



Vanguard

Parliament and Elections

- a superficial democracy

Expressing the viewpoint of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist)

For National Independence and Socialism • www.cpaml.org

Parliament and Elections – a superficial democracy

Parliamentary rule is the preferred system of capitalist government in the western developed world, with differences in name and details between countries due to historic differences resulting from colonialism and/or feudalism. The right to vote and stand for election is promoted as the ultimate expression of democracy, but beyond that, the people have no say in how society operates.

This article analyses Australia's British-based parliamentary system and its veneer of democracy; a veneer that creates illusions about parliamentarism as a vehicle for significant change.

We respect and value the views of many people working and hoping for real improvements to people's lives and protection of the environment through parliamentary elections.

However, it is our view that Australia's parliament administers and protects the exploitative and corrupt economic system of capitalism; and that real democracy will grow out of a grass roots mass movement with an independent working class agenda based on the demands and needs of working people.

The British invasion and colonisation of Aboriginal Australia brought with it Australia's present parliamentary system.

A short history of Parliament

The institution of Parliament arose in England from the struggle of the emergent manufacturing and merchant class (the bourgeoisie) against the hereditary rights of the monarchy and the feudal aristocracy. It allowed the new class a share in the running of society, which was reflected in the parliamentary division between "Commons" and "Lords".

Increasingly the hereditary rights of the aristocracy have been eroded, so that many modern parliamentary democracies have completely abolished their "upper house", or reduced it to "review" or ceremonial status. This process has stripped away the legal remnants of feudalism which stood in the way of the expansion of capitalism.

The right to vote and to stand for election to Parliament also provided a means for the differing factions within the bourgeoisie and other sub-classes to resolve their differences by peaceful means, rather than by coups or

civil wars which disrupt the orderly flow of business. It is an institution that arose from developing capitalism and serves to perpetuate the capitalist system.

In Australia, parliamentary democracy emerged out of the struggle against military colonial rule by Britain and the semi-feudal squattocracy that came into being. Parliamentary democracy was also instrumental in uniting the separate colonies into a single nation. However once these tasks were completed and society moved on, the progressive aspects of parliamentary democracy receded and its reactionary features became dominant.

Power in society

The system of parliamentary representation is presented as the pinnacle of democracy. In an historical sense, parliamentary representation has been a forward step from earlier feudal society. In this sense it did represent a development of democracy. But it was limited. The

new democracy was really for that class that had become dominant in society – the bourgeoisie or capitalist class.

Parliamentary democracy enshrines the sacred freedoms of the capitalist class. The freedom to own the means of production, land and resources, to trade freely, to exploit and sack workers, and to enforce their class rule by a legal system ultimately supported by armed forces and other elements of the state apparatus.

Real political power does not reside in parliament. It exists in the economy. Those who own and therefore control the economy have political power, not only because they control the purse strings, but also because they control the manufacture of culture, the body of law and ideas pushed by the media.

The driving seat is occupied by unelected people; the monopoly owners and shareholders of the key industries, the banking and financial executives, and high officials of the public service, police, armed forces and other bureaucrats. These people ensure the continuity and stability of the capitalist system, regardless of elections and election results.

In Australia for example, all the important decisions are made in the boardrooms and banks of monopoly capital and their unelected public service bureaucrats. The Business Council of Australia, the IPA, and the big business think tanks representing the biggest foreign and local corporations dictate their class agenda to the main parliamentary parties. Parliamentary elections merely determine which particular section of the big business ruling class is going to administer capitalism for the time being. For Lenin the role of elections was *“To decide every few years which member of the ruling class is to repress and crush the people through parliament – this is the real essence of bourgeois parliamentarism, not only in parliamentary-constitutional monarchies, but also in the most democratic republics.”* (Lenin: The State and Revolution 1917)

They do this because culture, law and ideas belong to the superstructure that emerges out of the capitalist mode of production. That is, the social class relations of society are based on production for private profit in conditions of private ownership of the means of production and commodities. The dominant culture, body of law and ideas, are stamped with this. Existing institutions needed to maintain society as it is, are also part of the superstructure - the courts, Fair Work Commission,

ABCC, etc.

