

# Lenin on the ALP:

## The Career of 600 Words<sup>1</sup>

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Lenin's 600 word article of 1913, 'In Australia', included a very brief outline of the nature of Australian capitalism and the Australian Labor Party (ALP)<sup>2</sup>. It came to be a touchstone for the Communist Party of Australia's (CPA's) analyses of these questions. For a period, during the 1940s and early 1950s, the article was reinterpreted, sometimes to reach a diametrically opposed conclusion, each time the Party's line changed. 'In Australia' became a talisman. The Australian career of Lenin's little article illustrates the importance of real social forces, here the forces which shaped the Party line, in defining the content of political 'ideas'.

An account of the CPA's interpretations of 'In Australia' also highlights a number of arguments about the nature of the Australian Labor Party, its relationships with capital and the working class. Some of these arguments may still prove useful in understanding the ALP today.

The following account embodies a particular understanding of the nature of CPA theory and policy. One aspect of the degeneration of the Russian revolution during the 1920s was the establishment of a state religion, 'Marxism-Leninism'. Formally, it bore some resemblance to the thought of its supposed inspirers. But the political practice it justified, the reproduction of an oppressive, exploitative society, cannot simply be interpreted as an extension of the struggles Marx and Lenin had engaged in during their lives nor as a product of their ideas.<sup>3</sup> The

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1. I am grateful to Dr Robert Kuhn, of Harvard University, Dr Lloyd Churchward, of Mitcham, and Dr Harry Rigby of the Australian National University for their assistance in tracking down republications of Lenin's 'In Australia'. An earlier version of this article was published in the *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 35, 1, 1989.

2. The text, taken from L. Sharkey Australia Marches On Communist Party of Australia, Sydney 1942, and a bibliographical note on it appear as appendices to this article.

3. Trotsky was the most prominent figure to explain the degeneration of the revolution in marxist terms, regarding the state bureaucracy which emerged in the Soviet Union during the 1920s as counter-revolutionary. His views are presented in The Revolution Betrayed Pathfinder, New York 1972; a recent detailed account of this process, which reinforces arguments that 'Stalinism' represented a counter-revolution, is to be found in D. Filzer Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialisation Pluto, London 1986. See Lenin's State and Revolution Foreign Language Publishers, Peking 1970 for an indication of how both Marx and Lenin conceived of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as an extension of democracy, e.g. 'democracy, introduced as fully and consistently as is at all conceivable, is transformed from bourgeois democracy into proletarian democracy' p50. For an account of the development of official 'Marxism-Leninism' into a conservative ideology see N. Harris Beliefs in Society Penguin,

developments in Soviet Union which led to the canonisation of Lenin and ossification of his pronouncements eventually affected followers of the Communist International around the world, including the membership of the Communist Party of Australia.<sup>4</sup> That Party's policies and behaviour were shaped by a three-way tug amongst the interests of the state/party bureaucracy in the Soviet Union, which controlled the Comintern and had tremendous prestige in the CPA as the leadership of the 'socialist sixth of the world'; working class militants, who made up a substantial proportion of the CPA's membership and audience; and the interests of Australian capital.<sup>5</sup> This latter factor was mediated through the Party's nationalism. In a capitalist society the 'national' or 'general interest' will, to a considerable extent, be understood in terms of the interests of the dominant class. Originally nationalism had been rejected by the CPA, and other Communist Parties, as incompatible with international working class unity. The Comintern had accommodated to nationalism during the Popular Front period between 1935 and 1939. Nationalism fell from favour during the Hitler-Stalin Pact but after 1941 the CPA consistently portrayed itself as the supreme representative of Australia's national interest. The relative influence of these factors changed. But during the period under discussion the position of Soviet Union's rulers was crucial and generally set the parameters for the influence of nationalism and the Party's working class base on CPA policy.

### **Lenin's 'In Australia'**

'In Australia' first appeared in the legal Pravda of 13 June 1913.<sup>6</sup> Lenin drew on the analysis of the Australian elections published in the press of the senior party of the Second International, the German Social-Democratic Party.<sup>7</sup> He may also have been influenced by comments from a

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London 1971 pp130-166. On the specifics of this process as it affected economic analysis in the Soviet Union see R. Day The 'Crisis' and the 'Crash' New Left Books, London 1981. E. Varga 'Political Testament' New Left Review July-August 1970 pp31-43 provides an account by an insider.

4. See F. Claudin The Communist Movement Penguin, London 1975 especially pp115-117, and D. Hallas The Comintern Bookmarks, London 1985 pp100-103 for the evolution of the Communist International; A. Davidson The Communist Party of Australia Hoover Institution Press, Stanford 1969 pp48-55 and T. O'Lincoln Into the Mainstream Stained Wattle, Sydney 1985 pp12-18, 36-37 deal with the Stalinisation of the CPA.

5. For a discussion of the influence of these social forces on the CPA see R. Kuhn Paradise on the Instalment Plan PhD Thesis, University of Sydney 1986 (second edition) pp33-34; also L. Trotsky The Third International After Lenin Pathfinder, New York 1982 pp61, 67 and J. Molyneux Leon Trotsky's Theory of Revolution Harvester, London 1981 pp147-148, 248.

6. V. I. Lenin Collected Works Volume 19 Progress Publishers Moscow 1963 pp216-7. For details of republications of the article see Appendix 2 below.

7. For a discussion of the German Social Democratic press's treatment of the ALP before World War I see J. Tampke 'Pace Setter or Quiet Backwater?: German Literature on Australia's Labour

leading Bolshevik resident in Brisbane around this time.<sup>8</sup> Cliff has pointed out that

‘Lenin knew how to write very popular, short articles for Pravda. They were always factual, and every article centred on just one idea, which was argued out’.<sup>9</sup>

The message in this article was that class struggle could not be avoided under capitalism, including in Russia. The Australian situation, with its class-collaborationist Labor Party, was exceptional. It could last only a short time because Australia was a young British colony, populated by Liberal English workers, which had not yet achieved full independence or a proper central government. Lenin’s article was designed to deprive liberals in Russia of an example of the advantages of class peace, by demonstrating that the Australian situation was an exceptional and temporary one. He argued the ‘Liberal Labor Party’ would ‘make way for a Socialist Labor Party’ with the consolidation of Australia as an independent capitalist state. A party based on the working class, which pursued liberal capitalist policies, he believed, would only be a temporary phenomenon. Eventually a party would emerge which pursued workers’ class interests. This conclusion was an extension of Lenin’s characterisation of the British Labour Party as ‘the first step on the part of the really proletarian organisations of England towards a conscious class policy and towards a socialist Labour Party’<sup>10</sup> (original emphasis).

Following the collapse of the Second International at the beginning of World War I, Lenin hardened and amplified his critique of labour parties, and also of the majority of the social-democratic parties affiliated to the International. The more sustained arguments in Imperialism and the Split in Socialism and The Collapse of the Second International<sup>11</sup>, for example, became

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Movement and Social Policies, 1890-1914’ Labour History 36, pp3-17.

<sup>8</sup>. Fedor Andreevich Sergeev, better known as ‘Artem’ was in Australia from 1911 to 1917. He was a leading Bolshevik, becoming a member of the Central Committee shortly after his return to Russia in 1917. During his stay in Australia he maintained correspondence with his Party, some of which was published in its official organs. Unpublished material may well have found its way into Lenin’s hands too. Artem engaged in criticism of the Labor Party in the course of the May 1913 elections. Earlier discussions of the Labor Party may have influenced ‘In Australia’, dated June 1913. For more information on Artem’s Australian career and a translation of his 1913 article ‘Australia, the Lucky Country’, which includes a treatment of the ALP, see T. Poole and E. Fried ‘Artem: A Bolshevik in Brisbane’ Australian Journal of Politics and History 31(2) 1985 pp243-54.

<sup>9</sup>. T. Cliff Lenin Volume 1: Building the Party Pluto Press, London 1975 p343.

<sup>10</sup>. V. I. Lenin ‘The Labour Party and the Class Struggle’, dated October 1908, in Lenin on Britain M. Lawrence, London 1934 p92.

