Russia as well as of the international working class movement. The stand of the Labor Socialist Group which was influential in the Balmain branch of the FIA was somewhat different, although it constituted another Trotskyist tendency. It criticised the Labor government from the left, but advocated electoral support for the Labor Party so that it would expose itself as acting contrary to the interests of the workers.

Thus what is indicated for militant workers is to help the masses put the Government back and to carry the 'Yes' vote so that the masses will have the opportunity to learn from experience the futility of depending on policies such as that enunciated by Chifley and so that as a result the road will be opened for the forward march of the labor movement behind a scientific socialist policy—the only road for the workers and humanity.<sup>74</sup>

In this view Labor was simply a party of reform pledged to the maintenance of capitalism, whereas the communists were traitors to the revolutionary movement. Corrupted by bureaucracy, they were a true reflection of the bureaucratically deformed society of the Soviet Union. Their support for the Labor government was evidence of their reformism. Their industrial militancy was a 'sham' imposed on workers from above when it was convenient for communist trade union bureaucrats to do so.

As the cold war became colder the communists found themselves in an increasingly hostile environment, in which the two elements of their policy became more and more in conflict. At the same time the Movement was continuing to perfect its organisation and beginning to undermine the communist positions of strength.

## 6 The Cold War I (1948-9)

By the beginning of 1948 Australia was well into the cold war, which was marked by the increasing polarisation of the world between the two centres of power, the United States and the Soviet Union. It was a war of words, of alliances, of conspiracies and counter-conspiracies, but it was also potentially an actual war in which the existence of nuclear weapons made the survival of humanity problematical. The war of guns did not occur, except in some colonial countries, which were sufficiently remote from the centres of world power for their suffering and devastation to be largely concealed from those who brought them. It was also a conflict of ideas, dogmas, economic systems, and political practices: capitalist democracy versus Soviet communism. The casualties were truth, tolerance, the open society, and socialism.

What happened in Australia in these years, and indeed for the rest of the period covered by this book, cannot be understood except in the context of the world contest. Every great issue in society, whether of political policy, ideological stance, or cultural commitment, was measured and judged, in some degree, by its relation to the issues raised by the world-wide conflict. Reactionaries and communists were prepared to be so involved. The rest of the community, who were the majority, were involved whether they liked it or not. This is not to say, of course, that the majority of people did not go about their own affairs, largely unconcerned by what went on around them, emerging as citizens only when they voted for a parliamentary candidate or for or against a strike, or wrote an impassioned letter to the newspapers.

The government was assaulted from two directions: by the employers, the Liberal Party, and all those who believed or professed to believe that it was attempting to impose a socialist system on Australia; and increasingly by the Communist Party, which, while it approved some aspects of government policy, followed the general line laid down by the CPSU. By 1948 this policy was based on the proposition that the world was divided into two camps, a war camp centred on the USA and a peace camp led by the USSR. In the international sphere the Australian

government was aligned substantially with the USA. Therefore communists saw it as a potential United States ally in a war against the Soviet Union. They also believed that the war would be started by the USA, which had a monopoly of nuclear weapons until late in 1949 and a superiority in them for many years thereafter.

Churchill (in March 1946) had declared that an iron curtain divided Europe, but it was not until mid-1947 that the USSR definitely withdrew from serious consultations about the future of western Europe. The critical dates were first, the announcement of the Truman doctrine in March 1947, 'that it must be the policy of the USA to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities, or by outside pressure'. The reference was clear: the armed minorities were communists in eastern Europe and the source of the outside pressure was the Soviet Union. Second, in June 1947 the American Secretary of State, General George Marshall, put forward a proposal for extensive American aid to assist in the economic recovery of Europe. The Russians refused to co-operate, and the Marshall plan was put into effect by the sixteen-nation Organisation for European Economic Co-operation in June 1948. This began the process in which western Europe steadily recovered from the devastation of the war. It also marked the arrival of the USA in Europe as a decisive force, and confirmed the division of Europe between west and east, of which the indefinite division of Germany was an essential part.

Stalin's aim was to surround the USSR by states controlled by friendly governments. This was ensured by the creation of the people's democracies in eastern Europe. But Germany was a special problem. It was the greatest potential threat; twice in a generation it had invaded Russia. It must not be able to do so again, but how to prevent this was the question. The occupation of West Germany by the USA, Britain, and France pre-empted a solution similar to that contrived in Poland or Czechoslovakia. The alternative was a weak Germany, but with the American decision to support economic recovery and, in 1949, the re-establishment of a German government, this too was ruled out: the Russian answer was to withdraw behind the line which divided East from West Germany, and to fight it out with the USA in Berlin, an



island in the Soviet zone the administration of which was shared by the Soviet and the western powers. It was here that the first physical confrontation of the cold war occurred.

When America, Britain, France and the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg), declared that they intended to ensure the economic recovery of western Europe including Germany, and to establish 'a basis for the participation of a democratic Germany in the community of free peoples',<sup>1</sup> the Russians began to harass western traffic into Berlin. With the introduction of a new currency in June 1948 they barred access by road or rail. This was followed by eleven months of acute tension in which the American authorities thought seriously of shooting their way through but refrained and, with Britain, supplied Berlin by air.

In eastern Europe, with differences in detail between the several countries, governments friendly to Russia had been set up behind the shield of the occupying Red Army. These were seen in the west as puppets of the Soviet Union; by themselves, and by Stalin, as people's democracies. In all cases they were minority governments and in most cases the most influential members were communists who had been prepared for their role while in exile in the Soviet Union. They were established by force but with differing degrees of consent by indigenous political groupings. At one end of the spectrum was Yugoslavia, in which the Yugoslav Communist Party carried through its own revolution with virtually no assistance from Russia—that later became its crime in the eyes of Moscow. At the other end of the spectrum was Poland, where the government was directly imposed by the Russians. In all cases the governments were given a degree of authenticity by the theory of people's democracy. It was this which had affected the thinking of communists throughout the world, including Australia.

Initially the governments set up in eastern Europe were required by the Russians to meet two desiderata: they should be democratic and they should be friendly to the Soviet Union. This broad statement of intention had been accepted by the western powers at the wartime conferences, without, it must be added, any serious attempt being made to consider the content of the democracy. In practice what happened was

that the governments created were based on alliances between a number of parties, with communists having varying degrees of influence, depending mainly on their actual strength in the country concerned. In most cases these governments operated within inherited constitutional structures. Only Yugoslavia adopted an entirely new constitution. The governments were a product of three things: expediency; the use of available political resources; and the demands of the Soviet Union (backed by the presence of the Red Army) for governments friendly to it. But in terms of prevailing Marxist-Leninist theory there was a problem of what kinds of government had been created.

Clearly they were not dictatorships of the proletariat, on the Soviet model, since that would have involved the communist parties wielding all effective power. This they did not do, and furthermore the social structure was not significantly changed—the capitalist class retained important rights to property, although the presence of Russian troops inhibited the expression of their political demands. The answer arrived at was that they were transitional societies with distinct national differences. One of the best summaries of this point of view was made by a Hungarian, M. Rakosi:

During the last 25 years the Communist Parties of the world learned that there are several roads which lead to Socialism and accordingly we cannot build Socialism if we do not build our own road, taking into account the special conditions prevailing in the country. We have learned that lesson, and, while we are strengthening the Hungarian democracy, we are not doing this because of tactical reasons or in order to achieve some secret aim, but because of our deep Communist convictions, and we will do whatever we can to fill the frame of the democracy with the largest possible Socialist content. That will speed up the progress which leads mankind into Socialism. We also know that, although Socialism utilizes a multitude of international experiences, our Socialism can be created only as a result of the development of Hungarian history and Hungarian economic, political and social forces. That will be Socialism born on Hungarian soil and adapted to Hungarian conditions.<sup>2</sup>

The people's democracies were to find their own roads to socialism, although taking into account the Russian experience.

This interpretation began to change in 1947, but in the meantime communist parties, including the Australian, accepted a line which was

essentially of the same kind: the need to rally the widest sections of the Australian people in defence of Australian democracy and independence. At the central committee meeting in May 1947 the main speech was given by J. C. Henry, who had recently returned from a conference of the communist parties of the British Commonwealth. In his speech, which was supported by all of the other leaders of the party, he focused on the threat of American imperialism, not only to countries such as Australia, but to Britain, which had become America's junior partner. The need for closer association between the democratic elements in Australia and Britain was emphasised. Following Henry, Dixon said:

Australia and Britain should pursue an independent foreign policy, independent of the Yankee Imperialism. Australia should not subordinate itself to the United States of America. We should combat all moves to divide the world, to prevent the division of the world the reactionaries are aiming at and which can only end in war. Australia's policy should be to promote, in every sense, world unity.<sup>3</sup>

Henry felt that this could be done by building the greatest possible unity between different political forces in Australia. He appealed to a very broad spectrum of opinion and interest.

The questions which confront us, comrades, today in regard to the struggle against American penetration, and all the problems that flow from the present situation, mean that when we think of a broad front of the Australian people we must see that it should include workers, farmers, town middle class and the patriotic elements among the capitalist class in Australia. Those are the requirements of the situation as I see it and they are not impossible aims by any means.

Of course, these aims for independence, the struggle for the maintenance of peace, the establishment of durable world peace and the general uplifting of the lives of our people, these aims are mostly expressed by the aims of the Communist Party and also the Trade Unions and Labor Party, and undoubtedly as the reality of the position becomes clearer elements in the ranks of the Country Party and also the Liberal Party will be found to be for Australian independence as against American domination.<sup>4</sup>

The importance of this speech lies not in the fantastic prospects of national unity which it adumbrated but in the extent to which it reflected the ideas surrounding the concept of the people's democracies. But the communist estimate of the political forces in the governments of

eastern Europe was changing. Within a year the leaders of the Austrian Communist Party were putting forward radically different propositions, which reflected the changing climate in the people's democracies.

The founding of the Cominform in September 1947 marked the beginning of the new period. Although not formally a resurrection of the Comintern, in practice it was just that. It was an instrument through which Soviet policy could be transmitted directly to the communist parties in eastern Europe, and less directly to the parties in the rest of the world. The first resolution stated the nominal purpose of interchange of experience:

The Conference states that the absence of contacts among the Communist Parties participating at this Conference is a serious shortcoming in the present situation. Experience has shown that such lack of contacts among the Communist Parties is wrong and harmful . . . [It was decided to] charge the Information Bureau with the organization of interchange of experience and, if need be, coordination of the activities of the Communist Parties on the basis of mutual agreement.<sup>5</sup>

The chief speaker at the founding conference was A. Zhdanov, the leading Soviet representative. He attacked the United States, charging it with conspiring to achieve world supremacy. This had resulted in the division of the world into two camps: a camp of peace centred on the Soviet Union, and a camp of war centred on the United States. As the doctrine developed, all those countries which in any way supported the United States were designated as allies of the imperialist aggressor, a designation to be avoided only by unqualified support for the Soviet Union in its international dealings. For the internal politics of states it had equally decisive consequences. In the people's democracies anything other than wholehearted support for the Soviet Union made those who took this position 'objectively' agents of imperialism. So by a combination of persuasion, coercion, and terror the communist parties abandoned the appearance of co-operation with other parties and openly took over the control of governments. Socialist parties were absorbed into the communist parties, some other parties were abolished, and others merged into fronts of one kind or another. By mid-1948 this process was com-

pleted. The idea that the people's democracies were a new means by which the transition to socialism could be secured was abandoned. Equally the idea that different countries would find their own way to socialism became heresy. As summed up by one scholar:

The new pattern, which was to serve as a basis for the relations between the USSR and East Europe and which was applied uniformly to the area, stressed: (1) the implementation of the theory of the Communist Party's political supremacy and the assertion of the dictatorship of the proletariat; (2) the intensification of the class struggle not only to seek out the known hostile classes but also to unmask the enemies which had infiltrated the Communist movement; (3) the carrying of the class struggle into the countryside to break the resistance of the peasants, particularly the more prosperous ones, to the socialist transformation of agriculture without which both effective industrialization and real socialism were said to be impossible; (4) the launching of rapid and large-scale industrialization of each People's Democracy.<sup>6</sup>

The complete communist takeovers—particularly that in Czechoslovakia in February 1948, carried out with the political support of the Cominform and the Soviet Union, and the threat from the Red Army on the border—marked the second last stage in the increasing dominance of Soviet political concepts and political power. The last stage was the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform in mid-1948. Ironically, the ideas of Tito, and the Yugoslav Communist Party, on the correct policy to be pursued in the people's democracies had from 1945 onwards approximated very closely to those adopted by the Cominform in 1947. Their crime in the eyes of Stalin arose not from any heretical theory but from too great a show of independence in their relations with the Soviet Union.

In Australia, where the communist leaders were observing events, reading the publications of the Cominform, particularly the monthly journal, *For a Lasting Peace, for a People's Democracy*, and at the same time experiencing an increasingly hostile political environment, the conclusion drawn was similar to that of the communists in eastern Europe. They decided to go on the offensive in a vainglorious attempt to win the leadership of the labour movement away from the Labor Party.

At the fifteenth congress of the Australian party in May 1948 the

Cominform line that the world was divided into two camps was formally accepted. The United States was seen as the imperialist power which not only threatened the Soviet Union militarily, but, by means of the penetration of American capital, threatened the independence of Australia. By its foreign policy and by its complaisant acceptance of American penetration of Australia, the Labor government had aligned itself with the reactionary US imperialists. Therefore the aim of the Communist Party should be to wean the people away from support for the government. The Labor Party and the reformist betrayers were to be isolated, and the Communist Party brought forward as the organiser of the people's struggle against reaction. The model for the forms of political action envisaged (it was to cause momentary embarrassment shortly afterwards) was to be Yugoslavia. Action was to be based on people's committees organised in factories, localities, suburbs, and towns throughout Australia. Unity should be sought with supporters of the ALP but the leadership of the Labor Party and the right-wing officials of the trade union movement should be by-passed, thus winning the workers away from their allegiance to them. In militant struggle, in which strike action would be a main component, a people's front would be organised, the objective of which would be the establishment of the Australian People's Democratic Republic.<sup>7</sup> When Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform, the Australian party quickly fell into line,<sup>8</sup> denounced the Yugoslav leaders, and attacked the people in Australia who, whether members of the party or not, showed any sympathy for Tito. For a time the term 'Titoist' took on the same connotation 'Trotskyist' had long possessed—an enemy of the Soviet Union, which by definition put all Titoists in the camp of reaction. Nevertheless, the expulsion of Yugoslavia made no difference in the line of policy adopted in its name.

The most extreme statement of the view that the Labor government was now fully in the camp of reaction was made by Sharkey in an address to the central committee in February 1949. In part he said:

The first thing in the policy of the Labour Party is that, although they are not so blatant, as in the case of Menzies, in demanding atomic bombing, is there anyone

who will deny that the Labour Party today—particularly in the person of Evatt, who has the main contact with international imperialists—is 100% solid on the idea of an alliance with the United States imperialists for war on the Soviet Union? . . . We are not fooling around with milk and water sentimental reformists, but people who, today are the definite allies of warmongers and imperialist aggressors, who are just as anti-labour as Hitler and Mussolini and the Japanese imperialists were. That is not only true of Chifley and Evatt, but of the remnants of the Socialist Parties in every country.<sup>9</sup>

He went on to say that it was no longer possible for the Communist Party to have the same attitude to the Labor Party as it had during the war. Support for Labor candidates in the coming election campaign would strengthen the hand of reformism. Instead, 'we simply go out and tell the working class, that we are the party of the working class'. Thus at the beginning of 1949 the stage was set for a head-on collision with the Chifley government.

The government which was now to be attacked from the left was already under heavy attack from the right, and at the same time its own supporters were largely immobilised. Ironically, the attack from the right relied heavily on identifying government actions with a supposed intention to impose a socialist system which, in the din of propaganda, became a communist system. At the same time, within the Labor Party and the trade unions, the Movement was consolidating its position, thus rendering the labour movement less able, or less ready, to resist the pressure from the Liberal Party, the employers, and those opposed to Labor. The legislative moves which excited the most organised, fierce, and protracted opposition were the government's health scheme and the attempt to nationalise the private trading banks.

The government attempted to implement its health policy by two Acts: the Pharmaceutical Benefits Act 1947, with an amendment in 1949, and the National Health Service Act 1948. The former was intended to provide a range of medicines free to the patient, and the latter some medical services at the expense of the government. They were a further stage of Labor's welfare program. They were not, despite the passionate and extravagant claims of the medical pressure group and

the spokesman of the Liberal Party, the beginning of a slide down the slope to nationalised or socialised medicine.

The Pharmaceutical Benefits Act of 1944 had been declared invalid by the High Court, but the 1946 referendum yielded the necessary powers. The 1947 Act re-enacted, with only minor variations, the provisions of the 1944 Act as well as those of an Act of 1945. The new Act simply provided that a range of drugs and medicines, listed in a formulary, could be prescribed free to patients by medical practitioners and the costs claimed from the government by the pharmacists. The British Medical Association (BMA) did not hesitate to denounce the scheme.<sup>10</sup> A leading Melbourne surgeon, Sir Allan Newton, addressing the Victorian branch of the BMA, referred to free medicine as 'free poison' and raised the banner of freedom—'If we do not unite to fight for freedom we shall deserve to be slaves'.<sup>11</sup> As the date on which the scheme was to go into operation approached (1 June 1948), the BMA urged doctors to boycott it. The stated objection was that the formulary was too limited and that doctors were required to prescribe free medicines on a special form provided by the government. Doctors were advised not to use the special forms, to return them with the formulary to the government and to go on prescribing as in the past.<sup>12</sup>

The rhetoric of the doctors' case may be judged from a statement issued by the federal council of the BMA in May.

[The scheme] restricted the doctor's freedom to prescribe according to his conscience and professional judgment and forced him to use an official formulary merely to cheapen administrative costs at the expense of the patient and efficient treatment.

By a curious exercise of logic the formulary and the forms became the thin end of a wedge which would divide the doctor from his patient and ultimately result in the disappearance of the family doctor.

The Government is not restricting public hospitals to the formulary for the purpose of obtaining free medicines for their in-patients. If the Minister is content to pay for any treatment prescribed in a public hospital, why cannot he do the same for sickness in the home? Why this inconsistency on the Government's part? Why discriminate against the patient of a private doctor? Is this a pre-



liminary movement towards the Government's declared objective ultimately to replace the family doctor with a Government doctor?<sup>13</sup>

The BMA boycott was effective, the vast majority of doctors acting according to its instructions. Having failed to conciliate the BMA, the government attempted a mild coercion of the doctors. By an amendment to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Act, a penalty of £50 was imposed on doctors who prescribed something which was on the formulary but did not do so on the government form. This was met by a flamboyant threat by the federal secretary of the BMA, Dr J. G. Hunter.

The doctor will have to choose one of three alternatives, namely, pass under Government direction, break the law, or jeopardize his patient's life.<sup>14</sup>

In fact the BMA appealed successfully to the High Court, which in a majority decision in October 1949 found the amendment invalid.

In the meantime the government was also attempting to put into effect its National Health Service Act. In introducing the Bill Senator McKenna, the Minister for Health, stated the government's health philosophy and enumerated positive actions already taken.<sup>15</sup> He said that, apart from spiritual considerations, 'the health of the people is the foundation upon which all their happiness and all their powers as a nation are built'. He saw the Bill he was introducing as the foundation stone of a national health structure which would be built over a long period. He recalled that during its time in office the government had taken an active interest in preventive medicine and research, nutrition, child health, and industrial hygiene. Community welfare was a part of the health program, in furtherance of which the government had doubled the amount of child endowment, trebled maternity benefits, and doubled invalid and age pensions. It had also introduced widows' pensions, and unemployment and sickness benefits. It had provided public and private hospital benefits and was about to do something to assist mental patients. It had made a nation-wide attack on tuberculosis. Also its policy of full employment was in one of its aspects a part of the total health program.

In outlining the next step, McKenna argued that the costs of advances

in medical science and technology were so great that they could not be borne by those unfortunate enough to be ill. He quoted from an editorial of the *British Medical Journal* of 3 July 1948:

The cost of ill health is a burden on the community, and a burden on the family, and the startling advances made by medicine in the past 25 years have steeply increased this cost. There is, therefore, a logical case for spreading it over the whole of the community so that those who are fortunate to remain in good health may help those who temporarily fall out of the ranks.

Nevertheless, he said, the government had no intention of nationalising medicine, nor did it have the constitutional power to do so, even if it so wished. Its plans were more modest.

The Bill authorised the Commonwealth to do a number of things, either directly or by co-operation with the states. In agreement with the states the government would seek to provide finance for buildings, equipment, and supplies. It would give assistance to appropriate institutions, universities or otherwise, for the training of medical practitioners and dentists, and for research. If supplies were not available from other sources, the Bill authorised the government to manufacture medical and dental supplies and equipment. These were all firm steps towards increasing the quality of medical service, but it was the benefits scheme contained in the Bill, in which the co-operation of doctors was crucial, which gave the BMA its best chance to resist. The Bill empowered the government to pay 50 per cent of fees charged by doctors, on application by those doctors who agreed to participate in the scheme, with the scale of fees determined by an appropriate tribunal. In addition the Bill foreshadowed some salaried appointments, including medical practitioners in outback areas, full-time specialists such as radiologists and pathologists in hospitals, and other full-time hospital medical staff. The development of group practices was to be encouraged and the establishment of health centres was anticipated. The Bill became law in December 1948.

The BMA rejected the scheme and refused to participate. An editorial of the *Sydney Morning Herald* (30 Dec. 1948) stated the BMA's case in

somewhat less belligerent language than was used by the doctors themselves. In part it read:

The public, as well as the doctors, have yet to be satisfied that the projected national health service is the best that can be devised, or that it is devoid of needless and objectionable features. Few people will be deceived by the minister's attack on the B.M.A. as 'lacking a sense of social responsibility' because it gives voice to those doubts.

While there is no question as to the desirability of a well-balanced national health scheme, both the nature of the Government's plan and the methods of operating it are open to severe criticism. The B.M.A.'s objections, particularly in respect to the system of payment for medical services and the invasion of the privacy of relations between doctors and their patients, are pertinent and important . . . Nor is it by any means clear that an underlying intention of the Government is not the complete nationalisation of medicine and the regimented socialisation of all health services.

The specific point argued by the BMA was that if doctors were to claim 50 per cent of their fees from the government they would be bogged down in clerical work. Furthermore they would be required to report the nature of treatments to government, where their reports would be serviced by 'mere' clerks, thus breaching confidential relations with their patients. But over all there loomed, in their minds, the spectre of socialisation.

The BMA complained of the lack of consultation, but the record, as reported by McKenna, suggests that by consultation they meant dictation by themselves.<sup>16</sup> He reported that the BMA had objected to the Health Act on three grounds: that the control of the service was to be by a department rather than a commission in which medical practitioners would predominate; that the government was empowered to make regulations under the Act; and that the Act provided for experimental health centres. The Minister invited the council of the BMA to appoint representatives to meet representatives of the government to consider the issues raised. The council agreed to appoint representatives, on condition that its proposals were accepted beforehand. As quoted, the council's reply read in part:

The Federal Council [of BMA] agrees to the principle of a joint committee of

representatives of the Government and the Council to consider certain details of the proposed scheme, but only when major matters of policy have been agreed to by both parties.

In relation to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Act the role of the BMA had been even more dictatorial and irresponsible.

McKenna, in March 1949, detailed the relations between the government and the BMA since 1943 when the first Bill was under consideration.<sup>17</sup> The then Minister had invited the BMA to appoint representatives to assist in drawing up the formulary. The BMA had refused. In 1947 the Minister had met the council of the BMA, which made certain proposals to vary the terms of the draft Bill. It had refused, however, to appoint members to a small committee to study the matters raised. In spite of the attitude of the BMA, a number of concessions to its demands were made in the Bill. The BMA was then invited to submit names for inclusion on the formulary committee. The response was to advise doctors not to co-operate with the scheme in any way. A conference finally did take place in July 1948, at which the government made further extensive concessions. But despite the concessions the BMA closed the door finally by a letter to the Minister in October. It read in part:

The alterations you are willing to make have failed to induce the members of the British Medical Association to offer co-operation in the working of The Pharmaceutical Benefits Act 1947.

The BMA boycott effectively prevented the implementation of that part of the government's health policy.