Parliament is painted with the same brush. It too is part of the superstructure, and can do no other than serve the existing monopoly capitalist economic system. Any action to do away with capitalism through parliamentary elections is completely out of bounds. This is reinforced by the conscious promotion of its best servants, by subtle and more pervasive corruption, and the general atmosphere of parliament that ensures its members are heavily influenced, and co-opted, by the rich and powerful, rather than their supposed constituents.

Australia’s present conditions are characterised by an economy that is not only capitalist in nature, but which has its commanding heights owned and controlled by US interests. Consequently there exists a subservient political relationship that involves Australia in wars for the interests of US imperialism and the ‘deputy sheriff’ role in our region. This subservience is reflected in parliament. Economic and social policies born in the USA are applied in Australia.

The Coalition parties and the Labor Party stand together on this, despite some differences on the detail and strategies. If they do not, they will not be allowed to form government. Imperialism and its collaborators would see to it in many ways, from their use of mass media resources, to judicial and even military intervention. Differences between the two main parliamentary parties are mainly in the method of administering capitalism, including controlling the people. Labor is a more useful tool of deception to control the people. The main parliamentary parties have been aptly dubbed twiddle-dee and twiddle-dum by ordinary people.

As a result, for the parliamentary parties elections become exercises to win the patronage of the real rulers, decisive sections of capital in Australia. At the same time, they project an image that provides them with enough of a social base to gather votes, thus furthering the illusion of democracy. Parliament, the parliamentary parties and the vast majority of parliamentarians do nothing and say nothing about extending genuine democracy to the workplace, to the communities. Quite the opposite. They legislate to restrict, suppress and chain up workers’ struggles and resistance that even slightly pose a threat to the seamless operations of capitalist exploitation (ABCC, WorkChoices, etc.).

Weapons of class rule

Marxists hold that the superstructure of society i.e., the ruling ideology, the political institutions such as parliament and the state apparatus, arise from and reflect the outlook and interests of the dominant class in society. “...*the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.*” (Marx and Engels: The German Ideology 1846)

In feudal society, the superstructure reflected the outlook and interests of the land-owning aristocracy. Under monopoly capitalism – imperialism – it reflects the outlook and interests of the most powerful section of the capitalist class.

This class in Australia consists of competing US, European and Chinese imperialist interests, together with local monopoly capitalist groups, banks, and various “camp followers” of imperialism. US and European imperialism are the dominant section of the ruling monopoly class. Their rule is defended by an apparatus of state power, relying ultimately on armed violence and repression, but for the moment these forces are held mainly in reserve. In periods of deep economic crises and social upheavals and resistance to ruling class attacks the state resorts to open suppression as the main method of rule. Even where elections are relatively free, a result not favourable to the immediate aims of imperialism can be overturned by military or judicial coup. (Remember Chile’s Allende government, the Whitlam sacking, Rudd vs Gillard over the 40% mining superprofits tax, and Bush vs. Gore, etc.?)

Currently deception is the predominant means by which the ruling class maintains its position, and at the centre of this deception is parliamentary democracy. The equating of elections and Parliament to democracy is a fallacy. Its main role now is that of an administrative management or a “talking shop” which enforces the supremacy and rule of capital, but does not control the workings of capitalism. “*The real business of government is done and its continuity ensured by the public service. It is backed by the army, the police, the courts and gaols. Governments come and go in competition with each other for the spoils of office: they call it power but it is a*

very limited idea of power and is based on power in the hands of the monopoly capitalists.” (E. Hill: Revolution and the Australian State 1974)

Even though the parliamentary system allows for the election of new leaders and parties, this does not threaten the ultimate control of the ruling class as such, but merely changes their “management team”. According to Lenin “...*a change of Ministers means very little, for the real work of administration is in the hands of an enormous army of officials. This army, however, is saturated through and through with an anti-democratic spirit, it is connected by thousands and millions of threads with the land-owners and the bourgeoisie and it depends upon them in every way.*” (Lenin: One of the Fundamental Questions of the Revolution 1917)

The truth of all this is plain to see whenever Parliament has a “recess” and the Members of Parliament head off overseas. Does capitalism grind to a halt? Is there economic chaos? Is there a crisis in the legal system? No! It is business as usual, because real power lies elsewhere, such as the boardrooms and business clubs of New York, London, Tokyo, Berlin, Beijing, Hong Kong, Sydney and Melbourne.

