

# Australian Communist



JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA (MARXIST-LENINIST)  
Summer 2021 | cpaml.org | info@cpaml.org

Capitalism in Australian Agriculture

Capitalism on Trial at the COP26 Climate Conference

The Work of Communists in the Unions

and more...





**“Conditions are changing all the time, and to adapt one’s thinking to the new conditions, one must study. Even those who have a better grasp of Marxism and are comparatively firm in their proletarian stand have to go on studying, have to absorb what is new and study new problems.”**

— Mao Zedong, *Speech at the Chinese Communist Party’s National Conference on Propaganda Work (March 12, 1957)*

You can never step in to the same river twice, as the saying goes. Everything is constantly in motion; everything is constantly changing. Sometimes change is excruciatingly slow and unperceivable, other times it is so rapid we fail to keep apace of it. What was correct today, may not be tomorrow. What was applicable in one time and place, may not be in another.

For us Communists, what does this mean? It means we must constantly be learning, constantly be studying the changing conditions, constantly reviewing our analyses and our practice for what is correct and corresponds to the actually existing conditions, and what does not.

There have been a lot of changes in the conditions in Australia over the years. The last two years of the global COVID pandemic has seemingly shaken up the world and turned it on its head. Yet, fundamental facts remain that shape and affect those changes. Society remains divided into classes; the contradictions of capitalist-imperialism continue to deepen and manifest in various ways.

This edition of *Australian Communist* brings together a number of recently written articles with a focus on analysis of Australia and its current conditions. ‘Capitalism in Australian Agriculture’ scans the national landscape to provide some insights into the current state of farming and agriculture in Australia. It is an important step in the direction of a renewed investigation and updated class analysis of all Australian society. It is an ongoing task of the Party, and much work remains to be done.

‘Capitalism on Trial at the COP26’ is the collective effort of a Party Study Group, the basic organisational unit of the Party, and is a timely and in-depth look at the reasons why Australia is failing to address climate change and increasingly becoming a climate pariah on the world stage. Likewise, ‘The Scandal of Aged Care in Australia’ is the work of a Party Study Group and offers some recent analysis of developments in that sector.

‘The Railways and Capitalism’ highlights some of the major changes in the Australian rail industry over the years. ‘The Work of Communists in the Unions’ offers some self-criticism on historical mistakes made by the Party in its work in the unions in years gone by and how they might be avoided in the future. While, Louisa L.’s long article ‘Covid Exposed Our Party’s Weaknesses’ is an honest appraisal of the last two years of the Party’s analysis and work in the rapidly changing conditions of Australia’s response to the global pandemic.

The Book Review takes a look at Emma Shortis’s *Our Exceptional Friend*, a welcome though somewhat insufficient addition to the growing body of anti-US Australia alliance literature, as US imperialism beats its war drums ever louder.

Lastly, From the Archives offers a fascinating report by founding Party Chairperson Ted Hill that reveals much about his leadership of the Party ideologically, politically and organisationally and contains many gems of wisdom that younger Communists today will find valuable. Perhaps most important amongst them is his constant reminder of the need to study Marxism-Leninism, not as a dogma, but in order to truly integrate its universal truths with the concrete conditions of Australian reality as a guide for the revolutionary action of the Australian working class and the people. A lot of work remains to be done.

We offer this edition of *Australian Communist* as a modest contribution towards that most mammoth of tasks. We hope all our readers, both Party members and non-members, will find it useful and interesting.

Editors, December 2021



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# Capitalism in Australian Agriculture

by **Duncan B.**

**A**s part of our study of the Australian economy, we need to look at agriculture in Australia. Agriculture does not hold the important place it once did in the Australian economy, contributing 1.9% to the GDP and contributing \$40 billion in export income, about 15% of the total. Approximately 70% of Australia's agricultural produce is exported, particularly beef, sheep and grains.

Agriculture currently employs about 2.6% of the workforce compared with 5.2% in 1996, 15% in 1954 and 28% in 1933.

According to the ABS, there were 87,800 agricultural businesses in Australia in 2019-2020, down 2% from the previous year. This compares with 173,650 in 1976-7, 128,700 in 1986-7 and 104,270 in 1998. In 2019-20 there were 377 million hectares of agricultural land in Australia, down 2% from the previous year.

Agriculture started in Australia as a necessity to ensure the survival of the new penal colony. Convicts were set to work on government farms to raise crops to supplement the supplies sent from England.

Small farms came into existence on land granted by the Government to retired soldiers and marines and were worked by convict labour. They existed alongside the government farms until eventually, the government farms were discontinued. After 1793, the Government started granting large areas of land to members of the officer caste. John Macarthur, for example, received a grant of 5,000 acres on which he bred Merino sheep.

During the nineteenth century, squatters moved out into New South Wales and Victoria, sometimes violently dispossessing the Indigenous inhabitants who had lived in Australia for about 60,000 years. In that time, they had lived very well, hunting game, fishing and gathering yams and many other vegetables,

fruits, seeds and nuts. They practised methods both spiritual and practical to ensure the continuation of their food supply and lived in harmony with the land.

(Currently there is some controversy over this question. Peter Sutton and Keryn Walshe in their book *Farmers or Hunter-Gatherers? The Dark Emu Debate* are disputing claims made by Bruce Pascoe in his book *Dark Emu* about how Indigenous people lived before colonisation.)

From the 1860s, Government policy was to reduce the size of large landholdings to allow more small landholders to go on the land. After both World Wars, Soldier-Settler schemes put more small farmers on the land.

## The Capitalist Mode of Agriculture

In Chapter 37 of Volume III of *Capital*, Marx described the capitalist mode of agriculture in these terms:

The actual tillers of the soil are wage-labourers employed by a capitalist, the capitalist farmer who is engaged in agriculture merely as a particular field of exploitation for capital, as investment for his capital in a particular sphere of production. This capitalist farmer pays the landowner, the owner of the land exploited by him, a sum of money at definite periods fixed by contract, for instance, annually... for the right to invest his capital in this specific sphere of production. This sum of money is called ground-rent, no matter whether it is paid for agricultural land, building lots, fishing grounds or forests, etc. It is paid for the entire time for which the landowner has contracted to rent his land to the capitalist farmer. Ground-rent, therefore, is here that form in which property in land is realises economically, that is, produces value. Here, then, we have all three classes—wage-labourers, industrial



capitalists, and landowners constituting together, and in their mutual opposition, the framework of modern society.

This system of agriculture described by Marx is what prevailed in Britain in the mid-1860s when he was writing *Capital*. It arose because of the monopoly of landownership by a class of landed gentry. Even today in Britain a group of landowners which includes dukes, earls, viscounts, barons and other titled parasites own 13 million acres of the 37 million acres which comprise England and Wales. Eleven hundred wealthy landowners control almost half of Scotland's 20 million acres.<sup>1</sup>

The English system of agriculture described by Marx did not happen in Australia because of Australia's development as a colony with a seemingly unlimited supply of land.

On the fateful day of 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1788, when Governor Philip raised the Union Jack at Sydney Cove, all land in Australia became Crown Land, the property of the British monarch. Today in Australia, all land which is not owned freehold or under any other form of tenure is still Crown land, which comprises about 23% of Australia's land.

Land for farming could be obtained by purchasing Crown land from the Government or by "squatting." Because there is no **private** monopoly of land ownership in Australia, there is limited scope for the creation of absolute ground-rent as described by Marx in the quote above.

Instead, in Australia we have the situation described by Marx in Chapter 45 of Volume III of *Capital*:

If we consider the cases in a country with capitalist production, where the investment of capital in the land can take place without payment of rent, we shall find that they are all based on a de facto abolition of landed property, if not also the legal abolition; this, however, can only take place under very specific circumstances which are by their very nature accidental.

First: When the landlord is himself a capitalist, or the capitalist is himself a landlord. In this case he may *himself manage* his land as soon as market-price has

risen sufficiently to get

... the price of production, that is, replacement of capital plus average profit. But why? Because for him landed property does not constitute an obstacle to the investment of capital. He can treat his land simply as an element of Nature and therefore be guided solely by considerations of

expansion of his capital, by capitalist considerations. Such cases occur in practice, but only as exceptions. Just as capitalist cultivation of the soil presupposes the separation of functioning capital from landed property, so does it as a rule exclude self-management of landed property. It is immediately evident that this case is a purely accidental one.

While Marx described this situation as accidental and an exception, in Australia the exception is the general rule. The majority of Australian farmers combine the role of landowner, capitalist and labourer.

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<sup>1</sup> Winchester, Simon. *Land: How the Hunger For Ownership Shaped the Modern World*, William Collins, 2021, p.159.



A similar situation occurred in the west of the United States, where land was freely available to small settlers, either by Government grants or by purchase. (Lenin discusses this in his work *Data on the Development of Capitalism in Agriculture*.) Here also there was little scope for the development of absolute ground-rent.

### Differential Rent

Marx analysed what he called differential rent in Chapters 38-44 in Volume III of *Capital*. Differential rent is the extra profit derived from land which is more fertile and/or more favourably located compared to the worst land under cultivation.

It is easy to see that a farmer with better quality land closer to transport will enjoy an advantage over a farmer with land which is poorer or more remote, and will gain a higher profit from his produce.

As there is no landlord class to syphon off this differential rent it is retained by the farmer in his role as his own landlord.

### Types of Farming in Australia

#### 1. Family Farms

The majority of farms in Australia are farms run by an individual farmer using his own labour and that of his family. Hired labourers may also be used. Seasonal labour may be used on some farms in industries such as fruit growing and horticulture. Contractors may be used at times such as shearing and harvesting. Family farms can range from small farms to massive enterprises.

Farmers may enter into contracts with agribusiness firms such as processors or supermarkets to supply meat, fruit and vegetables or milk.

Since 2019, Coles has been sourcing milk directly from farmers in VIC, NSW and SA. They are expanding this to Tasmania and WA. This eliminates the direct involvement of dairy processing companies in dealing with farmers. The dairy processors are reduced to being contractors for Coles.

Farmers often raise chickens or pigs under contracts to processors. The contract farmer becomes little more than a labourer working for agribusiness.

Family farms still comprise well over 90% of farms in Australia, but more farms are being absorbed by bigger players, both local and foreign owned. According to statistics from the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, middle-sized farms are the ones feeling the squeeze.

Over the last 40 years, large farms (defined as those with receipts above \$1 million per year in real terms), have grown from about 3% to 14% of the number of farms. Their share of total output value has increased from 25% to about 59%. Small farms, (defined as farms with receipts less than \$200,000), and middle-sized farms, (defined as having receipts between \$200,000 and \$1 million) both lost out considerably. Small farms went from about 15% to about 10%. Middle sized farms went from about 50% to about 30%.

In terms of area operated, over the same period, small farms increased slightly from about 6% to 11%, while large sized farms increased from about 45% to about 60%. These moves were at the expense of middle-sized farms which decreased correspondingly. Large farms also enjoyed a massive increase in their share of farm cash income from about 18% to about 70%.

#### 2. Capitalist Farming

Increasingly in Australia, large capitalist companies are running farms themselves using hired managers and labourers, eliminating farmers altogether. We are seeing many farms that were run by individuals being purchased by investors, many from overseas.

For example, in June 2021, major fruit and vegetable grower and wholesaler Costa paid \$230 million for a Queensland citrus and grape growing farm 2PH. The deal meant that Costa acquired very large areas of plantings and exclusive rights to two varieties of mandarins.

As another example, in August 2021, a US private equity firm placed on the market a group of



properties in western Victoria and South Australia totalling 22,500 hectares. This portfolio, operating as four aggregations was the amalgamation of about **50 individual properties**. The portfolio of properties has a price tag of \$350 million, with 6,000 megalitres of water entitlements attached. This would be a very attractive purchase for another foreign investor.

Also in August 2021, a Sydney-based investment company paid \$120 million for a property aggregation made up of over 60 former dairy farms in northern Victoria.

### 3. Share Farming

In Chapter 47 of Volume III of *Capital* Marx described share farming as “a transitory form from the original form of rent (i.e. labour rent, rent-in-kind) to capitalist rent.”

Share farming is very common in Australia, particularly in the grain and dairy-farming industries. About 17% of dairy farms are share farmed. An agreement is drawn up between the landowner and the sharefarmer specifying who supplies inputs such as land, livestock and machinery and who provides management and labour. The division of costs and income are also specified.

Share farming is often used by young farmers seeking to get into farming, as a means of raising enough capital to buy their own farm. Established farmers may use share farming to obtain access to more land.

### 4. Farming on Leased Land

Farming on land leased from individuals or companies does occur to a limited extent in Australia. As with share farming this can be a means of getting into farming or acquiring extra land. According to Rabobank, 28% of Australian farmers lease some of the land on which they operate. The figure is higher in grain growing areas, South Australia (45%) and Western Australia (38%). The figure is lower in New South Wales (17%).

In Queensland, Western Australia, New South Wales and the Northern Territory, the State and Territory governments lease vast areas of land to individuals and companies for grazing cattle and sheep. In cases where land is leased, absolute ground rent as described by Marx would be payable to the landlord.

## **Issues in Australian Agriculture**

### Climate Change

Climate change is hitting Australian farmers hard with drought, bushfires, floods and cyclones. Many farmers are responding to climate change by working to make their farms carbon-neutral. They are trying improved methods of farming to reduce their demand for inputs such as water, power and fuel. They are concerned also at the possibility the European Union and the US could impose carbon tariffs on their produce, which would make it harder to sell in those markets.

Farmers are active in organisations such as Lock the Gate and Farmers for Climate Change Action. They have been active in campaigns opposing the Narrabri Gas Project and the Adani Coal Mine.

### The Murray-Darling Basin

*Vanguard* has reported often on the fiasco of the Murray-Darling Basin. Climate change is making the situation worse with less rainfall occurring, resulting in reduced water flows in the already stressed system. Continuing sabotage of the Murray-Darling Basin plan by politicians, especially the National Party means that the environment and small irrigators are suffering.

### Foreign Take-Overs

Canadian Pension Funds have been very active, investing billions of dollars in Australian agriculture, building up large-scale farms in sheep and cattle raising, horticulture, cotton and nut crops. It is particularly concerning that they are targeting properties that have water rights attached to them. Canadian interests currently control over 800,000 gigalitres of water rights in Australia.



Differences are developing between smaller irrigators and the large companies that are taking so much precious water to grow water-hungry crops such as almonds.

The chart in Fig.1 below shows foreign ownership of Australian agriculture as of 2018. Canada has greatly increased its investments in Australian agriculture since then. The latest figures for ownership of water show that Canada has jumped to first place with 698 gigalitres, ahead of China with 662 gigalitres and the US with 660 gigalitres.

### Rising Farm Debt

Farm debt continues to rise. At June 30, 2019 it was \$86.9 billion, up from about \$74 billion the previous year. This compares to \$70 billion in 2016-17.