The BMA put its case in frequent statements to newspapers, in letters to its members, and in propaganda pamphlets. They saw the government scheme as a threat to the freedom of doctors and patients. One pamphlet set out what purported to be an alternative scheme.<sup>18</sup> The foreword, written by the president of the federal council of the BMA, declared that the present legislation would 'restrict the rights of doctors to freedom in private practice, destroy privacy of relationship between doctor and patient, and open the way to complete control of the medical profession by the State'. The nature of freedom, as conceived by the

BMA, was made clear in the body of the pamphlet: 'the fee-for-service method of payment is the only one compatible with the retention of freedom'. Such assertions gave unwitting support to the pungent sentences of Karl Marx written a century earlier. Capitalism, he wrote, had destroyed the multiplicity of relationships between people which had existed in previous societies, and had

left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment'. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of Philistine sentimentalism in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value and, in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single unconscionable freedom—free trade.<sup>19</sup>

It must be admitted, however, that had the *Communist Manifesto* been included amongst the bedside reading of the members of the federal council, it is unlikely to have weakened their conviction of the rectitude of their opinions.

The national health service proposed by the BMA included much that was advocated, and indeed put into effect, by the government. It included housing, slum clearance, and popular medical education. It advocated an extension of preventive medicine, immunisation, industrial hygiene, and measures to prevent venereal disease. More and better hospitals, sanatoria, mental hospitals, and homes for the aged and infirm were needed. How all this was to be achieved was left vague, except that it should not be done by the Commonwealth government, because

Greater efficiency will result if Governments realise that Federal financial aid should be expended through State agencies and only in conformity with the above principles. (p. 13)

The doctors' alternative health service was a tactical propaganda measure to demonstrate that they were not the hidebound conservatives pictured by their opponents. In fact it revealed deeply reactionary attitudes. For example, the methods by which payment should be made were to be on a strictly hierarchical basis, with suggestions of medical charity for the lowest stratum.

1. For the middle income group, the use of voluntary prepayment systems similar to that of the Medical Benefits Fund of New South Wales . . .
2. For the lower income group, the existing system of lodge medical benefits extended to provide a more complete service.
3. For pensioners and unemployed over prolonged periods the provision of a general practitioner service paid for through existing State agencies and also the provision to them, free, of life-saving and disease-preventing drugs. (p. 12)

But nowhere are the prejudices more clearly revealed than in the reference to Aborigines. Amongst matters calling for early and close attention, they said, were

The education of natives and hybrids in hygiene and the housing of these people under conditions consistent with the maintenance of their own health and the security of the white population with which they live. (p. 9)

The 'natives and hybrids' must not be allowed to endanger the health of whites. 'Hybrid' may have the ring of scientific language. The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* gives as its original meaning, 'offspring of a tame sow and wild boar', and its substantive meaning as 'the offspring of two animals or plants of different species, or (less strictly) varieties; a half-breed, cross-breed, mongrel'.

Even more remarkable than the outline of the health service proposed by the BMA was *The Socialised Medicine Bedside Book*.<sup>20</sup> Clearly not intended as an opiate for the ill, it expounded the horrific consequences of socialised medicine. It starts with Lenin and ends with Stalin.

Lenin, the founder of international revolutionary Communism, once proclaimed socialised medicine 'the keystone of the arch of the Socialist State'. Nowhere in the world today is the profession of medicine more completely under the control of the government than in the Soviet segments of Russia.

To summarise the argument, if such the series of ill-supported assertions may be called: Russia has socialised medicine, therefore socialised medicine is bad; and socialised medicine is the first step on the road to the totalitarian society, for, once the government has regimented the doctors, the rest will follow. There is no regular sequence of events lead-

ing to the ultimate horror, but an arithmetical sum of the consequences of socialised medicine adds up to the all-powerful state. It means increased bureaucracy, and the invasion of privacy, with mere government clerks knowing the details of people's illnesses and of the relationship between doctors and patients. It means civil conscription and the transformation of the doctors into salaried servants of the state who are necessarily less efficient. Social security means loss of freedom. The family doctor will be disregarded and this will help to undermine the institution of the family itself. The case is buttressed by extensive quotation from the sayings of eminent men, Lord Horder, the King's physician, Lord Acton, Lord Hewart, and Archbishop Mannix, and less eminent newspapers, such as the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Argus*, and the *Advocate*.

The BMA beat the government by its monopoly of an essential skill. At the same time it both fed on and contributed to the atmosphere of extreme anti-socialism and above all anti-communism. For a professedly non-political organisation it had remarkably few inhibitions against stoking the fires of the darkest political bigotry with half-truths, innuendoes, and *non sequiturs*. It was not a matter of coincidence that men for whom the cash nexus was the essential ingredient in a free relationship between men should have found themselves shoulder to shoulder with the men whose business was cash. The doctors and the bankers proved powerful allies.

The attempt to nationalise the trading banks was the strongest attempt ever made by an Australian government to control directly an important area of the capitalist economy. The issue, connected though it was with many others, dominated politics for more than two years, from August 1947 to the general elections late in 1949. In the course of the battle the conservative forces were more effectively organised for political action than they had ever been before or have ever been, or needed to be, since.

Nationalisation of banking had been a plank of the ALP platform from 1919, and from 1921 one of the clearly stated 'methods' of realising the objective of 'the socialisation of industry, production, distribu-

tion and exchange'. The depression had deepened the belief within the labour movement that direct control of the banks was the single most important means of modifying capitalism in the interests of the working class. As a member of the Royal Commission on banking in 1936-7, Chifley had brought down a minority report advocating nationalisation. As we have seen, by regulations during the war, and by the Acts of 1945, his government had implemented most of the recommendations of the majority report. The decision to nationalise sent a shock through the community: of delight qualified by disbelief on the part of those who favoured any movement in the direction of socialist organisation of the economy; of anger, and perhaps fear, on the part of those for whom unfettered capitalism was the natural condition of society.

The decision was taken by cabinet and announced to the public on 16 August 1947. It followed immediately on the High Court decision declaring invalid section 48 of the 1945 Act, which was intended to force state government instrumentalities to bank with the Commonwealth Bank. This was not in itself of overriding importance, but Chifley concluded that other sections of the banking Acts, which were essential to the control of financial policy, were in danger from possible future applications to the court.<sup>21</sup> Nationalisation would put government control beyond dispute.

Much has been written about the attempt at bank nationalisation, but what follows relies most heavily on the careful and exhaustive account given by A. L. May.<sup>22</sup> The response of the banks and the Liberal Party was predictable and immediate. Menzies announced that Australians were faced with a great battle for their freedom, and the banks saw the matter likewise, thus defining the terms of the contest. The newspapers, too, entered the fray immediately. A sample of adjectives employed in comments, resolutions, letters and editorials on nationalisation in the *Sydney Morning Herald* between 18 and 23 August gives a shorthand impression of the atmosphere:

Sensational, radical, unprecedented, spleenful, Red, revolutionary, dishonest, communistic, ill-considered, terrible, irresponsible, ruthless, authoritarian, totalitarian, unauthorised, insidious, subversive, disturbing, drastic, stupid, astonishing, tragic, iniquitous, impudent, arbitrary, violent, destructive, contemptible, mad, ominous,



calamitous, audacious, illegal, sinister, servile, predatory, venomous, extremist, unwarranted, scandalous, unscrupulous, unjustified, undemocratic, unsound, doctrinaire, unconstitutional, putrid, appalling, tyrannical, anti-democratic, unnecessary, provocative, ill-conceived, dangerous, vindictive, shocking, deplorable, cynical, savage, wanton, petty.<sup>23</sup>

No time was lost by the government in drafting the legislation, which was introduced in the House of Representatives two months after the intention was announced. In speaking to the Bill, Chifley pointed out that the banks and the opposition had consistently opposed controls, including those contained in the 1945 Act. Banking policy was a matter of the greatest importance to the economy as a whole, but banks run for private profit could conduct their affairs in ways contrary to the public interest and had done so. The banks spoke of competition as being the impulse to economic efficiency, but in fact the long-term process had resulted in control of the banks being concentrated in a few hands. The sixty-odd banks which had entered the depression of the 1890s had been reduced by 1947 to nine, of which three had their head offices in London. These few had been unwilling to co-operate fully with the government, so the government proposed to implement its long-standing policy of nationalisation. The Bill provided for the voluntary or compulsory acquisition of the Australian assets and business of the private banks. Shareholders' interests were to be protected by the government purchasing their shares at not less than their market value on the day on which the intention to nationalise had been announced. In the case of compulsory acquisition fair compensation would be decided either by agreement or by a special federal court of claims which would be set up. All bank staff were guaranteed security of employment and conditions. It was not confiscation; but opposition to it was not less savage because of that.

The response of the labour movement was varied but generally sluggish. Bank nationalisation had been there on the program for a long time; it was an article of faith, but most members of the ALP scarcely expected that the government would actually act upon it in the present—it was always something for the future. So, except for the Communist Party, the unions under its influence, and some militant ALP members,

there was no great flurry within the ranks of labour. Perhaps the confidence which members and supporters of the ALP had in Chifley's capacity to do it single-handed may have discouraged the movement as a whole from entering the lists in opposition to the furious campaign of the Liberals and the banks.

The communist attitude on bank nationalisation naturally differed from Chifley's.<sup>24</sup> The communists allotted the banks a less crucial place in the capitalist economy than the Labor bank nationalisers did. They were suspicious of monocausal theories and saw banks as only one of many institutions of capitalism which had to be taken over by the state as the necessary condition of transforming a capitalist into a socialist economy. Nevertheless, bank nationalisation was a step in the right direction—a longer step, indeed, than any they had previously expected a Labor government to take. In the party press, in leaflets and pamphlets they threw their weight behind the government. At the ACTU congress in September 1947, between the announcement and the introduction of the Bill, full support was given to nationalisation. However, there were differences in the congress. A resolution moved by Wright, a leading communist, read:

Congress declares that the proposal of the Federal Government to nationalise the banking system is one of the most progressive steps ever taken in the interests of the Australian people. It will give small farmers and business people protection from a small group of financiers who exercise a monopoly control over large sections of the economic life of the community, and will give the Government greatly added power to ameliorate the effect of economic crisis and depression. Congress directs the Executive to conduct a national campaign in support of the nationalisation of banking and directs all affiliated Trades and Labor Councils and Unions to participate in the campaign. Further in view of the tremendous importance of steel and coal in the economic life and welfare of the Australian people and the great power wielded by monopolies, Congress requests the Federal Government in co-operation with the State Governments to nationalise the Coal and Steel Industries.<sup>25</sup>

The right wing of the congress considered that the inclusion of steel and coal weakened the tactical position, and tried to have reference to them removed, but the congress carried the motion by a substantial



Rank and file vision of the new order in banking.

—By courtesy of *The Bulletin*

majority. So much for the resolution; the launching of the campaign was another matter entirely. The campaign turned out to be a very weak affair. Communists entered it with energy, but this may well have reduced the enthusiasm of other sections of the labour movement.

The two years in which bank nationalisation was in dispute coincided with the rise in influence of the Industrial Groups and the authority of the Movement. Official Catholic opinion on bank nationalisation was divided, many leaders adopting an equivocal position. The most definite were the Archbishop of Adelaide, Dr M. Beovich, and the Archbishop of Brisbane, Dr J. Duhig. The former said it was a political question and Catholics were free to make up their own minds about it; the latter, the most consistent reactionary in the Australian hierarchy, declared it a revolutionary measure and warned that it could be the first step to a general attack on private property. Dr Mannix equivocated, wanted more information, but noted that 'the Communists will be delighted if the bill is passed'. May comments:

Such barely concealed hostility from a man whose political associations with Catholic Labor opinion were close, and who was playing a leading role in the campaign against Communism, is of considerable significance. Even if Mannix and his kind did not openly campaign against nationalization, their opinions must have both influenced and reflected wide sectors of Catholic Labor opinion—at least to the extent of restraining enthusiasm and sowing doubts about the Chifley proposal. (p. 55)

The weight of Catholic papers and journals was thrown against nationalisation, only the *Catholic Worker* taking a firm stand for, with a consequent drop in its circulation which anticipated the catastrophic fall following its open breach with the Movement eight years later.

There was virtually no ALP campaign in any state except New South Wales, and even there it was a very puny thing. The ALP is not structured to carry out extensive propaganda or educational activities, being primarily an organisation to fight elections. However, since it was clear that, if the propaganda of the other side was not met, the electoral consequences of nationalisation would be disastrous, an explanation of the party's poor showing must be sought in something other than a general

inadequacy to conduct such campaigns. The simple answer is in the influence of the Movement and its refusal to co-operate with communists under any circumstances. The New South Wales state executive of the ALP met within a week of the announcement and decided to launch a state-wide campaign. However, the party was not to associate in any way with the Trades and Labor Council, because this would mean co-operation with communists. A few meetings were arranged, but without the full involvement of the unions they made little impact. The Industrial Groups likewise made plans to carry the word to the workshops, and to the people by radio, newspapers and pamphlets. There were virtually no practical results from the plans. The field was left clear for the manoeuvres of the opponents, who were inhibited neither by internal divisions nor by any humility as to the virtue of their position.

For two years Australians were subjected to the most intense, highly organised, highly financed, and unscrupulous propaganda campaign they had ever experienced. At first it was against nationalisation of the banks, but this by easy stages became an all-out attack on the government. It was a struggle, as they put it, in defence of freedom, against a government determined to regiment and dictate. The parliamentary opposition took the lead in public, but numerous citizens' organisations lent their support and helped with propaganda and money. The banks themselves appointed a general staff of senior officers and a small army of bank officials who became full-time political activists, supported by a larger contingent who gave part-time service.

The organisation, fully described by May, was centred in Melbourne, where a representative of each bank was appointed to a 'central committee' to control the campaign. In addition there was an 'executive committee' led by L. J. McConnan, the chief manager of the National Bank of Australasia. In each of the other capitals except Sydney central committees were appointed; in Sydney the managers of the two Sydney-based banks appointed a man to be responsible for the campaign. The general staff prepared for a two-year battle. As one of the leaders put it,

Our immediate object was to inform and arouse the public so that the electors, by letters, telegrams, public resolutions and the signing of protests and petitions might

force the Labour Government either to reject the bank nationalization proposal or to submit it to a referendum. Our long term aim is to inform the public regarding banking and finance and to keep before the public the dangers of an extreme socialistic trend in the affairs of the country.<sup>26</sup>

It did this and more. For two years the country was flooded with anti-government propaganda. In addition the banks, in association with some of the state governments, fought the Act, when it became law, through the High Court and later through the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

How to rally the activists created some problems, but they were of protocol rather than of a substantive kind. Banks were supposed to be unpolitical, and it would have been contrary to accepted values for the management to call on the assistance of their employees to engage in political action. But there was no need to. Meetings of bank staff all over the country decided to 'vigorously oppose' nationalisation. Management obliged by releasing key men from their normal duties so that a permanent organisation was formed, an organisation which at its peak had 400 full-time workers excused from their normal occupations, supported by thousands of volunteers.

The bank officers were not alone. Business in general rallied in defence of its property or, as it preferred to call it, freedom. Organisations ranging from the Employers' Federation, the Institutes of Public Affairs, the Constitutional League of Australia, the Sane Democracy League, and the Sound Finance League to the Australian Women's Movement Against Socialisation entered the lists.<sup>27</sup> A massive outpouring of propaganda by press, radio, pamphlets, and meetings flooded the country. Modern (for the time) public relations techniques were employed. Sponsored by the banks, such radio programs as 'Star Pupil' and 'Musical Families' went on the air in all states. The Institute of Public Affairs of New South Wales provided food for thought of a more traditional kind. It published pamphlets which included *What's Wrong with Socialism?* by W. C. Wentworth, and *What is Nationalisation For?*, an 'exposure of the Plan to nationalise industry and to establish a "Supreme Economic Council" dominated by Communist and Labour Leaders'. Leaflets were issued in runs of between a quarter and half a million. Petitions

were pushed by bank officers, in the banking chambers themselves and in the streets. In eight days in New South Wales 218,000 signatures were gathered, and even more in Victoria. The Liberal and Country parties had to do little more than take it easy and collect the political advantage. But they did more: they rode the wave too. Menzies addressed overflow meetings, and the Liberal Party's federal president, R. G. (later Lord) Casey, toured all states. He told a Sydney crowd of 3000 that

in the future, no matter what platform, what policy speech, Labour may be elected upon—if it is ever elected again—we can never be sure that it will not attempt to socialise the shops or the newspapers, or even, heaven knows, the Churches.

In Queensland he described the bank nationalists as 'thin-lipped, long-haired doctrinaires in a back-room seeking to grind the people down to political cannon fodder'.<sup>28</sup> It was tough language, and what he said, he meant.

The campaign may be seen as consisting of three parts. The first stage occupied three months until the passage of the Bill, which received the royal assent on 27 November 1947. The second was the whole of 1948 when the Act was tested and found wanting in the High Court. The third was the preparation for the elections due at the end of 1949—at the same time the Act was before the Privy Council, which dismissed the appeal by the government in July and gave its reasons in October, two months before the elections.

In the first period a shaky Victorian Labor government was defeated at the polls. Despite its ostrich-like attempt to deny that nationalisation was an issue in the state election, its defeat, in which the anti-nationalisation forces had taken an active and vociferous part, was claimed as a victory for those opposed to nationalisation. The second period was devoted to building organisation, perfecting propaganda, and generally preparing for a final onslaught on the Commonwealth government to remove it from office. It is unnecessary here to recapitulate all the details of the organisation and the development of the propaganda—it has already been done by May. But it is worth while looking at the crest

of the wave as it raced towards the government in the year before the elections.

McConnan, who led the bank's campaign, said of himself in March 1948 that he had become less a banker and more of a politician—'I have accordingly developed more and more into a cunning political organiser, and am spending my whole time trying to gather together our forces to defeat the Government at the polls.'<sup>29</sup> Neither money nor manpower was spared. Bank officers were released for total political activity. May describes the organisation:

Sydney metropolitan electorates were to be broken up into eight groups and a senior officer placed in charge of each. For all but one of the groups, two other full-time staff would be necessary. The names and addresses of metropolitan bank officers volunteering to assist in the campaign would be sorted into electorates and given to the officer in charge for assessment and allocation of duties. . . . country electorates would be visited and a committee of bank officers appointed in each town, with a liaison officer in charge. The liaison officer in the main centre of the electorate would be appointed campaign director for the electorate and organiser of activities as a whole . . . The campaign director would be responsible, *inter alia*, for newspaper vetting, holding of public meetings, organization of discussion groups and speakers' groups, distribution of literature and assistance to the anti-socialist parties. (pp. 104-5)

A central organising committee was reconstituted, consisting of representatives of each of the banks, with a full-time headquarters staff consisting of seven members with state-wide responsibilities. They renamed themselves the 'Bank Employees' Committee' and defined their objectives:

- (1) The overwhelming defeat of the Socialist Party at the Federal Election which should be held in September-December, 1949. This defeat must be sufficiently crushing to bring about the removal of the Socialisation objective from the party platform.
- (2) The establishment of sound government in Australia, based on free enterprise and freedom for the individual.
- (3) The development of the political consciousness of bank officers so that they will occupy a responsible position in the political life of the community.<sup>30</sup>

Organisation was tight, and propaganda massive.



The organisational work done by the Bank Employees' Committee in New South Wales has been itemised.

They did any job which seemed likely to help the non-socialist candidates: speaking at street meetings; door-to-door canvassing; distribution of pamphlets, 'How to Vote' cards, etc.; organising political meetings for non-socialist candidates; arranging teams to ask awkward questions at Labor candidates' meetings; acting as campaign directors for Liberal/C.P. candidates; writing newspaper articles and 'Letters to the Editor'; manning polling booths on election day; giving talks in factories and the dozens of special jobs which became necessary from time to time.<sup>31</sup>

Bank officers became professional political organisers, and their intensive activity was an important factor in the defeat of the government at the December polls.

The attack on the government from the left was based on a theoretical appraisal by the Communist Party which was fully articulated during 1948. As we have seen, the idea of the division of the world into two camps carried with it the inference that labour and socialist parties were, whatever their claims, a part of the imperialist camp. Within Australia the Labor government was increasingly pictured as one ineffectually attempting to prop up a capitalist system in crisis—the inevitability of economic crisis being assumed. The government had attempted to carry through measures to mitigate the crisis, but was failing. By contrast with the people's democracies, where the power of the bourgeoisie had been broken by nationalisation of industry and the banks and the division amongst the peasantry of the great estates, the Australian government was collapsing under the pressure of capital. The failure of the prices referendum in May 1948, the successful boycott of the health scheme by the doctors, and the apparent failure of bank nationalisation were all evidence that real power was in the hands of the monopolists. As put by Sharkey,

The rejection of bank nationalisation means that the Labour Party's economic policy is in ruins, shattered by the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, who have once more shown their power to defeat and destroy both reforms unpalatable to them and the Government that proposes such reforms. All this is in accordance with the

Marxist-Leninist theory, which further indicates that even had the Labour Government been able to implement its economic and social reforms, this would have proven entirely inadequate to prevent 'depressions' or to cushion the effect of depression on the masses. Everyone knows that pensions for the old, the sick and the widowed were ruthlessly slashed in the pre-war depression by the Premier's Plan, while the unemployed received the minimum 'dole'. The Labour Party theorists drew the conclusion that the bankers 'engineered' the depression, not seeing the connection, cause and effect, that the economic slump necessarily caused a financial crisis. That is why bank nationalisation, bigger social benefits, doles and the rest cannot prevent economic crises, nor prevent the impoverishment of the people. Now the Labour Party faces the crowning disaster, advancing economic crisis which will no doubt complete the ruin of the Labour Governments.<sup>32</sup>

The lesson to be drawn from this interpretation was that the workers must be led into militant struggle for better wages and conditions, even though this could lead to outright confrontation with the government. The Queensland railway strike was the exemplar of the new militancy.

As is usual, the causes of the strike were complex, a combination of general dissatisfaction at the circumstances of life in post-war Queensland and specific grievances of which the most important were delays by the Queensland government in making the necessary arrangements to give practical effect to the 40-hour week, and the refusal of the government to extend to railway workers the full consequences of the awards which had followed the metal trades dispute in the south in 1946-7. The strike lasted for two months, from early February to early April 1948.<sup>33</sup> Its long-term importance is due to the fact that it became a political strike, a conflict between unions and government. On the union side it was marked by a progressive extension of the strike beyond railway workers to seamen, waterside workers, and miners. On the government's side exceptional legislation, namely the Industrial Law Amendment Act, was rushed through the Queensland Parliament, giving police power to enter premises, and to arrest without warrant people suspected of attempting to influence others to strike or remain on strike. Under the powers so conferred, police harassed individuals, meetings, and strike-pickets. Key unionists were arrested, with the onus of proof of innocence being placed on the defendants, not on the Crown. The

tension created burst into violence on St Patrick's Day. As described by the strike's historian:

On the morning of St. Patrick's Day a small group of men and women left the Trades Hall carrying placards and a black coffin with 'Trade Unionism' painted on the side, to stage a protest demonstration against the Industrial Law Amendment Act. They had marched for only a few hundred yards when they were set upon by large numbers of police, placards were torn from their grasp, and the group was scattered and dispersed. In the achievement of this, women were pushed or knocked to the roadway and many of the men were viciously batoned, booted and punched.<sup>34</sup>

Amongst those seriously injured was Fred Paterson, a communist member of the Queensland Parliament. This brutal use of power by the state probably won the strike for the unionists. Earlier the government had made great play of the communist role in the leadership of the strike, equating them with the communist *coup d'état* which was occurring simultaneously in Czechoslovakia. Following the police bashings, the ACTU rushed representatives to Brisbane to urge caution on the government.

The strike settlement granted the strikers the greater part of their claims. More important for our purposes were the conclusions communists drew from the strike. These were expounded with simple clarity to the fifteenth congress of the party by Henry, a leading member of the central committee. He declared it a triumph for united front activity—of the twenty members of the central disputes committee which organised the strike, eight were members of the ALP, eight were members of the Communist Party, and four had no party affiliations. The strike demonstrated that the Hanlon Labor government was the servant of both local capital and British and American imperialist capital, which intended to keep Queensland as a low-wage state. It also showed that the repressive action mounted by the state did not intimidate the workers, but welded their unity. The general conclusions to be drawn, he said, were that

The strike struggle provided a very rich experience for the whole working class but particularly the Trade Unions, the Communist Party, and the A.L.P. members

in the Unions of the power of united front working class action and of the discipline, courage, initiative and devotion of the working class in face of all the old legalistic bogies, repression and violence, when given determined and clear-sighted leadership . . . During the course of the struggle the workers were able to observe at first hand the difference between the actions of right wing Labour Party leaders of the Government and politicians and those of the Communists and militant Trade Union leaders.<sup>35</sup>

In short, the Queensland strike was a model of how to win industrial gains, expose the reactionary character of ALP politicians, and at the same time win workers to support the Communist Party. It fitted in all respects the general analysis of Australian capitalism and the more militant tasks that communists should accept.