In truth, many of us make a slip of the tongue when we talk of this or that party “getting into power” when they win an election. It would be far more accurate to say that a party “wins office”, not “power”. Governments can and do make decisions, but whether by choice or the simple reality of where real power is located, those decisions do not break the boundaries established for the protection of the private ownership of the major means of production, distribution and exchange.

In periods of economic boom capitalism has more room to manoeuvre in granting concessions to workers for small increases to wages, expenditure on social structure, health and education.

Whenever the modern imperialists and their monopoly media talk of “freedom” and “democracy” and “human rights”, what they really mean is unlimited freedom for them to exploit more people, grab more resources and seize control of new markets eg. Iraq, Libya, Syria.

The dead end of Parliament

In providing greater freedom for the bourgeoisie to hire and fire workers and to trade freely, the parliamentary system is also compelled to provide the working class with some limited rights to organise and struggle for their class interests. In this sense, it is preferable to earlier autocratic or feudal institutions, or to open fascist dictatorship. *“A wider, freer and more open form of the class struggle and of class oppression enormously assists the proletariat in its struggle for the abolition of classes in general.”* (Lenin: The State and Revolution 1917)

Because of the illusions created, these issues require careful attention, so that the workers and other oppressed classes see beyond the hypocrisy of bourgeois-imperialist dictatorship.

On the one hand the process of class struggle exposes the limitations of bourgeois freedoms; on the other hand, even limited bourgeois freedoms can assist the process of class struggle. As Ted Hill pointed out: *“The formal freedom of speech, of assembly, of organisation, formal equality before the law; all have value in organising and educating the workers.”* (E.F. Hill: Revolution and the Australian State 1974)

The limited freedoms fought for by organised working class also generate illusions about parliamentary democracy. As long as the struggles of the working class and other oppressed working people are ineffective or do not seriously challenge the capitalist-imperialist domination, these freedoms and rights are not withdrawn by the ruling class. Some concessions and minor reforms are possible within the narrow limits of change set by monopoly capitalism, but are often quickly eroded and never lead to more far-reaching change. On the contrary, Parliament usually provides blatant support for the schemes and policies of imperialism, and invariably waters down any reforms demanded by the people beyond recognition.

The capacity of the parliamentary system to deceive the working people and to divert their struggles into endless debate and legalism, factionalism, and fights over spoils of parliamentary office has its basis in these minor reforms and freedoms. They serve to foster the illusion that fundamental change can be achieved by voting in the right party or particular individuals, and of course, it is fertile ground for opportunists and careerists to ride on the backs of working people.

However, nothing really changes because real economic and political power lies with the imperialists and monopoly capitalists, and is backed by the armed force of the state apparatus – the courts, anti-worker parliamentary outfits (Royal Commissions into Trade Unions), prisons, uniformed and secret police.

Further deception stems from the mere right to vote, to elect and be elected, which is held to be the purest form of democracy, when in reality the wealthy, well educated, and “well connected” people have the greatest power and dominate. Poor and working class people rarely get a look in, and their struggles are often denigrated or ignored. It must always be borne in mind that *“...the method of elections and the form of democracy are one thing, and the class content of the given institution is another thing.”* (Lenin: The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky 1919)

Illusion of democracy

The pro-imperialist ruling class uses both deception and violence to maintain its rule. It uses “democratic” forms of rule such as parliamentary government in periods when the working class is not in a revolutionary mood. Violent means such as open state fascism are used when the workers start to rebel against capitalism.