<sup>11</sup>. V. I. Lenin Imperialism and the Split in Socialism Progress Publishers, Moscow 1975 p19 (first published October 1916):

‘The fact is that ‘bourgeois labour parties’, as a political phenomenon, have already been formed in all the foremost capitalist countries’ (original emphasis)

The Collapse of the Second International Progress Publishers, Moscow 1975, first published

reference points for the international Communist movement. 'In Australia', with its brief treatments of the question of the Labor Party and Australian capitalism, did not, understandably, become a focus of attention outside Australia.

The article bore some of the marks of a second or third hand account. Lenin mistakenly attributed national educational and factory laws (still not a feature of Australian society) and uniform tariffs to the ALP, as well as the land tax which the second Fisher Government did introduce. His account of the numbers of ALP members of the House of Representatives and Senators in 1913 was also inaccurate.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless his conclusion that the ALP was a 'liberal' workers' party was a real insight and constituted a point of interest for Australian socialists.

### **1933-1939: From Third Period to Popular Front**

Lenin's sole specific attempt to analyse the conditions of Australian capitalism and the ALP apparently had no direct influence on Australian Communists until 1933. That year it was published in Australia and, it seems, in English for the first time in the CPA's Labor Review.<sup>13</sup> 'In Australia' did not immediately become a touchstone for Communist analyses of the Labor Party or of Australia's place in world capitalism. But within a month of its publication, Jack Mason made a reference to the article: what Lenin wrote proved that Jack Lang's proposal to unify Australia was simply a capitalist policy.<sup>14</sup>

'In Australia' did not fully accord with the extreme leftist spirit of the Communist Party which adhered to the Comintern's 'Third Period' policies during the early 1930s. These were based on a sectarian attitude to reformist workers and predictions of imminent revolution. Where the

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September 1915.

<sup>12</sup>. Lenin said there were 44 ALP Members of House of Representatives before and 36 after the elections with 30 ALP Senators after the elections. According to G. Sawer Australian Federal Politics and Law 1901-1929 Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 1956 the correct figures were 40, 37 and 29 and 36. D. Rawson 'Politics and 'Responsibility' in Australian Trade Unions' Australian Journal of Politics and History 4(2) November 1956 p231 challenged Lenin's description of trade union leaders as 'moderate' and 'capital serving' pm the ground that trade union officials constituted a left 'industrial section' in the N.S.W. ALP during World War I. His objection, however, telescopes events and fails to distinguish between the role of union officials, including the leadership of the A.W.U. in the industrial section and the atmosphere in the working class at that time. F. Farrell 'A Laboratory for Social Reform in G. Whitlam et al. Traditions of Social Reform in NSW Pluto, Sydney 1987 p10 points out, contrary to Lenin's characterisation of the Australian working class as holding English traditions, that there were large numbers with Irish backgrounds.

<sup>13</sup>. See Appendix 2 below for details.

<sup>14</sup>. Probably a pseudonym for J. B. Miles, the CPA's leader. Miles certainly used 'Mason' in the early 1940s.

Comintern called social-democratic parties 'social fascist', Lenin had more accurately described the ALP as a 'Liberal Labor Party'.

The CPA republished the article in Workers Weekly, on 8 January 1935, on the occasion of the eleventh anniversary of Lenin's death. Neither this presentation of the article to an Australia public, nor those that followed, made any serious attempt to place it in historical context. In early 1935 The CPA was in a transitional phase between Third Period and Popular Front politics. For a while the Party's orientation roughly accorded with Lenin's. The Communist Party had cast off the worst of its sectarian excesses and advocated a United Front with the ALP, though not yet a Popular Front.<sup>15</sup> An article in Communist Review and a Workers Weekly editorial announced that Lenin's prediction was coming true, as the bourgeois Labor Party made way for the socialist Labor Party, in the form of the CPA.<sup>16</sup>

The Popular Front was formally adopted as an international Communist policy at the 7th Congress of the Communist International in August 1935. The main motivation for the new policy, which was quickly adopted in Australia, was a reassessment of the Soviet Union's foreign policy and defence needs.<sup>17</sup>

In 1938, the logic of the Popular Front politics led to the first major Australian reinterpretation of Lenin's essay. The Popular Front was premised on the idea that the democratic capitalist countries could play a progressive role in the world by allying with the Soviet Union against fascism. This was the first of an implicit two stage strategy. The second stage, postponed until the first had been achieved, was to be the struggle for socialism.<sup>18</sup> In the late 1930s a pattern in Australian Communist policy emerged. The pattern recurred for over a decade. When Australian capitalism was regarded as progressive, the ALP was seen as an ally. Sometimes the Labor Party's policies were also believed to have a socialist content. This position alternated with one which saw Australian capitalism as reactionary and the ALP as a conservative opponent.

During the Popular Front Period, Communists emphasised their own nationalism and the

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<sup>15</sup>. The 'United Front' tactic, elaborated during the early 1920s, was designed to win social democratic workers to Communist politics by involving social democratic and Communist organisations in joint struggles over limited common goals. The 'Popular Front' of the 1930s sought to involve sections of the bourgeoisie in general political agreements which included defence of democratic institutions and alliance with the Soviet Union.

<sup>16</sup>. R. D[ixon] 'Socialism and the Australian Labour Movement' Communist Review January 1935 p6-16. Workers Weekly 18/1/35 p2. This issue of the paper also carried a reprint of Lenin's article on p3.

<sup>17</sup>. See Claudin Communist Movement op. cit. pp178-181, D. Hallas The Comintern op. cit. pp141-143.

<sup>18</sup>. See G. Dimitrov The United Front Against Fascism Current Book Distributors, Sydney January 1945 for the classic 1935 statement of Popular Front politics.

progressive role Labor Party could play. Party Secretary, J. B. Miles had, in 1936, already foreshadowed that affiliation of the Communist Party to the ALP would prepare

‘the way for a fundamentally class outlook on essentials in the ALP ranks, and for a united working-class party for the struggle to end the power of capital, establish a class government of workers to suppress all counterrevolutionary opposition and go forward to the building of socialism’.<sup>19</sup>

L. L. Sharkey, second in the CPA hierarchy, trimmed Lenin’s article to fit the new perspective. He indicated that the struggle to reform the NSW ALP was part of the process Lenin predicted whereby a Socialist Labor Party would emerge. The implication was that the ALP could be transformed into a Socialist Labor Party.<sup>20</sup> In identifying Australia as a progressive capitalism the CPA blurred the distinction between the progressive role of the ALP and socialist politics.

### **1939-41: Imperialist War**

Within a year of Sharkey’s article the Communist Party’s interpretation of ‘In Australia’ changed again. Just as Stalin’s increasing exasperation with the western democracies, which he was attempting to woo into an anti-fascist pact, led him to turn to Germany, by mid-1939 Australian Communists were becoming disenchanted with the Labor Party. Despite repeated overtures for a Popular Front, the ALP had shown no willingness to collaborate with the Communist Party or with ‘progressive’ sections of the conservative parties, as the CPA proposed. For this latter crime ALP leaders were labelled ‘sectarian’ in the Communist press.<sup>21</sup> In June 1939 Richard Dixon, a senior Party official, anticipated the leftism of the Party’s line during the ‘Second Imperialist War’. He said that ‘the Labor Party is by no means a socialist workers’ party. It is, to quote Lenin, a “bourgeois Labor Party”’.<sup>22</sup> But Dixon did not refer to Lenin’s wider analysis of the role of the ALP in developing Australian capitalism nor to the need for a Socialist Labor Party.

Once Australian Communist leaders had sorted out the correct, i.e. Comintern sanctioned, response to the outbreak of World War II and the Hitler-Stalin Pact, the Party embarked on a more thorough-going leftist course. The CPA toned down its nationalism, criticised the rightwing nature of Australian capitalism and, for the first time, raised ‘In Australia’ to the status of a key doctrine. The article retained that status throughout the 1940s, despite two further, dramatic changes in the Party’s orientation.

In What Is This Labor Party? Mason (Miles) and McShane (Sharkey) set out to discredit the ALP and its support for Australia’s efforts in the ‘Second Imperialist War’. ‘Our starting point,’ they

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<sup>19</sup>. J. B. Miles ‘The Federal Conference of the Australian Labor Party’ Communist Review September 1936 p23.