Throughout 1948-9 Indonesia continued to be a matter of contention. In mid-1947 it had become an international issue in a way in which it had not been previously. Until then the Dutch government was negotiating with a dissident nationalist movement in a colony. It had made concessions to a *de facto* authority which would have been inconceivable in a pre-war colony, but they were concessions within the context of an ultimate restoration of substantial Dutch control. The Dutch government saw the Linggadjati agreement as an interim arrangement from which would emerge a new constitutional structure, within which Holland would remain the senior partner. The Indonesian nationalists saw it as the first step to genuine independence. So the agreement could not possibly work. Extended negotiations simply proved this point, until finally the Dutch dropped the appearance of negotiations between equals and declared its intention to restore order in its colony. Its term was a 'police action', which commenced on 20 July 1947. Its aim was to occupy with military forces the areas of Indonesia controlled by the Republic. The Dutch made military gains but they also precipitated the issue into UNO, where it could not be ignored.

Leaving aside the interminable disputes about definitions, the UN acted from the beginning of the police action as though it was a dispute between states which the UN must conciliate. The first step was a ceasefire, to become operative on 4-5 August 1947. The ceasefire was agreed to by both sides but did not stop the fighting, which went on

intermittently until January 1948. The UN appointed a Good Offices Committee consisting of representatives of Belgium, the USA, and Australia. After lengthy and difficult negotiations the Good Offices Committee arranged the Renville agreement, signed on 17 January 1948, which was little more than a truce. Under the truce the position of the Republic steadily deteriorated. The country was blockaded by the Dutch, who held all the key posts and whose economic and military situation became increasingly secure. On the other hand, the Republic was beset by economic problems which exacerbated a growing dissatisfaction amongst left-wing groupings with the performance of the Republican government. Internal 'disorder' in the Republic became one of the excuses for what the Dutch called their second police action, which was in fact full-scale warfare. On 19 December 1948 airborne troops occupied Jogjakarta, the inland capital of the Republic, and took prisoner all the important Republican leaders including the President and the Commander-in-Chief of the army. Within a few weeks the Dutch were taking the stand that the Republic had ceased to exist. On the contrary, their use of massive force was the beginning of the end for them. It turned world opinion heavily against them, a number of countries, including India, Pakistan, Ceylon, and the Arab states, refusing facilities such as airfields to them. The UN began to act more firmly, with the result that after another year of negotiations and pressure Holland agreed to the transfer of complete sovereignty over Indonesia to the Republican government, the transfer to be completed by 30 December 1949. Sovereignty was bought at a very heavy financial cost, in the assumption of debts by the new government, but independence in a strictly political sense had been achieved.<sup>36</sup>

The first police action produced an immediate response on the Australian waterfront. Two days after the action began and six weeks after lifting the original ban, the WWF ordered an immediate stoppage of work on all Dutch vessels. This was a much more complete boycott than the previous one, which had applied only to cargoes bound for or believed to be bound for Indonesia. Further, the action against the Dutch was extended more widely amongst the unions. In response to a request from the WWF the ACTU called a conference of all federal unions

associated in any way with land or sea transport. A meeting of sixteen unions, including all metal and engineering as well as the transport unions, adopted the following resolution:

This Conference of Federal Unions declares its complete opposition to Dutch Imperialist aims in Indonesia and condemns the Dutch war of aggression against the Indonesian people. To this end we call upon all Australian Trade Unionists to refuse to assist in any way whatsoever the movement of any Dutch goods or the repair, re-fueling, and/or movement of any Dutch transport, vessel, vehicle or aircraft in or adjacent to this Commonwealth, until the A.C.T.U., in consultation with the Federal Unions concerned, again considers the question in the light of any decision of the United Nations, and until some change of policy is desired by the Indonesian Trade Union Movement.<sup>37</sup>

The WWF needed no urging from Indonesia to apply its ban but it was strengthened by an appeal from the Indonesian trade unions which, as recorded in WWF minutes, read in part:

we appeal to all democratic and progressive peoples everywhere, and especially to the working class in all countries of the world, to boycott all that is Dutch in all harbours, stores, roadways and other places throughout the world, in the event of the outbreak of warfare in Indonesia.<sup>38</sup>

It also took strength from the fact that in Holland, too, some unions had placed black bans on military and other supplies intended for Dutch forces in Indonesia.

In Sydney, university students, much less given to demonstrating than their successors twenty years later, were involved in what some newspapers chose to call a riot outside the Dutch Consulate. 'Massed police battle with Sydney rioters, SOS to HQ as mob gets out of hand', was the way in which the *Argus* (25 July 1947) headlined its report. It was reported rather differently by Roach in a circular to the branches. It read in part:

on Friday afternoon, 25th July, the NSW Police Force in a most brutal and unprovoked manner broke up a peaceful demonstration of University students who gathered to register a protest outside the Dutch consulate in Sydney against the criminal war of aggression by the Dutch against the Indonesian people . . .

The whole building in which the consulate is housed was literally alive with special police assembled ready to attack anybody approaching the building and as the students moved down the footpath and came abreast of the main door a squad of plainclothes men disguised in sweaters, working clothes etc., raced out and without warning or provocation or reason grabbed the students, knocking them down, then threw them into the doorway finally arresting 13 of them. . . .<sup>39</sup>

Subsequent investigations showed that Roach's account had the truth of the matter. Feelings ran high but probably the 'battle of Margaret Street', as it became in the oral tradition, helped in a minor way to turn opinion against the Dutch in Indonesia. It did not have that effect on Menzies. He attacked the government for complicity in denying labour to Dutch vessels, and declared that 'the Dutch are entitled to their rights in Java just as Australia was entitled to theirs in Papua and New Guinea'.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, he said that Australia, 'at the dictates of a few union officials', had virtually been at war with Holland for two years.<sup>41</sup>

The complete ban on all Dutch vessels was later modified at the request of the government to exclude oil tankers and vessels trading between Australia and Europe, but the boycott on Dutch cargoes bound for Indonesia remained in effect until 26 May 1948. Then, at the request of the government, and on the understanding that no permits for the export of war materials would be issued by the government, the ban was lifted.<sup>42</sup> It was reimposed when the second police action began, and finally lifted by a decision of the WWF federal council in November 1949.<sup>43</sup>

The conflict over Indonesia was exceptional amongst the political battles of 1947-9 in that the WWF's stand gained more support and attracted less obloquy than any other political initiative of communists. Reactionaries, with Menzies in the forefront, beat the drum of imperial legitimacy and criticised Chifley and Evatt for Australia's support of the Republic in the UN, but reserved the most bitter vituperation for the WWF. The government was embarrassed by the embargo but did not move strongly against it. Crisp says:

While neither approving nor condoning the Communist-inspired embargoes placed

on Dutch shipping in Australian ports by the Waterside Workers Federation—a challenge indeed, to the authority of the Government over Australian foreign policy—Chifley held most critical views of Dutch Eastern policy.

Following the police actions (more particularly the second), there is reason to believe that Chifley and Evatt saw some advantage in the stand of the WWF, although they were not prepared to admit to it publicly. On the other side, at a time when communists were hurling more brickbats than bouquets at the government for its foreign policy decisions, it is notable that the same federal council meeting which reimposed the ban following the second police action also resolved that:

This Federal Council of the Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia commends the Commonwealth Government's forthright demand for the withdrawal of the Dutch forces to their original frontiers. This stand by the Government must receive the endorsement and support of all trade unionists and peace-loving people.<sup>44</sup>

The coal strike which ran for seven weeks from 27 June to 15 August 1949 was a very different matter. In an economy more dependent on coal than it later became, the strike caused drastic restrictions on the use of power, both domestic and industrial, brought the public transport system almost to a halt, and caused extensive unemployment. In its effects on the community it was one of the most devastating strikes in Australian experience.

The grievances of the coalminers were real. The attempt to regulate the industry after the war by means of the Joint Coal Board and the Coal Industry Tribunal had little to show by 1949 in the way of improvement in production or in the working lives of miners.<sup>45</sup> So in April 1949 the Miners' Federation, together with the other unions covering men who worked in or about the mines, adopted a log of claims which asked for a 35-hour week, long service leave of three months for every seven years served in the industry, a wage increase of 30s. per week, and improved pit and town amenities. The hours, wages, and leave demands were being considered by the Coal Industry Tribunal before the strike began. The hearing of the 35-hour week claim had been adjourned at the request of the Miners' Federation a month before the strike. The



demand for the wage increase was lodged and then withdrawn by the Federation three weeks before the strike. The hearing on long service leave was completed, and a draft award promised for 14 June—two weeks before the strike—but the tribunal refused to publish when the Miners' Federation announced aggregate meetings for 16 June to discuss direct action. At the aggregate meetings, attended by about 40 per cent of the membership, a nine to one vote was given in favour of a general coal strike.

Between the announcement of the aggregate meetings and the decision to strike the government had been making its preparations also. By the National Emergency Coal Strike Act, which became law two days after the strike began, the Commonwealth assumed powers intended to limit the ability of the union to conduct the strike. The purpose of the Act was set out in the title:

An Act to prohibit, during the period of the National Emergency caused by the present General Strike in the Coal-mining Industry, the Contribution, Receipt or Use of Funds by Organizations registered under the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904-1948 for the purpose of assisting or encouraging the Continuance of that Strike, and for other purposes.

This gave the Commonwealth government power to freeze the funds of unions directly or indirectly engaged in the strike. In New South Wales, by the Emergency Powers Act, the state government gave itself extensive powers over lives and property to be exercised by executive action. The response of the unions was to withdraw large sums of money from their bank accounts and hide it. When ordered to pay this money into court—the Miners' Federation, £15,000, the WWF, £6000, and the FIA, £25,000—the officials refused and were sentenced to gaol for contempt of court, the sentences varying between six and twelve months. With the powers it had assumed, the New South Wales government took control of coal stocks, rationed them, and attempted to maintain essential services. In addition to the court action the Commonwealth government, under enormous pressure from the conservative press and its political opponents, reluctantly decided to attempt to win coal by the use of troops. On 1 August military forces were put into open cut

mines on the northern and western coalfields of New South Wales. It was a gesture which was applauded by the forces of 'law and order', aroused bitter hostility on the part of the people of the coalfields, and produced very little coal at great cost. The strike was terminated by majority votes of three to one at aggregate meetings of miners voting against the recommendations of their officials, much diminished in authority by the absence of their established leaders, who were in gaol.

Typical of the press reaction to the end of the strike was that of the *Sunday Herald* (14 Aug. 1949). Under the heading, 'Now Let us Get Rid of the Red Wreckers', its editorial demanded that the Communist Party be outlawed.

Labour, moved partly by other fears—of electoral wrath to come—has so far overcome its trepidation as to stand up boldly, if belatedly, to the Communists and their mine-working dupes.

Will it now, risking a breach with the big Red-controlled unions which help to back and finance it, have the resolution to outlaw the Communist Party, as the disruptive fifth-column of a foreign power? . . .

Now the people have had enough. The 'political conspiracy' of the coal strike is the finish. If this Government still hangs back from proscription, another will be called in to do the job.

The government did hang back, but the 'other' was more than anxious.

At the time and retrospectively, spokesmen of the communist leadership of the Miners' Federation have justified the strike on both industrial and political grounds.<sup>46</sup> The industrial grounds were that the tribunal had decided not to grant any of the reasonable demands of the unions, therefore strike action was the only way open to the miners to press their demands. This would have been a more plausible case if the Miners' Federation had not pre-empted a decision of the tribunal on some of the matters before it by precipitating the strike in such a way as to prevent the court from giving a decision. The political grounds for the strike, as argued by its most vehement defender, Edgar Ross, were that the government had decided to take the offensive against the Communist Party, so the party, through the institutions it controlled or in which it had influence, had to stand up and fight. This view has the element of truth that in the course of the struggle it became a contest

between the Labor government and the Communist Party. But it is wrong in that it misstates where the initiative lay.

The government had been under increasing pressure from the Liberal Party and the conservative press to move against the Communist Party. The pressure was of the insidious kind, in that it argued that if the government did not act against the communists then its failure was clear evidence that it was under the influence of communists. As the cold war became more tense the demands for action became more raucous. A number of censure motions were moved in Parliament, of which that of April 1948 was typical. Moved by Menzies, it said:

That in the opinion of this House:—

- (a) Communist activities in Australia are subversive.
- (b) Communists in Australia have fomented widespread stoppages of employment, sought to weaken the authority of the industrial law, and inflicted misery and loss upon thousands of citizens.
- (c) There is good reason to believe that Australian Communists act in the interests of a foreign power.
- (d) Recent events in Europe have proved that Communist minorities in countries outside the Soviet Union are organized so as to overthrow by force, majority rule in those countries.
- (e) The Government has failed to take any adequate steps to attack Communist activities in Australia or to prevent the employment of Communists by the Commonwealth.

And that by reason of the above, the Government deserves the censure of this house.<sup>47</sup>

Calls for the banning of the Communist Party became more frequent, but Chifley continued to maintain that, although he abhorred the communists, they could not be contained by suppression but only by improving conditions. Yet the anti-communist atmosphere continued to thicken.

Newspapers reported the moves against communists and those suspected of being communists in the United States. Alger Hiss, a senior member of the State Department who had organised the conference at San Francisco at which the United Nations Organization was born, was accused (Aug. 1948) of being a communist and Russian agent. For the next eighteen months, in hearings and trials, charge and counter-

charge filled the press. In January 1949 twelve leaders of the United States Communist Party were charged with having worked for the forcible overthrow of the United States government. They were subsequently convicted and gaoled.<sup>48</sup> In February the civil war in China ended with the establishment of the Communist government in Peking, and Anthony Eden arrived in Australia with a warning that Australia should take the Chinese communist victory very seriously.<sup>49</sup> In March J. T. Lang, since 1946 a maverick member of the federal Parliament, moved the adjournment of the House to demand that the government prosecute Sharkey, who had been reported as saying, in answer to a journalist's question:

If Soviet forces in pursuit of aggressors entered Australia, Australian workers would welcome Soviet forces pursuing aggressors as the workers welcomed them throughout Europe when the Red troops liberated the people from the power of the Nazis.

I support the statement made by the French Communist leader, Maurice Thorez. Invasion of Australia by forces of the Soviet Union seems very remote and hypothetical to me. I believe the Soviet Union will go to war only if she is attacked, and if she is attacked I cannot see Australia being invaded by Soviet troops. The job of Communists is to struggle to prevent war and to educate the mass of people against the idea of war. The Communist Party also wants to bring the working class to power, but if fascists in Australia use force to prevent the workers from gaining that power Communists will advise the workers to meet force with force.<sup>50</sup>

Sharkey was charged, convicted, and sentenced to three years' gaol (later reduced to eighteen months) a week before the coal strike started. In April Cecil Sharpley, a member of the Victorian state committee of the Communist Party, broke with the party and in articles in the press charged the party with many crimes, including ballot-rigging in trade union elections, the charges being later amplified in a book.<sup>51</sup> In May the Victorian government set up a Royal Commission, with Sir Charles Lowe as commissioner, to investigate communism in Australia.

Many communists, of whom some 4000 served in the armed forces during the war, had joined the relevant ex-service organisation at the end of the war. One aim was to counteract the organisation's extreme

right-wing and anti-communist position, which had characterised the inter-war years. It was a hopeless attempt: all communists were banned, and members were expelled from the Victorian branch of the RSL from 1946, in New South Wales from 1948, when the federal conference also made anti-communism an official part of its program. It called for the banning of the party, the removal of communists from the Commonwealth public service and executive positions in trade unions, and the deportation of foreign-born communists.<sup>52</sup> Similar action was taken by other ex-service organisations. Some small groups, flying under various flags, made anti-communism their business, in most cases arguing also that by secret membership and through the unions they were strongly influencing the ALP. Such groups included the Sane Democracy League, the People's Union, the Australian Constitutional League, and the Victorian League of Rights, whose director, Eric D. Butler, mixed anti-semitism with his anti-communism in virulent proportions.

The major political parties had been only a little slower in officially calling for a ban on the party. The Country Party was first into action when, in his 1946 policy speech, A. W. Fadden said:

The Country Party regards the Australian Communist in the same category as a venomous snake—to be killed before it kills. Therefore, it stands foursquare for declaring the Communist Party an illegal organisation.<sup>53</sup>

Until 1948 Menzies maintained that the Liberals would not ban the Communist Party, the main argument being that it would be more dangerous underground than in the open; also that, if outlawed, it would attract the sympathy of people for whom civil liberties were precious. In March 1948, however, the parliamentary Liberal Party decided that the Communist Party, and all organisations controlled by it except trade unions, should be banned. The ALP, with the exception of a few civil libertarians of whom Maurice Blackburn and Brian Fitzpatrick were the most notable, and a few militant socialists of whom E. J. Ward was the most forthright, has never been deeply committed to civil liberties. Playford's comment is apposite:

The Labor Party in Australia, by comparison with the British Labour Party, the French Socialist Party and other European Social-Democratic parties, has been reluctant to resist attempts to ban or legally restrict the activities of Communists, even when such attempts threaten important civil liberties. The latter parties are wary of anti-Communist campaigns because these can so easily turn into attacks on their own left-wing (and predominantly Marxist) groups, and because legal action against the Communist Party will usually entail some erosion of the regime of civil liberties.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, while in office Chifley resisted pressures from within his own party and the taunts of the parliamentary opposition to outlaw the communists. In replying to attacks by the opposition at a tense point of the Berlin blockade, Chifley made his thinking clear.<sup>55</sup> He considered that Russia was not forcing war on Europe—if they chose to, their military strength was such that 'if they wanted to take Europe by force they could do it'. They were using pressure in their own interests, but were not determined on war; if they had been, they would already have marched. Communism, he believed, was due to poverty; thus in Italy, 'a great capitalist country and a catholic country—communism had grown and spread because economic circumstances had provided a suitable seed-bed'. There were no communists in Parliament in Australia but there were in France, Italy, Norway and even England. The way to deal with communism was to change the conditions favourable to it and to carry on a political struggle against it. The political struggle in the labour movement took various forms. The most general form was a continuation of the long-standing rule which prohibited members of the Communist Party from being members of the ALP.

In 1945 the federal conference decided to campaign against communism, and the president ruled that no ALP member could officially represent the party on any platform on which a member of the Communist Party was present. In 1948 the federal conference declared that Australian communists were acting on Russian instructions and seeking to destroy democratic institutions, retard economic progress, and slow down defence preparations.<sup>56</sup> A number of members were expelled from the ALP on the grounds of their sympathy with the Communist Party or of membership of organisations declared to be under sub-

stantial communist control. Such organisations as the Australia-Russia Society and the New Housewives' Association were proscribed in this sense. However, despite demands from individuals and branches that the Communist Party be declared illegal, the ALP refrained from adopting this as policy. On the other hand, the barriers against any kind of co-operation with communists varied from state to state—the most impenetrable being in Victoria where the Movement had its greatest following.

Communism was certainly under attack internationally and within Australia. The conclusions the Communist Party drew have already been indicated—they decided to fight the government, and the miners were the available weapon. Edgar Ross outlined the strategy to the central committee of the party in February.

The job then is to seize the initiative, to present a positive programme on the way to win more coal, expose provocation, expose the fatal limitations of the Coal Board—while not supporting a return to the previous set-up, the jungle set-up, when the coal owners had no check on their activities at all, emphasising the need for nationalisation . . . Our policy provides a very sound basis for winning the united front among the mine workers and at the same time differentiating ourselves as a Party from the policy being followed by the current Labour Government.<sup>57</sup>

For the communist bureaucracy the coal strike was primarily a political act in which the party was making its bid for hegemony of the labour movement. This proved to be at least a tactical mistake and at most an irresponsible exercise of bureaucratic power. For most of the miners the only issues were their own, as they felt, justified demands. For the communist leadership there were political intentions which were far from frankly stated to the membership. In the event the strike did not have the effect the leadership expected. Instead of uniting the labour movement behind the Communist Party, its effect was deeply divisive. The ACTU executive lined up with the government. The ARU transported 'black' coal. The New South Wales Labor Council denounced the strike. Only the communist-led unions, notably the WWF and the FIA, provided support. The communists explained the 'treachery' of the

labour movement generally as the result of right wing machinations. It is true that it provided a heaven-sent opportunity for the Movement to picture the communists as a malign and treacherous influence. But it went deeper than the right wing—apart from communist minorities in a number of unions, the miners were isolated in a hostile community. The decision finally taken by the rank and file of the miners to return to work against the advice of their officials was the final evidence of the failure of the industrial strategy.

The miners' strike was not an outcome of communist strength. It was an act of bravado and adventurism at a time when the party was in decline. The congress of the ACTU which followed shortly afterwards provided the clearest evidence of this. In 1947 the policy decisions of congress had followed very clearly the communists' intentions. The 1949 congress went very strongly against them. In a bitter article, Tom Wright described the congress:

The 1949 Australian Congress of Trade Unions, held in Sydney on September 19-23, was a very tawdry affair compared with the biennial congresses held in 1945 and 1947. At the two preceding Congresses, the left wing succeeded in leading the discussions and carrying the day on all vital questions of policy. At the 1949 Congress the left wing had approximately the same number of delegates as in 1947, but there was a large increase in delegations from unions under right wing leadership, giving a substantial right wing majority which was successfully regimented to support the reactionary line of the A.C.T.U. Executive.<sup>58</sup>

He then went on to cite, from his point of view, the evidence on which this description was based. The congress had approved the close ties between the ACTU executive and the Chifley government—close ties which had brought the ACTU into the miners' strike on the side of the government. The decision to disaffiliate from the WFTU was made in slavish adherence to the reactionary foreign policy of the government. On all major points, including elections of officers, communist policies were defeated by more than two to one. Wright concluded his review:

There was no recognition whatever given to the war plans of imperialism, or the real nature of the developing economic crisis, the effects of devaluation or the infringements of democratic rights. There was a paean of praise for the Labour



Government and, excepting for some temporary difficulties during a period of recession possibly for three years, the prospect was a rosy one of increasing prosperity and security for the workers, through a benevolent government, without class struggle.<sup>59</sup>

The ACTU congress marked the complete defeat of the communist attempt to win the hegemony of the labour movement.

As the attitude in the community hardened against communists and Russia, intellectuals who were members of the party or sympathetic to it found themselves doubly embattled. Always suspect by many members of the party itself because they were not members of the working class, they were at the same time expected to accept and expound an increasingly narrow and inelastic ideological orthodoxy which cut them off from fellow intellectuals and often deeply disturbed their basic assumptions about the nature of intellectual activity. Always a small minority in the party, and indeed in the society generally, intellectuals reacted in various ways. A dribble left the party as each new act of faith in the omniscience of the CPSU was required; others became inactive or involved themselves only in pushing those aspects of policy in which they believed; others accepted the dogmatism required. Probably the most general reaction was to close ranks against the strong growth of anti-socialism in any of its forms. The Soviet Union and the slavish acceptance of its verities was an albatross to be worn at least for the time being.

As we have seen, social realism had been one of the more creative influences in Australian literature. But the publication in the *Communist Review* in February 1947 of Zhdanov's brutal and vulgar criticism of a number of sensitive writers marked the beginning of the drive for narrower conformism in matters of literature and art than had previously prevailed. It paralleled the similar drive in all other questions of ideology. The quality of the 'criticism' made to explain the suppression of a Leningrad literary journal may be gauged from this assault on Akhmatova, one of the best of the then living Russian poets.

The range of her poetry borders on squalor—the poetry of a frenzied lady, dream-

ing between the boudoir and the chapel. Basic with her are amorous-erotic motifs, intertwined with motifs of sorrow, yearning, death, mysticism, a sense of doom. The feeling of being doomed—an understandable feeling for the social consciousness of a dying group; gloomy tones of death-bed hopelessness, mystical experiences coupled with eroticism—such is the spiritual world of Akhmatova . . . Not exactly a nun, not exactly a harlot, but rather nun and harlot, with whom harlotry is mixed with prayer.