### China

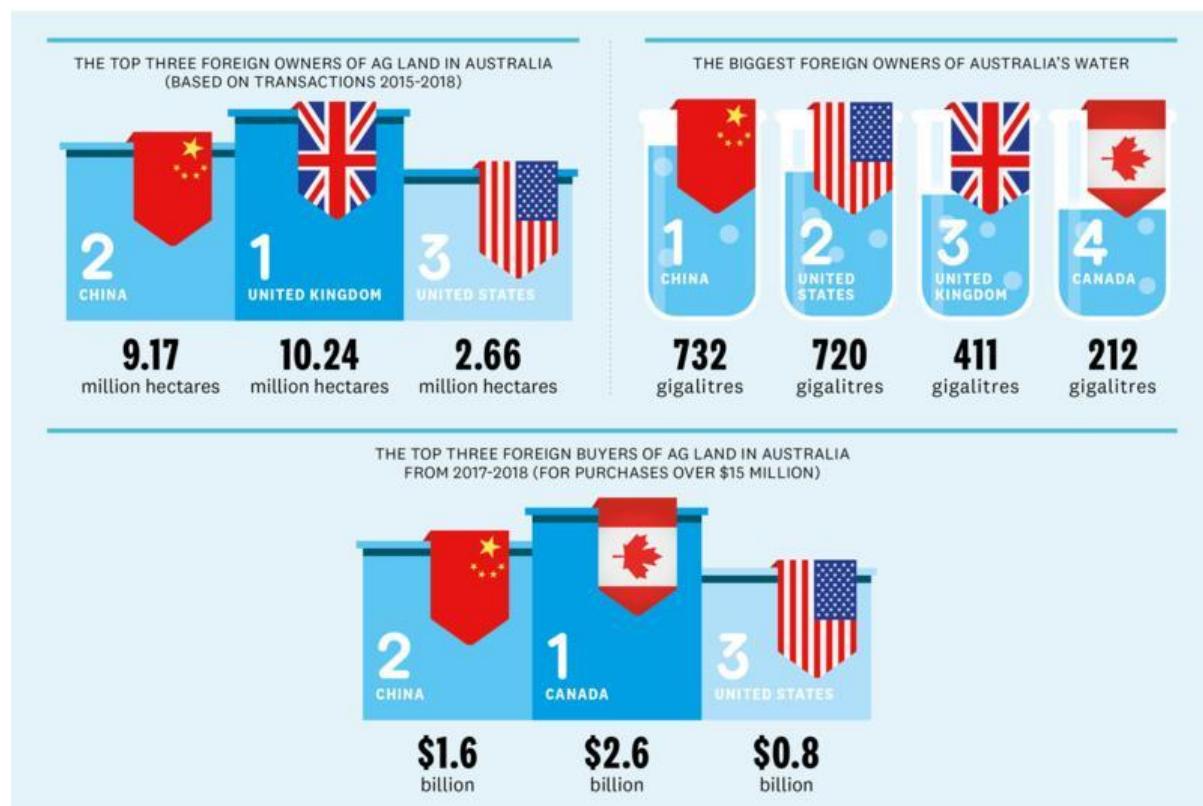
Since the early 1960's when the anti-communist Liberal-Country Party Government of Menzies

and McEwen started selling wheat to China against the wishes of the US, China has become a major trading partner of Australia in agricultural commodities.

Rural Bank estimated that the annual value of Australian agricultural exports to China averaged \$12.1 billion over the past five financial years. That is about 25% of the average annual value of Australian agricultural exports over that period.

Wheat, barley, wool, meat, wine and sea food all enjoyed strong sales to China. (Over 280,000 tonnes of Australian wheat were sold to China in December 2020 alone.) However, thanks to the Australian government slavishly following the US in attacking China, the Chinese government imposed tariffs and other restrictions on some products such as barley, wine and sea food.

This has hurt the growers of these products who have had to find other markets for their produce. Some farmers and farm leaders have been critical of the government's actions over China.



**Fig.1**

**Sources:** Register of Foreign Ownership of Agricultural Land 2018 and Register of Foreign Ownership of Water Entitlements 2018, Australian Taxation Office, Foreign Investment Review Board Annual Report 2017-18

Retrieved from NSW Farmers website:

[https://www.nswfarmers.org.au/NSWFA/Posts/The\\_Farmer/Environment/Who\\_owns\\_Australias\\_land\\_and\\_water.aspx](https://www.nswfarmers.org.au/NSWFA/Posts/The_Farmer/Environment/Who_owns_Australias_land_and_water.aspx)



China also emerged as a major investor in Australian agriculture. According to the FIRB, in 2020 China was the biggest foreign owner of land in Australia, with about 9 million hectares, putting China ahead of the Netherlands and the US. However, only about 800,000 hectares of this is freehold, the rest being leasehold land. In terms of **value** of investments, China is well down the list, way behind Canada and the US.

Chinese investors are actually reducing their investment in all areas of the Australian economy including agriculture. In 2019, total Chinese investments in Australia fell to \$3.4 billion, a fall of 58.4% from the \$8.2 billion of the previous year.

### Labour

The COVID crisis in Australia revealed a weakness that many areas of Australian agriculture require the use of overseas workers for casual work in planting and harvesting fruit and vegetable crops, shearing and operating harvest machinery.



*A map of the massive Murray-Darling Basin, vital to a large part of Australian agriculture*

Often these are backpackers, visitors and illegal immigrants. They can be at the mercy of unscrupulous farmers and dodgy labour-hire companies. (Meat works also have a large percentage of overseas workers. The Midfield meat works at Warrnambool, in Victoria, was in the news recently over its use of a crooked labour-hire company to obtain Chinese workers.)

Without access to overseas workers the sections of agriculture reliant on them have experienced difficulties in planting and harvesting crops. There have been some supply shortages and retail price increases as a result. Government schemes to entice Australians to do these jobs have largely failed.

(While preparing this article I gratefully received some information about labour in Australian agriculture prepared by another comrade. This gives much detailed information and is included as an appendix.)

### Women

Women are an important force in Australian agriculture. They help run family farms may also work off-farm to support the family farm. Many women are running farms in their own right or working in agricultural jobs. According to a recent ANZ Bank survey, there are about 100,000 women employed in Australian agriculture, about 34% of the workforce. 26% of these were in full-time employment and 56% in part-time employment. 28% of managers in agriculture were women. Women are taking leading roles as agricultural scientists and researchers.

Women are taking leadership roles in farmer organisations and in parliamentary politics, often running successfully as independent candidates against National Party candidates.

### **What Can Farmers Do?**

Farmers and country people are rejecting the National Party and are voting for minority parties or independents, although they are a long way off rejecting the parliamentary system. They need to realise that their true allies are the workers. Farmers and workers have a lot of common



enemies. The same agribusiness firms that exploit farmers in the marketplace also exploit the workers in their factories.

Farmers and city-based environmentalists are also uniting despite the attempts of the National Party leadership to divide them. There needs to be even greater unity between farmers and workers and environmentalists.

### **The Future?**

The family farm will continue to be an important component of farming in an independent Australia. Family farms would be encouraged to form co-operatives and syndicates. The foreign-owned and large agribusiness farms would be nationalised and operated as State-run enterprises under the control of the working class and local working farmers.

A socialist government of an independent Australia would manage scarce resources such as water, promote farming practices that protect the environment and put an end to farming practices that are harmful to the environment.

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## **APPENDIX:** **FARM WORKERS IN AUSTRALIA**

Farm workers in Australia are an essential part of the working class. Without them, there would be no locally grown food for the millions of people who live in such a highly urbanized country as Australia.

Farm workers comprise what is classified by Australian Government Departments as the agricultural workforce which has a diverse number of sub sectors.

There are 13 sub sectors with significant numbers of workers in each:

Nursery and Floriculture; Vegetables; Fruit and Nut Trees; Sheep; Grains; Beef; Mixed Grain Livestock; Other Crops; Dairy; Poultry and Pigs; Other Livestock; Services to Agriculture; Meat and Poultry.

Most of the workers in these sub sectors are categorized by Australian Government Departments as "farm workers"

In 2018-19 there were 326,000 workers employed on farms in Australia. The nature of their employment comprises varying degrees of job security/insecurity:

Local casual and contract – 40,000

Non-local casual and contract – 10,000

Overseas casual and contract – 60,000

Part time – 55,000

Full time – 140,000

Between 40% and 50% of the above types of employment is filled by workers who were born overseas.

31% of farm workers are female.

Machine operators and drivers comprise 5% of the farms workforce while technicians and tradespersons comprise only 2% of the workforce.

The majority of work on farms is so-called unskilled work such as planting, picking and packing. However, the workers are highly skilled in these jobs, which is why farm owners, especially the corporatized farm owners, participate in government schemes and sign agreements with Unions that give these workers first option of return to work the following and subsequent years. Many of the workers are so good at their "unskilled" jobs that they are able to move from one part of the country to another depending on what product is in season for planting, picking or packing.

The value of farm production from the labour of these workers in 2020-21 was \$66.3 billion.

Agricultural exports in 2021-22 is expected to rise by 6% to \$49.7 billion.

Included in the full time employed category are "owner operators" who are either working owners of farms or working managers of farms. In 2001, these owner operators comprised 56%



of full time farm workers, in 2016, this had fallen to 37% of full time farm workers.

One third of the total farms workforce in 2016 lived and worked in the massive Murray Darling Basin.

In the Southern Queensland region of the Basin, overseas workers are utilized most of the year round due to the wide range of crops produced there.

Overseas workers include workers from the Pacific Islands under the Federal government's Commonwealth Seasonal Worker Programme and Pacific Labour Scheme.

In Covid 19 times, the overseas workers from the Pacific Islands have been in even more demand due to the decline in numbers of back packers and overseas student migrants in Australia. Since March 2020 when Covid 19 lockdowns began, 3,000 workers from the Pacific Islands have still come to work on Australian farms.

These workers and indeed most farm workers in Australia are employed through large labour hire companies such as MADEC, Farmpro Labour, Owen Pacific Workforce, Jobs Australia Enterprise, Ausfarm Fresh, Food Industry People to name a few.

The most labour intensive farm work is in vegetable and fruit production. Australia produces on a mass scale 35 different kinds of vegetables. Potatoes, tomatoes (called a vegetable in Govt stats), mushrooms, carrots, onions are the top five produced with a yearly combined value of \$1.9 billion. Fruit production is dominated by the tropical fruits produced in NT, QLD and north of WA and grape and citrus

production further south.

The farm worker sector is largely non-union labour and stories abound of wage theft, even slave like conditions for vulnerable migrant workers on temporary visas.

However, the former National Union of Workers, now United Workers Union has had some success over the last decade of organising farm workers where they are employed by large corporations and major suppliers to large retailers like Coles and Woolworths or fast-food chains. Union organisers have succeeded in organising different migrant groups of farm workers in regional Victoria, SA, QLD and NSW through a combination of traditional organising on the job methods, combined with community-based organising targeting the large retailers at the other end of the supply chains.

In the last decade, union membership in the sector of the well over 100,000 labouring farm workers has grown from a few hundred to over 20,000 and growing at a steady rate. The organizing efforts has rubbed off to the other union, the Australian Workers Union, which traditionally has had coverage of farm workers but ignored them.

Farm workers are a very important sector of the working class. They produce essential products and despite some farm mechanization methods, much of the work cannot be mechanized. Farm workers are also in a strategically strong position in that large retailers and food processing corporations who put their products on supermarket shelves and send them to export markets know that their whole business and profits start with the hands of migrant farm workers.



# Capitalism on Trial at the COP26 Climate Conference

## *Part 1 (Before the Conference)*

by A Party Study Group

The global warming crisis is confronting capitalism/imperialism with enormous difficulties in moving from fossil fuel sources of energy to clean, renewable sources of energy. There are just too many competing political and corporate interests to guarantee the transition is fast enough to achieve a significant reduction in global emissions, and this poses a grave threat to humanity.

The movement to renewable energy requires a massive injection in fixed capital in the form of new technologies and means of production. However, this will result in a relative decrease in the labour required to operate and maintain these new developments and an overall decrease in the unit cost of energy production. Competition within capitalism drives companies to achieve this outcome either through more productive, cheaper labour sources or new, more efficient technologies. In the case of moving to renewable energy, there are two positive outcomes in the longer term for the energy companies; cheaper costs associated with the production of energy and an increase in revenues at the expense of the rate of profit. This is already happening in a number of countries, including Sweden, Germany, Norway and Nicaragua.

Investment in renewable energy is consistent with the tendency within capitalism to adopt new technologies that provide a more efficient, relatively cheaper means of production. However, this is only a tendency and can be countered by a number of factors and it is necessary to understand some of these when addressing the issue of replacing non-renewable energy with renewable resources in Australia.

In relation to energy there are at least two competing factors within capitalism. The first is that energy is a cost to all industries, and while it is a cost to the energy industries, it is also the primary source of revenue. The second is that the energy industries are some of the largest companies in the world and exert extensive control internationally. The energy industries have significant investment in the production of non-renewable energy resources and any movement to replacing these will be constrained by the need to maximise the opportunities to realise profit on existing investments. From their point of view, the interests of the country are a very secondary consideration. They will attempt to make the people pay for any transition that does occur.

The adoption of new technologies has been analysed in depth in Marx's Volume 3 of Capital. In Part III, Chapter XIII, "The Law of the Tendency of the Rate of Profit to Fall", he points out how the introduction of more efficient means of production through technological innovation causes a relative increase in fixed capital relative to variable capital (labour power) and this results in a relative decrease in the rate of profit. "The immediate result of this is that the rate of surplus-value, at the same, or even rising degree of labour exploitation, is represented by a continually falling general rate of profit."



This brake on moving forward with renewable energy resources is further constrained within countries like Australia because of their particular economic nature and corresponding historical alliance with industries associated with the extraction and export of raw materials. The investment by the energy industries is very significant in Australia as is the extensive influence and control of the owners of the energy industries. A particularly glaring example of the willingness of Australian politicians to collude with these industries at any cost is the LNG export arrangements and taxes.

In an article in the *Age* by Melissa Clarke (9-Sep-2021 – “Resource sector lobbies hardest on climate change, while net zero backers ‘disengaged’”), it is pointed out that a report by a UK-based think tank that maintains a global database of corporate and industry lobbying efforts on climate change found that: “Corporate support for government action on climate change is muted in Australia, with the most intense lobbying coming from resources and energy companies calling for more limited change. Corporations that back reaching net zero emissions by 2050 as well as other policies that broadly support the Paris Agreement do little or negligible lobbying to encourage federal and state governments to take stronger action on climate change.”