<sup>20</sup>. L. L. Sharkey ‘Working-Class Unity’ Communist Review October 1938 pp55, 57.

<sup>21</sup>. R. Dixon ‘Towards A People’s Front’ Communist Review September 1938 p55.

<sup>22</sup>. R. Dixon ‘Labor Reformism and the Popular Front’ Communist Review July 1939 p397.

announced 'is Marxism-Leninism, more especially Lenin's well known analysis of the Australian Labor Party, made in 1913'.<sup>23</sup> They emphasised the non-socialist nature of the ALP, its nationalism and protection of Australian capital. These undesirable features were explained in terms of the Party's base in the petty bourgeoisie and the aristocracy of labour. That is, they employed the Lenin's general critique of social-democracy, which attributed the corruption of the aristocracy of labour to bribes made out of the proceeds of colonial exploitation, and identified the conservative influence of trade union officials in the parties of labour.<sup>24</sup> Mason and McShane conceded that the Labor Party had achieved 'liberal' reforms before World War I but, as in Lenin's article, they counterposed these advances to the need for a Socialist Labor Party, quickly identified as the CPA. This, the main conclusion, indicated why Lenin's article was summoned up to play an important role during 1940. Where the Popular Front strategy had been premised on a relatively uncritical attitude towards the ALP, a merit of Lenin's analysis was precisely that it highlighted the obsolescence of Labor's class-collaborationism as far as the pursuit of working class interests was concerned. Once 'In Australia' was established as a revered text, however, it became necessary to reinterpret it systematically with each turn in CPA policy.

#### **1941-45: A National Front for Victory<sup>25</sup>**

After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 Australian Communists rediscovered the merits of nationalism, secure in the belief that their patriotism served the interests of the 'socialist motherland'.<sup>26</sup> So it did, at least for the time being. The ruling classes of the Soviet Union and its allies had a common interest in the defeat of the Axis powers. Communists again regarded Australian capitalism as progressive and the ALP as capable of playing a positive role. The Communist Party of Australia's most substantial explanation of its war-time orientation was L. L. Sharkey's 1942 Australia Marches On.<sup>27</sup> The pamphlet included

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<sup>23</sup>. Mason and McShane What Is This Labor Party? Forward Press, Sydney (as the covers says 'Published. . . For The Communist Party Of Australia' the pamphlet probably appeared before May 1940 when the Party was banned) p2.

<sup>24</sup>. See Lenin Imperialism and the Split op. cit., The Collapse op. cit. and 'Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism' in Selected Works Progress Publishers, Moscow 1977 pp714-715.

<sup>25</sup>. Communist Party of Australia A United Working Class and a National Front for Victory: Resolution of the 13th Congress March 1943, Sydney 1943.

<sup>26</sup>. The 'Australian Working Class March' (Tune: 'Men of Harlech') in Australian Communist Party A Book of Community Songs Sydney 1945 p5 began 'Sing Australia's greatest glory, Battles in her epic story. . . '

<sup>27</sup>. L. L. Sharkey Australia Marches On NSW Legal Rights Committee, Sydney 1942. Also see the third impression Communist Party of Australia, Sydney 1943. L. H. Gould's review of Australia Marches On indicated the exalted status of 'In Australia' at this stage. 'The author's starting point', according to Gould, 'is Lenin's analysis in 1913, of the Australian political scene, and his

Marx's 'News from Australia, 1855' and Lenin's 'The Labor Government in Australia', i.e. 'In Australia'.

Where What Is This Labor Party? was primarily concerned to document the ALP's anti-working class features, including its nationalism, Sharkey's contribution in Australia Marches On stressed a different aspect of Lenin's argument. He gave priority to an issue that in Lenin's article was subordinate and transitory: the progressive role of the ALP in developing Australian capitalism. Lenin regarded the influence of the ALP and working class support for the Labor Party as a preliminary to the emergence of a 'Socialist Labor Party'. Earlier CPA interpretations of the article accorded with this expectation. They either maintained that the ALP was on the verge of transforming itself into the Socialist Labor Party, or that the CPA was about to supersede the ALP as the Socialist Labor Party itself. Both positions assumed that Australia was already a unified capitalist nation, the old role of the ALP was, therefore, already redundant. Sharkey turned earlier interpretations of Lenin's article on their heads: the ALP was still playing a progressive capitalist role by promoting Australia's emergence as an independent and centralised nation. Sharkey gave the ALP credit for legislation that helped to consolidate and develop an independent Australia, including that for the Commonwealth Bank, land taxation, the Scullin tariffs and, following Lenin's mistakes, the uniform Customs tariff, Federation Acts and Factory Acts. The Curtin Government's ratification of the Statute of Westminster and proposed constitutional amendments were evidence that this process was still going on and that the CPA should support it.

'Independence, unification, democratic institutions, industrialisation and numerical and political growth of the working class, these are the basic conditions which capitalism itself has been compelled to create, but which are, historically, also the basic preconditions for the transition to a socialist society. . . it is for us to help along the historical development.'<sup>28</sup>

The Communist Party, in other words, should promote capitalist development so long as it proceeded along prescribed lines, as it did during the War. The argument was the same as that

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forecast of future developments -- amazingly fulfilled in all details' Communist Review February 1943 p13.

<sup>28</sup>. *ibid.* p44. In Tribune 5/4/45 p5 Sharkey paraphrased this statement:

'The Communists support this trend towards an independent Australian national sovereignty, not because we are narrow nationalists, 'superior racists', chauvinists and flag waving 'patriots' of the imperialist type, but because we are true Australian patriots who place the welfare of this land first.

'. . . It is a necessary stage of our nation's growth, for the establishment of an industrialised and self-governing nation increases the strength and importance of the working-class and creates the conditions for eventual socialism.'

Also see L. L. Sharkey An Outline History of the Australian Communist Party Australian Communist Party, Sydney December 1944 p30 for a reference to 'In Australia'.

used by Labor Party supporters for decades.

Sharkey supplemented Lenin's analysis by explaining that the ALP's liberal capitalist behaviour was a result of its greater independence from any sectional capitalist interests than the conservative parties could attain. The Labor Party was therefore better able to 'legislate for Australian capitalism as a single entity'.<sup>29</sup> Although he maintained that the Curtin Government was still worthy of support, because of this progressive capitalist role, Sharkey defined a space for the CPA, 'the mass Socialist Labor Party'<sup>30</sup>, by arguing the ALP's old role was 'reaching fulfilment'<sup>31</sup>. The Communists were leading the working class in independent action. Eventually they would show the way to socialism, through a 'United Front' with the Labor Party. This United Front would result in a fusion of the two parties on the basis of socialist principles. The CPA's Handbook for Tutors also stressed this argument.<sup>32</sup> The Party's formal position, however, did not prevent it from again seeking affiliation to the ALP, without preconditions, in 1944.

E. J. Rowe, an Amalgamated Engineering Union Commonwealth Councillor, explained the connection between the development of Australian capitalism and the inevitable ascendancy of the Communist Party in the labour movement in more detail. He linked the rise of an independent Australian capitalism and its large factories to war-time dilution of skilled trades and hence the erosion of reformism's base in the labour aristocracy. The development of manufacturing industry occurred because over the past forty years, 'the Australian bourgeoisie refused the role of 'hewers of wood, etc,' to the British imperialists and commenced a sturdy development that resulted in Australia becoming a second class imperialist power'.<sup>33</sup> Australian capital accumulation now deserved the same positive attribute that British imperialists reserved for the 'sturdy' English yeoman.

Reflecting a further accommodation to the ALP, E. W. Campbell's 1945 History of the Australian Labor Movement revived a Communist hope of the late 1930s. CPA affiliation might convert the Labor Party into a vehicle for achieving socialism.<sup>34</sup> Campbell's explanatory

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<sup>29</sup>. *ibid.* p26.

<sup>30</sup>. *ibid.* p39.

<sup>31</sup>. *ibid.* p20.