Akhmatova's crime, and the crime of those denounced with her, was that she wrote of profound human experience and did not simply celebrate the triumphs of socialism. Let us, said Zhdanov, take another theme, the Soviet woman.

Surely one cannot cultivate among Soviet men and women readers the shameful views inherent in Akhmatova on the role and vocation of woman without giving a really truthful general notion of the modern Soviet woman, the Leningrad girl, of the woman heroine, particularly those who bore on their shoulders the enormous difficulties of the war years, and now labour self-sacrificingly on the solution of the hard tasks of restoring the economy.

The writers' task is a political task devoted to the political education of the people in the truths of Marxism-Leninism as expounded by the central committee of the Communist Party.

We demand that our comrades, both those who give leadership in the literary field and those who write, be guided by that without which the Soviet order cannot live, i.e., by politics, so that our youth may be brought up not in a devil-may-care, unideological spirit, but in a vigorous and revolutionary spirit.

Too many writers had been influenced by the literary fads of the west. They had come to look on themselves as pupils of bourgeois-philistine writers rather than as teachers of the Soviet youth about the values of Soviet society. What the Soviet people needed, he said, was for writers to

comprehend and generalise the tremendous experience gained by the people in the Great Patriotic War, for them to portray and generalise the heroism with which the people are now working on the restoration of the national economy of the country after the expulsion of the enemy.

The speech, as can be seen, was not an exercise in literary criticism: it was an order for the production of a particular brand of goods and a threat to those who did not conform. It silenced some of the greatest writers and widened the market for the outpourings of literary hacks prepared to produce for the 'made to order' market. Socialist realism was placed firmly on the world communist stage by A. Fadeiev, the Soviet spokesman on literature at the World Congress in Defence of Peace in August 1948. In his speech he distinguished between those artists who are for socialism and those who are against it; the criterion: their attitude to the Soviet Union.

Throughout 1948-9 art and literature were popular subjects of discussion in communist journals. In a two-part article Emile Burns, a leading British communist theorist, expounded the significance of socialist realism in a language less rough than that of the Soviet exponents.<sup>60</sup> He pointed to four characteristics. First, the positive aim of all cultural activity should be to assist in the forward movement of society, that is towards communism. This carries with it the rejection of notions of 'art for art's sake' and the elaboration of form without concern for content. Second, it should express man's ability to control his own destiny. It must be positive, confident and heroic. 'Only such an approach helps society forward, and is therefore in harmony with reality', with the actual forward movement of society. Third, art should be national, not a slavish imitation of past works but a creative development from them. Fourth, and this sums up all four points,

[Socialist realism] implies the conscious use of cultural activity to express and inspire the actual movement now going on in the Soviet Union, stressing the forward movement, stressing man's power to create, while also stressing the fact that what he creates is only soundly built if it rests on the achievements of the past — particularly, in their case, of the Russian past, or rather the past of the peoples of the Soviet Union, because it is they who are creating the new society. Such Socialist realism is opposed to, and actively fights against, formalism which can neither express nor help forward the actual movement of society, and 'bourgeois decadence', expressing the defeatism, despair, escapism and remoteness from real social problems of a society which is in decay.

Thus softened, the truth according to Zhdanov was made marginally more acceptable to English and Australian ears. Except that it was

another step on the road to a restrictive dogmatism, it was not noticeably different from the precepts of the social realism of the previous two decades.

As discussed in Australia, the issue turned around a proper estimate of the work of Picasso. As an abstract painter and the leader of a school, his work was unacceptable. On the other hand, he had recently joined the French Communist Party. J. B. Miles pronounced on the dilemma, but without really coming to terms with the debate about the relationship between form and content. He welcomed Picasso to the communist movement, but felt that the artist had now to look at his own work more critically.

But must he not learn why he painted as he did and begin to work for a considerable body of ordinary people who want peace and so expose the warmongers; for people who want democracy and so expose fascists and fascist trends; for people who want security and so expose the monopolists and fight with the exploited?<sup>81</sup>

The test for Picasso, as for all other artists, must be, he said, whether or not his writing or painting furthered the cause of democracy, anti-fascism, and peace—his term was ‘socialist directional realism’:

no matter how skilful they [artists] are, no matter how large their audience, the test of good and bad in the sense of desirable and undesirable must include, progressive or reactionary, for my class or against my class, for the people or for the imperialists.

Miles left unanswered, except for the crudest and therefore least influential work, the question of how a decision was to be reached about which side the artist was on.

Probably socialist realism of the Zhdanov kind had little effect on the work of Australian writers. It was a subject of political argument, but its practical consequences were limited. It may have confirmed the radical nationalist tradition and had marginal influence in other respects on, for example, Frank Hardy. In his powerfully realist and influential first novel, *Power Without Glory*, the weakest link and the most contrived situation is the one surrounding John West’s beautiful and rebellious

daughter, Mary. Her husband, a highly idealised and heroic communist who dies in Spain, conforms with the type characters of Soviet literature in 1949, but is out of place in Melbourne in 1937, a Melbourne which in other respects Hardy paints brilliantly. On the other hand, to take another example, John Morrison's artistic integrity was little, if at all, affected by the demand for blatant heroes. S. Murray-Smith wrote correctly of Morrison in 1964:

Morrison, the only radical writer of our day who is actually a manual worker, expresses better than any of his contemporaries the understanding that it is the long view, the quiet view of life and of people that, finally, wins the day. Pervading all his work is a militant humanism and sympathy for the under-dog, but in reading Morrison one is never conscious of being unduly influenced. He comes closer than any left-wing contemporary to the vital understanding that each man also fights himself.<sup>62</sup>

Socialist realism, as interpreted in the Soviet Union, was a political demand made on left-wing and communist writers. Most of them did not respond, to the disappointment of the communist political leaders and to the great good of Australian literature.

In science the new orthodoxy was in biology, with Academician Lysenko as the banner-bearer of the new science. Lysenko was for many years a dissident Soviet biologist who advanced a theory of heredity contrary to the generally accepted theory of genetics. In 1948 he won the political struggle against his opponents when, at the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Science and the Academy of Science of the USSR, his theory was accepted as official. His opponents were forced to recant and agree that he was right or be dismissed from their positions and see their laboratories and institutes closed. Later proved in theory and practice to be wrong, and unscientific in its use of evidence, for a number of years his theory dominated the Soviet science of living things. Its appeal was that it appeared to have produced important practical results in agriculture, and that it seemed to be more in conformity with Soviet political aspirations. Art was politics of a particular kind; so too was science. Lysenko had disproved some basic propositions in bourgeois science, thus striking another heavy blow in the battle of ideologies.

The prevailing theory of inheritance was based on the work of Mendel and Morgan. In their theory the characteristics of living things are transmitted by genes which are not affected by changes which occur, as a result of environmental influences, in the living matter which carries them. Occasionally, in a random manner, a gene changes in such a way as to bring a permanent change in the cell affected. Lysenko disputed this fundamental proposition, and claimed to have succeeded in bringing about the transmission of acquired characteristics. This claim was politically significant in a number of respects which were put before a meeting of the Victorian Science Committee of the Communist Party early in 1949. J. D. Blake spoke at length.<sup>63</sup> He saw it as a triumph over bourgeois ideas, a triumph for a line of thought which led back to a Russian scientist, Michurin. It also opened up limitless prospects for the transformation of nature, and of man himself. If acquired characteristics could be transmitted, then man could be changed by social processes. Socialist man would be, from his birth, a different and higher kind of being than one conditioned by capitalist society. Soviet science was opening Pandora's box, and the opposition of western science was the clearest evidence of the revolutionary significance of the new discoveries.

The average member of the Communist Party or friend of the Soviet Union had no more chance than did the man in the moon of determining the validity or otherwise of the Lysenko revolution in genetics. But since it was a political matter communists were expected to accept the party line. For those who had no knowledge of biology there were no serious intellectual problems. If the weight of high-powered scientific opinion in Russia was on the side of Lysenko, then who was the layman to say otherwise? Authority lay with the decisions of the Communist Party. And, although there was uneasiness about procedures by which theories and ideas could be declared false and people removed from their jobs because they were unable to accept the new truth, those who accepted the general position of the party were generally prepared to propagate the new ideas as best they could, or at least to suspend judgment. As with artists and the more rigorous socialist realism, so with scientists and Lysenko: some were persuaded; others were not.

J. D. Blake spoke of the problem that scientists presented to the leadership of the party. They were solidly with the party in everything except their own speciality. He cited Christopher Caudwell as arguing that artists may accept proletarian leadership in everything except their own field, and the same applied to scientists. He quoted from *Illusion and Reality* by Caudwell.

Of course this is not peculiar to the artist. Scientists, for example, will make an alliance with the proletariat in the same way; they make reservations only in the field of science.

The explanation of this phenomenon for both artists and scientists lay in the fact that the whole educational process bore more heavily on intellectuals who, despite the fact that they might see in communism a release from their frustrations under a capitalist system, were still more deeply marked than were the working class by bourgeois values. The conclusion Blake drew was that:

They [scientists] are under the most unceasing and direct pressure from bourgeois ideology. Unless the most vigorous and unflinching struggle against corrupt bourgeois ideology and for working class Marxist ideology is carried on, it is quite certain that our Communist scientific workers will become infected with bourgeois decay.

The majority of intellectuals were in due course to sever their connections with a Communist Party far gone in dogmatism and dependence upon truth as revealed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In the meantime, they either quietly withdrew or searched their souls or their minds to discover what made them so unworthy—or professed themselves more working class than their working-class comrades. All of these reactions were a great disservice to the socialist movement, a conclusion Blake in later time was more ready to recognise than any other member of the then leadership of the party.<sup>64</sup>

## 7 The Cold War II (1950-5)

The first half of the 1950s was a severe testing time for the Communist Party. From being a generally unpopular minority political party it became an allegedly seditious conspiracy on trial before the community and the courts. The test was both internal and external. Internally communist ideology and practice held in tension competing tendencies. Communists saw themselves as both revolutionaries and reformers. They were both nationalists and internationalists, although the latter had become increasingly a single concern for the security of the Soviet Union. Their ultimate aim was the replacement of the irrational, exploitative, and unequal society of capitalism by a rational, humane, and egalitarian socialist society. The Soviet Union was to have provided the model for it, but by 1950 it was very difficult to believe that it had; though this could be explained by the frightful suffering inflicted by World War II. The communist movement had arisen out of the struggles against imperialist war, and although communist theory had no place for it, pacifist sentiment was part of the mental make-up of many communists. This was held in tension within the party, and often within the mind of a single person, with the fact that violence was a necessary political weapon. Likewise authoritarianism and libertarianism co-existed in the same party and the same mind. For tactical reasons one or other of the opposing tendencies was emphasised from time to time, but the conflict between them also constituted a genuine dilemma for many communists. When the tension became unbearable they either managed to close part of their mind or left the party, sometimes to denounce it, but more often to try some other way to oppose the manifest evils, the awareness of which had first taken them into the Communist Party.

The general trend, however, was towards the dominance in the party of authoritarianism, illiberalism, and a belief in *realpolitik*. This trend was influenced, but not solely caused, by the example of the monolithic party of the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the dominant attitude was the conviction that the Soviet Union could do no wrong. This was the



transmutation of the original internationalism which had given the early communist movement so much of its moral authority. It also provided the opportunity for the attack mounted on the party in these years.

The first test began in Victoria in 1949. Encouraged by the revelation that a Russian-directed spy ring was operating in Canada and perhaps by the spy-hunting of the Un-American Activities Committee, but most immediately by the defection of Cecil Sharpley, a communist official, the Victorian government set up a Royal Commission to investigate the Communist Party in Victoria. Under the Royal Commission (Communist Party) Act 1949, Sir Charles Lowe, a Justice of the Supreme Court, was commissioned to inquire into and report on the history, aims, objects, and funds of the party. While not a trial, the commission took the form of communist counsel defending the party against charges of wrongdoing levelled by Sharpley and other witnesses, who were for the most part members of the Movement and ex-communists. There was also an extensive consideration of communist theory, presented both offensively and defensively. The charges, not considered here in detail, ranged from the claim that the party was directed from Moscow, that it was authoritarian (even interfering in the personal lives of its members), that it penetrated and controlled other organisations, and that it organised violence and ballot-rigging in union elections.<sup>2</sup> The communist defence was to throw doubt on the evidence of witnesses and, positively, to present the less revolutionary aspects of theory and practice as the norm. The commission was conducted with dignity and scrupulous attention to legal procedures. The report was printed in April 1950, the day after Menzies had introduced a Bill into the Commonwealth Parliament to outlaw the Communist Party.

The substance of the 107-page report has been summarised as:

The most striking feature of the Report was its dispassionate tone, entirely out of keeping with the sensationalism promoted by the public exponents of anti-Communism. While not always exonerating the Party, the majority of Lowe's findings were both mild and inconclusive . . . Lowe found, for instance, that there was no evidence to show that the A.C.P. was controlled from abroad, although its policy was 'in harmony' with that of the Cominform. Funds came from various local sources, but there was no evidence that they came from overseas. The Party

did not hold itself bound to obey laws which it regarded as oppressive, or restrictive of its efforts to overthrow the existing system. It was in fact, said Lowe, 'prepared to use any means to achieve what it thinks to be a desirable object, so long as it regards the means as fitting and the result as not on the whole disadvantageous'. On the Party's industrial policy, he concluded that 'where strikes have occurred under Communist leadership or influence, the purpose has been really, in the first place, to gain the advantages sought in the men's demands. I think, however, that the leaders of the Communist Party at any rate have never lost sight of what they consider are the further advantages of giving training to the strikers in concerted action against the employers and of striking one further blow at the capitalist system'.<sup>3</sup>

With the exception of one case, Lowe was not convinced of the charges of ballot-rigging in union elections. Of an election in the Building Workers' Industrial Union (BWIU), he found the allegations proven.

What emerged from Lowe's report was a picture of an organisation which did not constitute a conspiracy to bring about a violent insurrection, but which did expect that at some time in the future a situation would arise in which, with the collapse of the capitalist system, violence would be needed to replace it with a socialist system. In the meantime it had been guilty of at least some acts of mild corruption of a kind which were not unique to the Communist Party. This, however, did not affect the caricature which Menzies was sketching in Canberra and which was eagerly transcribed by most of the press.

Menzies came to office following the elections on 10 December 1949 on a policy which included banning the Communist Party. On 27 April 1950 he introduced a Bill 'to outlaw and dissolve the Australian Communist Party'. Its purpose, which the *Sydney Morning Herald* (28 April) headlined, quoting Menzies, was to deal with the 'King's Enemies'. The preamble explained the reasons for the proposed outlawing of the party. It asserted (its fulsome language here omitted) that the Communist Party did the following things: that following the basic theory of communism expounded by Marx and Lenin, it sought to bring about a revolutionary situation in which, as the leader of a minority, it would seize power; that it used violence, intimidation, and fraudulent practices to bring about the dislocation or overthrow of established government; that it was a part of a world-wide revolutionary movement

which was subversive and treasonable; and that by means of strikes and stoppages in key industries, in which it had influence, it aimed to cause dislocation and disruption of the economy. There were six main provisions of the Bill. It dissolved the Communist Party and appointed a receiver of its property. Other organisations which the government was satisfied were substantially communist could also be declared illegal by the executive government. Officers of unlawful associations would be subject to imprisonment. Where the government was satisfied that a person had been a member of an unlawful association (that is, one declared unlawful under the Bill) after 10 May 1948, he could be declared to be a person who was likely to be prejudicial to the 'defence or to the execution or maintenance of the laws of the Commonwealth'. Such 'declared' persons would be ineligible for employment by the Commonwealth or any Commonwealth authority. Further, the government could declare that certain industrial organisations which covered key industries (coalmining, iron and steel, building, transport, power, and engineering were specified as examples) could not have 'declared' persons as officials.

Menzies explained that there was nothing contrary to liberal principles in the proposed measure. Anticipating the argument that acts, not ideas, should be prohibited, he answered his own question with the rotund logic which marked his version of liberalism—'Can we recognise and deal with the enemies of liberty only when they actually take up arms?' In a curiously circular argument he agreed that you cannot suppress ideas, but when 'ideas give rise to overt action, and that action is against the safety and defence of the realm, we are not only entitled but bound to suppress it'. As to the assertion that the government cannot touch a union official, that would place union officials above the law. The argument that by suppressing the Communist Party you merely drove it underground he treated with derision—'they are underground already'.<sup>4</sup> Before following the course of the attempt to suppress the Communist Party we will look at the general political atmosphere in which it occurred.

Two months after the Bill to dissolve the Communist Party was intro-

duced into the House of Representatives, and while it was still under consideration by Parliament, the war in Korea began. Menzies lost no time in announcing that the RAAF would join the Americans,<sup>5</sup> and this was later followed by the decision to send ground troops. Generally the war was interpreted as due to communist aggression, and the US decision as intended to call a halt to aggression. The *Sydney Morning Herald* gave its opinion:

America has learned well the bitter lesson of the late thirties—that retreat in the face of aggression breeds aggression, and that appeasement is the first long step towards war . . . President Truman's statement has thrown the mantle of American military might over all that remains of free Asia. It has served notice on Russia and her Asian satellites that Formosa and Indo-China, the points most immediately threatened, are now considered within the American sphere of vital strategic interest. . . . (29 June 1950)

In Parliament the ALP supported the government. The Communist Party declared that the war was a result of American imperialism and that it had been initiated by the American puppet, Syngman Rhee. For the next three years, as the war swayed backwards and forwards across the 38th parallel, the Korean war was a fact in Australian politics.

In September Menzies, recently returned from a visit to Britain and the United States, told Australians that they must prepare for the possibility of the third world war. He was reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

'It is because your Government has considered the facts and weighed the risks,' he said, 'that it was decided to call upon the people of Australia for the greatest effort in defence preparation and the most realistic approach to the nature of the threatened war ever undertaken here in time of peace.' . . . (21 Sept. 1950)

Both the regular army and the citizen military force would be put on a new footing so that they could fight anywhere in the world, thus bringing 'some of the best troops in the world' into the common front against communism. Menzies continued to sound the war drum ever more urgently. In October, in a signed advertisement in the press, he announced that 'We—all Australians—are in greater danger than ever

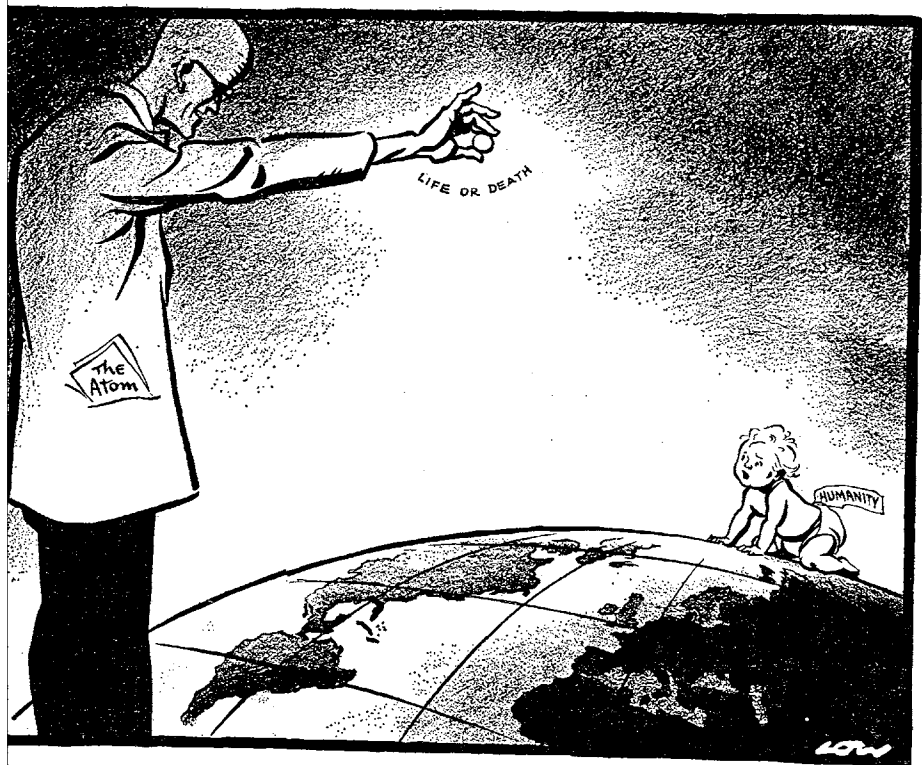
before'. He said that the choice was between freedom and tyranny, and that the problem was immediate. Therefore he called on all Australians, young men who might join the armed forces, workers and employers, to develop the country and to make their contribution to defence preparedness.<sup>6</sup> In December Menzies spoke of the international situation as extremely grave, and the *Sydney Morning Herald* (2 December) gravely spoke of the possible need to use the atom bomb in Korea.

Terrible as this weapon is, deep as must be the abhorrence of its employment, it is a no less legitimate instrument of warfare than other modern means of mass destruction.

In February 1951 Menzies spoke of the need to get Australia on to a semi-war footing, and in July he introduced the Defence Preparations Bill, which, he claimed, would prepare Australia for a major war by the end of 1953.<sup>7</sup> Amongst world political leaders none was more adamant than the Australian Prime Minister that the third world war was coming. He praised General MacArthur, who was publicly advocating an attack on China, on the day before he was dismissed by President Truman for his bellicose intentions.<sup>8</sup> At the same time he attacked Chifley for believing that there would be no war, saying that Chifley's views on communism were rubbish.

There is no way of establishing, with the evidence available, whether or not the views of Menzies were sincerely held. But there must be some doubt, since his reiterated statement of the need to prepare for war was not matched by any serious attempt to prepare Australia for war either economically or militarily. At the same time there were evident advantages for him in his campaign against communism in creating an atmosphere of impending war in which communists would be the enemy. The peace movement was the positive response to the threat of war.

The Australian Peace Council was formed in Melbourne in July 1949, following the World Peace Congress held in Paris earlier in the year. The founding members were clergymen, writers, intellectuals, and some trade unionists, the great majority of whom were not communists,



"Baby play with nice ball?"

—By courtesy of the National Library of Australia

although they were soon labelled by their opponents as dupes of the communists. The purposes of the council were to mobilise public opinion in support of the UN; to foster the idea of peaceful co-existence between different social systems; to seek to have atomic weapons outlawed; and to counter all forms of war propaganda and race hatred.<sup>9</sup> The Peace Council held a peace week in November 1949, and launched a peace ballot, in which people were invited to vote on such questions as support for the UN Charter, co-existence between capitalist and communist states, the banning of atomic weapons, and so on.<sup>10</sup> The first big public occasion was the peace congress held in April 1950 in

Melbourne. Its theme was the World Peace Committee's Stockholm declaration against the use of atomic weapons, which read:

In the name of humanity—

We declare that no nation has the right to use the atomic bomb.

The atomic bomb is not a weapon of war, but a means of exterminating whole populations.

We demand its unconditional prohibition under strict international control.

*We brand now, in advance, as a war criminal, that Government which first uses the atomic weapon.*<sup>11</sup>

The main drawcard for the congress was the Dean of Canterbury, Hewlett Johnson. He attracted large crowds to hear him speak, often in the open air, because halls were denied to the congress by both public authorities and private owners. He also attracted much unfavourable comment from the conservative press. His remarks that China was better off under communism and that the Chinese should be allowed to settle in northern Australia were reported without comment.<sup>12</sup> But his arrival in Sydney was reported in an article which also contained the information that the aeroplane on which he arrived also carried a British police officer who had been shot in the head by 'Malayan Communist terrorists', and who was on his way to hospital in Melbourne.<sup>13</sup> The *Sydney Morning Herald's* considered opinion was that he could scarcely have expected a warm welcome from the press.

Dr Johnson comes here, not as a dignitary of the Anglican Church, but as an apologist for Russo-Communism, with which the democratic world is in a state of 'cold war' with a shooting war as a dread and not remote possibility . . . It is because of this anxiety that the amiable Dean, who looks altogether too much like a decoy duck, has been an unwelcome guest in Australia. His talk of letting in the Chinese—in 1933 it was the Japs.—is an abuse of our reluctant hospitality. (23 April)

The Melbourne congress was the beginning of an extensive campaign in support of the Stockholm declaration and of later conferences both in Australia and overseas. The general message of these conferences was an assertion of the crucial need to maintain peace and prevent nuclear war; their aim was to attract the support of those who were repelled by the

prospect of another world war rather than to consider any detailed policy to prevent it.