The ruling class pays a lot of attention to elections and Parliament for two very good reasons. One is that the parliamentary system can to an extent serve to mediate conflicts between different sections of the ruling class. The second is that it promotes the illusion that the people hold political power through the right to vote. As a result, elections and Parliament serve as a safety valve to hose down and divert the class struggle leaving the working class disorganised (2007 Your Rights @ Work).

The ruling class would prefer to use non-violent, deceptive means to enforce the exploitation and maintain its class rule with minimum disruption and social upheavals. Deception is cheaper, more stable and effective in controlling the working class. That is why it is necessary for the monopoly capitalist class to keep the parliamentary system effective in maintaining people’s illusions in Parliament. This may involve moving deck chairs around, restructuring the parliamentary parties from time to time and finding less discredited leaders, or even allowing one or two left candidates get elected.

Deception and hypocrisy are features of parliamentarism, a point that Lenin stressed: “*The bourgeoisie in the old parliamentary countries has mastered superbly the art of hypocrisy and of fooling the people in a thousand ways, passing off bourgeois parliamentarism as ‘democracy in general’ or ‘pure democracy’, and so on, and cunningly concealing the million threads which bind parliament to the stock exchange and the capitalists, utilising a venal, mercenary press and exercising the power of money, the power of capital, in every way.*” (Lenin: Letter to Sylvia Pankhurst 1919)

When we hear or see media reports on the comments and actions of politicians at election time, trivia is promoted. Overall, one can see a definite detachment from the everyday concerns of ordinary people. For the most part, parliamentary debates are not on the basis of championing the concerns of the people, but on the basis of personalities and mud-slinging at parliamentary opponents and diversion from real and critical issues to ordinary people’s lives and livelihood.

Sure, Communist and other progressive candidates are allowed to stand for office, but the ruling class has an overwhelming monopoly on information and propaganda, and generally ignores, ridicules or slanders anti-capitalist opinions. Hill pointed this out by noting that: “*This choice [the choice between candidates] occurs in an atmosphere thoroughly permeated with capitalist ideas. Newspapers, radio, television, are all in the hands of the capitalist class.*” (E.F. Hill: Revolution and the Australian State 1974)

Although elections and what goes on in Parliament have to be taken into account, the politics of real everyday life that exists outside Parliament is far more important. It is here in workplaces and communities where people strive to exist and fight together for a better life together that the shoots of real people’s democracy grow.

An independent working class agenda

In Australia’s capitalist society the working class and all working people have common needs – secure employment, decent wages and working conditions, affordable housing, quality and free healthcare and education and reliable transport, and the right to organise collectively in unions, are critical issues for workers, their families and their communities.

These are the common problems that workers want resolved, regardless of parliamentary election promises, regardless of party factions and regardless of union membership or affiliation. They are the starting point for practical demands and day to day struggles that are both economic and political, and around which the working class and trade unions can unite and mobilise.

These issues are highlighted even more during a federal election campaign when working people sift the competing promises. But after each election, regardless of which parliamentary party wins office, workers are soon disappointed and angry, as the transfer of wealth from the working class to the rich continues as before. The lesson of the history of modern capitalism is one of the working class winning a few reforms and concessions and then seeing any gains watered down and eventually taken back.

The working people should be the ones setting our own agenda, not the big business interests. This really means the building of a powerful mass movement demanding fundamental change, independent of the parliamentary parties. In the process, workers can find out who’s really on their side and who’s out to serve the interest of capital.

This is a working class agenda, independent of the parliamentary scrapping for the perks of office. It’s an agenda of people’s struggles that transcends parliamentary parties and marginal seats campaigns. An independent working class agenda relies on the unity and mobilisation of all working people (workers, farmers, students) above allegiances to parliamentary parties.