<sup>32</sup>. Communist Party of Australia Handbook for Tutors 1943 (no date is given but internal evidence indicates it was published after 1942 and the Party changed its name to Australian Communist Party at the beginning of 1944) p10; Tribune 26/8/43 pp1, 3, 7/10/43 p3; J. R. Hughes 'Amalgamation -- A Historical Step' Communist Review January 1944 pp178-9; R. Dixon We Must Go Forward Australian Communist Party, Sydney March 1945 p5.

<sup>33</sup>. E. J. Rowe 'New Processes Demand New Union Policies' Communist Review January 1944 p188-9.

<sup>34</sup>. E. W. Campbell History of the Australian Labor Movement Current Book Distributors, Sydney 1945 pp159-60.

framework was based on Lenin's characterisation of the ALP as a 'liberal-bourgeois' party.<sup>35</sup> He also reproduced V. G. Childe's arguments that the ALP's parliamentarist strategy led it to seek and attract cross class support, on a far from socialist basis, and that the professional politicians played a conservative role in the Party.<sup>36</sup> These obstacles were to be overcome through Communist Party affiliation, the pressure of trade unions on the Labor Party and the positive influence of the best elements in the working class. In other words Campbell misinterpreted a temporary convergence of policies, brought about by the War, as the basis for agreement on political principles and unity between the two organisations.

Using their 1941-45 interpretation of 'In Australia' Communists achieved their keenest insight into the dynamics of Australian imperialism since the mid-1930s. Ironically this was because of Communist endorsement of, or at least indifference to, Australia's imperial ambitions.

In 1944 Richard Dixon found little to object to in the Curtin Government's ambitions in the South Pacific and accurately assessed the motivation behind Government policy in the last years of the War:

'If left to itself Australian imperialism has little chance of asserting itself against America. Hence, whereas in 1942 Mr. Curtin appealed to America for aid, now, at the end of 1943, he is for a strengthening of the ties of the British Empire, so as to strengthen Australian capitalism for the struggle against U.S. imperialism. It must not be assumed from this that he wants to strengthen the Empire on the old basis.'<sup>37</sup>

The Communist Party invoked the analysis of the Labor Party and Australian capitalism in Australia Marches On extensively during the War. It was invoked to refute the renegade Lloyd

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<sup>35</sup>. *ibid.* pp36, 62.

<sup>36</sup>. *ibid.* pp43-44

<sup>37</sup>. R. Dixon 'The Federal Labor Conference' Communist Review January 1944 pp180-2. The CPA's position on New Guinea was to oppose 'Australian imperialism', and call for an eventual exercise of national self-determination by the local people, R. Gibson Communist Review April 1943 p37; S. Purdy 'Post-War for the Fuzzy-Wuzzy's' Communist Review October 1943 pp138-9; E. Laurie 'A Democratic Policy for New Guinea' Communist Review December 1943 pp165-6; E. A. H. Laurie Australia in New Guinea Current Book Distributors, Sydney August 1944. L. H. Gould 'New Zealand and Australia' Communist Review February 1944 pp201-2 greeted the Australia-New Zealand Agreement as a fulfilment of the predictions in 'In Australia'. He said its provisions concerning defence in the south-west Pacific had 'the earmark of unwarranted grab -- not large, perhaps, just commensurate with Australia's position as a 'secondrate imperialist power'' but he nevertheless endorsed Australia's claim to retain bases on the Pacific islands.

Ross's defence of the ALP,<sup>38</sup> to justify support for ratification of the Statute of Westminster<sup>39</sup> and the Curtin Government's proposed constitutional changes,<sup>40</sup> on the sending of an Australian ambassador to Moscow,<sup>41</sup> and to explain a variety of the Government's other actions.<sup>42</sup>

The Party's line was imbued with the Australia Marches On perspective even where it and 'In Australia' were not mentioned. In November 1942 'Dublin' maintained that the manner of Menzies' declaration of war in 1939 'was just one of the last splutters of the old system of complete subordination' to Britain. Australia was achieving independence: 'success will be ensured to the degree that the working class can effectively influence and support progressive actions by the Curtin Government in foreign affairs'.<sup>43</sup> The Party praised the 'liberal reform tradition established by the Andrew Fisher Labor Government' and 'never failed to recognise the Labor Party's services in building an economically strong, a more unified and more independent Commonwealth'.<sup>44</sup> On the third anniversary of the Curtin Government, Tribune maintained that 'The period witnessed Australia's quickened pace towards nationhood'.<sup>45</sup> During the War full independence for Australia seemed as perpetually imminent (thus prolonging support for the Curtin Government). The actual point at which independence was reached was only retrospectively identified as the 1942 ratification of the Statute of Westminster, after the Party's line had changed several years later.

The perspective embodied in 'Lenin's' analysis of the ALP and Australian capitalism provided the framework for the CPA's other economic ideas. During the War these can be roughly grouped into three categories. 1) The importance of Australia developing as an independent capitalist state. Such an assessment fitted in well with the class collaboration the Party encouraged during the War. Unlike the Popular Front, the cross class unity of the War period went well beyond agreement on international issues to include questions of production and

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38. Communist Review July 1942 pp11-12

39. Tribune 23/9/42 p3; J. Mason 'Changing the Constitution' Communist Review October 1942 pp2-3; 'S.P.' 'The Constitution and the Post-War World' Communist Review December 1942 p4.

40. J. Mason 'Changing the Constitution' op. cit.; J. Mason 'More Power for National Parliament' Communist Review November 1942 p8, 'S.P.' 'The Constitution and the Post-War World' op. cit.; E. F. Hill 'The Need for Greater Federal Powers' Communist Review February 1944 p206; Tribune 16/9/43 p1 editorial, 13/1/44 p4.

41. 'Dublin' 'Envoy to Moscow: Australia Grows Up' Communist Review November 1942 p1.

42. e.g. Evatt and Curtin's renunciation of nationalisations during the War 'Lenin, Curtin and Evatt Agree on ALP' Communist Review September 1943 p118; the signing of the Australia-New Zealand Agreement Tribune 27/1/44 p1; and the 1945 bank legislation Tribune 5/4/45 p5, 29/3/45 p1 editorial.

43. 'Dublin' op. cit.

44. Tribune 29/3/45 p1 editorial.

45. Tribune 5/10/44 p1 editorial.

budgetary policy. In the interests of the War effort Australian Communists promoted labour productivity and frowned on industrial action. 2) A much less polarised view of the anatomy of Australian capitalism. Again in contrast to the earlier Popular Front interpretation, the Communist Party's war-time line militated against an economic analysis of Australian capitalism based on anti-monopolism, and against the demand for nationalisation of key industries. 3) A drift into left-Keynesian economic policy prescriptions. In emphasising the progressiveness of the Curtin Government's policies, Communists tended to suggest that a Labor Government could overcome some of the constraints placed on economic policy by the capitalist system, including the inevitability of economic crises. This aspect of Communist thought became particularly pronounced in 1944 and 1945.<sup>46</sup>

During the War the Communist Party wholeheartedly accepted Lenin's contention that the ALP pursued liberal-bourgeois policies. Unencumbered by any conflict between Australian foreign policy and the interests of the ruling class in the Soviet Union, the CPA went further and endorsed the interests of Australian capital as progressive. The Party not only identified with Australian nationalism but also regarded the Government's War policy as essentially in accord with the nation's interests. After the War, as in Popular Front period, there was a divergence between the Party's conception of the national interest and that of the Government. The ALP's foreign policy was increasingly anti-Soviet. This distorted Communist perceptions of the capitalist class's pursuit of its own (in the final analysis, the only operative 'national') interest.

#### **1945-47: 'The Leaders of the ALP are Today Vacillating'<sup>47</sup>**

In some ways the 1945 Congress of the CPA was an expression of the Party's war-time policies, including the affirmation of an 'Australian way to socialism'. The Congress took place a few days before the War ended and held to the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism.<sup>48</sup> The Party continued, moreover, to support an alliance with sections of capital until its left turn of 1947-8. But even before the Congress the Party had started to move away from its most conciliatory war-time positions. The CPA had returned to a more forthright anti-monopolism, with concomitant demands for nationalisations. It called for the relaxation of wage-pegging. Communists had also become increasingly critical of the Government's foreign policies, notably Evatt's opposition to the veto power of Security Council members in the United Nations Organisation.