The lack of strategic thinking and subservience by politicians to these largely American owned companies reflect the nature of Australian capitalism and our dependence on the extraction and export of raw materials. Clinton Fernandes (*ARENA Quarterly*, Sept 2021) argues that Australia is characterised as an economic growth rather than an economic development country. This simply means we are focussed on a limited number of exports and if economic development involves ‘only such changes in economic life as are not forced upon it from without but arise by its own initiative, from within’, then Australia is not well placed to initiate substantial change. In terms of economic complexity which relates to the level of diversification (manufacturing and number of products to export), Australia is an

anomaly amongst advanced economies with the lowest level of all the OECD countries and in 2017 was ranked fifty-ninth in the world for economic complexity.

Further in his *ARENA* article Fernandes states that “Australia’s .... Critical Minerals Strategy isn’t concerned with nation-building or increasing economic complexity but with creating a benign environment for private investors to carve up our critical minerals.”

### **The role of the capitalist state**

Currently in Australia there are a number of coal-fired power stations. Most were built by the various state governments using taxpayers’ money to provide reliable electricity for the manufacturing boom after World War II. An important function of the capitalist state is to provide infrastructure, services and investment capital beyond the resources of individual capitalists. These power stations were sold off to corporate ownership during the wave of privatisations that swept Australia over the last two decades. Now they are owned and operated by corporations such as Origin Energy, Alinta, Energy Australia and others.

Similarly, the previously state-owned distribution grids of sub-stations and transmission wires were also privatised to different corporations, and so too the retail sectors servicing the customers.

Even though the generation, distribution and retail of electricity is owned by many separate companies, they are mutually dependent and combine to form a powerful bloc of interests. Collectively, they occupy a monopoly position in capitalist Australia, though having the appearance of competitors in the retail market. In particular, they use any and every excuse to “pass on costs to the consumer”.

The state governments continue to provide services to these powerful corporations in the form of access to land, tax concessions, and subsidies for new equipment and technology. The capitalist state organisation ensures the profitability of these corporations, giving them



privileged access to government in acknowledgement of their leverage and the implied threat of “blackouts” and “loss of jobs”.

### UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow (November 1-12)

The looming threat of devastating climate warming in excess of 2°C will be the focus of world attention at this international conference. Limiting warming to 1.5C will require a much faster rate of retiring fossil fuels than currently projected.

Various countries, and especially the industrialised countries, will be expected to detail what progress they have made in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and what initiatives they have taken to introduce and support renewable technologies, and what efforts have been made to clean up and restore the natural environment as fossil fuel production phases out.

Political leaders seeking media attention will focus on what commitments they are prepared to make into the future, for example, net zero emissions by 2050, or 50% reduction by 2030. China has already signalled to meet net zero by 2060, but this may change when the conference meets. Undoubtedly there will be some positive movement and commitments made by many countries at this conference. Several factors are influencing the positions taken by governments around the world with many realising that some progress has to be made on this critical issue.

- Firstly, there is the massive wave of popular struggle and demands by people across the world, but especially young people concerned at the future humanity is facing.
- Secondly, there is the growing evidence of unstable, extreme climate events which are not only devastating livelihoods, but are also threatening established industries and corporate profits.
- Thirdly, there is an increasing investment risk for companies, banks, insurers, superannuation funds and shareholders to invest in fossil fuels which may become “stranded assets” in a relatively short time.
- Fourthly, there is the rapid expansion of renewable technologies and the growing attractiveness for investments in solar, wind, hydrogen, geothermal and batteries, with new opportunities to realise profits in emerging markets.

### Morrison's hot air

Prime Minister Morrison will travel to Glasgow immediately after the G20 meeting in Rome. The Australian government has a well-earned reputation as an apologist for the fossil fuel monopolies, led by a shallow individual whose promises and commitments mean little. In a government flush with climate change deniers and protectors of the coal and gas giants, Morrison waffles on about “modern farming technologies” and “avoided land clearing” and funding “carbon capture and storage”, but has



*Popular protest led by young people around the world demands radical action on climate change*



not been able to demonstrate any practical pathway to significantly reduce emissions in Australia.

Under pressure from his AUKUS mates Biden and Johnson, Morrison might even make some conditional commitment to meet a net zero by 2050 target to keep in step, but his credibility has been torpedoed.

In any case, as Greg Jericho points out in an article in the *Guardian*, “To stay within our 1.5C carbon budget, we need to get on a path to net zero by 2035 from now, not 2030”

Nor will Morrison make any commitment to cease the export of coal and gas to developing countries which adds to extreme weather events, dangerous levels of air pollution and the rising sea levels which threaten many island states and low-lying communities. The disastrous consequences of increasing global greenhouse gas emissions will inevitably lead to more mass migrations and regional conflicts.

### **The future of Coal**

Apart from the emissions target, another key issue for the COP26 conference will be the future of coal, the most polluting and damaging of the fossil fuels. Leaders of countries will be under pressure to set closure deadlines on the mining, export and use of coal in power stations.

Immediate pressure will come from demonstrations of people from across the world demanding an end to the global coal industry, as well as many rallies, public meetings and actions in Glasgow prior to and during the conference. Further pressure will come from scientists and delegates to the conference who have studied the facts and reflect the concerns of the mass populations already experiencing changing and extreme weather patterns.

According to an article published in *Nature*, much of the world’s reserves of coal will have to remain untouched if a target of 1.5C is to be achieved by 2050. Globally that means 89 percent of reserves or 826 billion tonnes. For Australia, it translates

to 95 percent of coal reserves or 80 billion tonnes. Nearly 60 percent of oil and gas reserves would also have to be left in the ground to limit global warming to 1.5C.

Given the weight of evidence for urgent action on limiting greenhouse gas emissions, the political/environmental demands of global populations and the risk to profits, it clearly means that thermal coal production in Australia is on borrowed time.

Companies such as BHP and AGL are restructuring to protect their investments and winding back their involvement in coal production. AGL will close down its Liddell power station in NSW next year and may bring forward the projected dates for Bayswater in NSW (2035) and Loy Yang A in Victoria (2048). Energy Australia will close down Yallourn power station in Victoria 4 years early in 2028.

While coal is used to generate up to 70 percent of the power for east coast Australia, this could be replaced within a few years by large scale battery farms fed from wind and solar and other renewable technologies. This has been the experience in South Australia where 60 percent is currently supplied by renewables.

Thermal coal is becoming increasingly unviable as an investment. Coal-fired power stations in Australia will shut down sooner than current company projections as profits disappear in the face of competition by renewables. The export market for thermal coal will also contract as other countries step up their transition to other renewable sources for electricity generation.

Coking coal exports for steel making will continue to be Australia’s major contribution to (global) emissions in other countries. However, the days of selling iron ore and importing it back as steel may also be under threat. There are plans by Fortescue Mining to develop a “green steel” manufacturing industry using hydrogen made from renewables, doing away with the need for coking coal and its export overseas, and perhaps providing jobs for displaced mine workers.



*Prime Minister Morrison brandishes a chunk of coal in parliament, showing whose interests he serves*

The Morrison government will continue to underwrite the coal industry in Australia using every trick to frustrate and delay the final years. Federal Energy Minister Angus Taylor has been sprouting a “capacity mechanism” which would provide rapid energy generation when “the sun isn’t shining and the wind blowing” using pumped hydro, gas, batteries and coal-fired power stations. The implication is that renewables are not reliable and that coal needs to stay in the mix. In return, Morrison and Co. hope to be re-elected on the back of coal miners’ votes in Queensland and New South Wales.

While granting the fossil fuel monopolies billions of dollars in tax concessions and subsidies for exploration, railways, ports and research on so-called “clean coal”, the federal government has not committed to ensuring the economic future of mine workers and their communities when the coal mining industry shuts down.

At the same time, the federal government has refused to properly fund schools, hospitals, public housing, pensions and social benefits to meet the needs of the people.

### **Gas-fired profits**

Although the production and use of LNG causes less pollution than oil or coal, it in fact releases methane into the Earth’s atmosphere at a rate that significantly contributes to climate change and global warming.

Coal seam gas production and use, in addition to releasing methane, also pollutes waterways and degrades farmland.

Australia is now the largest exporter of LNG, overtaking Qatar in the last couple of years. LNG exports are primarily to Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore where it is used for heating, power generation, cooking and transport.

The multinational corporations that control the export of Australian LNG are Chevron, Shell Energy, Woodside, Santos, INPEX and Origin Energy.

As stated in *Vanguard* (Feb 2019):

Because of a tax system that is completely in the service of imperialism, the multinational companies that control Australia’s oil and gas industry are subject to only one tax – the Petroleum Resources Rent Tax (PRRT).

The PRRT is a tax on profits generated from the sale of all petroleum products created from onshore and off-shore oil and gas projects in Australia. But aggressive tax avoidance schemes and the off-shoring of profits by the multinationals means Australians are effectively being robbed blind. In 2018, Australia received just \$946 million from the PRRT. That’s from both oil and gas. In comparison, Qatar is estimated to receive \$26.6 billion from its gas royalties alone.

The production and use of LNG is promoted by the Morrison government as a “transition fuel”. No mention is ever made of the fact that it can already be replaced for heating and cooking by cheaper renewable electricity such as hydrogen, solar and wind and also for transport in electric vehicles.

Gas fired power generation is still viable for investment finance because Australia has large reserves of LNG, gas fired power stations have a shorter start up time compared with other fossil fuel power stations and they are Australian government backed and promoted.

As with all centralised power production, gas use promotes consumer dependency and with



government-assisted pricing and tax incentives, extremely high profits.

Corporations exporting LNG will resist any moves to limit their operations and will promote their “clean image”. Morrison and Co. will push for gas-fired power stations to replace the aging coal-fired ones.

### **The strategic importance of Oil**

The position taken by the largest energy and mining companies in Australia is focused on extracting the maximum benefit they can out of their investments with little regard to the longer-term interests of the country.

As discussed earlier, it is important to acknowledge the overall strategies of such companies and their application (or non-application) in relation to particular areas of investment and countries. Financial market monitor, Bloomberg Professional Terminal, sees US-based investors as owning more than two-thirds of BHP, two-thirds of Rio Tinto and two-thirds of Woodside. All of these companies are major operators in Australia.

Woodside is Australia’s largest independent producer of oil, producing the equivalent of 900,000 barrels a day. Woodside’s stated policy on climate change includes, “We support the Paris Agreement and its goal to limit the rise in global temperature to well below 2 degrees from preindustrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5 degrees.” It goes on to focus on gas and new technologies.

According to Melissa Clarke, Woodside together with Santos, Origin Energy and AGL have been the most engaged in lobbying climate policy in Australia with the focus on limiting expectations and change.

Oil production is even more essential for capitalism/imperialism – for the generation of profits, for political-economic domination of countries, for military equipment and weaponry, for petrol, diesel fuel, bunker oil, aviation fuel, lubricants, plastics, medicines, etc. State power in USA and Australia now operates in the

interests of this section of the (international) ruling class. Therefore, we cannot rely on capitalism closing down fossil fuel production fast enough to prevent < 2.0 degrees global warming, let alone 1.5 degrees which is now recognised as practicable by the year 2050.

### **Nuclear Power bandwagon**

With the exception of one nuclear power reactor at Lucas Heights (used for the production of nuclear medicine) Australia has no nuclear capability, no nuclear power stations, enrichment plants or reprocessing facilities. Such facilities are specifically prohibited by Commonwealth law (Environment Protection & Biodiversity Act 1999).

With the Morrison government’s recent commitment to the AUKUS “treaty” and the future acquisition of American nuclear-powered submarines, the pro-nuclear energy lobby has loudly called for a review of the current ban on domestic nuclear energy, under the guise of presenting a “clean” alternative to fossil fuel energy production.

The promotion of a nuclear power industry will increase. It is attractive to capitalism as it presents a new investment opportunity for foreign multinational corporations like General Electric and it centralises the production of electricity and therefore dictates and controls the cost of power to the Australian people.

We will be asked to forget or ignore the prospect of Three Mile Island or Fukushima disasters and the insurmountable problems of waste “disposal” and storage and weapons proliferation.

### **Fundamental change is needed**

This decade will be critical in reducing greenhouse gas emissions to prevent dangerous climate warming from having disastrous effects in Australia and across the world. The global monopoly capitalist/imperialist economic system may indeed be able to adjust to the replacement of coal with renewable sources of power.



But even this will require the need for intense struggles by the people to force federal and state governments to cease guaranteeing the coal industry and to guarantee the futures of the workers and communities as coal production winds down. Many, but not all, may be able to transition into new jobs in the renewable industries. Others who cannot must not be abandoned by governments and certainly not by the organised working class.

Gas and oil corporations are at the centre of the global monopoly capitalist/imperialist system. They exercise direct and indirect power and influence over governments, providing crucial resources for manufacturing and land, sea and air transport. They will not surrender their power and profits without a fight.

Companies such as ExxonMobil, Chevron, Woodside, Shell, INPEX, Origin Energy and Santos control the production, refining and export of gas and oil in Australia. They rely on a network of international banks and investment financiers to support the continuing profitability of fossil fuels, and at the same time, finance their diversification into renewable energy projects. The gas and oil companies have great influence through the Business Council of Australia and the Minerals Council. Their executives, both in Australia and internationally, form part of the ruling class of imperialism which dominates Australia's economic and political existence. Prime Minister Morrison promotes their influence through his "gas-led recovery" and calling for new gas-fired power stations to replace the older coal-fired ones and continuing support for coal seam gas fracking.

Waiting for their turn to oversee capitalism, the Labor Party leadership never challenges this ruling class domination of Australia. They also

have with no program for winding back emissions, and actively support fossil fuel exports and coal seam gas extraction.

Breaking the hold of these companies and rolling back their substantial contribution to global climate warming means radical and far-reaching change in Australia's ownership and control of resources.

Not only do the old polluting technologies have to be replaced, but the anarchic capitalist system of private ownership which sustains and protects them also needs to be replaced. Socialism, based on collective ownership and participatory democracy, can rebuild the harmony between nature and humanity, and do it more efficiently and effectively.

### **It calls for determined struggle to expel imperialist domination of the economy, the military, politics and culture. Only widespread mass struggle of the people can force the necessary changes, not waiting and hoping for a 'progressive' parliament.**

It calls for determined struggle to expel imperialist domination of the economy, the military, politics and culture. Only widespread mass struggle of the people can force the necessary changes, not waiting and hoping for a 'progressive' parliament.

It calls for the ownership and control of Australia's critical infrastructure and resources to transfer to a revolutionary state of the working people which will lead the people in building a socialist society.

Socialism must ensure decentralised systems of participatory democracy where communities, townships, workplaces, etc. can have meaningful input into the policies and services that affect their lives; a real democracy not only monitoring the implementation of agreed policies but also participating in their delivery. This must involve the intensive rehabilitation of degraded lands, forests, and marine and river systems as well as the continual development and expansion of clean, renewable energy with both large-scale and community battery storage systems.