The wet blanket of parliamentarism

The ideology of parliamentarism seeks to divert all struggles into mindless and dumbing down debates within the institution of parliament; an institution which arose from early capitalism and which reflects the ruling class interest in preserving the status quo. It really is a wet blanket which smothers the fires of struggle by restricting and confining people’s struggles and issues to narrow legalistic “acceptable” limits.

Between elections, the people have no involvement whatsoever. At best they may form mass organisations, trade unions, etc. to seek reforms or changes to

government policy. There are no guaranteed human rights in the Constitution and in fact peoples' rights are permanently undermined and threatened by the Crimes Act, new anti-worker industrial laws and "anti-terror" measures.

The system only permits a limited amount of lobbying and protesting. This builds the illusion of 'democratic rights', the illusion that dissenting views can freely compete. It is a useful safety valve for the irreconcilable contradictions and class struggle within the system. *"The capitalist class seeks to adapt any and every mass organisation to itself. It permits mass organisations to exist because thereby it can if it acts wisely direct opposition into harmless channels..."* (CPA M-L: More on Ideological Questions)

As the saying goes, 'talk is cheap', but as soon as mass organisations take action to actually force change, or to resist or obstruct government policy, they are met with legal and forceful repression by the capitalist state eg. coal seam gas, strikes, union pickets.

Today's anti-worker and so-called anti-terrorist laws clearly prove that this kind of democracy can be given and taken away at whim. It all depends on the perceived interests of those who actually exercise political power. Where is the democracy that empowers a community running their affairs? Where is the democracy in which the great majority runs the economy and society, not in words, but in action?

When it comes to the real politics of everyday life, there is very little democracy. Through their mouthpieces, the Business Council of Australia, the IPA, the Productivity Commission, the Murdoch media monopoly, the Reserve Bank and other foreign banks, big business develop policies and hand them over to politicians and the senior public service to implement. The people are left out. Surely democracy should involve a method of mass participation in both policy decisions and their implementation.

The Labor Party – part of the capitalist system

For the institution of Parliament to have any authority, there needs to be an illusion of choice of political parties and an opposition to the incumbent. In Australia, the role of "official opposition" has often fallen to the

Labor Party, which puts itself forward as the reformist alternative.

In practice, however, the history of the Labor Party has been one of mainly giving lip-service to the aspirations of the working class while caving in to the demands of corporate monopoly capital. A recent example is caving in to mining corporations to abandon the 40% mining super profits tax. Hill was right when he said that: *"On no single issue does (Labor) have an unequivocal attitude. It compromises on almost everything. When it does propose something progressive it then begins to retreat in the face of opposition. It fears the masses and does not seek to rely on them."* (E. F. Hill: The Labor Party? 1974)

Although many people are cynical about Parliament and often feel betrayed and disillusioned with the Labor Party, they still maintain some hope that Labor will improve their lot with minor reforms and better regulation of the capitalist system. The deceptive role of the Labor Party is the most effective means of diverting and confining class struggle to the safe arena of parliamentary debate. The 2007 Your Rights at Work campaign was a powerful grass roots people's movement used by Labor to get elected into government. Once elected, the Rudd Labor government with the assistance of sections of union leadership, disbanded the mass movement and diverted the focus and enthusiasm into the safety of parliament.

The Labor Party is a party that accepts the permanence of the capitalist system and imperialist domination and works entirely within the system. The Labor Party is a particularly important part of the deception of Parliament because of the illusion that it is a genuine workers' party, despite all evidence to the contrary.

This does not alter the fact that there are many members and supporters of the Labor Party who genuinely want to see change in Australian society, and regard the Labor Party as the main vehicle for change. Harsh experience and cruel disappointment is more likely to shift their thinking than impatient scorn and ridicule.

Many workers and working people are cynical; they feel betrayed and used by the Labor Party, yet still maintain some hope, some faith that the Labor Party will implement its reformist promises and protect the interest of the people against harsh attacks by monopoly capital. In spite of the evidence of history which clearly shows

the Labor Party as being tied to foreign imperialism, many continue to believe that Labor represents their interests and that the only realistic avenue for change is via parliamentary election of the Labor Party.