It is most useful to see the Congress as the end of the Communist Party's period of war-time

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<sup>46</sup>. For a more detailed account of these policies see R. Kuhn Paradise op. cit. pp165-167.

<sup>47</sup>. L. L. Sharkey 'The Role of the British Labour Government' Communist Review May 1946 p132.

<sup>48</sup>. Davidson op. cit. p98-9 assesses the Congress in this light. For an affirmation of the 'peaceful approach to socialism' see Australian Communist Party Victorian State Executive Communist Plan for Victory and Peace Melbourne 1945.

class collaboration and the opening of a new period. By rejecting 'Browderism' (the idea of liquidating the CPA, in recognition of the Government's progressive policies) during 1945, the Party rejected the post-war logic of its own war-time policies. The Congress thus saw the Party reverse its position on the Government's Keynesian proposals and return to its earlier belief in the inevitability of an economic crisis.<sup>49</sup> Neglected for several years, the idea of economic crisis again became a matter of immediate concern, even if Communists still believed, for the time being, that Government policies could alleviate the worst effects of a new depression. The progressive features of Australian capitalism were, in Communist analyses, beginning to dissolve. Finally, as far as the Party was concerned, the Congress marked the end of the class truce of the War period. The most tangible short-term consequence was the demand that wage-pegging should be abandoned.<sup>50</sup> Miles spelt out the wider implications:

'Government, Executive and Court delays will not be overcome only by resolutions and deputations. No other pressure can equal job meetings, including stopwork meetings, trade union rallies and demonstrations and, if necessary, well organised strikes.'<sup>51</sup>

Henceforth the Party's conception of the class struggle underwent a growing radicalisation. The CPA's new policy involved an essentially a defensive conception of the class struggle, which lagged behind the tempo of rank and file militancy during the second half of 1945 and 1946. Heartened by the rising level of working class militancy the Party then adopted a more aggressive view that workers were on the offensive and should win improvements in wages and conditions by means of industrial action while economic conditions were favourable. Eventually the Party, encouraged by the Communist Information Bureau started a sharper turn to the left in 1947. The consequent analysis envisaged the CPA displacing the ALP as the main party of the working class by means of industrial struggles.<sup>52</sup>

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49. compare R. Dixon 'Post War Policy and the National Congress' op. cit. p540 with his 'Full Employment and Capitalism' Communist Review August 1945 p570 and the Congress Resolution in Communists In Congress: The 14th Congress of the Australian Communist Party Current Book Distributors, Sydney 1945 p12.

50. R. Dixon in Communists In Congress op. cit. p13. Compare J. McPhillips 'Economic Demands of the ACTU' Communist Review August 1945 p573, with its call for the easing of wage-pegging, to Tribune 30/8/45 p7 where the demand is abolition.

51. J. B. Miles 'The Fight on the Industrial Front' Communist Review October 1945 p516. Tribune 28/9/45 p3 reported CPA policy in the following terms:

'While our general attitude of support for the Labor Government continues we must engage in more constructive criticism, especially on such issues as the disposal of war facilities, refusal to modify wage-pegging, failure to lift [sic] the burden of taxation from lower income groups etc.'

52. If a 'wrong decision' was made to drop the class collaboration or 'moderation' of the war period it was made around the time of the 1945 Congress rather than in 1946 as Davidson has

The transitional nature of the period 1945 to 1947 is reflected in contemporary interpretations of 'In Australia'. As in Australia Marches On, 'Lenin's' analysis was trotted out to demonstrate that the ALP was a progressive 'Liberal Labor' rather than a 'Socialist Labor Party'.<sup>53</sup> The most interesting use of the article was in references to divisions inside the Labor Party over its historical role as proponent of Australian independence. During the War the CPA had had no doubts of the progressiveness of the ALP's Federal Parliamentary leadership and the Labor Party as a whole. The Chifley Government's foreign and industrial policies after the War, however, led to increasing Communist concern that the right wing opposed the old progressive role of the Labor Party and was gaining in influence. In December 1945 Sharkey noted that

'The Australian Labor Party is still fulfilling its Liberal tasks, while within it there is also a vicious right wing. . .'<sup>54</sup>

He observed a further deterioration during the ensuing six months:

'The leaders of the ALP today are vacillating between the traditional liberal progressive policy of the ALP and the imperialism and anti-Sovietism of Bevin. Their current policy is a weird mixture of both.'<sup>55</sup>

While holding on to the interpretation of 'In Australia' expounded in Australia Marches On, Sharkey also compared the positions of the now 'right wing' leadership of the ALP with the 'disastrous' policies of the German Socialist Party.<sup>56</sup> Despite this growing criticism of the ALP leadership and the consequent belief that the CPA had an increased responsibility for continuing the progressive traditions of the labour movement, the Communist Party still had a realistic assessment of its own limited influence.<sup>57</sup>

Sharkey's reluctance to abandon the war-time interpretation of 'In Australia' found expression

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suggested, Davidson op. cit. p99. Early in 1946, however, the Party became much more critical of the Government's foreign policy.

<sup>53</sup>. See, for example, Congress Resolution in Communists In Congress op. cit. p16: 'The policy of the Government is liberal and progressive and will help promote the further development of Australia', Tribune 20/8/46 p6; E. W. Campbell and L. L. Sharkey 'After the Federal Elections' Communist Review November 1946 p323.

<sup>54</sup>. L. L. Sharkey 'The Role of Reformism in the Post War World' Communist Review December 1945 p680.

<sup>55</sup>. L. L. Sharkey 'The Role of the British Labor Government' op. cit. p132 also see Tribune 24/5/46 p3.

<sup>56</sup>. L. L. Sharkey Labor Betrayed Current Book Distributors, Sydney 1946 p7.

<sup>57</sup>. 'The Communist Party is aware of its increasing responsibility in the struggle against alien forces within the forces of labor. . . ' L. L. Sharkey 'The Role of the British Labor Government' op. cit. p132; Dixon pointed out to the Central Committee in May that disillusionment with the ALP Government had not led to a substantial increase in the CPA's support, 'The Federal Elections and the United Front' Communist Review July 1946 p195.

in his view that the Government's encouragement of foreign investment could be in accord with Labor's progressive role:

'Although development by native Australian capital is preferable, the labor movement raises no barriers to the transfer [from the USA] of industries that would provide employment, consumer goods and capital goods for Australian development.'<sup>58</sup>

At any time between 1948 and 1983 such a view would have been derided inside the Communist Party.

### **1947-51: 'The Need To Take The Offensive'<sup>59</sup>**

In September 1947 the Communist Party of the Soviet Union reasserted its influence over the world Communist movement, by setting up the Communist Information Bureau or Cominform. The Bureau only included the Communist Parties which held power in Eastern Europe and the two largest western European Parties. Nevertheless, during the Cold War, it was the undisputed voice of the international movement. A challenge to Moscow's authority, such as Tito's in Yugoslavia, meant exclusion from the movement. Reflecting rising cold war tensions, the Cominform's analyses encouraged Communist Parties in the west to adopt more militant and anti-American policies.<sup>60</sup> For the Communist Parties of the British Empire the Cominform's reassertion of the international character of the movement had been foreshadowed in April 1947 with a Conference of Empire Communist Parties held in London. These two events initiated a radicalisation of the policies of the CPA, encouraging it to draw unrealistically extreme conclusions from the 'strike movement', which it had finally recognised during 1947.

The radicalisation of the CPA's policies was not an even process. The Party adopted a hostile attitude towards the Chifley Government's foreign policy more rapidly than it did towards the Government's domestic policies.<sup>61</sup> Leading Australian Communists had already identified the

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<sup>58</sup>. Tribune 24/5/46 p3, L. L. Sharkey 'The Role of the British Labor Government' loc. cit. Also see L. L. Sharkey 'The Labor Movement at the Crossroads' Communist Review March 1947 pp451-2.