Was the peace campaign fraudulent, as the press, the government, and also the ALP insisted? The Communist Party from 1950 onwards attached the greatest importance to the peace movement and made no secret of this, but it was not quite the cut and dried policy its opponents chose to see. For example, in July 1950 J. D. Blake complained at length that the party, in spite of its words, was not really convinced that the struggle for peace was the most important issue on the political agenda.<sup>14</sup> His aim was to make it so, and by mid-1951 it had taken a central place in the draft program which was later adopted by the party congress. The program stated that the struggle to maintain peace was the most pressing at the present time, and therefore the party should devote its main energies to organising for peace. An atomic war, it said, would be ruinous for all countries, including Australia. War was not inevitable, and therefore could be resisted successfully. The main danger of war was in aggressive acts by the US.

An end must be put to the aggressive war alliance with the U.S. warmongers, our national independence asserted and a peaceful policy substituted which aims at world peace and international co-operation, independence and respect for the rights of all nations, the banning of the atom bomb, disarmament and adherence to a Five-Power Peace Pact.<sup>15</sup>

The predominant attitude in the higher echelons of the ALP was that this communist involvement necessarily rendered the peace movement spurious. In February 1950 the New South Wales executive of the ALP prohibited members from belonging to the Peace Council. This was followed shortly by the Victorian executive, and in May the federal executive imposed an all-Australia ban on the Peace Council—all of these committees being by 1950 controlled or strongly influenced by the Industrial Groups. For others who were members neither of the ALP nor of the Communist Party, the peace movement was the most effective medium through which they could voice their opposition to the constant clamour that war was inevitable.



The legislative attack on the Communist Party was made in the atmosphere described. Whether it would pass or not depended on the influence that labour movement and community opinion might have on the parliamentary Labor Party, which had a majority in the Senate and was thus able to defeat or amend the measure. Mass meetings of members of the Miners' Federation and the FIA rejected recommendations to stop work in protest against the Bill, which was clear evidence of the decline in the authority of their communist leaders. On the other hand, with the exception of those controlled by the Movement, the unions were opposed to the Bill or at least to some of its consequences. A special congress of the ACTU rejected a proposal put by Healy to oppose the Bill in all its clauses, and adopted instead a motion which stated a general opposition to legislation which suppressed any political party and particular opposition to some of the clauses of the Bill.<sup>16</sup> It opposed the power to 'declare' an organisation or individual, and considered that it was wrong for the onus of proof to be placed on a person to prove that he was not a member of the Communist Party. It noted that this was a departure from the normal concepts of justice, thought that the Bill should be opposed in its entirety, but in the interests of unity of the labour movement accepted the view of the federal parliamentary Labor Party that it would be opposed only in part. The fact was, of course, that the parliamentary Labor Party was deeply divided.

There was some opposition to the Bill by people who did not normally take up a public political position. For example two letters from staff members of Sydney University stated different degrees of opposition. In both cases the signatories stated their dislike of the aims and methods of the Communist Party. In one case the objection to the Bill was to particular aspects: the power of the government to 'declare' a person without his being given an opportunity to be heard; to retrospective operation of the Bill so that actions which were not illegal at the time would become illegal later; and the loose definitions which could provide 'a happy hunting-ground for malicious secret informers'.<sup>17</sup> A second letter, published three days later, was much more forthright in its condemnation. It took its stand on the dangers of totalitarianism and the rights of minorities. It concluded,

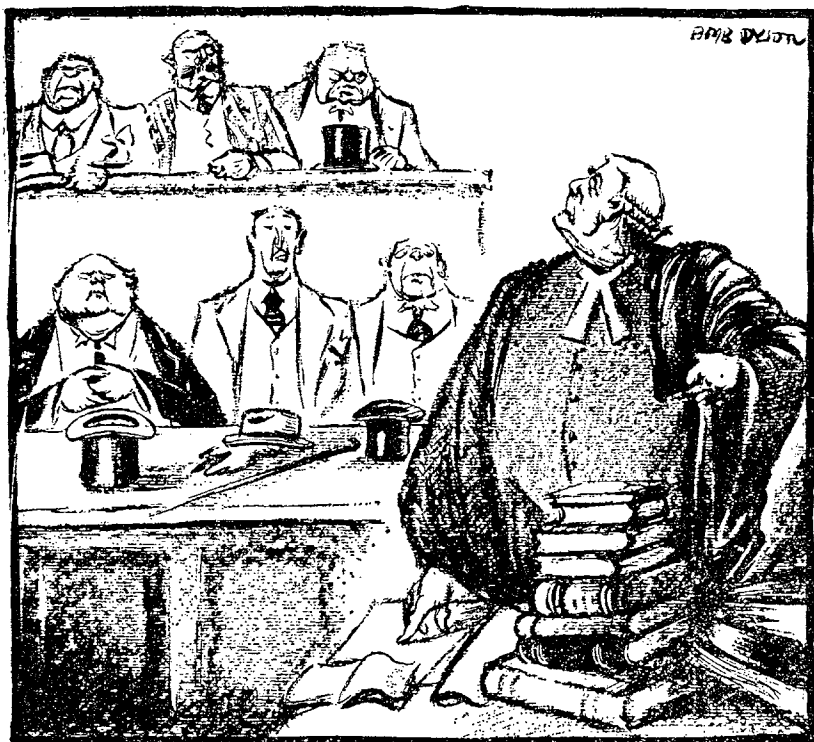
Have not all suppressors of unpopular minorities—even the Nazis in persecuting the Jews and the Communists in destroying all opposition in Russia—justified themselves on the same grounds?

Amongst the signatories were P. H. Partridge and John Anderson, who had long been amongst the most severe critics of the Communist Party.

The federal parliamentary Labor Party followed a tortuous course in which the more liberal-minded were at first forced to compromise and then were defeated. Chifley was completely opposed to the Bill, and made his personal position clear in one of his most famous speeches. Speaking on the second reading he said,

I do not want any honorable member to think that I believe there is any virtue in this repressive legislation . . . This Bill goes much further than the Prime Minister (Mr Menzies) gave the people to understand in the policy speech on which he and his Government were elected . . . it also strikes at the very heart of justice. It opens the door for the liar, the perjurer and the pimp to make charges and to damn men's reputations and to do so in secret without having either to substantiate or prove any charges they might make . . . Without having an accusation made against them in direct terms, such individuals might have their reputations as well as their livelihoods destroyed . . . Nothing could be more hateful than witch hunting, which gives to liars, perjurers, and informers, opportunities to make statements without being called upon to substantiate them in a court of law.<sup>18</sup>

Despite his own opinion, however, the case against the Bill which Chifley put was not one of total opposition but for substantial amendment. This had been decided by caucus, which was divided both by opinion and by estimates of electoral consequences. The members of the Movement, whose numbers in caucus had been increased by the recent election, were more strongly in favour of the Bill than Menzies himself. More generally the party feared that if it opposed the Bill outright, and carried its opposition to the Senate where it had a majority, it would lose votes in the elections which would follow the double dissolution threatened by the Prime Minister.<sup>19</sup> The compromise was not to oppose the dissolution of the Communist Party but to move the following amendments: the right of appeal to state supreme courts when affiliated communist organisations were declared illegal; the onus



Counsel: "And, of course, gentlemen, you will give your verdict as if the accused were just an ordinary citizen and not a Communist."

—By courtesy of the *Tribune*

of proving a person guilty be on the government rather than on the accused to prove his innocence; in the case of a successful appeal by an individual the costs to be met by the government; and a limitation on the right of search and seizure of goods.<sup>20</sup> Menzies made some concessions to these criticisms, but not the crucial one connected with the onus of proof. Thus the Bill passed the House of Representatives against Labor opposition. In the Senate, using its majority, Labor passed its amendments. The Bill was then laid aside for three months until it could be presented again. If it were then rejected, the government could seek a double dissolution.

Before it was presented again the Korean war broke out, Menzies re-

turned from Britain talking about the third world war, and the supporters of the Bill in the labour movement were very busy. The federal executive of the ALP met late in September 1950, just before Parliament resumed. It divided evenly on whether the party should continue its opposition in the Senate. This was ruled as meaning that the earlier decision to oppose the Bill in the Senate should prevail, but not for long. Western Australia, having changed its mind, sought and gained a special meeting of the federal executive which voted eight to four to allow the Bill to pass the Senate. So the Bill became law in October 1950. The next round was fought in the High Court, to which the Communist Party and ten unions appealed. After a 23-day hearing, made notable among other things by Evatt's appearance for the WWF, the court adjourned to consider its decision. It delivered its verdict on 9 March 1951. Six of the seven judges found the Act unconstitutional, only the Chief Justice, Sir John Latham, finding in its favour. The general drift of the judgements was that the Act invaded the field of power occupied by the states and that this was not justified by the defence power, as had been argued by the government. Australia was not at war in the sense previously understood by the court.

Before the next test Menzies gained a double dissolution, and in the ensuing elections, held in May, won a majority in both houses of Parliament. Chifley died in June and was succeeded by Evatt as leader of the Labor Party. Early in the life of the new Parliament the Prime Minister introduced the Constitution Alteration (Powers to Deal with Communists and Communism) Bill, which provided for a referendum to empower Parliament to make a law in terms of the Communist Party Dissolution Act 1950, the date of the referendum being set as 22 September 1951. The federal executive of the ALP by eight to four decided to resist the proposal, and Evatt was soon launched on one of the most energetic campaigns of his career.

The burden of Evatt's message was that the government's proposals were unnecessary, unjust, and totalitarian. They were unnecessary because there were sufficient powers under existing laws to punish subversive actions. They were unjust and totalitarian because the innocent as well as the guilty would be caught in the same wide net. As the

campaign progressed he widened his attack to take in matters of a kind to which the electorate normally responded. He pictured the attack on communism as a diversionary move by Menzies to draw the attention of people away from inflation (which was real) and an impending budget which would impose drastic financial burdens on people already suffering from the effects of inflation. He did not refrain from drawing the parallel with nazism. The government, he said, was

'following the road that led to the horrors of Belsen . . . It is the Hitler technique over again. First the Reds, then the Jews, then the trade unions, then the Social Democratic parties, then the Roman Catholic Centre Party, then the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches'.<sup>21</sup>

It was a powerful campaign in which Evatt, the consistent civil libertarian, gave one of his finest performances, and probably tipped the scales against the government. But the party which he led was far from united. Many of the politicians and the ordinary party members were half-hearted, and a proportion were positively in favour of a 'yes' vote. Notably in Victoria, where the Movement was strongest, a number of members of the federal Parliament ostentatiously refused to take part in the 'no' campaign and obstructed the organisation of meetings to put the 'no' case.<sup>22</sup>

The Communist Party naturally threw most of its available resources into the campaign for a 'no' vote. A national fund of £40,000 was called for and probably raised. Millions of leaflets were printed and distributed (5,000,000 in Sydney alone).<sup>23</sup> Committees were formed in work places and unions to advocate a 'no' vote—the party policy being to organise groups on the single issue of opposing the grant of powers. Organisations influenced by the Communist Party, such as the Australian Peace Council, spoke for 'no', on the grounds that the attempt to outlaw the Communist Party was a part of the war plans of the government. The campaign in the unions was co-ordinated by the Combined Federal Unions Committee, which consisted mainly of unions with communist or militant leadership.

Intellectuals played a similar part to the one they had played in the earlier opposition to the Bill. Groups of university staff signed letters to

the press, and some academics spoke at meetings. Some leading lawyers made public statements about their fears of the consequences for the principles of the law if the referendum passed. Others said the opposite. Most men of the Church remained silent, but a few spoke up on either side, the most notable being Dr E. H. Burgmann, the Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn, who announced in the *Southern Churchman* that he proposed to vote 'no'.

In the referendum the government's proposals were defeated by the narrow majority of 52,082, with three of the six states recording a majority for 'no'. The result can scarcely be called a triumph for Australian liberalism, but it may have saved Australia from taking the first long step on the road to a police state.

In the course of the struggle for survival the Communist Party took up a much more moderate position than the one which had characterised it in 1949, when it had attempted unsuccessfully to challenge the ALP for leadership of the labour movement. This was a response to the failure of the 1949 strategy, to the importance attached to prevention of war by the world communist movement, and to the precarious position in which the party in Australia found itself. The sixteenth congress of the party in August 1951 adopted a program which declared that Australia's path to socialism would be by peaceful and parliamentary means. The program declared:

Australia will . . . find her own path to People's Democracy and Socialism in accord with her own historical conditions, her own level of economic, political and cultural development and political institutions and forms of organisation.<sup>24</sup>

This would be achieved by the development, under the leadership of the party, of a people's movement, which would become aware of the failure of the capitalist class to solve the economic problems of the workers, and ultimately an equal failure of the ALP to meet their needs. Internationally, a strong stand against American imperialism would demonstrate that the national interests of the Australian people were opposed to the policies being pursued by the government—from which the ALP differed only marginally. As Ian Turner puts it,

they adopted a militant stand on international affairs, seeing every blow against 'imperialism' as weakening the position of Australian capitalism; while their chiliastic hopes were centred on the U.S.S.R. and on China—especially and increasingly on China, whose revolutionary *élan*, radical 'mass-line' style of party work, and seeming success in uniting the various strata of China's population behind the social revolution appeared to offer a new universal model of Communist advance.<sup>25</sup>

Thus the policy was similar to that of 1945-7, except that the international conflict was much more acute. In practical terms the policy led to a concentration on the peace movement and maintaining a position of strength, so far as it was possible, in the trade unions.

The analysis which justified this emphasis was set out by Sharkey in mid-1952.<sup>26</sup> It was based on the proposition that the Menzies government represented the interests of the Australian monopolists and American and British imperialism. Its drive was to militarise the Australian economy in the interests of the imperialists and at the expense of the majority of the Australian people. The evidence for this was Menzies' 'war in three years' program, and the fact of rapid inflation accompanied by rising levels of unemployment. The right-wing-dominated ALP was not essentially different, he said—it was 'the second party of Australian capitalism'.

The ALP is also a party of class collaboration, it supports the fundamental policies of monopoly capitalism and imperialism, both British and American imperialism, as well as Australian capitalism's expansion in New Guinea, its investments in British colonies, such as Malayan tin and so on. It does not interfere with the big monopolists, who control Australian industry and finance, through nationalisation, when in control of the Government. (p. 228)

This role was determined by the fact that the ALP was a two-class party, consisting of middle class and working class members in which the predominant middle class, and the 'aristocracy of labour', were represented by the right-wing leadership, so the left wing in the ALP must be encouraged to struggle against the right wing for a progressive policy. Such a policy could only be a policy of peace, which rejected the program of war preparations directed against the Soviet Union, People's China, and

the people's democracies. It would be a policy which ended the subservience to American imperialism and sought to bring about peaceful co-existence between the different social systems. Within Australia a progressive policy would demand the application of national resources to housing, education, economic development, improved living standards, combating drought, fire and flood, and the other measures required to improve the life of the nation. This, Sharkey remarked, would not be a socialist program, but was of a kind which could be implemented by a progressive Labor government.

The task of the communists was to assist this process. They should seek to establish the broadest possible united front with the rank and file members of the ALP, and also with its progressive leaders. This should lead to the building of a united workers' party based on socialist principles. However, the nature of such a party was not made clear by Sharkey unless it be in his final statement:

Because of its character, the Labor Party cannot play the role of liberator of the working people from capitalist exploitation. Only the Communist Party, firmly based on the granite foundation of scientific Marxism-Leninism can lead the masses, headed by the industrial proletariat, to People's Power. (p. 231)

Thus, it would seem, if the contradictions in the exposition are ignored, the united workers' party was to be a transitional stage to the hegemony of the Communist Party. The tactical means, however, were more explicit than the ultimate objective: communists should try to win the support of the members of the ALP and its progressive leaders to a policy of peace activism and social welfare policies. As an earlier article by Dixon put it: 'The fight for peace is a fight for bread'.<sup>27</sup>

In this schema the peace movement obviously had a crucial place. Its main institutions, which changed over time from the beginnings in 1949, were peace committees in the capital cities, which were linked to one another by either formal or informal contacts. The committees were self-appointed groups which, on the basis of an agreed policy, sought to influence public opinion and ultimately the policies of political parties and governments. Although they were labelled communist-front organisations by their opponents, the great majority of their members were



not communists, but people who were prepared to co-operate with communists for agreed purposes. Nevertheless much of the initiative came from communists, or people who broadly agreed with at least the relevant part of the communist analysis. The main form of activity was the organisation of conferences in Australia and the arrangement of Australian delegations to attend conferences overseas. In the preparation for such conferences, and reporting back from them, literature was issued, meetings held, and discussion groups organised. There was also a regular appeal to other organisations, such as trade unions and church groups, for moral and financial support. They saw themselves as educational and propagandist organisations.

The most permanent organisation was the Australian Peace Council, which organised the congress in Melbourne in 1950. But for particular conferences it became the practice to get together sponsors or sponsoring committees which were *ad hoc* groups, usually more representative of a range of opinions than were the permanent members of the Peace Council. In 1951 the main activity of the Peace Council was the advocacy of and circulation of petitions in support of a five-power peace pact; in 1952 it became the arrangement of a delegation to attend a peace conference in Peking. This became a matter of public note when it was announced that Dr John Burton, previously permanent secretary of the Department of External Affairs when Evatt had been Minister, and more recently High Commissioner in Ceylon, from which position he had resigned to contest (unsuccessfully) a seat in the Commonwealth Parliament, was to attend a preparatory meeting of the conference.<sup>28</sup> Burton stated that he was going because

Consultation with Australian experts on Chinese affairs, and other enquiries have led me to believe that the conference is a genuine attempt by a group of leading citizens to break the stalemate the various Governments concerned have reached in Korean and other affairs affecting Chinese relations with the West.<sup>29</sup>

The *Sydney Morning Herald* (27 May) had quite a different interpretation. A special article explained that the conference was intended to draw attention away from a Soviet military build-up in the Far East and a probable new military adventure in Indo-China or Burma. The longer-

term aim of the peace movement, according to this view, was that it would undermine the confidence of people in their governments and weaken their will to resist. When Burton reported from China in a cable addressed to the press gallery that Chinese authorities alleged that the Americans were employing germ warfare in Korea, and that this should be investigated, his message was interpreted as an assertion on his part that the allegations were true. The Minister for External Affairs, Casey, said that Burton had accepted communist propaganda as true, and that his statements were not worthy of a reply. Evatt, too, sloughed off any responsibility for the man who had until recently been his right hand.<sup>30</sup> On his return to Australia Burton said that he merely sought an investigation of the germ warfare allegation, but that his impressions of China and its policies were quite inconsistent with information available in Australia.<sup>31</sup> A few days later the federal executive of the ALP met in Canberra and decided, amongst other things, that it supported the UN action in Korea, viewed with disquiet the suggestion that British Commonwealth forces would be victualled on a scale inferior to that of other UN (read US) forces, and considered that the recent Peking 'peace conference' was held to further communist aggression in Korea.<sup>32</sup> A little over a week later Burton's endorsement as an ALP candidate was withdrawn by the New South Wales executive of the Labor Party.

The main conference was to be held in October, and thirty delegates were ready to leave when the government decided that they would be denied passport facilities. In explaining the decision Menzies said:

The simple fact is that at this very moment Australian Servicemen are participating in an armed conflict in Korea in which United Nations forces are fighting against forces the major part of which are under the control of the Chinese authorities at Peking. Yet apparently certain people wish to participate in a conference, purporting to be held to promote 'peace', in the territory of authorities which are opposed to us in serious hostilities and with the approval of those authorities.<sup>33</sup>

In the event eight delegates did attend, without the blessing of valid Australian passports, these documents being no more than evidence of identity and a promise that the issuing government would concern itself with the welfare of those who held them. They were also normally re-

quired by shipping companies or airlines as a condition of issuing tickets. The delegates managed to reach China without this assistance, and to attend a conference which expressed a number of opinions. In summary they were:

Peace and National Independence are indivisible; therefore in order to safeguard peace the sovereign independence and territorial integrity of all nations must be respected, and the right of all people to determine their own political system and way of life must be safeguarded.

The wars now proceeding in Korea, Vietnam, Malaya and other countries must be brought to an end, and all foreign troops outside their own countries must be withdrawn.

Racial discrimination and war propaganda must be opposed, and the religious and cultural freedom of all people respected.

The co-operation of the peoples of the U.S.A., Britain, and France in achieving these aims is essential.<sup>34</sup>

For Menzies, the leaders of the ALP, and newspapers such as the *Sydney Morning Herald*, such sentiments were merely a smokescreen for malevolent intentions. They were part of the propaganda of the cold war, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald* (22 Sept. 1952), 'to exploit an almost universal anti-war sentiment [which] is being enlarged to "take in" more effectively the peoples of South-East Asia and the Pacific'. The statements of the peace movement were a part of the propaganda of the cold war, but their significance should be seen in the context of a massive and regular statement that the third world war was inevitable, the most consistent exponent of this view being the Prime Minister.

The themes of the peace movement were highly generalised, so that the widest consensus possible could be achieved amongst people of diverse views. The extreme example of this was the Australian Convention on Peace and War, which met in Sydney in September 1953, sponsored by ten ministers of religion. The theme of the conference was that negotiation should displace war as a means of settling international disputes. It aimed to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas, in the belief that this was the only way in which an informed public opinion could be developed. To avoid any one section imposing its views on the

conference, no resolutions were permitted. This did not prevent the Prime Minister from warning, however, that people attending the convention would need to be careful or they 'would find themselves subscribing to resolutions which were "loaded" in favour of the Communists'. Evatt agreed, saying that anyone genuinely interested in contributing to world peace could do so through local United Nations Associations.<sup>35</sup> The Australian Peace Council approved of the convention,<sup>36</sup> and communists were involved in its organisation, but the evidence brought by Menzies against it was mainly that of guilt by association. The statement issued by the executive following the convention reported that a thousand delegates and observers had attended, and that they had agreed on a statement which read, in part:

The Australian Convention of Peace and War has succeeded in meeting in a common enterprise men and women with radically different religious, cultural and economic convictions. They have found unity in accepting two fundamental principles—(a) there are no differences between nations that should not be settled by patient negotiation; (b) all peoples have the right to unite in expression of the desire for peace and in the determination to work for it.<sup>37</sup>

Points of agreement reported were: that negotiation should continue in Korea; that Chinese representation in the UN would need to be settled before Pacific problems could be solved; that public opinion could influence foreign policy if fear were removed; that Australia should assist in raising Asian living standards; and that the Colombo plan should be extended. The convention was simply an assertion that peace could be discussed without implying guilt—something which in 1953 it was very important to establish.

Further conferences of a similar kind were convened, such as that in Sydney in November 1955 to discuss 'An Australian Policy for Peace and Co-existence', the purpose of which was to 'give organised expression to the will of the people for a peaceful resolution of international differences'.<sup>38</sup> But in an important respect the situation had changed by 1955, when the ALP swung sharply to the left as a result of events which must now be considered. Part of the swing was expressed in a statement of foreign policy very different from the positions taken by

the Labor leadership from 1951 onwards. The federal conference which met in Hobart in March 1955 adopted a 17-point policy on international relations. This included a call to utilise the machinery of the UN for high level negotiations to prevent the use of atomic and hydrogen bombs, whether for war or experiment, and for the admission of China, as well as twelve other nations, to the UN. It opposed the sending of Australian troops to Malaya, and approved the settlement of the Indo-China war by negotiation.<sup>39</sup>

Between 1951 and 1955 the ALP leaders had rivalled Menzies in their attacks on communists and what they accepted as being communist-dominated organisations, such as the peace groups. In May 1952 Casey announced that there was a 'nest of traitors' in the public service, with the strong implication that they had been allowed to nest during Labor's term of office.<sup>40</sup> Labor's reaction, with the notable exception of Ward, was to shudder away and attempt to outdo the government in anti-communism. Ward counter-attacked with the demand to know why, if, as the Minister for External Affairs alleged, a secret document had been leaked to and published by *Tribune*, the government did not prosecute. He also alleged that the security service had tapped the telephones and recorded the conversations of Labor members during the referendum campaign. Casey accused him of trying to protect the communists.<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, Calwell and Evatt quite readily joined in attacks on individuals. For example, when Burton requested investigation of the germ warfare charges, Calwell remarked that Dr Burton's 'services to the communist propaganda machine entitled him to the highest distinction the Kremlin can bestow';<sup>42</sup> and Evatt disowned him. But Labor men also took the initiative in attacking the government for its leniency towards communists. In bombastic language a Labor senator, Ashley, accused the Minister for Immigration, Harold Holt, of conniving in the issue of passports to four communist union officials to attend a conference in China. He said:

I charge that, as one of her Majesty's Ministers of State, Mr Holt is guilty of a grave dereliction of Ministerial duty in that he has allowed these Communists to

visit a country whose armed forces are engaged in actual warfare against members of her Majesty's British Commonwealth forces in Korea. Such an act is sufficient to warrant his impeachment on the ground of having violated his oath of office to uphold and defend the safety of her Majesty's realm. . . .<sup>43</sup>

The two most consistent exposers of communists in high places were S. M. Keon (Labor), and W. C. Wentworth (Liberal). Keon discovered that the grants of the Commonwealth Literary Fund had in recent years gone almost exclusively to communists and their associates. He also believed that the Australian National University had become 'a nest of Communists organising to subvert the educational institutions of Australia'.<sup>44</sup> Neither of these statements was even remotely true. Wentworth not only discovered communists, but believed that communists would smuggle dismantled nuclear weapons into Australia, where they would be assembled in key positions in the large cities, thus allowing the communists to hold the country to ransom.<sup>45</sup> Verisimilitude was given to this theory by the fact that communists controlled the Seamen's Union, the WWF and the FIA, and there was also at least one communist physicist. The combined skills and opportunities of seamen, waterside workers, ironworkers, and scientists would provide the technical means to carry out this operation. Such notions were not taken seriously by most people, but they contributed to an atmosphere of extreme intolerance.