(This theme is hammered by the Labor Party machine and its media connections. More than any other factor, the deceptive role of the Labor Party is the most effective means of diverting and confining class struggle into the safe arena of parliamentary debate.)

This is nothing new, as Lenin observed, “*The opportunists of present-day Social-Democracy accepted the political forms of the parliamentary democratic state as the limit which should not be overstepped; they battered their foreheads praying before this “model” and denounced as anarchism all desire to smash these forms.*” (Lenin: *The State and Revolution* 1917)

The Labor Party long ago junked any ideas of “socialisation” or “nationalisation” of key industries. At both state and federal levels it has embraced imperialist monopoly capital’s policies of privatisation of government services and resources, along with pandering to multinational investment through public-private partnerships.

At best it offers mild, temporary reforms and compromises which are designed to take the heat off imperialism and make the capitalist system work. Even this “imperialism with a human face” is generally not enough for the ruling class, and they only give Labor a go when there are increasing signs of social discontent by working people, and the other mob is totally discredited.

A key element in maintaining the capacity of the Labor Party to divert struggles into parliamentarism is the role of the many “Left” politicians, some trade union officials and party bureaucrats who have become enmeshed in the system and have some “importance” within it. For the most part, they are sincere and hard-working people, but they are also doomed to failure if they continue to dismiss the notion of mass struggle and action outside of parliament and continue to rely on “favours” and “faction deals” instead of putting their faith in the people. Hill: “*The ‘socialism’ of the Labor Party is deception designed to gather up the socialist sentiments of the Australian workers and divert them into an acceptance of capitalism.*” (E. Hill: *Revolution and the Australian State* 1974)

It is not a question of sincerity or commitment. Parliamentarism is an ideological issue; until its stranglehold is broken and people find ways to progress their struggles outside of the current legalistic confines, struggles will continue to founder, be diverted, and make only temporary gains. Parliamentary politics divides working people and weakens the mass movement.

Lenin recognised the necessity of acting in accordance with the facts on this issue, and led the Russian working class out of the swamp of parliamentarism: “*You must not sink to the level of the masses, to the level of the backward strata of the class. That is incontestable. You must tell them the bitter truth. You must call their bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices – prejudices. But at the same time you must soberly follow the actual state of class consciousness and preparedness of the whole class (not only of its Communist vanguard), of all the toiling masses (not only of their advanced elements).*” (Lenin: *Left-Wing Communism, an infantile disorder* 1920)

Greens and Independents

Many voters are turning away from the Liberal-Labor merry-go-round. The Greens and independents attract more primary votes than ever before. A positive aspect of this reflects the growing cynicism of people with the traditional bourgeois parties, and the irrelevance of parliament to improving their lot.

It is all because people sense that real power in Australia is exercised by those who own key sectors of the economy, who dominate the world markets, who control the major financial resources. In other words, the US, European and other foreign multinationals who pursue their ‘globalisation’ agenda as they take over Australian industries and wipe out Australian jobs. Neither Liberal nor Labor make any challenge to this, in fact both these parties promote and facilitate it.

However, the move towards the smaller parliamentary parties and progressive independents is the reinforcing of illusions about bourgeois democracy. Any fantasy that capitalism/imperialism can be regulated or reformed through parliamentary legislation is particularly dangerous, as it diverts and chokes off the struggle against imperialist domination. While they more strongly reflect the desire of the people for change in society, especially on particular issues, it creates an

illusion that class struggle can be peacefully reconciled, that capitalism can be reformed, and that imperialism does not even exist! Reformism always fudges the issues of political power and the role of the state as an instrument of class rule.

They effectively enshrine parliamentarism even though their most active supporters come from mass struggles outside of Parliament. They present neither threat nor challenge to the imperialists who are content to see struggles bogged down and diverted into parliamentary haggling, or given lip-service in Parliament. The main usefulness of Independents and Greens is their capacity to give voice to many concerns and mobilise people outside parliament.