<sup>59</sup>. Australian Communist Party Speakers' Notes February 1950 held that 'The emphasis must be on the need to take the offensive' in speeches by Party members.

<sup>60</sup>. See Claudin The Communist Movement op. cit. p465, Davidson The Communist Party of Australia op. cit. pp101-102

<sup>61</sup>. The emphasis in J. C. Henry's speech to the London Conference of Empire Communist Parties was ultranationalist, but not particularly radical with respect to industrial strategies. He stressed the need to keep the parties of monopoly capitalism out of office and for policies which were in the interests of 'sections of capital not tied to the great monopolies', Communist Review May 1947 pp515-7. Gollan points out that the Australian Communist Party's position at

anti-soviet thrust of Foreign Minister Evatt's policies and needed no outside prompting to criticise the Chifley Government on that count. Slow to recognise the postwar strike wave, the Party counterposed industrial militancy to the Chifley Government's 'reactionary' domestic policies later than it rejected Evatt's foreign policy.<sup>62</sup>

The left turn in Communist policy did not involve rejection of Australian nationalism. But the focus of the Party's nationalism shifted. The CPA heightened its identification with the interests of the Australian 'people' as a whole as against the monopolies with their imperialist ties.

The 'reactionary right-wing' of the Labor Party had dashed CPA hopes for progressive foreign and soon even domestic policies from the ALP Government. Australian Communists increasingly saw their own Party as the only real representative of Australia's national interests once.<sup>63</sup> Around the time of its May 1948 Congress, The CPA's perceptions of domestic and international events were brought coincided again. The Congress also saw the emergence of a new interpretation of Lenin's 1913 article on Australia.

Two theoretical developments from overseas helped to crystallise the CPA's new, radical position. First the Cominform's pronouncement that the world was divided into two camps: the Soviet Union, its allies and the progressive movement in capitalist countries were opposed to the reactionary forces in the world, centred on US imperialism.<sup>64</sup> This led to the identification of the progressive workers' and national liberation movements with Soviet foreign policy interests. In Australia the CPA's hostility to the Government's foreign and domestic policies coalesced in the assertion that both were in the interests of Collins House, which was closely tied to Wall Street imperialism. The capitalist class and, in practice, the ALP leadership had gone over to the side of the monopolies. Australia was polarised between those who looked to the CPA for leadership and those who furthered the interests of monopoly capital.

The path of independent, progressive capitalist development for Australia had been closed off.

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the September 1947 ACTU Congress was opposition to the Government's foreign policies combined with 'a more militant exposition of the aims of the federal Labor government', that is, the CPA had heightened its criticisms of the ALP on domestic issues, but only on the basis of Labor's own formal policies R. Gollan *Revolutionaries and Reformists* Australian National University Press, Canberra 1975 pp202-3.

<sup>62</sup>. J. B. Miles *Communist Review* July 1947 p593 expressed the radicalisation of the Party's nationalism, though not yet of its strategy for achieving socialism which remained stagist. Miles expected a 'long period of struggle for democracy', before the advance to socialism.

<sup>63</sup>. see, for example, *Tribune* 12/11/49 p1.

<sup>64</sup>. Gollan *Revolutionaries and Reformists* op. cit. p211. For Australian references to this approach see *Tribune* 25/2/48 p3 and the documents of the Australian Communist Party's Congress of May 1948, National Library of Australia Communist Party of Australia Papers MS3000.

The second theoretical innovation from overseas, however, opened new path of national development. This was the discovery that the states of eastern Europe were on the road to socialism.<sup>65</sup> They were taking a different route from Russia. One that Australia could emulate in the near future. Just as the CPA was recognising the reactionary role of the ALP and Australian bourgeoisie, the honey moon between capitalist and Communist Ministers in Eastern European governments was ending. The functions of the dictatorship of the proletariat were being carried out 'without the Soviet form' (in fact without any working class content).<sup>66</sup>

When it embarked on its more radical course during 1947, the Communist Party did not immediately change its assessment of the ALP and the progressiveness of the Australian capitalist class. But reconciling the old interpretation of Lenin's 1913 text with the reactionary role Communists saw the ALP playing on the domestic and the international plane became increasingly difficult. In contrast with its position a couple of years before, the CPA's radical course now dictated that foreign investment in Australia had to be opposed:

'The economic policy pursued by the Labor Government here in Australia, is to attract British and United States capital. This to our minds means that Australia would become a semi-colony'.<sup>67</sup>

Hardly a progressive development. Dixon argued that the ALP had abandoned its old election program of nationalisations for the benefit of 'big overseas trusts and monopolists'.<sup>68</sup> He and Sharkey both sought a way out of this problem by contrasting the ALP's progressive intentions with its effectively reactionary policies. They attempted to salvage the current interpretation of Lenin on the ALP by arguing that:

'This policy of attracting overseas capital, which is so basic in the policy of the Labour Government, does not mean any conscious departure from the aims of the

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<sup>65</sup>. see J. D. Blake The Communist Party of Australia: 1945-63 mimeo National Library of Australia p7; E. Varga 'Democracy of a New Type' Communist Review November and December 1947 pp721-4, 757-9 and J. D. Blake 'Some Questions on People's Democracy' Communist Review December 1948 pp367-70. These Communist Review articles denied that the dictatorship of the proletariat existed in the 'new democracies', but this position was soon reversed, see Gollan Revolutionaries and Reformists op. cit. p212.

<sup>66</sup>. see e.g. M. Rakosi 'The People's Democratic State' Communist Review May 1949 pp138-42. For a recent account of the events in Eastern Europe see C. Harman Class Struggles in Eastern Europe Pluto, London 1983 pp50-57.

<sup>67</sup>. L. L. Sharkey Reply to discussion at the 1948 CPA Congress Communist Party of Australia Papers op. cit. box1 folder1. Also see L. L. Sharkey For Australia -- Prosperous and Independent: Report to Fifteenth Congress, CPA Current Book Distributors, Sydney May 1948 p17.

<sup>68</sup>. R. Dixon 'Import of Capital and Labour's Policy' Communist Review May 1948 pp134-5 Also see Draft Resolution for 15th Congress National Library of Australia Communist Party of Australia Papers MS3000 box2 folder3.

Labour Party, as set out by Lenin, of building and strengthening Australian capitalism, even though it must lead ultimately to the subordination of Australia to US imperialism. . .'(my emphasis)<sup>69</sup>

The Australian bourgeoisie 'hoped' to exercise the same independence with respect to the USA as it had with Britain.

During the May 1948 Party Congress E. W. Campbell solved the problem in a more satisfactory way, by reverting to an interpretation of Lenin's article similar to those current during the 'Second Imperialist War', i.e. before Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 and, earlier, before the Popular Front period. He said that Communists 'had to stop thinking about the role of the Labor Party in the old terms' because

'The Australian bourgeoisie has long since become an independent bourgeoisie. . . Politically the bourgeoisie has also come of age and the old role of the Labor Party has just about been exhausted. Ratification of the Statute of Westminster put the seal on Australia as a sovereign power.

' . . . The Labor Party, being a bourgeois labor party reflects the tendency of the Australian bourgeoisie in the new world situation to turn to America'.

Campbell argued that an independent Australian capitalism already existed. The ALP had therefore exhausted its old role, as Lenin had predicted. So the Communist Party should lead the defence of Australian independence and the fight for nationalisations to combat the approaching economic crisis and to open the way to a People's Democracy in Australia.<sup>70</sup>

In his reply to the discussion at the Congress Sharkey attempted to dispel the 'confusion' amongst some comrades on the role of the Labor Party. He identified the contradiction between the Communist analysis of the Labor Party as the party of independent Australian capitalism, based on Lenin, and the ALP's encouragement of foreign capital. According to Sharkey the contradiction was only apparent. Taking up Dixon's approach he said that Chifley was attempting to make Australia the centre of the British Empire, in accord with Lenin's analysis (or at least that interpretation of it current in the CPA between 1943 and 1948). But the Labor Party did not have the advantage of marxism-leninist theory and so could not understand that this attempt was in vain. In a conclusion Sharkey said that

'We do not have to change the estimation that Lenin made, that we have always [sic] put forward as the essential historical role of the Labor Party to establish here in Australia an independent capitalism. . . In the conditions of the present day world they are going to get opposite results to what they anticipated'.<sup>71</sup>

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69. Dixon 'Import of Capital and Labour's Policy' op. cit.