## Part 2 (After the Conference)

### G20: a smokescreen for resisting change

**The G20 meeting in Rome immediately prior to COP26 in Glasgow brought together the top 20 countries that produce 80% of global economic output. They have the biggest stake in the survival of the global capitalist/imperialist economic system. They also contribute 80% of global greenhouse gas emissions on levels that threaten the future of humanity.**

Countries involved were Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union. The leaders of China and Russia were not present, but participated remotely.

Collectively they could not even embrace the distant target of net zero emissions in 2050, let alone more realistic commitments to keep global warming below 1.5C and a target of 50% reduction on 2005 levels by 2030. They settled for the vague and weak intention to achieve “net zero by mid-century”. This was a sop to countries heavily dependent on fossil fuels for power generation, mining and export industries – Brazil, Russia, India, China, Saudi Arabia, and Australia.

Even though the powerful G7 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US) had already committed to the net zero by 2050

target, they were unable or unwilling to win wider support.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison predictably opposed any deadline to phase out coal mining and exports and shut down coal-fired power stations. He pushed his fanciful theory of new and emerging “technology”. His Minister for Industry, Energy and Emissions Reduction, Angus Taylor, opposed any reduction of methane emissions – this was the pay-off for the National Party’s last minute secret pact with Morrison.

### COP26: Capitalism/imperialism’s failure means more suffering for the people and the planet

The COP26 Climate Conference has underlined the opening statement in the first part of this analysis which was released in the days prior to the Conference. *“The global warming crisis is confronting capitalism/imperialism with enormous difficulties in moving from fossil fuel sources of energy to clean, renewable sources of energy. There are just too many competing political and corporate interests to guarantee the transition is fast enough to achieve a significant reduction in global emissions, and this poses a grave threat to humanity.”*

Leader’s speeches revealed totally inadequate commitments by the major industrialised countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions – the total of the promises and commitments made



*Inaction on climate change by capitalist governments at COP26 was met with determined protests by the people*



so far would ensure, at best, a global warming level of 2.4C (Climate Action Tracker) by the year 2050, nowhere near the proclaimed goal of <1.5C. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has said emissions must be cut by 45% by 2030 to stay within 1.5C.

While many countries endorsed the target of net zero by 2050, major coal users had longer target dates. India and Poland looking at 2070, and China 2060. Interim targets for 2030 were very mixed and subject to financial aid from the UN and richer countries. The small island states threatened by rising sea levels could only plead.

Some 46 countries agreed to phase out coal during the 2030's and 2040's, but not China and the US. This is too late to meet the 1.5C target. Developing countries said their commitments were subject to receiving billions of dollars from the richer developed countries to fund the transition to renewables. \$100 billion annually had previously been agreed at the Paris meeting, not only grossly insufficient but is now years behind schedule.

20 countries agreed to stop funding fossil fuel developments in other countries. However, China, Japan and South Korea, as suppliers of investment capital, did not sign.

108 countries agreed to reduce methane emissions by 30% by 2030, but not Australia, China, Russia and India.

A non-binding agreement to end deforestation by 2030 and promote regrowth was signed by 124 countries, including China, USA, Brazil and Australia. Brazil and Indonesia subsequently put conditions on their commitment, while Australia maintained that this has already been achieved!

### **Morrison exposed as a puppet of the fossil fuel monopolies**

Morrison shamelessly refused to agree to any 2030 target, instead boasting that Australia had exceeded its old commitment of 26-28% reduction (very much contested) and would "probably" meet 35% reduction by 2030, but would not commit to this as a target. This was in

stark contrast to other developed countries such as the USA, UK, and European Union countries which all put forward various 2030 targets, realising that some progress had to be made. Australia, Brazil, Mexico and Saudi Arabia did not improve their 2030 targets.

Morrison refused to sign on to agreements to phase out coal-fired power and coal exports, and refused to sign an agreement on reducing methane emissions. He promoted the dubious technology of Carbon Capture and Storage, which was on display at an Australian Pavilion with a feature of the Santos Moomba Gas Field CCS project which is receiving government subsidy via carbon credits from the misnamed carbon reduction fund! His government sponsors a "gas-led recovery" and refers to gas as a "transition fuel" as coal is phased out on the never-never.

### **COP26 ends with a whimper**

The biggest polluters, China and USA, revealed that they had been in discussion for six months prior to COP26 and had reached an agreement to cooperate on climate warming issues. Each wants to dominate global resources, trade and capitalist markets. Each wants to control the pace of transition to renewables, hoping to keep their fossil fuel corporations going a bit longer while also generating new profits from renewable technologies.

Given the influence of the two superpowers and G20 countries, it was therefore no surprise that many of the earlier agreements and commitments made in the first week of COP26 have been retracted or replaced by "weasel words" in the Final Declaration from the conference. All intended to distract and delay the pace of change. (For example, "phase down coal" has replaced "phase out coal").

As predicted by Lenin in *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, when capitalism reaches its monopoly stage it can put a brake on new developments – as it clings to profits from old technology and stifles the new. "Certainly, the possibility of reducing the cost of production and increasing profits by introducing technical



improvements operates in the direction of change. But the tendency to stagnation and decay, which is characteristic of monopoly, continues to operate, and in some branches of industry, in some countries, for certain periods of time, it gains the upper hand."

### **Socialism is the only way to roll back climate warming before the tipping point**

Socialism is a revolutionary change in the management of society where hands-on power is vested in the class of working people rather than the class of capitalists, monopoly owners, shareholders and finance speculators. Socialist democracy gives working people their say in the day-to-day operation of society.

Socialism means the major industrial enterprises and natural resources of the nation are owned collectively by the Australian people rather than being sources of profit for foreign multinationals and absentee landlords. Socialism can mobilise these resources on a massive scale to close down polluting fossil fuel operations in good time, while simultaneously accelerating the conversion to renewable sources of power and transport.

Socialism regards the unity of humanity and nature as a critical balance which must be understood, respected and safeguarded. An understanding and effective management of the Australian environment was developed over thousands of years by the First Australians. The involvement of the First Australians is essential to

repairing the damaged lands, forests, seas, rivers and waterways.

Socialism recognises the need to develop and implement a plan that will ensure all people have the opportunity to engage in developing a sustainable environment. Socialism ensures that the items produced, the level and standards of clean, emissions-free production, and the

distribution of products is planned and rational. Importantly, it means that no section of society is left behind, whether in the cities, regional towns, the countryside or outback.

Socialism guarantees all working people have rights to decent inexpensive housing, to free medical and hospital services, to free education, free childcare, free aged care and all other social services. There is already enough wealth in private pockets to achieve this now, but for the role and greed of the

ruling class.

Capitalism/imperialism has proven incapable of dealing with the climate crisis. While COP26 has buried the hopes of the people of the world, at the same time it has ignited a growing wave of disgust and anger at the self-serving politicians, bureaucrats and corporate vandals that dominated the conference and ignored and excluded the voices of people suffering the bitter consequences of climate warming. The global foundations of capitalism/imperialism are cracking, its institutions are rotten. It can't last.



# The Scandal of Aged Care in Australia

by A Party Study Group

**T**he issue of aged care in Australia, or any other country, reflects a great deal about the nature of the society and the attitudes that condition those responsible for policy and program funding for aged care provision. To understand the situation in aged care it is necessary to address the underlying economic principles of Australian Capitalism.

A significant recent development in Australia in the area of aged care was the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

It is important to recognize the composition of the members of the Commission, who and what they represent in Australian society. The Honourable Tony Pagone QC and Ms Lynelle Briggs AO were appointed as Royal Commissioners. Pagone served on the Federal Court and was the judge in charge of the Commercial List. Briggs is a former Public Service Commissioner and has served on a number of Government Boards and Committees.

The conclusions from their report can be summarised by the following paragraph:

"The neglect that we have found in this Royal Commission to date is far from the best that can be done. Rather, it is a sad and shocking system that diminishes Australia as a nation." (p.12 Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety)

The importance of addressing this issue in a substantial way so that future aged care recipients are guaranteed appropriate care and support is further emphasised by the changing demographics in Australia. The Royal Commission's report points out that:

"The aged care sector is facing an ageing population with increasing frailty. Australians are living longer than ever before. It is projected that the number of

Australians aged 85 years and over will increase from 515,700 in 2018–19 (2.0% of the Australian population) to more than 1.5 million by 2058 (3.7% of the population). With advanced age comes greater frailty" (p.61).

And:

"In 2019, there were 4.2 working age (15–64 years) people for every Australian aged 65 years or over. By 2058, this will have decreased to 3.1. This decline has implications not only for the financing of the aged care sector but also for the aged care workforce. There will be relatively fewer people of working age available to pay." (p.62)

The summary of the final report on pages 61-71 identifies a range of significant areas and abject failures on the part of government over the years. It is stated that:

"Funding for aged care is insufficient, insecure, and subject to the fiscal priorities of the Australian Government of the day. For several decades, one of the priorities for governments dealing with the aged care system has been to restrain the growth in aged care expenditure in light of demographic changes. This priority has been pursued irrespective of the level of need for care, and without sufficient regard to whether the funding is adequate to deliver high quality and safe care" (p. 74).

This will continue to be the case. As long as the aged are seen and treated as a burden on society and an impediment to enabling profit and wealth generation for the owners of the means of production, the situation will grow worse. Real improvement requires a fundamental change in how all members of society are viewed and ensuring the vulnerable are given appropriate



consideration when developing support and resource allocation.

### **Summary of Government's Position on Key Findings**

When examining the government's response to recommendations the specific nature of the responses is not as important as the underlying political and ideological agenda that informs them.

Any assessment of an undertaking of this nature recognises that the terms of reference for the Commission are conditioned by the economic and political system within which they are defined. These terms of reference necessarily limit the nature of the findings and recommendations to at best offering some positive, but limited reforms.

It is also necessary to take into account the public nature of the Royal Commission findings and the need for the government to assess what the public will accept. This involves delaying decisions on certain matters to at least give the impression they have some possibility of acceptance when given further consideration. In some cases, this involves making commitments without any serious intent to fulfill them.

While not related to the Royal Commission, this is blatantly clear with the stated federal

government Covid-19 strategy of ensuring aged care recipients and their carers would be in the front line for receiving vaccinations. It simply has not happened.

There are five primary aspects to the government's position in responding to the Commission's recommendations:

1. A focus on ensuring the non-productive (non-profit generating) members of society receive the minimum acceptable support and protection.
2. A focus on user pays which involves extracting as much as is feasibly possible from the care recipient, including diminishing, wherever possible, what little accumulated wealth the recipient may have.
3. A commitment to constrain any consideration of improvement to wages and conditions for those who work within the existing aged care system. A framework that is geared to ensuring non-productive (non-profit generating) work is rewarded at the lowest possible publicly acceptable level.
4. An ideological commitment to ensuring private ownership and profit are the key considerations when determining the costs associated with service and accommodation provision. The emphasis on "**a reasonable rate of return on investment**" in deciding such costs clearly exposes this ideological



*Commissioners Tony Pagone and Lynelle Briggs, responsible for the recommendations to the government*



- position and the need to ensure such outcomes ahead of the care of the aged and the support for those who care for the aged.
5. The government's commitment to maintaining direct control over the management of the aged care system through legislation and regulation.

The Government has accepted 19 of the 148 recommendations: 18, 22, 25, 35, 38, 39, 41, 46, 56, 58, 59, 62, 65, 73, 77, 107, 118, 130 and 139. An examination of these recommendations demonstrates a willingness to accept moderate change and possible improvement, but in no way addresses substantial change.

Several of the recommendations that have been either rejected or relegated for further considerations address more than one of the above aspects that condition the government's position. The following provides an overview of these recommendations and has allocated them to the most appropriated aspect determining the government's response.

Examples of recommendations that directly impact accommodation and support services for aged care recipients that were rejected or relegated for further consideration include:

- The establishment of a Seniors Dental Scheme with benefits
- Equity for aged with disabilities with access to aids and equipment as specified within the NDIS
- Civil penalties for providers' failure to meet Aged Care Quality Standards
- Compensation damages for breach of civil penalty provisions

While they may have relative weight in terms of immediate value, every one of these recommendations relates to essential needs of aged care recipients and in some cases demonstrate a profound lack of care. Dental care is an obvious need for the elderly.

As stated in the summary of the report:

"Poor oral health can have far reaching consequences for general health and wellbeing. We heard consistently that oral and dental health care needs of people

living in residential aged care are not treated as priorities. Daily oral health care is often not undertaken and access to oral and dental health practitioners is limited. Much of what we heard about the failures in oral and dental health care focused on lack of staff time and inadequate training, as well as a lack of access to oral and dental health professionals, but there can be no excuse for failing to brush older people's teeth and clean their dentures daily." (p. 70)

With regard to the focus on user pays, the following is a list of recommendations either rejected or deferred for future consideration:

- The establishment of an Aged Care Pricing Authority to determine price cap determinations and other forms of regulation relating to the efficient cost of delivering relevant services.
- The abolition of fees for assistive technologies, home modifications and specific care services.
- Fees for respite care to be limited to ordinary costs of living as determined by the Pricing Authority.
- The Productivity Commission to investigate an Aged Care Levy through the taxation system.
- Abolition of fees for assistive technologies, home modifications and specific care services
- Fees for respite care be limited to ordinary costs of living as determined by the Pricing Authority
- Redefining the criteria by which a subsidised means tested amount can be allocated to the aged care recipient.
- Subsidised fees for residential aged care accommodation to be determined through a means test.
- The individual's subsidised means tested amount to be the greater amount worked out under the income test or the asset test.
- The phasing out of Refundable Accommodation Deposits.
- Fees for residential aged care to be determined by the Pricing Authority as a minimum amount payable by the recipient of



aged care, as determined by the ordinary cost of living.

Again, it is worth noting the statements made in the final report when referring to the current situation and their relevance to the above set of deferrals and rejections:

“The consequence of these funding arrangements for older people is that they may not be able to access care when they need it due to rationing of services, and when they do access care, funding may not be sufficient to meet the cost of providing the high quality care they need. The current state of Australia’s aged care system is a predictable outcome of these measures to limit expenditure and ignore the actual cost of delivering aged care”. (p. 74)

There are a number of recommendations for further consideration or rejected in relation to the training, pay and working conditions of aged care workers. They include:

- Minimum Certificate 3 qualification for personal care workers, and a National Board to approve Accreditation
- Increases in award wages, equity for men and women and for equal pay for comparable work
- A preference for direct employment
- Indexed increases for Home Care workers
- Amendments to residential aged care indexation arrangements. Wages for aged care workers and qualified nurses in this area to be brought under the umbrella of changes made to minimum wages by the Fair Work Commission including relative indexation.