Working class democracy

The mode of production and superstructure also gives rise to opposing ideology. This is the outlook of the working class, which differs in that it carries recognition of the importance of its role in the mode of production, a distrust of Parliament and politicians, and a focus on practical needs. Its most advanced detachments recognise that the present capitalist order needs to be ended and a new society established.

Working class ideology is based on the contradiction in production between the private ownership of the means of production and the product, and the socialised nature of work. Socialised work means that workers are compelled to act cooperatively. Yet they see the fruits of their common labour expropriated from them by capital. In this there is recognition of opposing class interests.

If this reality is accepted, so too must the conclusion that the most important political task is to work towards building a new movement for democracy from below. In contrast to the false and devious democracy of parliamentarism, Communists stand for true democracy where people are not merely consulted, but most importantly participate in making and implementing decisions at all levels of society – participatory democracy.

If there was real democracy in Australia, the working people (workers, farmers and small producers) would own and control Australia's industries and resources, using them in a rational manner to provide security of working people's livelihoods, wipe out poverty

and roll back environmental damage. *"The way out of parliamentarism is not, of course, the abolition of representative institutions and the electoral principle, but the conversion of the representative institutions from talking shops into 'working' bodies."* (Lenin: The State and Revolution 1917)

Real democracy would require the nationalisation of key industries and utilities, and the expulsion of many multinational companies.

It would require massive investment into clean energy and the rehabilitation of Australia's agricultural land, river systems and coastal waters.

It would require genuine acts of reconciliation through formal Treaties with the indigenous people, and acceptance of land rights.

It would require the dismantling of aggressive US military bases, an independent and peaceful foreign policy and withdrawing from the US-Australia military alliance.

It would require a monumental change in the way Australia is run. It would require revolutionary struggle against the vested interests that prosper from the status quo.

Real democracy would be defended in the first place by an informed and well-educated populace. This would be backed by a community-based peoples' army of soldier-workers rather than the current elite extension of the US war machine.

It would establish the material and social conditions for socialism: *"Our definition of socialism means people's ownership of the means of production, production for use and not for profit and proletarian dictatorship to enforce it. The Labor Party, in its many years aggregate in office in Australia, has never taken one step towards people's ownership; on the contrary it has always protected and advanced monopoly ownership."* (E. Hill: Revolution and the Australian State 1974)

Ideas of fundamental change confront this very question of political power. Communists strive to assist the people in struggle for a genuine alternative to the bog of reformism, while taking account of their general understanding and experience.

To remove obstacles in the way, it is necessary to free Australia from the dominance of US imperialism. To do this requires uniting the great majority to break the hold of US imperialism over the economic base and to develop a culture and identity of Australia's working people, laws and ideas that serve the extension of real democracy into all spheres of life – an independent socialist republic.

Historical Note:

The Workers and Peasants Soviets of Lenin's time were not only highly democratic grass-roots organisations; they also exercised both decision-making and administrative functions. Their development extended the concept of democracy beyond "representation" to actual participation in running society.

The Paris Commune (discussed in detail in Karl Marx's The Civil War in France) was a short-lived example of the working class organised as the ruling class. It was a tentative step towards a new type of democracy – proletarian democracy. This is democracy for the vast majority of the people rather than for the rich, and the exclusion from democracy of the exploiters and oppressors of the people.

The officials of the Commune were all elected by the masses, subject to recall at any time and were paid only the same as ordinary workmen. Contrast this to our current politicians with their high salaries, numerous perks and fat superannuation payouts! The failure of the Paris Commune was that the old state apparatus was not abolished and replaced by a state apparatus of a completely new kind, one that actually enforces the dictatorship of the majority over the minority of former exploiters.

The Paris Commune was a fleeting example of the working class organised as the ruling class. It was a tentative step towards a new type of democracy – proletarian democracy. This is democracy for the vast majority of working people rather than for the rich, and the exclusion from democracy of the exploiters and oppressors of the people. This is real democracy; the sort of democracy that the election of a Labor Government can never bring to Australia.

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