70. Campbell was a member of the Central Committee, his speech is in National Library of Australia Communist Party of Australia Papers op. cit. box2 folder4.

71. *ibid.* box1 folder1.

In other words, Australian capitalism and the ALP were no longer progressive forces. This line of argument, which did not appear in the draft resolution, was included in the Congress Resolutions, published as The Way Forward.<sup>72</sup>

Sharkey's reply to the discussion at the Congress and the Congress Resolution nevertheless proved to be the dissonant swan song of the interpretation of 'In Australia' elaborated in Australia Marches On. Campbell's speech to the Congress was published in the July Communist Review.<sup>73</sup> By September Sharkey was writing of the 'failure of the bourgeois-reformist policy of the ALP', in less subjectivist terms than his Congress reply,<sup>74</sup> and by April 1949 maintained that

'The Labour Party which, in the past stood for an independent capitalism, today, because of the desperate situation of world imperialism, pursues a policy that obviously lessens the possibility of Australia standing as an independent State, but draws our country to the level of a province of American imperialism. On all the major questions the Labour Party is in the camp of the bourgeoisie'.<sup>75</sup>

Even good intentions could no longer be conceded to the ALP.

This analysis was apparent in Frank Hardy's Power Without Glory, first published in 1950. Lenin's description of the ALP as a liberal capitalist party was the motto introducing a chapter concerned with the Scullin Government. Later his character Ashton (left Labor MHR Frank Anstey) argued that the Labor Party will soon become a reactionary party and the Communists the progressive party in Australian politics.<sup>76</sup>

This remained the orthodoxy until the Party line shifted to the right during 1951-2.<sup>77</sup> Communist attitudes to the Labor Party and the possibilities of a peaceful transition to socialism softened in the early 1950s. This change was conditioned by two factors. First some recognition of the scale of the defeats suffered by the working class and the CPA from 1949. And secondly, a decline in the importance of foreign Communist parties to the Soviet Union

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72. Australian Communist Party The Way Forward Current Book Distributors, Sydney May 1948 p14.

73. E. W. Campbell 'The Role of the Labor Party' Communist Review July 1948 pp195-6.

74. L. L. Sharkey 'The Collapse of the Labour Government's Economic Policy' Communist Review September 1948 pp267-70.

75. L. L. Sharkey 'The Reformists Serve Reaction' Communist Review April 1949 p112.

76. F. Hardy Power Without Glory Angus and Robertson, Sydney 1982 pp496, 544. The formulation 'liberal capitalist party' does not accord with other English translations of the phrase from 'In Australia', or the Russian all of which refer to the ALP as a 'liberal-bourgeois party'.

77. For an account of the transition to the new, more moderate policies see D. C. Lockwood 'To the Flinders Station: The Communist Party of Australia and the Popular Front' History Honours Thesis Australian National University 1976 pp39-43.

confirmed by the Soviet Union's acquisition of nuclear weapons in 1949. In August 1952 Sharkey affirmed the correctness of Lenin's assessment of the ALP, although the leaders of the Labor Party had now forsaken the course of an independent Australia.<sup>78</sup> Though the interpretation of Lenin's text was still that of the Party's radical phase, Communists had in practice returned to a strategy similar to that of 1943-7. In a 1953 report to the Central Committee, Sharkey closed the theoretical gap by reverting to an earlier, moderate interpretation of 'In Australia'. He affirmed that the ALP's new preamble demonstrated the correctness of Lenin's interpretation which applied to the whole history of the Labor Party.<sup>79</sup> The CPA should encourage the left wing of the ALP to pursue a progressive policy which could be implemented by a progressive Labor Government.

Lenin's text was not a reference point for the Australian Communists during the remainder of the 1950s. There are two probable and compatible explanations. First, the interpretation of a text could only be changed a limited number of times before its use became confusing to the Communist Party's rank and file. This was apparently already a problem at the 1948 Party Congress. More dangerously, frequent reinterpretations could stir up doubts about the cogency of Party theory. A little article when frequently manipulated and stretched can lose its elasticity. Secondly, the growth of the Communist Party during World War II and the upsurge in working class militancy after the War meant that the Party could use Lenin to justify an optimistic perspective. The idea that the Communist Party could supersede the ALP in the not too distant future seemed plausible. In the 1950s the Communist Party was much weaker and more isolated than it had been in the 1940s. The CPA placed a commensurately greater emphasis on the progressive role of 'a real and genuine [ALP] left-wing with whom we can work' in extending the influence of socialist ideas, as opposed to activities of Communists.<sup>80</sup> The distance between the situation of the 1950s and Lenin's prediction that a Socialist Labor Party would displace the ALP was a depressing prospect best left unviewed.

'In Australia' lost its status as a key Communist text during the early 1950s. The Party continued, nevertheless, to adhere to religious 'Marxism-Leninism' until the mid-1960s. The CPA then began to shed its dogmatism. But the Party's theory increasingly moved towards a radical liberal position, rather than returning to a critical and living revolutionary marxist position such as it advocated during the 1920s.<sup>81</sup>

Since the early 1950s Australian references to Lenin's essay have been sparse. It was republished in Australia in 1960. Lloyd Churchward included it in a collection of documents on the early Australian labour movement, largely compiled by Noel Ebbels.<sup>82</sup> Churchward's

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<sup>78</sup>. L. L. Sharkey 'The Labor Party Crisis' Communist Review August 1952 pp227-32.

<sup>79</sup>. L. L. Sharkey 'Report to the Central Committee' Communist Review April 1953 pp105-13.

<sup>80</sup>. *ibid.* p112.

<sup>81</sup>. See T. O'Lincoln Into the Mainstream Stained Wattle, Sydney 1985 for an elaboration of this argument.

<sup>82</sup>. The Australian Labor Movement: Historical Documents selected by R. N. Ebbels, edited by

explanation of liberal laborism, in his introduction to the book, was broadly in line with Lenin's arguments.<sup>83</sup> Subsequently other writers, mainly outside the CPA, also offered marxist critiques of the Labor Party.<sup>84</sup> Some have referred explicitly to Lenin's article.<sup>85</sup>

### **The Nature of the Labor Party**

No theoretical break-through is required to describe the ALP as a party pursuing the interests of capital when a Labor Government is explicitly arguing that the way to improve the circumstances of all Australians is by enhancing the profitability of Australian business. Three quarters of a century on, Lenin's conclusion about the ALP is a commonplace. The real question is 'why does the ALP behave this way?' Lenin's article provided several pointers to an answer. Australian Communists added others, sometimes drawing on the analyses of different writers. These offer useful lines for inquiry into the forces which shape the current Labor Government's behaviour.

While Lenin was clearly overoptimistic in expecting that a socialist labor party would supersede the ALP 'when Australia is finally developed and consolidated as an independent capitalist State', his contention that the ALP 'has to concern itself with developing and strengthening the country' stands. Given a commitment to parliamentarism and acceptance of a capitalist framework for policy making, the options available to a Labor government are severely restricted, particularly during a period of economic crisis.

The relationship between the ALP and trade union officialdom has sometimes been an additional constraint on the actions of Labor governments. On other occasions it has been an asset in implementing economic policies. Lenin highlighted the constitutive role of trade union officials in the Labor Party. The financial and human resources at the disposal of the union bureaucracy and its strong representation at ALP Conferences, by virtue of union affiliation, gives this social layer considerable influence in the Party. The relationship between union officials and the ALP also provides political leaders with leverage over their industrial counterparts. The relationship between union leaders and the Labor Party, along with the tensions between them, which Lenin did not mention, remains a key factor in understanding

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L. G. Churchward, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney 1983 pp243-245.

<sup>83</sup>. *ibid.* pp33-34.

<sup>84</sup>. H. McQueen's A New Britannia Penguin, Ringwood 1970 was particularly influential.