Within the labour movement the source of the most consistent anti-communism and oppressive illiberalism was the Movement, operating through the Industrial Groups. Between 1951 and mid-1953 the Movement was in the ascendant in the ALP. Evatt, whose outlook, as demonstrated over his whole career, was deeply opposed to that of the Movement, moved to the right in response to its pressures and to conciliate its leaders. But the members of the Movement became over-confident, generating an opposition from old-established members of the labour movement who had been prepared to co-operate with them so long as the fight against the communists was the top priority, but who found their ideology and methods unacceptable as the communist position weakened. The opposition to the Movement began to crystallise during 1953, although the time scale differed from state to state. In New South Wales it may be dated from a public warning issued in January 1953

by J. P. Ormonde (later a Labor senator) against the dangers of the Industrial Groups. His warning was that the Groups were pushing the labour movement away from its traditional policies, and would in the long run leave the way open to the communists to fill the vacuum in labour leadership.<sup>46</sup> The opposition grew, until in November 1954 the ALP federal executive withdrew recognition of the Groups. This followed a bitter attack by Evatt on 'a small minority' of labour members who were guilty of 'disloyal and subversive actions'.<sup>47</sup> The Movement was flushed from the undergrowth of politics, and even such doughty anti-communists as T. Dougherty, general secretary of the AWU, joined in the hunt.

Probably what finally decided Evatt to turn against the Movement, which he had been attempting uneasily to cultivate for the previous two years, was the intemperate criticism, inspired by the Movement, of his part in the Petrov Commission. On 14 April 1954 the newspapers reported a sensational announcement by the Prime Minister. As reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

Mr V. M. Petrov, third secretary of the Russian Embassy to Canberra and agent of the Russian secret police (MVD) in Australia, has forsaken his Russian allegiance and been granted political asylum in Australia, the Prime Minister, Mr Menzies, told the House of Representatives to-night.

Mr Menzies said a Royal Commission would be appointed to investigate the systematic espionage and at least attempted subversion in Australia which Mr Petrov had revealed to the Australian authorities.

He said Mr Petrov had handed to Australian security authorities documents naming Australian citizens as contacts or co-operators in this espionage. (14 April 1954)

What had been suggested for so long now seemed to be a fact—Russian espionage and Australian traitors were about to be exposed.

The truth about the Petrov story will not be told until the unlikely combination of events happens that the records of the Australian security service are opened to scholars and they are found to be intact. In the meantime it is not possible to go much beyond what was written at the time or shortly afterwards. Brian Fitzpatrick, whose life as scholar, civil libertarian, and scourge of the establishment had sharpened his senses

to public fraud, believed that the Commission was a political stunt to bring electoral advantage to Menzies and the Liberal Party. He set out his conclusions in a book which was at the time considered polemical and therefore not worthy of serious consideration.<sup>48</sup> It is, however, one of the most penetrating studies of Australian society in the twentieth century so far written. His view of the Petrov Commission is followed here.

Evatt believed that the Petrov Commission was the result of a conspiracy to damage the Labor Party and consequently himself as its leader. Fitzpatrick does not accept this view entirely, but he believed that it had very little to do with the investigation of espionage in Australia. The commission lasted from May 1954 to March 1955. It heard 119 witnesses, and sat for 109 days in public and 17 days in secret session. It found, amongst other things, that Petrov had been an MVD (Soviet secret police) agent in Australia from 1951; that his defection from his Soviet employment had been arranged by an agent and the deputy director of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO); that he had given certain papers to ASIO and in return had received a sum of £5,000. The commission found further that the papers handed over—'The Petrov papers'—were genuine and that the Petrovs were 'witnesses of truth'; that the MVD had been active in Australia but that after 1949 it had had no success in gaining information relevant to the defence or security of Australia; and that the lack of success of the MVD was due to its own inefficiency and the efficiency of ASIO. It also concluded that one Australian communist had been an MVD agent up to 1950 but had been unsuccessful in the later years. More generally the commission considered that it was only amongst communists that the MVD 'could expect to find *willing* helpers'.<sup>49</sup> Finally it recommended that no prosecutions of people whose activities had been investigated would be warranted. The commission had laboured and brought forth an hypothesis that 'Without Communism Soviet espionage could have no hope of success in this country. . . .'

Spies were scarce, but many people were seriously injured in reputation by interrogations carried on in the full glare of publicity. Given the atmosphere which existed, merely to be called as a witness was



damaging, and this was compounded by extensive coverage fuelled by the free distribution of the transcripts of evidence. By contrast with the Lowe Commission, which had been conducted with due legal decorum, the Petrov Commission conducted its affairs with the maximum of menace. As Fitzpatrick says, 'uniformed men of the Peace Guard, and A.S.I.O. agents, swarmed in court-room and purlieu' (p. 137), and, in many cases, witnesses were escorted to the court by ASIO officers.

The findings of the commission were trivial, but other circumstances surrounding it were not. Evatt believed that the timing of the commission was determined by the political advantage which it would give to the government. Naturally Menzies denied this. But the fact that it was announced in the last hours of a Parliament which was about to dissolve for a general election six weeks hence must arouse the strong suspicion that Evatt was right. The ceremonial opening of the commission in the Albert Hall in Canberra less than a fortnight before the elections, and then its adjournment without hearing evidence, must strengthen that suspicion. The elections were conducted under conditions in which suspicions had been aroused and ominous predictions made without any solid evidence being made public. The government won the election by a narrow majority. How much the Petrov affair influenced voters' decisions it is, of course, impossible to say, but it is relevant that before the Petrov cat was let out of the bag there was strong public speculation that the government would be defeated.

Relevant to an estimation of the government's motives also is the evidence of Burton. As the head of the Department of External Affairs in 1948 when some information had reached the Russians, Burton was to some extent implicated. Following the release of the commission's report he made public two pieces of information. The first was that when he became aware that some information was leaking, action had been taken to stop the leak. The evidence which Petrov produced, he said, was known to him and others high in government in 1948-9. He wrote (his italics),

*For example, the Crown Law authorities, Security and the Prime Minister knew that the substance of what was produced in the Petrov documents was already*

*known to Security years previously. They knew that investigations had then been made, and all necessary action had been taken. Petrov and his documents gave an excuse to rehash and to add to, in a way valuable from a political point of view, material already on the files of Security. I know that they knew this because I had this knowledge as Secretary of External Affairs, and was aware that this knowledge was shared by them at the time.*<sup>50</sup>

Burton also counter-charged that his department had been the victim of a plot arranged by military intelligence, of which Colonel Charles Spry, later to become director of ASIO, was then director-general. Following an advertisement for a Russian language officer at the Australian Legation in Moscow, an appointment was made by the External Affairs Department. When the appointee was refused a visa by the Russian authorities, 'External Affairs discovered it had had planted on it [by military intelligence] a highly trained Intelligence Officer known to the Soviet as such. . . .'<sup>51</sup> The evidence is weighty that the commission was a political act intended to achieve the same kind of consequences as those intended for the Communist Party Dissolution Act.

The unions, between 1950 and 1955, were subjected to a two-pronged offensive: by the government, which passed legislation intended to make the position of communists and other militants more difficult; and by the organised activity of the Industrial Groups. The first took the form of amendments to the Conciliation and Arbitration Act, which were made in 1951. Under the amended Act heavy penalties were provided for unions which did not accept industrial awards. Also it was made easier for a section of the membership of a union to have ballots for union positions placed under the control of the Arbitration Court. Under the Act, before it was amended, the holding of a court-controlled ballot usually followed protracted and costly legal proceedings, but under the amended Act these were rendered unnecessary. A ballot could be requested for positions in a union branch if 500 members or 10 per cent of the membership, whichever was the smaller, requested it. For positions in the federal committees of a union, 1000 members or 10 per cent were required. The legislation put the necessary weapons into the hands of the Industrial Groups. By utilising the new pro-

cedures they were able to defeat long-established communist officials in a number of unions, most notably in the FIA.

Playford (pp. 232-43) has analysed the electoral fortunes of communist union leaders in these years. For this purpose he divides unions with communist officials into three categories and classifies them in military terminology. The first category he calls the fortress unions, meaning those unions with a long history of industrial militancy and with well established communist officials. These included the WWF, the BWIU, the Boilermakers' Society, the Sheet Metal Workers' Union, the Seamen's Union, and the Miners' Federation. In addition there were a number of smaller unions. As he says, 'although the position varied from branch to branch in each of these unions, generally speaking their membership respected and trusted the Communists not only as trade union workers but as political radicals' (p. 233). His next category is what he calls an 'inner defensive ring', which consisted of unions in which communists controlled some branches, such as the ARU, and other unions, such as the FIA and AEU, in which communists were influential because they had acted effectively as conventional union officials. The third category he calls 'the outer defensive ring', which consisted of small craft unions and unions of white-collar workers. In these, in many cases, the communist influence dated from World War II and was maintained because of considerable apathy of members towards the affairs of their union.

In the 'fortress unions', despite Grouper attempts to displace them, communist officials generally held their positions, although in the Miners' Federation they lost control between 1952 and 1953. But it was otherwise in the second and third categories, where the Industrial Groups had considerable success. The most notable of these was the New South Wales Teachers' Federation, where the communists lost control in 1952 but were later to regain it in a modified form. One of the most bitter struggles was in the Federated Clerks' Union. It was a long struggle in which court-controlled ballots had a place. By 1952 the federal office and the New South Wales and Victorian branches were in the hands of Groupers. The most notable of the victories of the Industrial Groups was in the FIA, where a revolt against the communist

officials had begun during the war at Balmain. This was followed by strong opposition developing at Newcastle, where the Groupers gained control of the executive in 1949. Then, as a result of protracted court proceedings instituted by Laurence Short and the Groups, the court found that Thornton had been re-elected in 1949 with the help of a large number of forged ballot papers.<sup>52</sup> Short was then installed as national secretary, and this was followed by the defeat of the remaining communist officials in court-controlled ballots. Industrial Group candidates also had important victories, assisted by court-controlled ballots, but without the implications of previous large-scale corruption, in the ARU and AEU. Thus in 1952-3 the communist position in the unions was greatly weakened, although they were still strong in the traditionally militant unions. But then the tide turned somewhat in their direction. This was partly a result of the over-confidence of the Industrial Groups, which, as they had by their activities in the ALP, progressively alienated their allies; it was also due to the tactics of the Communist Party.

Just as in the peace movement, the communists from 1951 pursued policies of moderation in the unions. They were less anxious to precipitate industrial struggles, adopting the view that the workers had to learn from experience; that the gains they had won in the 1940s through the Arbitration Court had only been granted because the court hearings had been preceded by strikes. This fact would become evident, it was believed, if in the absence of strikes the court refused to grant improvements. Second, the communists adopted a different attitude to ALP or non-party workers, and even to some union officials or potential union officials whose allegiance was to the ALP. This began the practice (which had been followed in some unions earlier) of composing 'unity tickets'—that is, communists sought to stand for election on combined tickets with non-communists who they believed had the confidence of the workers. Third, they sought to isolate the Groupers from their rank and file support by arguing that they were the agents of the capitalist class in the labour movement, the evidence being the extent to which they utilised the court machinery set up by the Liberal government, and the evident approval of their activities by conservatives.

By contrast, the Groups, increasingly dominated by the Movement,

were losing friends by their aggressive tactics in the stacking of meetings and the lack of consideration for members who were not in the confidence of the Group leadership. In effect they were tending to isolate themselves in the way that communists had earlier. In addition, and again like the communists, as their strength increased, the Movement expounded its basic ideology more openly, with the result that even those with traditional labour values, who had co-operated with the Movement against the communists, began to have doubts, and the idea began to gain ground that the Movement intended to establish a corporate fascist state. All of this came to a head when Evatt, encouraged by the trends which he could see, launched his attack on the Movement. This brought about a major split in the ALP, which resulted in the Movement-dominated minority being expelled from the ALP and forming the anti-communist Labor Party, which became in due course the Democratic Labor Party (DLP).

With the split the Industrial Groups lost most of their authority when they were banned by the ALP leadership. Their strength had been that they were the arm of the Labor Party in the unions. By 1955 they were that no more.

By 1955 the Communist Party had regained much of the strength in the unions which it had lost in the previous five years. But it had paid a high price for its recovery. The price was that it had sought to assimilate itself as nearly as possible to the traditional Australian labour movement. Communist union officials, except for issues involving the Soviet Union or Soviet interests, were hard to distinguish in their words and actions from other union officials. The membership of the Communist Party had steadily declined to between five and six thousand by the end of 1955. But those who remained were experienced tacticians in the politics of the labour movement. In 1956, when the publication of Khrushchev's secret speech precipitated the exodus of dissident intellectuals, it became even more a party of the trade unions.

In the 1940s the Communist Party had set out to lead the labour movement. But by 1955 it was clear that any triumphs which it had had (to vary the words of J. K. Galbraith) reveal many of the characteristics of Jonah's triumph over the whale.

# Perspective

IN the thirty-five years covered by this book the Communist Party of Australia was the only political party or group claiming to stand for revolutionary socialism which had any general political significance. Other socialist groups including the Trotskyists, however valid their criticisms of the communists may have been, made little impact on politics in general. Born out of the crisis of world capitalism for which the evidence was World War I and the social and economic chaos which followed it, and encouraged by the Russian revolution, the Communist Party saw itself as showing the way to an alternative and better society. The great depression of the 1930s confirmed the idea that capitalism was being destroyed by its own internal forces. Thus the influence of the Communist Party steadily increased, reaching its highest point during World War II and the years immediately after it ended. It then declined, until by 1955 it was a mere shadow of what it had been ten years before. It was also on the verge of schisms which were first to result, in 1956-7, in the loss of many of its members, including most of its always scarce intellectuals. Five years later the party itself was to split, with a minority forming the Chinese-oriented party which declared its legitimacy in its sub-title, Marxist-Leninist. From then on the Communist Party of Australia became only one of a number of political tendencies and groups which sought to be accepted as the bearers of the true revolutionary policy. In this sense from the early 1960s there was a return to the conditions which prevailed before Lenin's revolution and Stalin's Russia produced the monolithic world communist movement.

The Australian story is unique only in the particulars, the general process being similar to that which occurred in a number of other countries, most notably in Britain. The similarity is to be explained by the similarities in the pressures to which the parties responded. Of these the most insistent were the economic circumstances in which they found themselves and the lines of policy laid down by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

All communist thinking was predicated on the inevitability of economic crisis—the general crisis of capitalism. It allowed for periods of temporary stability, but the overall process was expected to be one of deepening crisis to which the only permanent solution would be a socialist one. Under these conditions the Communist Party believed that it would emerge as the only party capable of leading the struggle for the establishment of socialism. In the meantime the purpose of the party was to consolidate its position in the mass organisations of the people, first in the trade unions but in other organisations as well. Therefore communists aimed to be, and often were, the most capable and dedicated workers for the achievement of the purposes of the organisation. Thus in the 1930s the resurrection of the trade unions from their collapse during the depression owed much to the work of communists at all levels of authority and responsibility in the unions. Similarly in the 1940s communist drive and initiative were important factors in the union fight to prevent the costs of post-war reconstruction being placed too heavily on the workers. Nevertheless the long-term perspective of ever-deepening crisis, at any rate in the terms conceived by communists of the time, proved to be illusory. Capitalism as an economic system was much more resilient than had been expected.

In the twenty-five years following World War II Australia became an affluent society. The economic reasons for this are beyond the scope of this book (and also the competence of its author), but some of the administrative reasons have been suggested. The economic policies put into effect by the wartime and post-war Labor governments, and followed generally by their Liberal successors, have had a stabilising influence on the economy and also some positive effect in encouraging its growth. Generally these policies, with some differences in detail, were supported by the Communist Party. Where the communists differed from the post-war Labor governments and later labour programs, it was in matters of detail and emphasis rather than in matters of principle. In other words the communists were not able to pose a serious alternative to a modification of capitalism, unless the strenuous advocacy of nationalisation of the larger monopolies is to be accepted as such.

Assumptions about the Soviet Union were the second major determin-

ant of communist thinking. These were in two related parts: the CPSU as the model for a revolutionary political party, and the USSR as the model of the good society in the making, putting into effect the historic aspirations of the socialist movement. By the early 1930s the Australian party, in organisation and style of work, was a replica, on a minute scale, of the CPSU. Thenceforward, until some re-thinking began in the 1960s, it responded directly to all trends within Russia. As the CPSU became steadily more authoritarian in organisation and dogmatic in ideology, so too did the Australian party. The detail of how this happened needs much more careful examination than can be offered here, but at least two points can be made. The authoritarian control gave it an apparent efficiency in mounting campaigns, in bringing people into political action, and getting results. Its justification was in the results achieved. The second point can be summed up in the statement made by one of them: that he belonged to the largest political party in Australia—the party of ex-communists. An unknown but large number of people joined the Communist Party between 1920 and 1955. They did so for many different reasons: because they were convinced that it alone was working for socialism, that Marxism provided an accurate analysis of capitalism and also a guide to action for its overthrow, or for the more immediate reason that it had the machinery to operate effectively in trade union or cultural committee. There were also many reasons for the resignation or expulsion of people, whether they had twelve months or twelve years membership, but perhaps the most common was the ultimate refusal of many members to accept the idea that the truth as revealed by the higher committees of the party could not be questioned. In this way the party destroyed itself.

The attitude of the Soviet Union which was integral to the party's official view of the world also contributed largely to its self-destruction. To a generation which has grown up with the vast literature revealing the monstrous cruelties with which Stalin and his minions maintained their iron grip on the people of the USSR the fact that communists could see the USSR as a model to be imitated may be inconceivable. The context in which it occurred, as set out in this book, may make it more comprehensible, though not necessarily more justifiable. What is



beyond question is that the blind adherence to the Soviet Union made every aspect of communist policy suspect to the great majority of people.

How far the political action by Catholics contributed to the decline in the fortunes of the communists and the extent to which the opinions of radical Catholics influenced the broad labour movement needs to be studied in depth. It is probable that the ideas propounded by the *Catholic Worker*, not necessarily in their pure form, made a greater contribution to the consensual attitudes in the broad labour movement than did those of the communists. It is certain that in the battle between the Movement and the communists the tendency of the Communist Party towards ruthless and unprincipled political action was strengthened. It is also clear that the behaviour of the Movement stimulated a radical reappraisal of Catholic social and political practice which continues to the present time.

In looking at the balance sheet of thirty-five years everything communist is not in the debit column. Communists, often at the cost of the destruction of their own lives, fought many brave and selfless battles for a more satisfactory way of life for the majority of Australians. They did so in a community whose predominant values were reactionary and obscurantist. In the course of these struggles the essential contradictions in the communist position became manifest. Three instances will be sufficient to pin-point them. Communists believed that a society of freedom and equality could only be achieved by the revolutionary transformation of capitalism into socialism. In practice their efforts were directed towards making capitalism work more efficiently. Communists were internationalists but this was held in tension with an Australian nationalism which grew out of opposition to imperialism but settled into a nationalism which took its colour equally from specifically Australian experience and Russian chauvinism. Libertarianism versus authoritarianism was the third of these essential conflicts—so far as it was resolved it was in favour of authoritarianism.

The exploitation of men by men, the inequalities and injustices of capitalist society, which gave birth to the communist movement in Australia and other countries, still remain even though they manifest themselves in a different form from that of the 1920s and 1930s. There

has been much new thinking in the last twenty years. There has been a great deal of action on specific radical issues. But it would be brave or foolish to suggest that anyone, or any group, has made an adequate analysis of contemporary society and proposed courses of action which would produce the results confidently, but mistakenly, predicted by communists a generation ago.