These recommendations are all attempts by the Commission to begin some form of redress to the failings identified in the report. To quote from the final report:

“In 2016, the majority of paid workers, 240,000 (or 66%), were in direct care roles. Registered nurses comprised 21% of the residential direct care workforce in 2003, but by 2016 this had dropped to around 15%. The proportion of enrolled nurses also

dropped, from 13% to 10%. Over the same period, the proportion of the residential direct care workforce who were personal care workers increased from around 58% to around 70%.” (p. 63)

And:

“We have found that Australia’s aged care system is understaffed and the workforce underpaid and undertrained. Too often there are not enough staff members, particularly nurses, in home and residential aged care. In addition, the mix of staff who provide aged care is not matched to the needs of older people. Aged care workers often lack sufficient skills and training to cater for the needs of older people receiving aged care services. Inadequate staffing levels, skill mix and training are principal causes of substandard care in the current system. The sector has difficulty attracting and retaining well-skilled people due to: low wages and poor employment conditions; lack of investment in staff and, in particular, staff training; limited opportunities to progress or be promoted; and no career pathways. All too often, and despite best intentions, aged care workers simply do not have the requisite time, knowledge, skill and support to deliver high quality care”. (p. 76)

The position taken by the Government enables it to continue the program that has been in operation for several decades.

With regard to the issue of private ownership, this is evident in many of the recommendations. It is not only a position adopted by the government but informs the nature of many recommendations relating to fees associated with service provision and accommodation. When defining a cost, the term “a reasonable rate of return” is seen as an essential consideration.

The government’s position in relation to control of the system and lack of transparency is also apparent in its response to recommendations it has either relegated for further consideration or rejection. These include:



- An Aged Care Commission to administer the system independently of the Minister of Health and Aged Care.
- An Aged Care Pricing Authority.
- An Implementation Taskforce.

The last recommendation proposed the establishment of a properly staffed administrative unit or body by the Australian Government (through the Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet) "to implement and direct implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations". In opposing this recommendation, the Government supported "the alternative proposal in recommendation 147 to establish an implementation unit within the Department of Health, overseen by a cross-departmental steering committee at Deputy Secretary level."

As noted in the final report:

"Commissioner Briggs observes that a lack of transparency is a pervasive feature of the current aged care system. It has been an important contributing cause of a number of the quality problems. Useful and relevant information on aged care services and the performance of services and providers is hard to come by". (p. 76)

It should also be noted that not only has the aged care system been underfunded and failed to identify and cater to the needs of the aged, it has also been extremely hard to access:

"Without access to home care services that meet their assessed needs, people face risks of declining function, preventable hospitalisation, carer burnout, premature entry to residential aged care, and even death". (p. 66)

#### **Capitalism's Inability to Care for the Aged**

The failure of aged care is not an unfortunate

accident or a failure to adequately grasp the needs of the older members of our society.

The only people that are considered useful in capitalist society are those who are productive and can add to the wealth of those who own the means of production. The aged fall within a similar category to other members of society including the chronically sick, those suffering mental illness, the disabled, the unemployed and underemployed, casual workers and those supporting the non-profit generating members of society.

**The only people that are considered useful in capitalist society are those who are productive and can add to the wealth of those who own the means of production.**

Capitalism creates a view that these members of society are less deserving and whenever the opportunity arises, either ignores them or vilifies them.

It should also be noted that the failures identified in the Royal Commission do not apply equally to all members of the aged. Their greatest impact is specifically on those who do not have the financial resources available to ensure they receive the care and support they deserve. And where they don't have resources to a level that will enable their independence, policies are introduced that focus on extracting any vestige of wealth from them. As pointed out in the report:

"The means testing arrangements for aged care funding are insufficiently progressive, affecting equitable access to care. While means testing should ensure that services and payments are directed towards those who need them the most, the current arrangements have a disproportionate impact on people with medium-level assets compared with wealthier people. The means testing arrangements can also result in very high effective marginal tax rates for some people". (p. 77)

Resources and care are available to those who can afford them even if this is at the expense of



others. This is consistent with the user pays emphasis within capitalism.

The aged care situation identified in the report can be seen as having parallels in several other areas of society. Education has seen an increasing focus on private education at the expense of public education. This has also become apparent in ready access to the best possible medical and health services.

The fundamental problem here is a system that places private ownership of the means of production and individual wealth creation as the primary considerations when addressing policy and program formulations and decisions affecting the general health and wellbeing of society.

We have seen capitalism, particularly over the last three to four decades, focus on privatisation of essential services and a user pays program. This has coincided with a growing inequality in wealth and reflects an ongoing attack on equity across society.

### Socialism as an Alternative

Economics is not some abstract, theoretical activity that is divorced from how society is structured. It is in fact the primary means by which class distinction and financial reward are implemented and maintained.

Within capitalism, the primary consideration is profits and the inequitable distribution of wealth. Reward for effort has never been the primary consideration. Now that these people are no longer capable of producing this wealth or enabling its production through support activities and occupations, they are seen to have lost their usefulness.

Socialism recognises the real contribution all members of society make to the economic and social well-being of society. This is not only about current and future contributions but importantly those that have been made in the past. The aged are the people who, through their hard work and commitment have enabled the wealth, prosperity and well-being enjoyed by many Australians.

Socialism bases the distribution of wealth on the condition **to each according to their contribution** not their ability to exploit others based on the ownership of the means of production. It recognises what the aged have contributed and ensures they are given the necessary support financially and socially to ensure their well-being, respect and dignity.

Aged care within socialism addresses the following key considerations in relation to aged care recipients and their providers:

- All policy decisions are formulated on the basis that the aged are a critical sector in the distribution of social wealth.
- Those directly responsible for the care and well-being of the aged are recognised as primary contributors to the health of society and their conditions and rewards are commensurate with that recognition.

### Conclusion

In recent years we have increasingly seen the eagerness of Australian Governments to call for Royal Commissions as a response to “emergency situations” that can no longer be ignored or sidelined. Unfortunately, this eagerness has not translated into a willingness of these Governments to fully adopt the recommendations of these Royal Commissions.

Unlike many other “emergency situations”, the scandal of aged care in Australia will affect all of us who reach old age and those we love and care about, and consequently there should be constant close monitoring of Governmental responses.

As more Australians become aware of the half-hearted/hypocritical response of the federal government to the recommendations of the Royal Commission, further campaigns will arise demanding more progressive and substantial reforms ensuring the government is held accountable.

The struggle for a decent system of residential and home-base aged care is another part of a working class agenda of demands that challenges and exposes capitalism.



# The Railways and Capitalism

by Duncan B.

**I**n 1973 a Party Study Group comprised of railway workers produced a pamphlet about Australia's railways. There have been considerable changes in Australia's railways since then. In 2011, Humphrey McQueen produced an updated version of the pamphlet. I felt that it was time to have another look at the subject.

Marx analysed the role of transportation in the capitalist system in Volume II of *Capital*. The transport industry is one branch of industry which does not produce a product, i.e., a commodity. What the transport industry sells is *change of location*. What Marx calls a "useful effect" is inseparably connected with the process of transportation, i.e., the productive process of the transport industry.

The transport industry facilitates the movement of raw materials such as iron ore, coal and grain from the mines and farms to ports for export or

to factories for processing. Railways are especially suited to the movement of large quantities of bulk cargo over long distances.

Components may be moved from one location to another for further processing and finished products moved to ports or to markets in other locations. Many workers use railways to travel to and from work.

Railways are an independent branch of production, thus a separate sphere of investment for productive capital and are also a continuation of a process of production within the process of circulation and for the process of circulation. Improvements in transport allow the capitalists to turn their capital over much quicker by getting their products to market in a shorter time. Think of the improvements in travel time brought about by steamships and railways compared to travel times by sailing ships and horse-drawn transport.



*Railways and the transportation industry occupy a unique position in the process of production and circulation*



### **Changes to Australia's Railways**

Australian railways in the 1970s were all owned by the individual states. There was also the Australian Government-owned Commonwealth Railways which operated the Trans-Australia Railway and the Central Australia and North Australia Railways.

The only privately-owned railways were found in the iron ore mining areas of north-Western Australia.

Beginning in the 1970's the state government systems began undergoing a process of cutbacks, reduction or elimination of passenger and freight services, particularly in country areas, and the closure of many branch lines. This process culminated in railway privatisations throughout Australia in the 1980s and 1990s.

### **The Commonwealth Railways**

The Commonwealth Railways continued until 1978, when it became Australian National Railways, as a result of a Whitlam Labor Government plan to take over the railways of all the states. Only South Australia (with the exception of the Adelaide metropolitan system) and Tasmania handed their railways over to the federal government.

In 1997/98 the Australian Government sold off ANR's passenger and freight operations to private operators.

### **Victoria**

The Victorian Railways operated all services until 1983 when it was split into V/Line, which operated country services, and The Met which operated Melbourne suburban services. Various restructures followed which culminated in the privatisation of Victoria's railways. The Met services and V/Line were franchised to privately-owned operators. (V/Line became Government-run again in 2002.) V/Line Freight was sold outright to a US company, Rail America. This company, known as Freight Australia was eventually sold to Pacific National. Track and

vehicle maintenance were also contracted out to private contractors.

### **New South Wales**

The railways in New South Wales followed a similar pattern, with closures of branch lines and restructuring of operations. The freight company Freightcorp was sold to National Rail Corporation. Sydney suburban services and NSW country services are operated by Government-owned companies.

### **Queensland**

The Queensland Government operates all passenger services in Queensland. The freight division was privatised in 2010, and is known as Aurizon.

### **South Australia**

As mentioned above, South Australia's railways were operated by the SA government until the handover to the Australian Government when Australian National Railways was formed.

At the demise of ANR, the South Australian freight operations were sold to Genesee & Wyoming, and the Indian-Pacific, Overland and Ghan passenger services were sold to Great Southern Rail.

The SA government has privatised the operation of the Adelaide suburban train services, arranging as from January 2021 an 8-year contract for their operation with Kelios Downer, a joint venture between French and Australian capital, and operator of tram and light rail services in Queensland, NSW and Victoria.

### **Western Australia**

The Western Australian Government continues to operate passenger services in WA. The freight division of the former Western Australian Government Railways was privatised in 2000. It was sold to a consortium called the Australian Railroad Group, comprising Wesfarmers and Genesee & Wyoming. Further sales have taken place since then.



### Tasmania

The Tasmanian Government Railways operated railways in Tasmania until they were handed over to Australian National Railways. Hobart passenger services were discontinued in 1974. The other passenger services were stopped in 1978.

In 1999, the freight operations were sold to Australian Transport Network. Pacific National bought them in 2004. The Tasmanian Government bought them back in 2009, making this the only Government-owned freight service in Australia.

### Northern Territory

Trains on the former narrow gauge Central Australian Railway and the Northern Australian Railway were operated by the Commonwealth Railways until their closure.

The standard gauge track from Tarcoola to Alice Springs opened in 1980 and services were operated by Australian National Railways until the demise of ANR. The track from Alice Springs to Darwin opened in 2004. Passenger and freight services are run by private companies. One Rail Australia (formerly Genesee & Wyoming) operates the freight trains.

### National Rail Corporation

The National Rail Corporation was set up in 1992 by the Australian, Victorian and New South Wales governments to operate interstate freight services between Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide and Perth. In 2002, NRC was sold to a consortium of Patricks and Toll and became Pacific National.

### The Effect on Railway Workers

All of these changes have meant that railway workers, once a united, highly unionised and historically militant group numbering tens of

thousands across Australia, have seen their numbers reduced dramatically and much of the former unity lost. Railway workers found themselves divided and working for many different companies instead of monolithic state-owned systems. The industry lost many skilled workers with the closure of the massive workshops which were a feature of the railways when they were state-owned.

Many workers are employed by contractors in areas such as vehicle and track maintenance. Workers in station and carriage cleaning and security roles are often employed by dodgy employers on poor wages in insecure jobs. The

recent bribery scandal involving high-level managers in V/Line and Metro and shady cleaning contracting companies shows where privatisation can lead.

The job of Railway Unions and their on-job representatives has been made considerably harder. Every time they have to negotiate new EBAs they are forced to defend their members against the

continuing assaults on wages and conditions which the multiplicity of large and small companies involved in the rail industry continually throw at them. There have been some notable struggles in the years since privatisation.

Political organisation on the railways has been made more difficult due to the dispersion of workers into working for different employers and the closure of the large workshops and depots where many workers could be contacted in one place.

### Effects on the Public

The closure of branch-line services has resulted in increased traffic being placed on roads in country areas which are unsuitable to carry the large



numbers of B-Doubles carrying grain, superphosphate, livestock etc.

The shut-down of railway operations in country towns led to these towns losing residents as railway workers had to leave, with a flow-on effect to the shops, schools and other services in country towns.

### Conclusion

Contrary to our expectations, Australia's railways did not all become owned by the Australian government. Instead, we have the present situation where most passenger services are run by the State governments, but all mainland freight operations are in the hands of many private companies.

The railways have not lived up to their potential in Australia. Railways are the main carriers of bulk freight such as coal and iron ore in Australia. Railways only carry a small percentage of the freight volume on the Melbourne-Adelaide, Melbourne-Sydney and Sydney-Brisbane corridors. Rail transport only comes into its own on the longer distance haul from the eastern states to Perth. Road transport carries much of the freight in rural areas due to the poor state of country tracks.

Governments are spending billions of dollars on

transport projects in cities while neglecting interstate and rural tracks. Pie-in-the sky projects like the Inland Freight track to Brisbane are billions of dollars over-budget.

Victoria has been left with an uncompleted, botched railway project, the Murray Basin Freight Rail Project, which was supposed to convert the Mildura track and some grain branch lines to standard gauge. Instead, the project has only been half completed, with the branch lines left unstandardized, and in poor condition, resulting in slower timetables for grain trains.

The 1973 pamphlet concluded by saying:

"Railway workers occupy a key position in industry. We will remain in the front lines of struggle for an independent and democratic Australia.

Foreign monopoly domination of the railways and other industries will be smashed by all the workers and working people of Australia. We shall drive the exploiters right out, and operate these industries for the benefit of all the people."

We stand by these statements, and work towards the day when all transport in Australia will be run by the Government of an Independent Australia for the benefit of all the Australian people.



*Members of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union ( RTBU) rally to defend their rights and conditions in Victoria*



# The Work of Communists in the Unions

by Nick G.

**T**he work of Communists in the unions is an important matter, one that might seem superficially self-evident, but which is complicated by the need for Communists to work within the organisational structures of unions to raise the political level of members and to win the most politically advanced to the ideology of the proletariat, to Marxism-Leninism.

The same thing applies to Communists working in other mass organisations or areas of shared responsibility. The environment and peace movements are examples. Communists working in unions and other mass organisations listen and learn from the people with whom strategies and tactics of struggle are developed.

Generally speaking, Communists work amongst three levels of workers in terms of their political understanding.

