

Australian Communist



JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA (MARXIST-LENINIST)
Special Edition, December 2020 | cpaml.org | info@cpaml.org



1920-2020

**YEARS
OF THE**

**AUSTRALIAN
COMMUNIST
MOVEMENT**



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

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

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

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

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

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

Editors, December 2020



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100 Years of the Australian Communist Movement

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welcome!**



Warmly Welcome the Centenary of the Communist Movement in Australia

by CPA (M-L) Central Committee

This statement was first published on January 1, 2020.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

trace their history back to the original Communist Party. There are differences on the revolutionary working class organisation, the bourgeois state, parliamentarism, imperialism, mass work and the application of Marxism-Leninism to Australia's

local conditions. Without ignoring these differences, our Party seeks mutual agreement that a revolutionary movement must exist to promote the independent class interests of the workers. We seek mutual rejection of the defeatist notion that socialism has been a failed experiment. We seek agreement with the view that the main class contradictions and class struggle between labour and capital, and the necessity of proletarian led revolution to resolve those contradictions in accordance with the teachings of Marx and Engels, and further elaborated by Lenin, have not disappeared, but are sharper than ever today.

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

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

Fight for revolutionary anti-imperialist independence and socialism!

Celebrate 100 years of the Communist movement in Australia!

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The Communist Movement in Australia – 100 years

by Alice M.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

The birth of Australia's communist movement

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

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

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

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

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

Depression, Fascism and War

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

1950-1951 Communist Party Dissolution Bill

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



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

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

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



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

1956 - Differences in the Communist movement

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

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

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

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

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

1964 – A new direction

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

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



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

Australian conditions

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

Trade Unions

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

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

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

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

Parliamentarism

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



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

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

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

Methods of work – mass work

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

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

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

The CPA (M-L) moved away from this left sectarian echo chamber organisation. Instead members were urged to integrate with ordinary people in workplaces and communities, learning from the people ways to connect the longer-term

goals of socialism to the immediate day to day struggles of the people, without abandoning the principles of communism and succumbing to the all-pervasive and surrounding pressures of capitalist ideology and culture. It required a change in practice and attitude by communists towards ordinary people as the teachers of communists, instead of communists being

arrogant know-alls.

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

Revolutionary Organisation

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

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

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

Revolutionary service to the people

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

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

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

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

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



Comrade Ted Bull addresses workers

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



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

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

Mass work

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



and the environment, fighting for public education.

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Fighting for the future

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Comrade John Cummins dedicated his life to serving working people



Talk on the Centenary of the Communist Movement in Australia

by *Michael Williss*

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

Comrades and friends,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Communication was open and respectful.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So, what are the lessons for the future?

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Long live the Communist movement in Australia!



Reflections from Working in the Car Industry in South Australia

by Ned K.

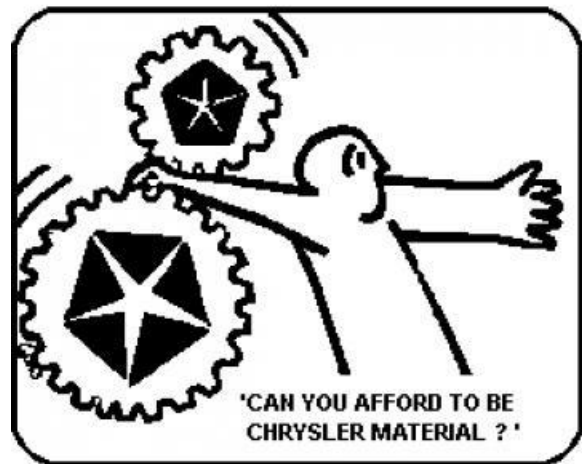
The factories of the multinational car companies were one area where CPA (M-L) supporters played a significant role in building rank and file organisation and class struggle trade unionism, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. This article is a reflection by one such worker on his experiences at that time.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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The future is bright for the working class in Australia.



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

Part 1: Bert and Syd

by Louisa L.

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

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

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

Comintern, the international organisation of communist parties run by the Soviet Party, had the final say in who ruled the roost in the Australian Party, even though communications had been very patchy in the early years.

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

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



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

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



events which had each side in Australia hurling insults and, in front-line industrial unions, even violence.

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

The greatest strength of these parties was in Sydney.

Painting targets

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

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

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

This is despite the contending parties or groups still bearing the names "communist", "socialist" or "left" largely burying the hatchet in the 1980s at such events as the 1989 Fightback Conference in Melbourne, which saw presentations from almost all of those parties. In Sydney it led to direct cooperation against nationwide attacks on the working class.

Bert

Only a small section of our members have made their membership fully public. There were times

in the old party when not revealing membership was also important. Witness Bert Chandler.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cold war, hot water

The Cold War poured heat on dissidents. In 1953 Bert was one of three men charged with sedition, under Section 24D of the Commonwealth Crimes Act, after raids on suburban homes and the Communist Party's offices.

The Crown Prosecutor raged, quoting this sentence, "The monarchy is a useful weapon to protect the system, to stifle class-consciousness,



foster class-collaboration, and paralyse working-class action for social change.” (*Illawarra Daily Mercury*, Thursday 20 Aug 1953) Shock horror!

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

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

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

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

Syd

During the anti-Japanese war, the Party developed close links and members among the Sydney Chinese community. These links were cemented during the 1938 *Dalfram* struggle at Port Kembla, when then Attorney General and later Prime Minister Bob Menzies earned the nickname “Pig Iron Bob” for trying to force waterside workers to load pig iron bound for Japan.