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# Index

- Aborigines, 193, 221  
Absenteeism, 132  
Abyssinian crisis, 34-5, 39, 48-9, 73  
Acts: Arbitration, 22; Banking, 223;  
Communist Party Dissolution, 267,  
281; Conciliation and Arbitration,  
246, 281; Crimes, 22, 46; Defence,  
117; Immigration, 45; National  
Emergency Coal Strike, 240; Nat-  
ional Health Service, 214-17; Nat-  
ional Security, 95, 103, 131; NSW  
Charities Collection, 65; Pharma-  
ceutical Benefits, 214-19 *passim*;  
Transport Workers, 22, 78; Work-  
men's Compensation, 14  
*Advocate*, 57, 59, 222  
African independence movement, 154  
AIF, 117, 124, 188  
Akhmatova, A. A., 248-9  
Alcazar, 56  
Alfonso XIII, 53  
All-Australian Trade Union Congress  
(1921), 8, 10-12  
All for Australia League, 31  
Amalgamated Engineering Union, 93,  
283; communist influence, 130,  
182, 282; strike, 181-2; anarchism  
and anarchists, 82-3; anarcho-  
syndicalists (Spain), 60; anarchy,  
101, (industrial) 149, 152; Spain,  
54, 59-60; USA, 18; writing, 3  
Anderson, John, 61, 134, 200, 265;  
Andersonianism, 200  
Andrews, E. M., 65  
Anglo-American front, 204  
Anglo-Soviet pact, 102  
Anglo-Soviet Twenty Years Alliance,  
120, 123  
Anti-communism, 34, 55, 86, 89,  
95-6, 139, 148, 169-78, 180, 182,  
205, 222, 241-6, 248, 256-69, 271,  
277-8, 283-4  
Anti-fascism, 42-4, 47-8, 51, 64-5,  
69-70, 80, 99, 124-5, 127, 130,  
195, 251  
Antonov-Ovseenko, V. A., 61  
ANZAC, 125-6, 192  
Appeasement, 36-9, 42, 49, 57, 66-7,  
80-2, 84, 127, 259  
Arab states, 236  
Arbitration: Act (1928), 22; awards,  
96; court, 10, 12, 22, 23-4, 33, 72,  
75, 93, 94, 178, 180-2, 281, 283  
*Argus*, 19, 47, 52, 55, 58, 119-20,  
145-50, 152, 158-9, 182, 202, 222,  
237  
Armed services, 4, 5, 40, 69, 83, 98,  
105, 106, 117, 128, 144, 150, 151,  
192, 243, 259, 260, 276; *see also*  
AIF  
Army, democratic, 40, 50  
Art, 191, 194, 248, 250-2; artists in  
Spain, 53; arts and sciences, 253-4  
Atlantic Charter, 139, 164  
Atom bomb: attempts to outlaw,  
261-3 *passim*, 276; use of, 213,  
260, (on Japan) 144, 193-4  
Attlee, Clement, 155, 194, 203  
Australia: defence of, 38-40, 69, 90,  
95, 98, 258, 279; imperialist, 203;  
in New Guinea, 235; threats to,  
17, 40, 99, 105, 124, 126, 144,  
147, 188, 267, (China) 243, (USA  
imperialists) 210  
Australia First Movement, 116, 195  
Australia-Russia Society, 246

- Australia-Soviet Friendship League, 101-2, 115
- Australian Constitutional League, 244
- Australian Convention on Peace and War, 274-5
- Australian Council of Trade Unions: and PPS, 16-17; boycotts, 19, 97; conferences and congresses, 14-15, 17, 40-2, 77, 91, 130, 133, 170, 201-3, 210, 225, 236-7, 247-8, 264; constitution, 133, 201; executive, 15, 133, 179, 186, 225, 246, 247; peace committee, 15
- Australian Highway*, 53
- Australian Iron and Steel, 178
- Australian Labor Party, 3, 6, 11, 17, 21, 24-6, 39-40, 72-4, 84, 113, 155, 173, 198, 204, 206, 214, 225, 232, 244-6, 264-5; and communists, 11, 64, 96, 128-30, 167, 175, 178-9, 182, 232-3, 241-2, 245-6, 265-7, 276-7; federal executive, 10, 44, 74, 92-3, 263, 267, 273, 278; foreign policy, 153-6, 203, 210, 213, 247, 262, 269, 275-6; Industrial groups, 171-7, 182, 218, 227, 263, 277-8, 281-4; NSW, 13-14, 25-9, 73-5, 91-3, 99, 117, 177, 227-8, 263, 273; opponents, 12, 17, 25, 230; program, 12, 23-5, 27-8, 108-14, 118, 157, 203, 214, 222, 227, 232-3, 259; socialism in, 10, 14, 28, 134, 204, 231; Victoria, 115, 117, 128, 177, 230, 246, 263, 268
- Australian Left News*, 68
- Australian National University, 134, 279
- Australian New Writing*, 191-3
- Australian Peace Council, 260-1, 268, 272, 275; *see also* Peace (movement)
- Australian People's Democratic Republic, 213
- Australian Policy for Peace and Co-existence, 275
- Australian Quarterly*, 53
- ARU, 12, 181, 233-5; 246; ALP Industrial Groups in, 283; communist control, 282; NSW branch secretary, 69
- Australian Secretariat of Catholic Action: *Justice Now*, *Pattern for Peace*, 140
- Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, 279; agents, 280; director, 281
- Australian security service, 276, 280-1
- Australian Socialist Party, 6-7
- Australian Women's Movement Against Socialisation, 229
- Australian Workers' Union, 10-12, 15, 180, 278
- Austria, 35, 43, 81
- Azana, Don Manuel, 53
- Baldwin, Stanley, 34-5, 40, 50
- Banks, 24-5, 27, 141, 162, 166; Banking Acts, 157, 223; Banking Bills (nationalisation), 108-9, 157, 224, 230; Bank Employees' Committee, 231-2; bankers, 100; bank nationalisation, 108-9, 222-32, (opposition to) 229-32; bank staff organisation, 229
- Baracchi, Guido, 2, 63
- Barcelona, 53-4, 58-9, 65, 169; *see also* Spanish Civil War
- Basic wage, 18, 181; *see also* Wages
- Basque provinces, 59-61
- Bavin, T. R., 23
- Bean, C. E. W., 187-90
- Belgium, 79, 83
- Belloc, Hilaire, 142
- Benelux countries, 208

- Beovich, Dr M., 227  
 Berlin, 194; blockade, 207-8, 245  
 Bethune, Norman, 64  
 Bevin, Ernest, 146, 155, 203  
 Blackburn, Maurice, 44, 46, 97, 115-18, 244  
 Blacksmiths' Society, 181  
 Blake, J. D., 84, 202-3, 253-4, 263  
 BMA, 162; boycott, 115-22; *see also* Doctors; Medical profession  
 Boilermakers' Society, 181; communist influence, 282  
 Bonaparte, Napoleon, 196  
 Borneo, 144, 151, 197  
 Bourgeoisie, 2, 4, 11, 51, 60, 82-4, 204, 232, 250, 253-4  
 Brady, E. J., 44  
 Brady, Robert A., 67  
 Brennan, Gerald, 59  
 Brennan, Frank, 44, 46, 117-18  
 Brisbane, 12, 152, 234  
 Britain, 19, 41, 66, 80, 113, 119, 123, 154, 259, 262, 267, 274, 285; British Commonwealth of Nations, 35-6, 38-9, 80, 148, 168, 273; economy, 155-6; Empire (anti-) 37, (loyalty in Australia) 17, 25-6, 30, 35-6, 38, 40, 49, 53, 57, 79, 80, 84, 89-92, 98, 145-9, 153-6, (preference) 148; foreign policy, 17, 34-7, 48-50, 57, 104, 121, 151, 167, 208, 210, (Indonesia) 183, 185-6, (USA) 122, 210, (USSR) 35, 38-9, 120-2; government, 49, 81, 85, 146-7; immigration from, 158, 161; imperialism, 16, 49, 83-4, 107, 203, 234, 270; Labour Party, 34, 150, 245  
*British Medical Journal*, 217  
 Broken Hill Pty Ltd, 178-80  
 Browder, Earl, 163-5, 168  
 Bruce, S. M. (later, Lord), 17, 22-4  
 Building Workers' Industrial Union, 257; communist influence, 282  
 Bukharin, N., 20  
*Bulletin*, 55-6, 85-6, 123, 126, 159, 193  
 Burgmann, Dr E. H., 269  
 Burke, Edmund, 116  
 Burma, 197, 272; independence, 154  
 Burnham, James, 87-9, 148-9  
 Burns, Emile, 250  
 Burton, Dr John, 272-3, 276, 280-1  
 Butler, Eric D., 244  
 Cairns, Dr J. F., 199  
 Calwell, A. A., 117-18, 175-6, 276; Minister for Immigration, 158-9  
 Cameron, A. G., 97  
 Cameron, D., 41-2  
 Canberra, 273, 280; code, 131  
 Canada, 36, 256  
 Capitalism, 2, 3, 7, 16, 24, 27, 43, 50, 60, 85-6, 103, 136-7, 140-1, 164-6, 169, 177, 187, 220, 222-3, 225, 232, 234, 245, 254, 257, 261, 288; abolition of, 8, 11, 255; ailing, 100; analysis of, 287; Australian, 1, 127, 235, 270; capitalist class, 16, 28, 163, 180, 209-10, 269, 283; capitalists, 29-30, 42, 92, 99-100, 127, 139, 164; control of, 114; crisis of, 5, 13, 28, 71-2, 167, 285-6; modification of, 111, 223, 286; overthrow of, 4, 73, 83, 91  
 Casey, R. G. (later, Lord), 230, 273, 276  
 Catalonia, 53, 57, 60-1; *see also* Spanish Civil War  
 Catholic Action, 173-4, 180  
 Catholic church, 58-9, 140, 169-71, 173-5, 199  
 Catholics, 57-9, 102, 139-43, 169, 174-7, 288; and bank nationalisation, 227; *see also* Australian Labor

- Catholics, *continued*  
 Party (Industrial Groups); Movement
- Catholic Social Studies Movement, 169-77; *see also* Movement
- Catholic Worker, 59, 89-91, 96, 100-5, 126-7, 139-40, 142, 169-70, 227, 288
- Caudwell, Christopher, 254
- Censorship, 95-7, 189
- Centralism, democratic, 5
- Century, 159
- Ceylon, 236
- Chamberlain, Neville, 35-9 *passim*, 69, 80, 84, 92
- Charlesworth, Max, 199
- Chauvinism (social), 83
- Chesterton, G. K., 142
- Chiang Kai-shek, 17, 127
- Chifley, J. B.: as Prime Minister, 91, 155-6, 161-2, 181-2, 185, 194, 203-4, 214, (on bank nationalisation) 223-5 *passim*, 227, (on WWF ban on Dutch shipping) 238-9; (suppression of Communist Party) 242, 245; as Treasurer, 106, 117, (and Minister for Post-War Reconstruction) 109-13; death of, 267; government, 105, 161, 214, 247; in opposition, 260, 265; on Royal Commission on Banking, 108, 223
- China, 15-18, 41, 121, 126, 153, 167, 260, 272-7; communism, 17, 67, 104, 127, 243, 262, 270; invasion by Japan, 35, 38, 69, 125, 127, 134; people's army, 125, 127
- Christesen, Clem, 193
- Churches, 53-4, 59-60, 168-9, 182, 269, 272; anti-clericalism, 169; churchmen, 65; clergy, 57, 189, 260
- Churchill, Winston, 121-2, 146-7, 163; Fulton speech, 147, 152, 207
- CMF, 98, 116, 259; *see also* Armed services
- Civil liberties, 21, 46, 79, 85, 91, 95-7, 244-5; libertarian, 97, 191, 244, 268, 279
- Clarke, W. J., 42
- Class struggle, 4, 9, 11, 28, 30-1, 43, 46, 51, 60, 82, 84, 86, 100, 127, 135-7, 163-6, 190, 195-6, 209, 212, 247-8, 251, 254, 270; *see also* Bourgeoisie
- Cleary, P., 202
- Coal, 48, 225, 239, 246; coalmining industry, 13-14, 71, 91, 131-2, 149-50, 239-40, 258, (Britain) 72, (USA) 72; miners, 22, 68, 149, 162-3, 178-9, 192, 239-42; strikes, 95-6, 181, 239-43, 246-7
- Cockatoo Island dockyard, 137
- Cold war, 89, 122, 147-9, 154, 169-71, 196, 204-11, 213, 232, 242, 262, 274
- Cole, G. D. H., 3, 67
- Collective security, 36, 40-3 *passim*, 49-51, 68-9, 81, 84-6 *passim*, 195
- Colombo Plan, 275
- Colonialism, 83, 154, 183-7, 206, 235-9; anti-colonial movement, 184; liberation movements, 5; *see also* Indonesian independence; Imperialism
- Cominform, 211-13 *passim*
- Comintern, 3-8, 20-1, 30, 41-3, 48, 59-60; journal, 21; Pan-Pacific Congress, 15; policy, 11; resurrection, 211; Spain, 55; Anti-Comintern Pact, 34; *see also* Internationals (3rd)
- Common Cause, 68, 71
- Commonwealth Bank, 25, 109, 157, 223; Bill, 108-9, 157; Board, 108; *see also* Banks

- Commonwealth Employment Service, 113, 161
- Commonwealth Literary Fund, 277
- Commonwealth powers, 107; 131, 217, 240
- Commonwealth public service: 'nest of traitors', 276; proposed banning of communists from, 244
- Commonwealth scholarships, 196-7
- Communist Party of Australia: attitude to world wars, 43-4, 79, 80, 83-5, 91, 93-4, 99, 100, 102, 114, 118, 123-4, 127-30, 163, 195, 243; authoritarianism, 97, 118, 133-4, 255-6, 287-8; foreign policy, 102, 154, 168, 203, 207, 210-14, 259, 270-1; influence (in ACTU) 15-17, 41-2, 91, 130, 133, 170, 201-3, 225, 247-8, 264, (in peace movement) 263, 272, 275, (in strikes) 75-8, 90, 94, 136-9, 178-80, 234-5, 238, (in trade unions) 8, 11, 31, 70-8, 105, 128-30, 132-3, 135, 138, 149, 152, 162-3, 170, 173, 175, 177-8, 195, 202-5, 233, 241, 246-8, 258, 264, 268, 270, 276-7, 281-7; relations with ALP, 8, 11, 29, 44, 74, 91-3, 99, 118, 128-30, 152, 170, 172-3, 176, 180, 203-4, 206, 212-14, 232, 239, 241-2, 244-6, 269, 283
- Communist parties: Britain, 67-8, 70, 210, 245, 250-1; France, 43, 67, 85, 163, 204, 243, 245, 251; Italy, 60, 245; Poland, 51, 121; Soviet Union, 20, 62-3, 101, 135-6, 163, 204, 206, 212, 248-9, 254-5, 285, 287; Spain, 52, 54, 58, 60-1; USA, 163-4, 243; Yugoslavia, 208-9
- Communist Review*, 43, 70, 80, 84, 96, 99, 163, 167, 248
- Conciliation and arbitration, 173; Act, 240, (amendments) 281; *see also* Arbitration
- Conscription: civil, 22; industrial, 131, 140; military, 24, 34, 40, 42, 51, 69, 90-1, 95, 98, 104, 115-18 *passim*, 131, 139, 168; *see also* Blackburn, Maurice
- Constitutional League of Australia, 229
- Convicts, 196
- Coombs, Dr H. C., 111-13
- Corcoran, Robert, 176
- Council for Civil Liberties, 96-7, 116
- Counter-revolution, 88, 150
- Country Party, 210, 230, 232, 244
- Crawford, R. M., 53
- Crimes Act, 22, 46
- Cripps, Sir Stafford, 155
- Crisp, L. F., 106, 109, 113, 155-6, 161, 238-9
- Cronin, Bernard, 44
- Crown Law authorities, 280
- Curtin, John: as Prime Minister, 91, 103, 105, 108, 116-17, 127, 131; government, 124, 128, 129; in opposition, 39, 79-80, 84, 91, 99; World War I, 117
- Czechoslovakia, 35, 37-8, 80-1, 207, 212, 234
- Daily Mail*, 154
- Daley, Victor, 199
- Darwin, 124
- Davidson, A., 130
- Davies, A. E., 199
- Dedman, J. J., 108
- Defence (of Australia), 116-17, 124-5, 259-60, 267; *see also* Acts
- De Leon, Daniel, 3
- Democracy, 36, 44, 51, 53, 69, 74, 80, 96, 100, 108, 114, 147, 149, 168, 191, 195-6, 209-10, 251, 262; against fascism, 42-3, 52, 62, 64,

Democracy, *continued*

- 81; bourgeois, 20, 50-1; capitalist, 69, 187; in eastern Europe, 208; in USSR, 51, 62, 67, 135-6, 167; sub-version of, 99, 143, 187
- Democratic Labor Party, 284
- Depression, 13-14, 19-32 *passim*, 33, 70-1, 75-8, 106-7, 109, 114, 156, 163-8, 177, 187-8, 192, 223-5, 233, 285-6
- Deutscher, Isaac, 51, 81, 87-9
- Dickinson, Ted, 125
- Dictatorship: of the bourgeoisie, 20, 50, 232; of the proletariat, 4, 6, 30, 51, 209, 212; Lang, J. T., 14; military, 53; Nazi, 80; *see also* Fascism; Franco; Hitler; Mussolini; World War II
- Dimitrov, G., 42, 50
- Direct action, 72, 76, 182, 201, 240; *see also* Industrial struggle; Strikes
- Dixon, R., 48, 50, 166, 180, 210, 271
- Doctors, 162, 214-22, 232
- Dog Collar Act (Transport Workers' Act), 22
- Double dissolution, 265-7
- Dougherty, T., 278
- Douglas Social Credit, 27
- Drake-Brockman, Mr Justice E. A., 33, 93
- Duclos, Jacques, 163-4
- Duhig, Archbishop D. J., 58, 227
- Dumbarton Oaks, 153
- Dutt, Palme, 67, 97
- Ebing, Krafft, 3
- Economists, 19, 25, 27; *see also* Banks; Depression
- Eden, Sir Anthony, 34-7, 243
- Education, 6-7, 58, 76, 134, 164, 188, 199, 201, 217, 220-1, 227, 243, 249, 254, 271-2, 277
- Educational Workers' League, 76
- Elections, 6, 28, 31, 46, 206, 227, 272, 279; federal (1929) 23, (1931) 26, 75, (1941) 99, 103, (1943) 115, 117, 139, (1946) 152, 161, 181, (1949) 162, 214, 222, 230-2 *passim*, 241, 257, (1951) 267, (1954) 280; in Britain, 34, 193; in Spain, 64; state, 14, 230; student, 197; trade union, 9-10, 76, 137, 138, 172, 177, 202, 243, (ACTU) 133, 170, (ballot-rigging) 243, 256, 283, (court controlled) 281-3
- Electrical industry, 13; workers, 181
- Elliott, E. V., 130
- Ellis, Havelock, 3
- Employers, 11-12, 22-3, 31, 103, 138, 141, 173, 181, 206, 214, 257, 260; Employers' Federation, 229
- Employment, 13, 104, 107, 111, 157-8, 168, 188, 224, 258; full, 109-13 *passim*, 154, 156, 166, 199, 216; *see also* Unemployed; UWM
- Engels, F., 142
- Ercoli, M. (Palmiro Togliatti), 60
- Espionage in Australia, 279; *see also* Royal Commissions (Petrov)
- Eureka, 51, 125-6, 168
- Evatt, Dr H. V.: anti-communism, 273, 275-6; attack on Movement, 277-8, 284; Attorney-General, 129-40; Kisch case, 45; Petrov Commission, 279-80; spokesman for small nations, 145-7, 153-4; support for Indonesian Republic, 238-9; support for imperialists, 203, 214; vote 'No' campaign, 267-8
- Ex-servicemen, 112, 159, 197, 200, 243-4
- Fadden, A. W., 244
- Fadeiev, A., 250



- Family, 90, 104, 140-2, 217, 222; *see also* Catholics; Doctors
- Farrell, J. T., 88
- Farwell, George, 191
- Fascism, 20-1, 29-31, 42-3, 45-7 *passim*, 50-2, 57, 60, 62, 65-73 *passim*, 80-1, 85, 89, 94, 102, 116, 121, 125, 129, 134, 163, 187-9, 191, 194, 243, 251, 284; *see also* Austria; Germany; Hitler; Italy; Japan; Mussolini; World War II
- Federated Clerks' Union, 282
- Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association, 93, 179, 181
- Federated Ironworkers' Association, 71, 75-6, 134, 136, 138, 143, 179-81, 202, 240, 246, 264, 283; Industrial Groups, 282; Balmain branch, 75, 136-9, 143, 162-3, 204, 283; centralised control, 137-8; communist influence, 75, 138, 178-9, 277, 282
- Fenton, J. E., 25
- Finland, 79, 85, 88, 91-2, 100, 119, 121, 147
- Fisher, Andrew, 64
- Fisher, John, 64
- Fitzpatrick, Brian, 96-7, 190-1, 244, 278-9, 280
- Fitzpatrick, Dorothy, 95
- Forty-four hour week, 14, 22, 93, 178, 181, 201, 203, 233
- Fox, Bishop A., 174
- Fox, Len, 125
- France, 34-5, 44, 48-50, 80-1, 85, 90, 153, 208, 274; Franco-Soviet Pact, 34, 43, 49; colonialism, 83; socialism, 43; Socialist Party, 245; *see also* Communist Party of France; World War I, II
- Franco, General Francisco, 52, 55-7, 59-60, 69, 125, 134
- Furphy, Joseph, 195
- Galbraith, J. K., 284
- Gallipoli, 192
- Garden, J. S. (Jock), 7-8, 11-13
- Gedye, G. E. R., 67
- George, D. Lloyd, 68
- Germany, 48-9, 57, 62, 79, 89, 101, 120-1, 135, 207, 288; aggression, 37, 40-1, 81, 84, 90, 94, 96; colonialism, 83; concentration camps, 33, 158, 193, 268; defeat, 121-2, 144, 165, 193; German-Soviet non-aggression pact, 35, 81-2, 84-6, 119; invasion (Poland) 82, (USSR) 99, 102, 119, 122, 128; rearmament, 34, 38; Spain, 55, 60; *see also* Austria; Hitler; Nazis; Poland; World War II
- Gibson, Ralph, 62
- Gold, 107, 125, 140, 200
- Gollan, Daphne, 138
- Gollancz, Victor, 66, 70
- Gorki, Maxim, 191
- Gott, Ken, 197-8
- Gould, L. H., 142
- Grattan, Hartley, 191-2
- Greece, 38, 167, 201
- Griffin, Gerald, 48, 73
- Gullett, H. H., 159
- Haldane, J. B. S., 67
- 'Hands off China', 15, 19
- 'Hands off Russia', 91-2
- Harlon Labor government, 234
- Hardy, Frank, 251-2
- Hasluck, Paul (later, Sir), 79, 99, 124
- Hatta, Dr M., 183
- Health: Act, 218; care, 216; insurance, 111; scheme, 214-22, 232; *see also* Doctors; Social security
- Healy, Jim, 77-8, 130, 184, 187, 264; *see also* Waterside Workers' Federation
- Heffron Labor Party, 74

- Henry, J. C., 210, 234-5  
 Hertzog, J. B. M., 36  
 High Court: banks, 157, 223, 229-30; BMA appeal, 216; communism, 267; Kisch, 45; pharmaceutical benefits, 161, 215; states' rights, 107  
 Hiss, Alger, 242-3  
 Hitler, Adolf, 34-5, 47, 49-50, 57, 66, 79-82, 84, 86, 88, 94, 100, 102, 119-20, 123, 127, 134, 149, 166, 194-5, 214, 244, 268  
 Hoare-Laval plan, 34  
 Hobson, J. A., 3  
 Holland, *see* Netherlands  
 Hollóway, E. J., 24  
 Holman, W. A., 100  
 Holt, Harold, 276  
 Hook, Sidney, 88  
 Hope, A. D., 193, 199  
 Housing, 110, 158, 220-1, 271  
 Hughes, W. M., 89, 100  
 Hughes-Evans Party, *see* State Labor Party  
 Hugo, Victor, 88  
 Hungary, 5, 209  
 Hunter, Dr J. G., 216  
 Huxley, A., 97  
 Immigration, 142; Act, 45; policy, 13, 16, 157-62, 196; prohibited immigrant, 44; *see also* Griffin, G.; Kisch, E.  
 Imperial Conference (1937), 36-7, 49  
 Imperialism, 5, 30, 49, 81, 84, 86, 147, 165, 204, 214, 232, 238, 251, 270, 288; Australian, 48, 203; British, 15, 48, 84; Dutch, 237; fascist, 49, 86; USSR, 88; USA, *see* USA (imperialism); wars as imperialist, 4, 73, 82-4, 91-2, 247, 255; *see also* India; Indonesian independence; World War I, II  
 Independence movements, 164, 263, 274; Africa, 154; India, 154; of small nations, 146-7, 153-4; *see also* Indonesian independence  
 India, 16-17, 84, 154, 236  
 Indo-China, 167, 259, 272, 276  
 Indonesian independence, 151-2, 178, 183-7, 235-9; Australian reactions to, 151-2, 155, 183, 185-6, 236, 238  
 Industrial arbitration, *see* Arbitration  
 Industrial Groups, *see* Australian Labor Party (Industrial Groups)  
 Industrial Labor Party, 74-5  
 Industrial Law Amendment Act, 233-4  
 Industrial struggle, 6, 30-1, 72, 75, 102, 129, 150, 173, 178, 180-1, 183-7, 205, 213, 281-3; *see also* Strikes  
 Inflation, 25, 109, 113, 156-7, 181, 268, 270  
 Institute of Public Affairs (NSW), 229  
 Institutions, democratic, 50-1, 188, 245  
 Intellectuals, 2, 48-50, 52, 60-2, 64, 88-9, 96-7, 163, 174, 190-1, 196, 248, 254, 260, 268-9, 284-5  
 International Brigade, 55, 61, 64-6, 105, 125  
 International Labor Defence, 64; Committee, 19  
 Internationalism, 14-17, 162, 195, 199, 200, 202, 204, 209, 255-6, 269  
 Internationals, 159; first, 3-4; second, 4, 42, 83, 204; third, 4-5, 87; *see also* Cominform; Comintern  
 Isolationism, 19, 33-4, 39-42, 55, 57, 85, 89, 91  
 Italy, 34-5, 37, 39, 40-1, 48, 55, 57, 60, 67, 121, 165, 245