Firstly, there are those workers who lack understanding politically and industrially. They are reluctant to join the union and use a variety of excuses not to. Some are openly anti-union. They just don't believe in unions and think they can do a better job of looking after their own interests. Some profess to be sympathetic to the union, but claim that they can't afford the membership dues. Some even claim that their religion prevents them from having a loyalty to anything other than their God or their Church. However, I have yet to come across one who refuses to accept the higher wages or better conditions that are won by their union colleagues. This group of workers must absolutely not be ignored by a Communist, they need to be won over or their hostility towards the union(s) neutralised when a struggle involves industrial or strike action. Attempts must be made to win them to union membership. Some in this group of workers express the individualistic neoliberal ideology, but they can also at times reflect the capitalist alienation and

disempowerment of workers. Some recently arrived migrant workers without the presence and experience of unions in their countries can also be suspicious and resistant to joining a union. They should not be dismissed as the enemy but won over.

A second group accepts the need to be a member of the union, but often only for the protection it offers from harassment or unfair treatment. The union is simply seen as a form of industrial insurance. Depending on their own values and beliefs, this group often has to be won over to any proposal for the union to develop its policies and extend its activities to any area not immediately related to the employment conditions of the members. They can also require winning to the idea of taking action themselves, rather than leaving it to the officials and the legal processes open to their union. This group of members is usually the vast majority of the members, and Communists must work to instill confidence in all workers that they are the collective strength of the union and that it is better to favour militancy over passivity. Communists must also work to convince them that there are social issues and political causes that affect all working people and that there is value in pursuing these objectives through their union so that they can have some impact on matters that are not immediately or directly employment related, but which greatly impact them and their families. The Green Bans of the Builders' Labourers' Federation (BLF), climate change, environmental and peace movements are examples.

A very small group of politically advanced workers who are strong unionists and politically progressive can be introduced to Communist views if their fellow worker, as a Communist, is respected for the performance of their work (i.e., isn't incompetent or a slacker) and respected for standing up for the rights of those that he or she



works with. Our organisational principle of general non-disclosure of membership is to protect our members from surveillance by the state and harassment and threat by its agents, to prevent persecution in and removal from the workplace, and to ensure that there are no barriers to the effectiveness of the mass work conducted by members, barriers that can arise if one prematurely and inappropriately declares oneself to be a Communist. However, we must absolutely not be held back by a general practice of non-disclosure of membership. If a Communist in the workplace does mass work around questions of anti-imperialist Australian independence, democratic rights and socialism, or passes on articles from the Party's website, then certain assumptions about that person's political affiliations will arise. When the time is right, and with the right people, a Communist can be increasingly open about his or her support for the Party and about the Marxist-Leninist beliefs that are guiding their political work. It is a question of making good judgements about when and where the conditions exist for doing this. Reluctance to take that step can indicate a lack of confidence in approaching people to join the Party.

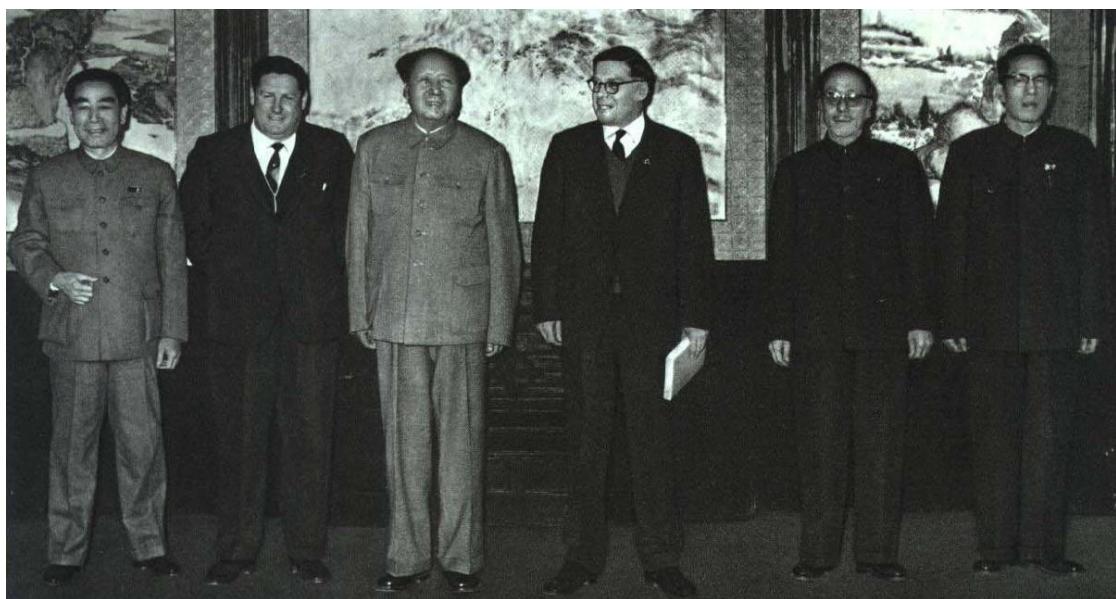
Some may allege that this type of mass work in the unions means that the Party is interfering in their internal affairs.

We disagree. None of what has just been said about working with various levels of the membership of a union constitutes an interference in the internal affairs of a union. Nothing is being imposed from the outside, and the method is embedded in persuasion with respect for the right of the individuals concerned to make up their own minds.

The question of non-interference by the Party in the internal affairs of the unions had a specific starting point in the Party.

In July 1984, our Chairperson Ted Hill and BLF general secretary and former Party vice-chairperson Norm Gallagher issued a leaflet in their own names, *The Communist Party and the Trade Unions*. Having been deregistered once in 1974-5, the BLF was again facing demands for its deregistration. Some of the media comment had portrayed Gallagher as "Maoist" and a "Chinaman" and implied that the Party, through Gallagher, was running the show. The Gallagher-Hill statement addressed that issue, stating correctly:

So far as the Communist Party is concerned each of us is a long-standing member. It is no function at all of the Communist Party to interfere in or attempt to manipulate the union. Each of us can say with the authority of our respective positions that that has



*Norm Gallagher (second from left) and Ted Hill (fourth from left) meet with officials of the Chinese Communist Party including Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai in 1967/68*



never occurred.

It is for the builders' labourers to decide on their own affairs and to manage the union. In our rather long experience there were times 20 to 40 years ago when there was far too much attempted manipulation of unions by outside bodies including Communist Parties. The NCC is a well known example also. The Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) has scrupulously striven to refrain from this.

The Hill-Gallagher statement did not mention, but certainly referred to, the allegations over the years that ballot rigging had been employed by both the right and the left in the union movement. This certainly seems to have been the case.

But there were other examples of interference.

In 1948, the National Secretariat of the Communist Party had ordered a transport workers' stoppage against the newly proclaimed Essential Services Act. Clarrie O'Shea had objected, saying that tramway men were in no mood for a political strike, and added "If I pull them out, it will be disastrous for union militants in the elections on the 24th of this month." The Party had ignored O'Shea's advice and in the elections that followed, the Communists were defeated. O'Shea himself was not up for election at the time.

ASIO's assessment of Clarrie O'Shea compared his method of work with that of another well-known Communist union leader: "He is very highly regarded by Tramway men, and particularly as he always abides by the majority view. He is unlike J.J. (John Joseph) BROWN (V.P.F.1210) who would work something at all costs to conform with Party policy."

Communists who hold official positions in unions can come under severe peer pressure from

others in the Party to get the union to adopt policies that correspond with those of the Party. There can arise the contradiction for a Communist union official of having to represent sometimes reactionary membership views which conflict with one's personal experience and beliefs, and with the line of the Party. To use the privilege of one's position as an official of the union to impose a Party-preferred policy on the union is interference. To raise the issue and have it debated by the membership and strive for its adoption by persuasion according to the democratic structures of the union's decision-making process, is not.

In practice, the Party's organisational principles, applied to members in the same union, have veered from dogmatically applied rigid enforcement of secrecy of membership and non-contact at a Party level, to self-serving liberalism. It is important that the Party accept that mistakes were made. Mistakes are inevitable and not a

lasting problem, so long as they are not repeated and are learned from.

**"...a genuine Communist must be ready to accept a higher or lower post and be able to stand the test of going up or stepping down many times."**

Gallagher was and is a hero of the working class. He was an activist in the old Party, and represented our Party well for quite a few years. Gallagher and O'Shea had been elected Vice-Chairs of the Party at its Second Congress in 1971, but

intemperate and sometimes reactionary comments by Gallagher had seen him dropped as Vice-Chair at the Third Congress conducted from late 1974 to early 1975. Gallagher's removal as VC had been demanded by Party members around the country. The Party made no public comment on Gallagher's demotion, but followed Zhou Enlai's remarks at the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Chinese Party that "a genuine Communist must be ready to accept a higher or lower post and be able to stand the test of going up or stepping down many times." In the Report on the Work of the Central Committee for the Third Congress of the Communist Party of Australia (M-L), it was



said, "Our comrades must be prepared to step up or down in the discharge of Party responsibilities....if it is the general opinion that a comrade should step down, again it is a question of service to the revolutionary cause. It is not possible to talk here in detail but we can talk in general." (AC 70, March 1975)

While Gallagher's name as a VC was no longer used, he was still regarded as a leading member and cosigned a number of Party statements (for example *Defeat New Penal Powers* in 1977, and *For Militant Trade Unionism* in 1987) with Hill, Bull and in 1977, O'Shea. His stature within the union and within the Party withstood his being stood down as VC, and the "non-interference" line originally stated quite correctly in relation to attacks on the Party and the union became a cloak he wrapped around himself to protect him from any further Party guidance and discipline.

Differences of opinion are bound to occur between Party members working in the same union (or mass organisation or mass movement). If Party members are in dispute or disagreement over a union matter and both individuals are behaving acceptably, the Party's role should be limited to requiring proper comradely behaviour and insisting that the disagreement is addressed through the democratic union procedures. The individuals should continue to try to resolve their differences amicably.

Given this history of the question of non-interference by the Party in the unions, the Central Committee recently adopted the following three points as policy to guide us in our work in the union, and by extension in any area of mass work where two or more members are involved:

1. The Party upholds the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of trade

**FOR MILITANT  
TRADE UNIONISM**

By  
**Ted Bull, Ted Hill  
& Norm Gallagher**

For *Militant Trade Unionism* was released by the CPA(M-L) in 1987, at a critical juncture in the history of Australian trade unionism

unions.

2. The Party must ensure that contradictions between Party members that are likely to lead to public disagreement and conflict must be properly investigated and resolved before damage is done to the Party.

3. When defending a union from attack, if there are allegations of bad practices or shortcomings on the part of its leading officials, there must be an honest appraisal, based on proletarian ideology and politics, of the role of those officials. Bad practices and shortcomings should only be referred to in ways that are appropriate to the given struggle and the people involved. The influence of the bourgeois ideology of trade unionism must be given prominence.



# Covid Exposed Our Party's Weaknesses. But We're Learning to Act on that Knowledge

by **Louisa L.**

*This article sums up a number of Vanguard articles and CPA (M-L) Central Committee Statements on the Covid-19 pandemic over the last two years. More importantly it reflects upon lessons learned. Louisa L is a current Vice-Chairperson of the Party.*

**A**ustralia and the world were not prepared for Covid 19.

No other major crisis has upended Australia so completely since World War II.

From March 2020, three incisive articles by John G analysed the economic organisation, responses and potential impacts here.<sup>2</sup>

Another by Alice M, ‘Covid-19 and capitalism’ stated

“Whichever way we look at the Covid-19 Pandemic and its dire consequences for the people, especially the working class, we inevitably come up against the brutal profit driven capitalist system.”

“In early April 2020 Professor Peter Doherty, Australia’s leading immunologist and Nobel Laureate, was asked why there had been little, if any, research into Corona viruses. He replied, “There is just not enough profit margin in it for pharma companies. They live by profits and the rules of capitalism. And

capitalism has no interest in human beings other than as consumers.”

“The pandemic has amplified Australia’s economic vulnerability and dependency on foreign capital. Imperialist globalisation has wiped out many local industries and production. From steel fabrication to the production of basics like medicines, personal protection equipment, masks and ventilators. The Australian people’s livelihoods, health, and safety are completely dependent on imports from overseas countries.

“It doesn’t take a genius to work out that privatisation and mass casualisation of millions of jobs is the main source of the current spread of the Covid-19 outbreak in Melbourne, and in other parts of the world.”<sup>3</sup>

The articles included a study of the rise of state capitalism, moves to develop structures of direct rule by corporations beyond parliament and

<sup>2</sup> Articles by John G. on Covid in 2020

*A spectre of rebellion haunts capital's response to COVID-19 (23 March 2020)*

<https://www.cpaml.org/post2.php?id=1584944173&catid1=19>

*COVID Crisis breathes new life into State Monopoly Capitalism (4 April 2020)*

<https://www.cpaml.org/post2.php?id=1585971564&catid1=16>

*One Pay Day from Poverty (2 April 2020)*

<https://www.cpaml.org/post2.php?id=1585820632&catid1=16>

<sup>3</sup> *Covid-19 pandemic and capitalism*, Alice M. (26 July 2021)

<https://www.cpaml.org/post2.php?id=1595806055&catid1=13,16>



drew lessons from the Melbourne lockdown. They provided key structural analyses missing in other Australian economic commentary and sketched the way forward.

Another article by this writer delved more into the corporate takeover of what was once government run social welfare.<sup>4</sup> It exposed Twiggy Forrest's connection to the military and war industries through charity. It failed to make a clear distinction between the charities gradually transformed by corporate links and the pipers calling the tune. After all, where else are they to get money? Certainly not from governments.

Unsurprisingly, John G's predictions have not all come true – yet.

The seemingly impossible upward spiral of house prices extends boom profits in an industry where all the biggest players are foreign owned.

Recent all-stops-out Covid decisions and ongoing structural ones by governments and the RBA ensured this: NSW construction industry operation allowed 24/7; laws favouring large numbers of small property speculators; record low interest rates; massive subsidies; government infrastructure spends; preparedness to quickly bolster immigration among those with the dough to buy housing.

### A swirl of exaggerated self-justification

By the time Delta hit, Federal Government lies and PR statements about vaccines, with nothing behind them but hot air, undermined the public's belief in anything they said.

This fed anti-vaccination manipulation. In 2020, the media gave big publicity to tiny protests, magnifying their effects. Much bigger progressive protests have been routinely and deliberately ignored over decades.

But in the online world, the far right – with the backing of a section of the US imperialist class

whose interests they serve – had systematically developed a wide network of contacts. Vaccinations and lockdowns were heaven's gift!

Clive Palmer sniffed that opportunity. His potential mining profits are so massive that millions spent spewing dishonest dissention are a good investment. Palmer's posters plastered Sydney's largest "Freedom" rally in late Spring 2021.

In contrast, lockdowns disorganised progressive political action. The green ban on Parramatta's historic Willow Grove, the focus of May Day 2021, was lifted. The union followed the health guidelines, but it angered some militant workers.