It followed the 1938 massacre of up to 300,000 thousand Chinese people by invading Japanese

troops in Nanjing. Workers also warned our pig iron could return as bombs.

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

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

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

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

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

Towards the future

A larger group operated, under similar conditions to the waterfront, in the building industry, especially in the Builders Labourers Federation (BLF). They formed the bulk of [the group](#) that supported the takeover of the NSW BLF by the



Federal organisation, with support from every state organisation.

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

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

When he became NSW BLF President in 1974 [Johnny McNamara](#) remained a rank and filer. Others also remained on the job. Their leadership

came from listening to and learning from their workmates.

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

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

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

Through the 80s and early 90s, as organisers were arrested day after day, the Building Workers Industrial union, dominated by the Socialist Party of Australia, poached BLF members. (There was discontent within SPA about this and eventually a group led by BWIU leader Pat Clancy left the SPA.)

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

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



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

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

by Louisa L.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Young university students are prone to adventurism. The party's militancy drew in young



People march against the Vietnam War in Sydney 1971



supporters who, like this writer from 1975, often lacked working class discipline. The actions that grew from this are covered in numerous books and articles. NSW based pieces almost always come down one-sidedly condemning “Maoist” adventurism.

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

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

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

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

Things were heating up, on many fronts.

The State and Revolution

The Vietnam War and the Moratoriums educated many people about the ruthlessness of the state overseas, and locally where police removed identifying numbers before committing deliberate organised violence.

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

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

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

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

An East Wind

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

Bobby Da Fong, not of Chinese heritage was nicknamed for his summer and winter thongs,



made a reluctant living as a tattooist, often persuading potential customers against getting one. His heart was with the revolution and hour upon hour he slogged in the East Wind Bookshop, with another comrade who gave up PhD study (pre fee-free university courses, a rare event for the son of Jewish refugees) to devote himself to the movement against war in Vietnam. Both set up openly Marxist-Leninist stalls, as well as supporting WSA and the Moratoriums outside factories and at universities.

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

This was unlike many of us young people, focused on a revolution or coup round the corner,

studying the Marxist classics and Australia, but also caught up with frenetic activity, too often thinking we knew it all.

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

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



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

³ *Australia's Revolution: The Struggle for a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party*, E.F Hill:
<https://www.efhill.com/s/Australias-Revolution-On-the-Struggle-for-a-Marxist-Leninist-Communist-Party.pdf>



ASIO & Co

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

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

Nazis and their mates preferred to visit when only an old and frail Bert or, in later years a youngish

female, were alone. Bravery is not their strong suite. They had a particular hatred for "Maoists" who, when they gathered to jeer at one May Day parade (unlike those on the ALP-dominated podium) quietly made sure they never had the gall to turn up again.

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

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

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

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



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

Part 3: Whitlam, Uncle Sam, and the People

by Louisa L.

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

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

Whitlam

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

CIA

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

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

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

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

NSW University was the most working class university and the one where our supporters were strongest. When Whitlam, the toppled hero, visited early in 1976 he was met with the two questions he was due to answer the very day he was sacked, "What's at Pine Gap?" and "Is Richard Stallings a CIA agent?" Whitlam refused

to answer the first, and in fact may not have known. While Pine Gap paraded as a joint military base, it has always been US run for a peppercorn rent, today outsourced to US war corporations like Raytheon Industries. Whitlam answered the second affirmatively, about Stallings, who rented his Canberra home from his good mate Doug Anthony, then Country Party leader.

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

Sir John

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

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

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

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



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

Part 4: No Surrender

by Louisa L.

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

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

The AAA's online 2020 gala [honours](#) Kathy Warden CEO and President of war corporation Northrop Grumman.

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

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

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

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

'Old King Rockefeller bagged all our best resources

Then he sent to CIA to muster up his forces

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Work

All this time, other members and supporters continued their daily efforts. On the buses and railways, in hospitals and schools, in factories and academia and the public service, on wharves and driving trucks, their work was quieter, longer-term, deeper, slower and powerful.

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

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

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

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

Errors

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



successor, Australian Independence Movement, folded.

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

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

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

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

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

Industry or community

From the early 80s through to the late 90s, the Party's chairperson, Bruce Cornwall, and other members and supporters were instrumental in

the Peace Squadron which, alongside Paddlers for Peace took to Sydney Harbour each time US warships sailed in. The focus on the enemy was sharp. In 1983, the NSW Government banned nuclear powered ships.

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

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

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

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

Community struggles were, and continue to be, numerous and diverse, including small ones that won against offshore sandmining, or gaining East Timorese families refugee status, against hospital



closures in Sydney and regional NSW or rapacious overdevelopment. There are too many to list.

No one will do it for you

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

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

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

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

We work quietly in numerous community struggles, building webs of connection despite

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

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

After 100 years of struggle for the classless society of communism in Australia, we are all

better placed to move forward, not because we have made no mistakes, but because we accept their inevitability, analysing and learning from them, enriched by them, as we are by what we have done well.

If you don't write your own history, no one will do it for you. So, these four articles focus on the role of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) in Sydney and in NSW. But we have to be truthful. We are not the only ones struggling for a better future. There is no sense in point scoring or mud-

slinging, to distinguish this or that group from the other. The Peoples of this continent and its islands need leadership. They want a unified and strong response to the destruction, by war or climate change or mounting attacks under Covid's cover. It is the people versus imperialism.

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

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

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





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December 2020