- IWW, 1, 6-8, 72, 168
- Japan, 34-5, 37-41, 48-9, 69, 77, 91, 99, 103-4, 106, 108, 114, 116, 121, 123-4, 126-8, 144-5, 148, 151, 165, 183, 193-4; *see also* Atom bomb; China; World War II
- Jews: anti-semitism, 158-61, 196, 201, 244; immigration to Australia, 158-61; Nazi persecution of, 265, 268
- Johnson, Dr Hewlett, Dean of Canterbury, 67, 262
- Johnston, George, 33
- Joint Coal Board, 239
- Jones, F. Elwyn, 67
- Joyce, James, 97
- Kautsky, Karl, 2, 51
- Keon, Michael, 185
- Keon, S. M., 277
- Keynes, J. M., 111, 166
- Khrushchev, N., 284
- King, Mackenzie, 36
- King, R. A., 41
- Kisch, Egon, 44-8, 73
- Korea, 16, 259-60, 266, 272-5, 277
- Kropotkin, P., 3
- Labor Party, *see* Australian Labor Party
- Labor Councils, 133, 201, (NSW) 40  
*Labor Daily*, 71, 74-5
- Lalor, Father Harold, SJ, 174
- Lambert, Eric, 99
- Lane, William, 168
- Lang, J. T., 13-14, 25-7, 29, 31, 73-5, 91-3, 117, 159, 243; Langism, 30; plan, 25-6
- Laski, Harold, 66, 150
- Latham, Sir John, 267
- Laurie, E. A., 101
- Lawrence, D. H., 97
- Lawson, Henry, 191, 195
- League for Peace and Democracy, 96
- League of Nations, 34, 36-7, 40-3  
*passim*, 48-50
- Left Book Club, 33, 66-70
- Lehmann, John, 191
- Lenin, V., 2, 11, 50, 81-4, 94-5, 97, 100, 104, 142-3, 164, 167, 169, 204, 221, 252, 257, 285; *see also* Marx (Marxism-Leninism)
- Leningrad, 125, 248-9
- Lewis, S. P. (Sam), 76-7
- Liberalism, 45, 67, 115, 258, 269; illiberalism, 45, 97, 255, 277
- Liberal Party, 146, 152, 159, 178, 206, 210, 214-15, 223, 225, 230, 242, 244, 279, 283, 286; British, 70
- Libertarianism, 115, 118, 255, 288
- Lindsay, Jack, 193
- Lindsay, Norman, 200
- Linggadjati agreement, 185-6, 235
- Literature, 250, 272; censored and impounded, 96; left-wing in Australia, 2-3; Spanish Civil War, 52; *see also* Left Book Club
- Living standards, 22-3, 27, 111-12, 139, 164, 166, 180, 271
- Lloyd George, D., 68
- London, Jack, 3
- Louis, L. J., 27
- Lovegrove, 'Dinny', 176
- Lowe, Sir Charles, 243; Commission Report, 256-7, 280
- Lukin, Mr Justice L. O., 22
- Luxemburg, Rosa, 51
- Lyons, J. A., 25-6, 35-8, 49, 69, 100; government, 37, 40, 50, 64, 69
- Lysenko, T. D., 252-4
- MacArthur, General Douglas, 148, 260
- McAuley, James, 193
- McCarthy, Mary, 88
- McConnan, L. J., 228, 231

- MacDonald, Dwight, 3, 34, 88  
 McKell, W. J., 91, 99-100, 155  
 McKenna, Senator N. E., 216-19  
 McKeon, K., 179  
 Madrid, 56, 58, 125, 195  
 Malaya, 201-2, 262, 270, 274, 276  
 Manchuria: crisis, 35, 49; secret invasion of, 144; *see also* China  
 Mannix, Archbishop D., 140, 175, 222, 227  
 Mansergh, Nicolas, 36-8  
 Margaret Street, battle of, 238  
 Maritime strike, 168; *see also* Waterside Workers' Federation  
 Marshall, General George, 207  
 Martin, David, 193  
 Marx, Karl, 3, 4, 50, 83, 97, 104, 135, 220, 257; Marxism, 88-9, 97, 135, 148, 164, 287, (ideology) 254, (theory) 7, 51, 63, 83, 165, 245; Marxism-Leninism, 50-1, 67, 164, 209, 233, 249, 270, 285  
 Mateship, 192, 195  
 Matthews, Herbert, 52  
 Maxwell, Ian, 193  
 May, A. L., 223, 227-8, 230  
*Meanjin*, 193-5  
 Medical Benefits: Fund, 221; scheme, 161-2  
 Medical profession, 162, 214-15, 221, 232  
 Melbourne, 2, 8, 12, 24-5, 41, 44, 48-9, 53, 96, 117, 139, 145, 151, 166, 193, 195-200, 202, 228, 252, 260, 272  
*Melbourne University Magazine*, 199  
 Mendel, G. J., 253  
 Menzies, R. G. (later, Sir Robert), 94, 97, 152, 154, 238, 274, 276; appeasement, 38, 84, 127; Attorney-General, 35, 45, 53; government, 45, 80, 90-2, 97, 102, 155, 259-60, 263, 267-70, 276, 279-81; in opposition, 146-7, 166, 178, 213, 223, 230, 238, 242, 244; pig-iron, 77, 127; Prime Minister, 35, 79, 94, 256-60, 265-8, 273-5, 278, 280; World War III, 259, 266-7  
 Merritt, John, 179  
 Metal trades dispute, 181-2, 233; unions, 179, 181, 237  
 Miles, J. B., 21, 129, 168, 251  
*Militant, The*, 61  
 Mill, John Stuart, 97  
 MMM, 30-1, 70-1  
 Miners, *see* Coal  
 Miners' Federation, 8-12, 23, 31, 71, 73-4, 76, 131-2, 239-42, 264; communist influence on, 57-60, 94, 130, 132, 241, 282  
*Modern Monthly*, 61  
 Molotov, V. M., 122  
 Monk, A. E., 42  
 Monopolists, 92, 141, 165, 167, 179-80, 203, 225, 232, 251, 270  
 Morris, William, 3  
 Morrison, John, 192-3, 212  
 Mosley, Sir Oswald, 195  
 Movement, the, 143, 169-77, 205, 228, 256, 277-8, 288; Catholic opposition to, 227, 277-8; control of unions, 170, 175, 264; Evatt attack on, 234; ideology, 277-8, 284; influence (in ALP) 175, 214, 246, 268, (in trade unions) 175, 214; methods, 170-4, 277; *see also* ALP; Industrial Groups  
 Movement Against War and Fascism, 44-6, 48  
 Munich Agreement, 35, 37, 39, 67-8, 73, 84, 86  
 Murdoch, Sir Keith, 96  
 Murray-Smith, Stephen, 199, 252  
 Mussolini, Benito, 33-4, 37, 49, 57, 67, 73, 141, 214

- National Health Scheme, 161-2, 214, 216-17, 220; *see also* Acts; Health
- National Register, 97
- National security, 90, 102; regulations, 108, 116; *see also* Acts
- National Welfare Fund, 111, 113
- Nationalisation, 141, 270; anti-nationalisation, 230-1; banks, 11, 108, 157, 201, 203, 214, 222-32; eastern Europe, 232; key industries (coal & steel), 11, 165, 225, 246; medicine, 214-22 *passim*; monopolies, 164, 286
- Nationalism, 1, 19, 50-1, 56, 89, 146-7, 162, 187-90, 195, 204, 209; Australian, 125-6, 145, 288; communist, 128; parochial, 146; *see also* Isolationism
- Nazis and Nazism, 44, 62, 63, 81-2, 90, 92, 101-2, 118-19, 134, 147, 158, 163, 268; anti-Nazi feeling, 80
- Nelson, Charlie, 71-2, 74; *see also* Miners' Federation
- Netherlands, 79, 151-2, 155, 178, 183-7, 235-9; East Indies, 124
- New Guard, 31
- New Guinea, 124, 126, 144, 192, 238, 270
- New Housewives' Association, 246
- New International*, 61, 86, 88
- NSW Public School Teachers' Federation, 75-7
- News Weekly*, 170, 175, 182
- Newton, Sir Allan, 215
- Niemeyer, Sir Otto, 24-5
- Nuclear weapons, 149, 206-7, 262, 277; *see also* Atom bomb
- Observer* (London), 154
- O'Day, G. P., 166
- Oeser, O. A., 199
- OBU, 8-12 *passim*, 13-14, 72
- Origlass, N., 137-8, 143
- Ormonde, James P., 175, 278
- Ormonde, Paul, 170, 174, 176-7
- Orr, W. (Bill), 71-3; and Nelson, C., 71
- Orwell, George, 61, 67-8
- Pacifism, 1, 47, 69, 82-3, 255
- Page, Sir Earle, 35, 37
- Palmer, Nettie, 53-4, 62, 97
- Palmer, Vance, 44, 193, 195, 200
- Pan-Pacific Secretariat, 15-17
- Pan-Pacific Worker*, 16-17
- Papal policy, 101, 142, 176
- Partisan Review*, 88
- Partridge, P. H., 134-6 *passim*, 265
- Passports, 16, 273-4, 276
- Paterson, Fred, 234
- Patriotism, 1, 51, 56, 98, 105, 120, 189, 191, 195, 210
- Peace, 11, 37, 40, 49, 81, 109, 120, 145, 149, 163, 187-8, 259, 270; conferences and congresses, 261-3, 272, (Peking) 272-4; demand for, 78, 83, 147, 168-9, 251, 263; maintenance of, 50, 69, 81, 146, 153, 164, 210, 262; movement, 260-3, 270-6, 283; transition to, 92, 113, 114, 144, 156, 191
- Penton, Brian, 187-90
- People's army, 105, 126-8
- People's democracies, 207-12 *passim*, 232, 269
- People's front, 43, 60, 67-8, 213
- Petrov, V. M., 278-81
- Phillips, A. A., 194
- Picasso, P., 251
- Pig-iron dispute, 77-8, 127
- Pitcairn, Frank, 64
- Playford, J. D., 244, 282
- Poland, 35, 38, 51, 79-82, 85, 87-8, 90, 101, 121, 123, 146-7, 159, 207-8; *see also* Germany

- Pollitt, Harry, 68  
 Popular front, 43, 48, 50-1, 64-5, 69-70, 85-6, 89, 197  
 Port Kembla, 71, 78, 178-9  
 Post-war reconstruction, 105, 109, 113-14, 132, 143-4, 149-50, 164-5, 168, 193-4, 197, 286  
 Poverty, 66-8, 232, 245  
 Power industry, 258; restrictions, 239-40  
 Premiers' Plan, 25, 113, 233  
 Press, 2, 34, 45, 53, 55, 64, 77, 93, 95-6, 102, 118-22, 132, 139, 143-4, 151, 153, 186, 206, 219, 222-3, 228-9, 232, 237, 240-3, 263, 269, 273-4, 278  
 Price control, 141, 156, 165  
 Prichard, Katharine Susannah, 44, 191  
 Pritt, D. N., 62  
 Privy Council, 229-30  
 Profiteering, 103, 114, 141, 165  
 Progress, 125-9  
*Proletarian Review*, 2  
 Proletariat, 51, 60, 84, 142, 254; *see also* Class struggle  
*Proletariat*, 197  
 Propaganda, 3, 6, 27, 46, 64, 78, 120, 214, 228, 230, 272, 274  
 Public ownership, 29, 87
- Queensland railway strike, 233-5
- Racial prejudice, 6, 19, 126, 139, 142, 158, 196, 221, 261, 274; *see also* Aborigines; Immigration; Jews; White Australia Policy  
 Radek, Karl, 63  
 Rakosi, M., 209  
 Ratliff, Horace: dispute, 96, 102-3  
 Rationing, 107, 139, 149, 156  
 Rawson, D. W., 172-3
- Reactionaries, 30, 46, 50, 64, 167, 206, 210, 213, 220, 227, 238, 251, 288  
 Reading, Sir Claude, 108  
 Rearmament, 40-1, 43, 69  
 Red Army, 56, 87, 105, 118, 122, 130, 146, 162, 194, 208-9, 212, 243  
 Referenda, 114, 139-40, 161, 181, 215, 229, 232, 267-8  
 Renville Agreement, 236  
 Returned Soldiers' League, 128, 159, 244  
 Rhee, Syngman, 259  
 Richardson, Len, 78  
 Rights, democratic: defence of, 43, 45-6, 48-50, 60, 64-5, 69, 80, 90, 95, 99, 115, 127, 150, 168, 189, 199, 206, 247, 262, 264-6  
 Rivett, Sir David, 199  
 Rizzi, Bruno, 87  
 Roach, E. (Ted), 77-8, 130, 186-7, 237-8; *see also* Waterside Workers' Federation  
 Roberts, Stephen H., 56-7  
 Roosevelt, Franklin D., 121-2, 163  
 Ross, Edgar, 68, 241, 246; *see also* Miners' Federation  
 Ross, Lloyd, 69, 116  
 Royal Commissions: Banking, 108, 223; Lowe, 182, 243, 256-7; Petrov, 278-9  
 Russia, *see* Soviet Union  
 Russian Revolution, 1-3 *passim*, 6, 8, 59-61, 87, 120, 135, 204, 285  
 Ryan, Jack, 16-17  
 Ryan, Peter, 199
- Sacco and Vanzetti case, 18-19  
 Salvemini, Gaetano, 67  
 Sane Democracy League, 229, 244  
 Santamaria, B. A., 169, 174-5, 177  
 Savage, P., 36

- Sawer, Geoffrey, 185  
 Schacht, Dr H., 166  
 Schachtman, Max, 88-9  
 Science, 199, 217, 252-4, 277  
 Scullin, James, 17, 23-5, 28, 75, 109, 117  
 Seamen, 178-9, 233, 236-7, 277; Seamen's Union, 42, 183-4, (ban on Dutch shipping) 151-2, (communist influence) 277, 282; *see also* Indonesian independence  
 Senate, 24-5, 264-7  
 Serle, A. G., 199  
 Sharkey, L. L., 21, 50-1, 102, 135, 163-5, 167-8, 179, 213-14, 232-3, 243, 270-1  
 Sharpley, Cecil, 243, 256  
 Sheet Metal Workers' Union, 181, 282  
 Sheridan, T., 182  
 Short, L., 61, 137, 176, 283  
 Simonds, Bishop J., 140  
 Sjahrir, S., 185, 187  
 Sloan, Pat, 67  
 Smith, Bernard, 191  
*Smith's Weekly*, 159  
 Social democracy, 43; Social Democratic Parties, 84, (in Nazi Germany) 268; social democrats, 21, 84; *see also* Democracy  
 Social justice, 101, 139, 189-90, 192  
 Social ownership, 8-10  
 Social security, 106, 111-13, 168, 216, 222, 225, 233; child endowment, 14, 90, 216; hospital benefits, 113, 161-2, 215-16; maternity benefits, 111, 113, 161, 216; pensions, 14, 33, 72, 112-13, 132, 141, 161, 216, 221, 233; pharmaceutical benefits, 113, 161, *see also* Acts; policy, 14, 90, 111-13, 141, 156, 161-2, 214-22, 271; sickness benefits, 111, 113, 141, 161, 216; tuberculosis, 161, 216; unemployment-benefits, 111, 141, 216, 233  
 Socialisation, 12, 14; of churches, 230; of industry, 10, 27-8, 203, 222-3; of medicine, 162, 215, 218, 221-2; objective, 10, 14, 28, 231; units, 29  
 Socialism, 1-3, 8, 11, 21, 28-9, 41, 43, 66, 73, 83, 87, 140, 157, 163, 165-6, 168-9, 173, 187-8, 196, 199-200, 204, 206, 209, 212, 214, 249-50, 257, 269, 287-8; anti-socialism, 1, 29, 222, 231, 248; guild, 3, 10  
*Socialist*, 137  
 Socialists, 1, 15, 51-2, 54, 60, 82-3, 139, 155, 163, 168, 198, 244  
 Socialist Workers' Party (USA), 88  
 Sound Finance League, 229  
 South Africa, 36  
*Southern Churchman*, 269  
 Soviet Union (USSR): anti-fascist, 41, 62, 81, 85; as bureaucratically deformed, 61, 87, 89, 134-5, 137, 205; as model, 70, 86-9, 118-20, 128, 132, 134, 137, 162, 165, 167, 169, 189, 195, 199, 209, 249, 255, 270, 287; attitudes towards, 65, 86, 88-9, 90, 94, 95-6, 100-1, 103-4, 118-21, 134-5, 146-9, 152, 154, 164-5, 178, 203-4, 206-7, 213, 243, 248, 250, 253; Australian relations with, 38-9, 120, 281; cold war, 148-9, 204, 206-7, 211, 245, 259; defence of, 61, 86, 87-8; democracy, 51, 62, 67, 135, 167; eastern Europe, 208-12 *passim*, 286; espionage, 256, 278-80; Finland, 79, 86, 88, 91; foreign policy, 34-5, 50, 84-5, 120-2, 145, 147, 167, 207, 211; Franco-Soviet Pact, 34, 43, 49; League of Nations, 43, 48-9; Moscow trials, 61-2; secret

Soviet Union, *continued*

- police, 61, 87-8, 278-9; Spain, 52, 54-5, 57-8, 60-1; totalitarianism, 134, 221, 265; Trotskyists in, 134, 163; war against Germany, 40, 81-2, 84-5, 87, 99-102, 119, 123, 125, 249, 255; writers, 249-50; *see also* Communist Parties; Red Army; Russian Revolution; Stalin; Trotskyists
- Spanish Civil War, 34-5, 37, 42-4, 51-62, 64-6, 69, 125-6, 134, 252; Australian aid to, 65-6, 68, 125, (Spanish Relief Committee) 53, 64, 66, 69
- Spender, Stephen, 67
- Spry, Colonel Charles, 281
- Stalin, J., 20-1, 61, 81-2, 84-8 *passim*, 99, 101, 120-2, 134, 142-3, 163, 166, 194, 200, 204, 207-8, 212, 221; influence, 20-1; opportunism, 87; regime, 120, 285, 287; Stalinism, 81; Trotskyist critique, 41, 87-8
- State Labor Party (Hughes-Evans Group), 73, 93, 102, 125, 129
- Stockholm declaration, 262
- Steel industry, 13, 225, 258; strike, 178-80; *see also* FIA
- Strachey, John, 66-7
- Strikes, 19, 22-4, 29, 54, 72, 74-5, 77-8, 90-1, 93-5, 103, 114, 131-2, 136-9, 143, 149-50, 160, 170, 173, 178-82, 192, 206, 213, 233-4, 236, 238-42, 246-7, 257-8, 264, 283
- Students, 197-200, 237
- Sukarno, President A., 183, 185
- Sydney Mail*, 56
- Sydney Morning Herald*, 52, 55-6, 92-4, 102, 119, 120-3, 133, 217, 222-3, 257, 259-60, 262, 272, 274, 278
- Tariffs, 13, 24, 111-12
- Taxation, 25, 106-7
- Taylor, A. J. P., 34
- Teheran conference, 121-2, 163-4
- Tennant, Kylie, 199
- Theodore, E. G., 24
- Thistlethwaite, A. B., 61
- Thomas, Hugh, 58, 64
- Thomas, Max, 96, 102-3
- Thorby, H. V. C., 97
- Thorez, Maurice, 67, 243
- Thornton, E., 75, 133, 136, 142-3, 202, 283
- Timber strike, 22, 24
- Timor, 151, 197
- Tito, Marshal, 212-13
- Tobruk, 99, 126
- Togliatti, P., *see* Ercoli
- Totalitarianism, 139, 221-3, 264, 267
- Trade unions, 8-11, 14-15, 22-4, 27, 30-1, 38, 43, 66, 70, 74, 77, 93, 133, 139, 143, 173, 175, 181, 183-7, 189, 228, 234, 236-9, 240, 244, 253, 258, 264, 267-8, 272, 281, 283-4, 286
- Trades and Labor Councils, 15, 225; NSW, 8, 12, 16, 19, 41, 80, 130, 179-80, 186, 228, 246; Victoria (Trades Hall Council), 17, 41
- Tradition, democratic, 50-1, 76, 168, 188, 193, 198-9, 237
- Transport: industry, 258; restrictions, 239; strike (Victoria), 181; unions, 236-7; *see also* Acts
- Tressell, R. A., 3
- Tribune*, 134, 276
- Tripp, E., 61
- Trolley and Draymen's Union, 10
- Trotsky, Leon, 61-2, 87-9, 120, 134, 148, 204
- Trotskyists, 213; Australia, 86, 89, 134-9, 176, (critique of CPA) 61-2, 89, 203-4, 285; Balmain (FIA),



Trotskyists, *continued*

- 136-9, 163, 204; China, 134; critique of USSR, 41, 61-2, 86-9, 134, 137, 163, 200, 204-5; Spain, 54, 61-2; USA, 61, 86-9, 148; Workers' Party of Australia, 61
- Truman, H., 207, 259-60
- Turner, Ian, 3, 10, 199, 269
- Unemployed, 26, 31, 33, 44, 78, 221; unemployment, 13, 20, 24, 27, 33, 71, 103, 110, 112, 239, 270; benefits, *see* Social security
- Unemployed Workers' Movement, 30-1, 70
- United Australia Party, 23, 26, 127
- United front, 5, 8, 15, 21, 43-4, 64, 71-5 *passim*, 128-30, 177, 203, 210, 234-5, 246, 271
- United Nations Organisation, 153-5, 161, 235-8 *passim*, 261, 273, 275-6; Associations, 275; Charter, 261; San Francisco Conference, 145-6, 153, 164, 193, 242; Security Council, 153, 183
- United Workers' Party, 270
- Universities, 107, 217, 268-9; Melbourne, 134, 193, 196-7, (Labour Club) 197-9; Sydney, 56, 134, 237, 264, (communists) 200-1
- USA: and Indonesian independence, 183, 186, 236; anti-communism, 148-9; Cold War, 148, 206-8, 211, 214, 256, 259; foreign relations, 120, 145, 155, 167, 207, (with Britain) 26, 121-2, 148-9, 153, (with Australia) 117, 127, 145-7, 154, 206-7, 213, 259, 274; imperialism, 15, 89, 167, 169, 203-4, 210-11, 213, 234, 259, 269-71
- Vanzetti, *see* Sacco & Vanzetti case
- Varga, E., 167
- VDC, 128
- Versailles, 48-50
- 'Vigilantes' (K. Zilliacus), 67
- Wages, 23, 27, 33, 41, 71, 74, 76, 90, 93, 103, 141, 181-2, 184, 188, 232, 239-40; control, 156; freezing, 131, 182; pegging, 181-2
- War, 260; Anti-War Congress, 44; anti-war sentiment, 40, 45, 263, 274; civil, 4, 82-3; germ, 273, 276; inevitability of, 4, 164; Lenin on, 82-3; politics of, 122; prevention of, 80-1, 85, 269; propaganda, 261, 274; warmongers, 42, 214, 251; *see also* Atom bomb; Nuclear weapons; Peace (movements); World War I, II
- Ward, E. J., 97, 117, 244, 276
- Waterside workers, 22, 77, 127, 152, 192, 233, 277
- Waterside Workers' Federation, 9-10, 12, 22, 71, 77-8, 237-40, 246, 267; ban on Dutch shipping, 151-2, 178, 183-7, 236; communist influence, 77-8, 130, 277, 282
- Workers' Education Association, 134-6; journal, 53
- Wells, Harry, 132
- Wells, H. G., 189
- Wentworth, W. C., 229, 277
- World Federation of Trade Unions, 133, 201-2, 247
- White Australia Policy, 15-17, 126, 196
- Whitlam, E. G., 155
- Wilde, Oscar, 3
- Wilson, Edmund, 88
- Wollongong, 71, 78
- Workers' Industrial Union of Australia, 8-12 *passim*

330 REVOLUTIONARIES AND REFORMISTS

- Workers, 4, 7, 11, 15, 30-1, 42, 60, 65, 78, 83, 89, 91, 93, 99, 104, 106, 127, 137-8, 140-1, 143, 163, 165, 195-6, 210, 234-5, 260, 269, 283, 286; control, 9, 11, 99
- Workers' Party of Australia, 61
- Working conditions, 5, 68, 71-2, 75-7, 85, 141, 180, 184
- World Movement Against War and Fascism, 44
- World Peace Committee (Stockholm), 262
- World Peace Congress, 260
- World War I, 1-2, 4, 7, 13, 34, 42, 56, 71, 83-4, 87, 115, 117-18, 120, 188; danger of another, 16, 40, 42, 47, 66, 69, 72-3; devastation, 285; post-war settlements, 34, 36, 41; weariness, 1, 83
- World War II, 33, 35-42, 67, 79, 89, 94-5, 121-2, 124, 137, 144, 155, 169, 187, 189, 194-6, 198, 243; anti-fascist, 80-1, 191; Australian attitudes to, 79-81, 87, 89, 91-3, 97-9, 118, 134, 139, 144-5, 214, 282, 285; Australian war effort, 98-9, 102, 105-6, 108, 118, 123; Australian government controls and legislation, 91, 95, 103, 105-14, 116, 124, 131, 157, 162, 223; conferences, 208; devastation, 157, 164, 191, 206-7; Europe, 94, 98, 121-3, 131, 145, 157, 207; imperialist, 81-2, 84, 91; Japan, 104, 196; Pacific, 122-3, 144; weariness, 114-15, 144, 147
- World War III, 149, 164, 167, 210, 259-63, 267, 270, 274
- Wright, Tom, 80, 202, 225, 247-8
- Xenophobia, 48, 190, 196
- Yalta Agreement, 146, 153
- 'Yellow Peril', 126
- Yugoslav Communist Party, 208-9, 213
- Zhdanov, A., 211, 248-9, 250
- Zinoviev, G., 62

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