By spring 2021, the far right prospered on tales of injustice ludicrously linked to "anti-apartheid" struggles. Some workers signed pacts never to be vaccinated. They became "conscientious objectors", an experienced teacher prepared to be sacked rather than be vaccinated. Misled in their sacrifices, they contributed to a swirl of ongoing hyperbolic self-justification for the great majority who gave up little.

At worst this was a thin veneer masking toxic bourgeois individualism, personified by a female protester interviewed in Sydney's November rain. "I'm not holding this umbrella to keep YOU dry," she said.

### Rows and rows of graves

During epidemics and pandemics particularly, vaccination is both a health and a class question. Our Central Committee Statement in the immediate aftermath of the attack on Melbourne's CFMEU headquarters called for solidarity through vaccination with all those at the front lines, the health workers, essential store-workers, delivery riders, and for all trade unions to take a lead promoting vaccinations.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Charity hand in hand with military, strengthens capitalism's hold on Australia*, Louisa L. (20 August 2021) <https://www.cpaml.org/post2.php?id=1629429927&catid1=19>

<sup>5</sup> *CPA (M-L) statement on Melbourne rallies*, Central Committee (24 September 2021) <https://www.cpaml.org/post2.php?id=1632443174&catid1=4,13>



A July Statement backed mandatory vaccines in some circumstances.<sup>6</sup>

It's not about following rules or doing as you're told by lying governments or capitalism's enforcers, the military and police. Many, seeing this deception became outraged by 'rule-breakers'. They saw the individuals, some photographed and named by media, but not the failure to even attempt to educate many of them. It served capitalism's purposes.

For this current writer, pandemic was always seen as a possibility, implanted in a childhood image of rows and rows of graves at Sydney's Rookwood Cemetery. The occupants all died on the same day as my maternal grandfather in June of the 1919 Influenza Pandemic. Later, this personal story helped quietly shift views of neighbours and friends fearful of vaccines. This approach rather than suppression and lecturing about breaking (capitalist-imposed) rules builds unity. So, sometimes, do facts, as whole extended families and religious congregations were infected. But this alone is only a fragment of what a communist must act on.

Meanwhile, different views on lockdowns and mandatory vaccinations by several avowedly socialist groups became public slanging matches.

#### **Understanding lags behind Covid events**

Workers and those in struggle have asked for unity of progressive forces for the nearly sixty years of our Party's existence. Born of the anti-revisionist struggles widely surfacing from 1956, the CPA (M-L) now refrains from abuse, except of the ruling class. We stand by our founding

principles of listening to and serving the people with working class leadership. Our ideology comes from practical struggle alongside the masses. We learn from successes, but even more from failures and errors.

During Covid, our Party's analysis was generally good. But we were initially too slow to reorganise. Our oft repeated statement, that we have to be ready for rapid changes in the political situation was often not shown in practice.

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no understanding of practice as a guide to action.

To a much lesser degree *On Practice* educated against empiricism. Empiricists only had fragmentary knowledge and did not understand the entire situation. They worked, said Mao, 'blindly though industriously'. It reflected how we worked as we found our feet.

In a new situation we see only its separate aspects at first. This is 'the perceptual stage of cognition'. We have 'a rough sketch', but cannot yet, says Mao, 'form concepts, which are deeper, or draw logical conclusions.'

Our Party had a strong understanding of the forces playing out on either side from day one, reflected in John G's and Alice M's work. But we didn't have the knowledge to organise effectively

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<sup>6</sup> *The Pandemic and People's Rights*, Central Committee (28 July 2021)  
<https://www.cpaml.org/post2.php?id=1627435305&catid1=4,19>



and widely in lockdowns. This was uneven, as deep ongoing work mass work continued. In some places our comrades adapted quickly to this new era of struggle and our Party's profile was raised. Others were at the first stage, struggling to use old, pre-lockdown methods of organisation. As a national body, it took us too long to effectively adapt.

In these two years, since Covid emerged life has been in constant change, especially in our most populous states. The ruling class has all society's forces at its disposal. Yet even they were wrought with division. Even they struggled with what to do.

The delay to payments of terrified people suddenly out of work was soon largely forgotten, by printing money to support them. Mr Morrison was gleefully rehabilitating himself after his bushfire disaster. But his gradually exposed lies on a vaccine roll-out showed 'governing' reduced to glib PR announcements was no longer enough.

### **Welfare state reincarnated?**

The article targeting Twiggy Forrest stated,

"When governments belatedly reintroduced support for those incomes collapsed, some proclaimed this as the welfare state reincarnated. In some ways that's true. The alternative was outraged action compelled by hunger and insecurity previously unknown to tens of millions of Australians.

"Governments are simply handing out money. They aren't rebuilding a welfare system. The poor have systematically and systematically been denied decent health care beyond emergency wards. The public psychiatric hospital system that provided

long term residential rehabilitation has been dismantled. Jails have picked up that 'responsibility'. Public housing is in crisis. Public transport has been privatised and services stripped.

"For those who disappear through these cracks, there's little to cushion the fall."

As communists, our greatest resources are the masses and the scientific socialist method of analysis. But lockdown often disconnected us from ability to work with the masses, beyond local suburbs. Change was happening so quickly, we struggled to keep up. But with change comes learning.

**"Marxism emphasizes the importance of theory precisely and only because it can guide action. If we have a correct theory but merely prate about it, pigeonhole it and do not put it into practice, then that theory, however good, is of no significance."**

Despite criticising dogmatists for lengthy quotes, *On Practice* explains how knowledge develops so clearly, if ever there was a time to quote from that document, it's now.

Mao states,

"As social practice continues, things that give rise to man's sense perceptions and impressions in the course of his practice are repeated many times; then a sudden change (leap) takes place in the brain in the process of cognition, and concepts are formed. Concepts are no longer the phenomena, the separate aspects and the external relations of things; they grasp the essence, the totality and the internal relations of things. Between concepts and sense perceptions there is not only a quantitative but also a qualitative difference. Proceeding further, by means of judgement and inference one is able to draw logical conclusions...This is the second stage of cognition...This stage of conception, judgement and inference is the more important stage in the entire process of knowing a thing; it is the stage of rational knowledge."



For Mao and other Marxists, this ‘integrated process’ is ‘unified on the basis of practice’. He called on students to ‘personally participate in the practical struggle to change reality’ with ‘honesty and modesty’.

Mao continues,

“Marxist philosophy holds that the most important problem does not lie in understanding the laws of the objective world and thus being able to explain it, but in applying the knowledge of these laws actively to change the world. From the Marxist viewpoint, theory is important, and its importance is fully expressed in Lenin’s statement, ‘Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.’ But Marxism emphasizes the importance of theory precisely and only because it can guide action. If we have a correct theory but merely prate about it, pigeonhole it and do not put it into practice, then that theory, however good, is of no significance. Knowledge begins with practice, and theoretical knowledge is acquired through practice and must then return to practice.”

Only through ‘the test of practice’ can errors be discovered and remedied. Often, Mao says, failures have to be ‘repeated many times’ before errors are understood and rectified.

### Sydney suburbs compared to war-zones

The forces of the state – laws, police, courts, jails, military – used lockdowns to practise for a time when old ways of ruling by US imperialism and its allies no longer suffice, when deception and divide and conquer are no longer enough. We understood this well.

On July 24, another article, ‘Locals compare Sydney suburbs under lock-in to war zones’ broke a story that had gone unnoticed in the week since the southwest Sydney lockdown began.<sup>7</sup>

It opened:

“Police have been let loose in Sydney.

“Capitalists demanded our city stay open. The NSW Government complied. Covid’s fearful spread is a direct result.

“Whole working class and migrant districts across the south west and west are locked in. People strive to keep themselves, their families and communities safe. Little assistance is provided.”

It showed what it was like for those suffering under direct military and police control, most painfully felt by being suddenly locked in, denied work, random searches, police everywhere and by the deafening, all-consuming roar of helicopters low overhead, from early morning till late night.

However, it’s not enough to write a *Vanguard* article and to talk to friends about the situation. A key task is to build enough forces to help organise the affected people. To serve the people in their immediate needs. To get their story out more widely than a left circle, so attempts to divide and conquer fail, to link, as the article did, to First Peoples, who have faced much worse suppression since 1788.

Suppression rises and wanes depending on the organised strength in struggle, and its capacity to break through into the wider community.

### Beware the emergency response

So, the article also focused on similarities to the 14 year ‘Emergency’ NT Intervention, and warned that “emergencies” can be indefinitely extended.

“The Territory is remote enough for the media to ignore as rights are systematically stripped from First Peoples which make up a third of its population. It’s a testing ground for how to get away with this in other places.

“Why there? The NT is home to huge resources on Aboriginal lands that an

<sup>7</sup> Locals compare Sydney suburbs under lock-in to war zones, Louisa L. (24 July 2021) <https://www.cpaml.org/post2.php?id=1627119709&catid1=19>



overwhelmingly foreign owned mining and gas industry want. Additionally, there are expanding US military bases and rapidly growing troop presence, all amid sabre rattling and preparations for US war with China,” the article pointed out.

Things have developed since the article was written.

The NT Land Rights Act gives First Peoples more right to say no to developments on their Country than anywhere else in Australia. It arose from the hugely important land rights’ struggles of the 1960s and 1970s most particularly the eight-year Gurindji walk-off demanding their land from Australia’s then biggest landholder, British Lord Vesty.

It is no coincidence that an 82-page amendment to the NT Land Rights Act is currently before the Federal Government after the PM touted “a gas-led recovery” to the Covid induced economic troubles of 2020.

On these issues at least, we have made ongoing contributions to support First Peoples in their leading roles.

“In 2020 *Vanguard* warned of emergency legislation (which removed criminal culpability from any soldiers) combining with the NT Intervention and an already existing secret military training manual, ‘Australian Army Manual of Land Warfare’, called ‘Aid to the Civilian Authorities’.

“The manual is a step by step how-to for a military coup or dissolution of parliament or other moves to open capitalist class rule.”<sup>8</sup>

Much of it was also practised in southwest Sydney.

The 2020 article was shared widely in First Peoples’ communities across the country because it resonated with their experience.

### **It can be done!**

The article stated, “Australia is not ripe for such an extremity. But police are certainly getting good experience.”

In Sydney we were unprepared for even the much milder lockdown version.

For our Party, it seemed impossible to effectively support those locked in. Not enough experience had accumulated to chart a way to action.

This is a key collective task a communist party must undertake. There’s no doubt at all that we will have to be ready for such actions in the future.

Yet the 2020 jailing of those living in Melbourne public housing towers evoked a huge response. People passed needed goods to those in adjoining lock-down areas, continuing till residents received supplies and solidarity. Some restrictions were lifted in the uproar.

### **It can be done!**

In Sydney, the locked-in and charities had to do it for themselves, without the tools of Marxism. But the far right made sure it was there, to sow ideas of division and reap them.

Despite police attacks on demonstrators, this deceptive division of the masses facilitates the growth of the more important (and increasingly open) rule of imperialism, embodied in the state apparatus of laws, police, courts, gaols, camps and military, that First Peoples often call “the injustice system”.

However, the July Central Committee Statement dealt with the issues of vaccination, bourgeois right of individuals, and how all this was being used by the far right. It issued a systematic list of demands to serve the people.

Just because you are fighting the police, it doesn’t mean you are on the side of the people. Militancy can be a powerful right wing weapon, especially

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<sup>8</sup> First Peoples likely to be the first target of law empowering the military, Lindy Nolan (3 November 2020)  
<https://cpaml.org/post4.php?id=2146>



when most trade unions have ditched it for compromise with capitalism and its easy life.

### **Sovereign individuals or sovereignty never ceded?**

Perhaps the far right saw its opportunity when First Peoples faced down the military as they arrived unannounced at a remote community as Covid spread to western NSW.

The preparedness of far-right activists to fight helped win over some First Peoples' leaders, particularly through the wider far-right sovereign individuals' movement.

Perhaps they had been at work already.

Libertarianism asserts governments have no right to limit the activities of individuals.

Although it uses that critical word, "sovereignty" and calls for unity against so-called illegal governments, the sovereign people's movement is the antithesis of genuine collective leadership based on unceded sovereignty.

Greens Senator Lidia Thorpe calls it a hijacking, with a \$40m spend by Clive Palmer for the coming Federal election which it will feed into and beyond.

A Yuin woman told this writer, "People will do what they have to do. It speaks to a level of desperation. There's a genocide going on."

So, prominent Yuin man, Uncle Max Harrison congratulated the Sydney 'Freedom' marchers, his message later shared widely by 'Children's Health Defence Australia', a US-based anti-vaxxer and anti-fluoride organisation now establishing itself in Australia.

"They're not a government! They're a

corporation!"

His rage against governments turned him against health measures. He said the current war was the worst he'd experienced, "There's no bullets, only vaccines. But the enemy becomes your little kids. Your grandchildren."

Worse than jailing ten-year-olds and torturing them? Worse than denying children health care, denying them culture or stealing them from family?

Uncle Bruce Shillingsworth led the powerful 2019

Yaama Ngunna Baaka protest to the Baarka/Darling River, then dying in water theft and drought. He also addressed the November 'Freedom' march in Sydney. Others round the country are drawn in.

**Detaching those who have been misled from imperialism's grasp is always a contradiction that leaders of the masses, and the masses themselves, must grapple with. But it's secondary to organising our own forces. It's idealist to think we can easily win back those who've thrown their lot in with the people's enemies.**

The right had already hoodwinked Muslim convert and boxer, Anthony Mundine, a supporter for Aboriginal youth, strong against racism. On a Facebook share, before Sydney's first anti-lockdown march, he wrote of vaccines, "I never thought I'd share something by Pauline Hanson. But she's right on this."

### **History lessons**

During the rise of Nazi Germany, Ernst Rohm's largely working class and unemployed brown shirts were Hitler's storm troopers, the SA. As with neo-fascists, their most intense hatred is focused on "the Left".

Divide and conquer always suits the ruling classes, including the German capitalist class decimated by World War One's defeat, locked out of the industrial heartland of the Ruhr and lands beyond its borders. But dialectically, it also



threatened the smooth running of capitalism.

The SA wanted the “socialism” of so-called national socialism, to benefit their “pure and chosen” section of the masses.

This is also true of some active “Freedom” marchers who come from the left and working class. They fail to understand that capitalism is more than a bunch of conspiracies. Their justifiable anger against rapacious pharmaceutical corporations is coupled with individualism and lack of genuine class consciousness.

‘The Night of the Long Knives’, when Rohm and up to 1,000 of his S.A. followers were murdered and many more arrested at Hitler’s orders, brought the military in behind Hitler.

This indicates the true motives of the ruling class. They organise disorder and division for the people, but unity and order of whichever imperialist block they are tied to.