<sup>85</sup>. See P. Conrick A History of the Australian Labor Party SYA 1971 p3; B. Catley and B. McFarlane From Tweedledum to Tweedledee ANZ, Sydney 1974 p4 and their 'Technocratic Laborism -- the Whitlam Government' in E. L. Wheelwright and K. Buckley Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism Volume 1 ANZ 1975 p242. T. Irving and B. Berzins note 'In Australia' as the source of a reference to Lenin's analysis of the ALP in a quotation from Sharkey, 'History and the New Left: Beyond Radicalism' in R. Gordon (ed.) The Australian New Left Heinemann, Melbourne 1970 p70.

the behaviour of Labor governments.

In explaining the hold of 'Liberal-Labor politics' on the English working class Lenin drew attention to 'the exceptionally favourable, monopolist position England occupied in the second half of the nineteenth century'. That is, English economic prosperity was an obstacle to working class radicalisation. Understandably, the CPA did not use this argument between the mid-1930s and the early 1950s, (although it had been advanced during the early 1920s). The experience of the long post war boom of world capitalism gave a new relevance to this explanation. Other things being equal, the generalisation of socialist consciousness is less likely during a long period when capitalism is consistently able to deliver the goods of full employment and rising living standards.<sup>86</sup>

Campbell noted the significance of the Party's preoccupation with parliamentary activity and the role of ALP Parliamentarians, drawing on Childe's cogent presentation.<sup>87</sup> Other Communists also highlighted significant divisions inside the Labor Party (although they never satisfactorily explained the organic relationship between the Labor left and right). Sharkey concluded that the Curtin Labor Government was better able to pursue the interests of capital in general because it was more independent of sectional capitalist interests than the conservative parties.<sup>88</sup>

A sustained marxist history of the Australian Labor Party is yet to be written. But some of the theoretical tools for the project have already been developed. From the 1930s to the early 1950s, the stalinised Communist Party used some of these to justify the Party line ex post facto. In doing so Communists both blunted (tending to discredit marxism in general) and preserved the tools for a period. Their critical edge restored, they may be used to develop insights into the contemporary political phenomenon of Labor in office.

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<sup>86</sup>. Cliff develops this argument in 'The Economic Roots of Reformism' in his Neither Washington nor Moscow Bookmarks, London 1982 pp108-117.

<sup>87</sup>. In How Labour Governs Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 1964. It should be noted that Marx drew attention to 'Parliamentary idiotism' (K. Marx and F. Engels Selected Correspondence Progress Publishers, Moscow 1982 pp308-9) and that W R. Winspear had rehearsed a number of Childe's arguments in an Australian context in his Economic Warfare International Socialist Sydney 1913.

<sup>88</sup>. L. L. Sharkey Australia Marches On Communist Party of Australia 1943 p26.

## Appendix 1

### V. I. Lenin 'In Australia'

The following text is from L. Sharkey Australia Marches On Communist Party of Australia, Sydney 1942 pp6-7.

## Appendix 2

### Bibliographical Note on Lenin's 'In Australia'

'In Australia' did not appear in the first Russian language edition of Lenin's Collected Works, Sobranie Sochinenii Moscow 1922-24 in 20 volumes. It was published in volume 16 of the Russian second and third editions, Sochineniia Moscow 1935 in 30 volumes pp482-483. According to N. Harding Lenin's Political Thought, Volume 2 Theory and Practice in the Socialist Revolution Macmillan, London 1983 p350 this edition is 'virtually a reprint' of the second Russian edition, Sochineniia Moscow 1926-29 in 30 volumes.

Publication of the first English language edition of the Collected Works (by M. Lawrence, London and International Publishers, New York) began during the 1930s but the volume covering the relevant period does not appear to have been issued. Nor does the extensive Selected Works volume 4, 1908-1914 The Years of Reaction and the New Revival Lawrence and Wishart, London 1943 include 'In Australia'.

The article did appear in Lenin on Britain M. Lawrence, London 1934 pp91-93 (also issued in identical form under the imprint International Publishers, New York 1934), under the heading 'Labour Government in Australia'. The original title was also included and Collected Works volume 16 was cited as the source. An Editorial Note, pv, stated 'The translation is from the 3rd edition of the Russian 'Collected Works'' throughout the volume. The translation in Lenin on Britain included:

'And while in England the so-called 'Labour Party' represents an alliance between the socialist trade unions and the extreme opportunist Independent Labour Party, in Australia, the Labour Party represents purely the non-socialist trade unionist workers.' (original emphasis)

In the following publications of 'In Australia', however, the English unions were described as 'non-socialist': the second and third Russian editions, Sochineniia volume 16 Moscow 1935 p483; the fourth Russian edition, Sochineniia Institut Marx-Engels-Lenin, Moscow 1953 p189; the Workers Weekly translation, discussed below; and the English language Collected Works Volume 19 Progress Publishers Moscow 1963 pp216-7, a translation of the fourth Russian edition (a very similar translation from the same Russian edition appeared in V. I. Lenin on Britain Foreign Languages Publishing House Moscow 1960 p168-170). The indications are that the formulation in Lenin on Britain represented a typographical or other mistake, rather than a fabrication. The assertion that the British Labour Party was 'a compromise between the socialist party and the non-socialist trade unions', even if these unions are beginning to turn towards socialism, occurred in 'The Labour Party and a Compromise', dated February 1913, Lenin on Britain p98. If 'In Australia' had been modified for political reasons then why not this formulation too?

It appears that the first publication of 'In Australia' in English took place in Australia. This

highlights the far greater significance attached to the article by the CPA, as compared to the rest of the international Communist movement. 'In Australia' began its Australian career in Labor Review, a Party organ, early in 1933. The relevant edition of Labor Review does not appear to have survived in a public collection. But the publication of Lenin's article was heralded elsewhere. For example, Workers Weekly 24/3/33 p4 proclaimed:

'... "In Australia", in which the genius of Lenin unerringly estimates the make-up of this Party. Every student must have this article'.

Jack Mason (J. B. Miles) referred to 'The recent publication in Australia of Lenin's characterisation of the Labor Party of 1913' Workers Weekly 7/4/33. Mason also quoted a passage from 'In Australia'. This passage was identical to that in the version of 'In Australia' which appeared in Workers Weekly 8/1/35 but was distinct from other translations.

The next Australian publications of 'In Australia' were V. I. Lenin How Lenin Studied Marx and Lenin on the Labour Government in Australia International Bookshop (which was operated by the Communist Party), Melbourne 194? pp8-10; and L. Sharkey Australia Marches On Communist Party of Australia, Sydney 1942 pp6-7. These cited Collected Works volume 16 as the source and were based on the translation in Lenin on Britain. They also used titles which derived from the Lenin on Britain version: 'On the Labor Government in Australia' in How Lenin and 'The Labor Government in Australia' in Australia Marches On.

The versions of the article published in Workers Weekly 18/1/35, How Lenin and Australia Marches On did differ. Apart from an apparently typographical error ('forty-five' rather than 'forty-four' Labor seats in the Lower House before the 1913 elections), some additional paragraph breaks and the use of 'Labor' rather than 'Labour' the How Lenin version was identical to that in Lenin on Britain, also describing the English trade unions as 'socialist'. The Australia Marches On version was the same again, apart from the elimination of a few paragraph breaks, the use of the abbreviations I.L.P. and A.L.P. for Independent Labor Party and Australian Labor Party and the correction of the characterisation of English unions to read 'non-Socialist'.

The translation Workers Weekly was distinct. The differences among these three Australian versions of the article were not, however, substantive, apart from the characterisation of English trade unions. They did not alter the sense of 'In Australia'. Nor have variations in the political interpretation of the article turned on differences in the formulations in any individual version.

'In Australia' subsequently appeared in The Australian Labor Movement: Historical Documents selected by R. N. Ebbels, edited by L. G. Churchward, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney 1983 pp243-245, first published by the Australasian Book Society, Sydney 1960. The translation was by Churchward from the fourth Russian edition of the Collected Works. L. L. Sharkey The Sharkey Writings (collated and edited by L. H. Gould) Quality Press, Sydney 1973? pp183-184 included the Australia Marches On version of 'In Australia' as an appendix.