Detaching those who have been misled from imperialism’s grasp is always a contradiction that leaders of the masses, and the masses themselves, must grapple with. But it’s secondary to organising our own forces. It’s idealist to think we can easily win back those who’ve thrown their lot in with the people’s enemies.

In the aftermath attacks on the CFMEU’s headquarters, our Central Committee July statement in part reflected an attempt to deal with this secondary contradiction. For revolutionary leaders, the task is not just to understand and correct errors as individuals. We have a collective task, to educate others, but don’t have a monopoly on wanting to influence others.

Mao states, “In a revolutionary period the situation changes very rapidly; if the knowledge of revolutionaries does not change rapidly in accordance with the changed situation, they will be unable to lead the revolution to victory.”

### More than thanks

The article, ‘NSW open for big business to spread Covid’, began by showing who was calling the shots,

“The corporate cat stuck its head out of the Covid bag in mid-July 2021 when then NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian mentioned she was taking guidance from business leaders.

“Sydney’s Lockdown Lite saw Covid spread like a hydra. Cut off one head and two or three more appeared. Red zones oozed across the city, regions and interstate.”<sup>9</sup>

It asked, and answered, rhetorical questions on many peoples’ lips: why is every giant retail outlet overflowing with shoppers? Who runs this country?

It continued:

“Foxtel demonised “entitled Sydney-siders” for not staying home. Meanwhile it also spewed bile at Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews.

“This gleeful finger-pointing separated ‘people like us’ from ‘people like them’. State lines, the relics of former British colonies, deepen division leaving us open for plunder as we blame each other.”

It demanded to know where the outrage was for the two thousand Ikea shoppers in one day who found themselves in isolation or infected. “Ikea’s two other megastores remained open. Not a fine. All legal. All good.”

It asked about children isolating, those living pay cheque to pay cheque, in overcrowded apartments with brick wall views, but no backyard, or those with life threatening mental health issues.

Not included was the recent federal government offer of hot air – 20 mental health support sessions to any Australian affected by Covid. The

<sup>9</sup> NSW open for big business to spread Covid, Louisa L. (19 July 2021)  
<https://cpaml.org/post2.php?id=1626690536&catid1=16>



NDIS is privatised of course, with huge staff turnover, unlike the public mental health services it replaced.

Those with life threatening mental health issues give up, or spend enormous amounts of their precious energy chasing support that never materialises, or is cancelled five minutes before the support worker is due.

Like private hospitals, NDIS profiteers don't want people who are really sick, only those with simple issues so they can churn profits through quickly.

There are many other questions begging to be asked and answered, but most importantly what do we do in face of all this?

The article asked us to be kind and generous, to build unity by explaining why some people push the envelope, rather than blaming individuals for problems caused by capitalism.

"It's time to extend the web of connection between ourselves and others, for only the organised and active masses can create history and defeat capitalism."

It asked us to "praise, and praise again, the health workers, epidemiologists, researchers, reporters and others who have fought for and won" the stronger lockdowns then announced.

It stated:

"Corporations demanded profit while pandemic raged. Their tame politicians obliged.

"Remember who to blame. Draw lessons. Never forget!"

But praise isn't enough. Nor is blame. It's words not actions. If nurses had been asked, they would have said, as they would have for years – better staff patient ratios to ease their crushing workloads.

A similar idea is encapsulated in a NSW Teachers Federation struggle, demanding "More than thanks!" before it called its first 24 hour strike in a decade for December 7, demanding a reduction in face to face teaching plus a 5 per cent wage rise.

### **Workers mobilise**

In November, Ned K summed up rising struggles in various states, including bans and strikes among public hospital support service workers, by warehouse women workers, Toll Logistics workers across three states, MUA members against privatized sea port operators from further casualization of the waterfront and ambulance officer/ paramedics, doctors and nurses across multiple states.<sup>10</sup>

Struggle was so widespread Anthony Albanese and the ACTU weighed in, demanding change. Ned K warned that more farsighted members of the capitalist class were likely to try and co-opt this input.

"The real struggle though will be about the ALP and ACTU supporting workers' demand to get rid of limitations on workers' right to take collective action at any time, not just in the extremely limited bargaining period, whether that be at a site level, sector or industry level or across a supply chain," he said.

In mid-July, Alice M. detailed the MUA two-year battle against the world's biggest shipping firm in 'Touch one, touch all – fighting call of the working class'.<sup>11</sup> She described the hundreds rallying dockside in support of the workers.

She concluded by calling for an independent working class agenda asserted in action.

"The Svitzer-Maersk attack on the MUA exposes capital and multinational corporations' permanent agenda of

<sup>10</sup> *Workers Struggles Intensify As ACTU Calls For New Industrial Laws*, Ned K. (21 November 2021)  
<https://www.cpaml.org/post2.php?id=1637452663&catid1=13>

<sup>11</sup> *Touch one, touch all – fighting call of the working class*, Alice M. (12 July 2021)  
<https://www.cpaml.org/post2.php?id=1626244420&catid1=13>



*Workers mobilise in support of the Maritime Union in Melbourne in July 2021*

relentless attacks on the rights, wages and conditions of the entire working class. Corporate attacks can only be fought by the collective power of the working class with its own independent and fighting demands - an independent working class agenda not beholden to or reliant on politicians, parliamentary parties and the courts.

"The enduring legacy and tough lessons of the 1998 MUA struggle for the next generation of workers is that job security and union rights have to be fought for and can be defended on the ground by the mobilised and organised working class and its allies in the wider community. It's a lesson that can, and will be, repeated."

### Vultures

In early November 2021, 'A Covid welfare state or corporate vultures feeding?' commented on opportunist conniving from those NSW Coalition

MPs supporting capitalism's hard right grouping.<sup>12</sup>

"During the 2020 bushfires [now deposed] NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian won kudos when she unfailingly gave precedence to frontline experts in daily media conferences. Meanwhile the prime minister sunned in Hawaii, and her Nationals' Deputy Barilaro attacked her from his London holiday.

"In last year's initial Covid outbreak, she bowed to increasingly organised action from health and education workers, and closed schools despite public pressure from the PM.

"Earlier, in 2019, she stood relatively firm on women's rights to safe abortion, despite an onslaught from the opportunist cabal within Coalition ranks drawing new groups into far-right action. This time Barnaby Joyce and

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<sup>12</sup> A Covid welfare state or corporate vultures feeding?, Louisa L. (9 September 2021) <https://www.cpaml.org/post2.php?id=1631167170&catid1=19>



company attacked her while she was overseas on a work trip and unable to organise effectively.

"All the while, Ms Berejiklian remained a model state capitalist manager, keeping corporations and their economy afloat with multibillion dollar construction projects for public schools, hospitals and transport.

"Not that they had enough nurses or teachers to fill the hospitals and schools. Early this year, there were regular short walkouts by state school teachers over staff shortages. Public hospitals, facing increasing staff shortages, were stripped of nurses to staff vaccine clinics, while Ramsey Health raked in billions from governments for accepting public patients.

"Motorways claimed the biggest slab of the NSW budget."

"Meanwhile the Federal Government tore desperately needed funding and threw it at private schools and hospitals. In lockstep, the NSW government enforced its miserable squeeze on public sector workers' wages, which mandate huge fines – for merely threatening industrial action!"<sup>13</sup>

### **Sharing the pain and the learning-to-live-with-it polka**

The article continued:

"All this puts the NSW Coalition's Covid response into sharper focus. Unlike bushfire press conferences, government appointed Medical Officer Kerry Chant is relegated to second, third or even fourth place. She speaks after Gladys Berejiklian, the "Health" Minister Brad Hazzard, and the police chief. Brad Hazzard (who stood with her in the abortion struggle) has joined the faction undermining hard lockdown.

"The ongoing battle was reflected in closure

announcements of some monopoly retail outlets one Friday being reversed by Sunday. The construction industry was open, then closed and now half open. But arts' workers can't come together at all to create, even outside. (At least some are doing so, brilliantly, online.)

"Unlike the sighs of relief of initial lockdowns, most working from home say every minute is accounted for, as managers see all time as worktime.

"Despite some improvements, state school teachers are still embattled, using second rate online programs. Teachers are distressed as many students disengage.

"In contrast, pain is eased in elitist private schools by the streamlined rollout provided by full-time IT teams. Some schools, like Perth's The Hale School that 'educated' Christian Porter and Ben Roberts-Smith, took well-publicised \$7m JobKeeper handouts despite an \$8m surplus.

"Word has leaked out, that we aren't in this together. Mr Morrison's moved on to his next catchcry."<sup>14</sup>

Commodities had to sell and capital circulate.

"As Delta continued its gallop through Sydney, the Business Council of Australia spruiked ending lockdowns sooner rather than later. By September 1, it had lined up 79 supportive member CEOs including Qantas and Transurban for an open letter.

"The PM had long danced the "learning to live with it" polka. But ... he sensed that salvaging his reputation – after failing miserably to provide vaccines – was a good idea. Fire up the electronic printing presses!

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<sup>13</sup> ibid

<sup>14</sup> ibid



Again. Time to save the poor and suffering.

"It was nothing to do with peoples' suffering, which normally means capitalist administrators put in the boot. Think the half a million Centrelink penalties to First Peoples in the NT since 2015. The unemployed are still copping frequent penalties in locked down Sydney. Others find themselves with huge public housing debts.

"Let's ask, then, are the 2500 Qantas workers - sacked while the company is on target to receive a total \$2bn bailout with more to come from state governments – receiving the PM's largess? The Transport Workers Union and pesky journalists still ask why the government didn't re-nationalise part of the company in return for the dough. Sixty two percent surveyed said they should have.

"Regional airport workers were excluded from a rescue package favouring Qantas. Rex, which keeps regional areas connected with cities and each other, lost out in the 2020 money shovelling too."<sup>15</sup>

The article went on to provide evidence about Sydney Airport's sale, supporting Lenin's conclusion, that unless they bring revolution, imperialist crises concentrate monopoly.

### More than "stuff"

Rival imperialisms are compelled to monopolise. It's not a choice. It's 'get bigger or die.'

Although capital and pyramid cryptocurrency circulated at dizzying speed, there was no real productive activity behind it.

Dangerously, lockdowns reminded people relationships were more important than "stuff" – capitalist commodities.

We learned we didn't need so much. We shuffled round in old clothes, joking about it.

**Our Party is not afraid of capitalism, its deception, divide and conquer or its violence. Emersed within the peoples' emerging strengths and understanding, in action led by the working class, we all have a world to win.**

There was no rush on shops when lock-downs ended. Instead, we rushed to those we loved most, family and friends, with those circles moving outward, and Christmas shopping delayed.

A horror at the rise of far right street marchers can blind us to the strength we are learning.

But progressive political action is more thoughtful and deeper, creating stronger links.

We have a way to go, but we've made a good start.

Our Party is not afraid of capitalism, its deception, divide and conquer or its violence. Emersed within the peoples' emerging strengths and understanding, in action led by the working class, we all have a world to win.

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<sup>15</sup> ibid



# Book Review:

## Our Exceptional Friend

### Australia's Fatal Alliance with the United States

**Emma Shortis,**  
**Hardie Grant Books, Melbourne, 2021 (280 pages)**

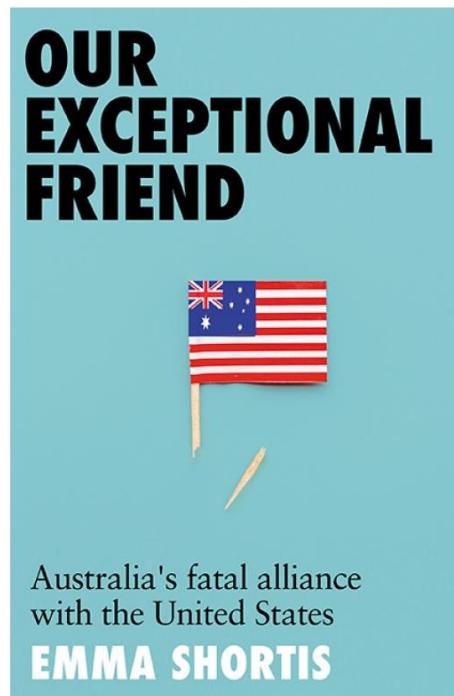
by Alex M.

**E**mma Shortis has written an accessible book that highlights the problems for Australia in its dependent relationship with the United States. Published in the year of the seventieth anniversary of the ANZUS Treaty, Shortis argues in her book that 'ANZUS is at once a symptom and a cause.' In her view:

The particular relationship that [ANZUS] created and defined means that the worst of American politics is reflected here in our own. The United States and Australia share histories and presents of egregious, systemic racism, intertwined with dramatically increasing economic inequality and environmental destruction. (p.5)

Shortis uses the concept of sharing as her organisational theme. That is, each of the chapters examines the things that the US and Australia have in common, such as settler colonial histories, values, enemies, climate and so on. All nine chapters, including the introduction and conclusion have the word 'shared' as the first word in the title. All very well, but it tends to underscore the similarities between the two countries and plays down the dissimilarities that exist.

One thing common to each country is a shared political economy. Shortis does give an overview of elements of American capitalism in chapter five 'Shared Money' and Australian endorsement of the American economic model, but her analysis here is rather superficial. Superficial because her political-ideological outlook is left liberal. That is, there is not the critical Marxist edge to her analysis that would allow her to



reveal the dependence on US capital that is a feature of Australian capitalism. For Shortis, Australian governments have been happy to go along with the global spread of American economic values 'because those values have tended to suit what those governments have understood as Australia's national economic interests.' (p.126) Shortis points out that the American economic model of neoliberal capitalism is not without problems. Such a model is predicated on 'growth at all costs' which has deleterious consequences for the global environment among other things. Like American capitalism, the Australian version is based on 'extractive and exploitative' practices, that help perpetuate fossil fuel dependence. Companies involved in the extractive industries such as the mining giant Rio Tinto, have been known to ride



roughshod over the cultural heritage of Indigenous people here in Australia and across the globe.

In May 2020, the mining corporation Rio Tinto, an Anglo-Australian company in the American model, destroyed a 46,000-year-old Aboriginal heritage site at Juukan Gorge, in Western Australia's Pilbara region. Rio Tinto ignored the desperate pleas of the Puuti Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura peoples and blew up the site 'in order to access higher volumes of high grade ore'. Those were the company's words, the company's admission. It was after more money. (p.134)

While what Shortis emphasises here actually happened, there are problems with aspects of her understanding of capitalism. Not least is the notion that companies are just 'after more money'. Profit maximisation is what drives capitalist companies. It is not a matter of 'if only companies were not so greedy then things would be better'; capitalist corporations are compelled by the laws of capitalism to maximise profits otherwise they will be gobbled up by their market rivals. The growth at all costs model is hard-wired into capitalism, it is in the DNA of capitalism.

Also, Rio Tinto is not merely an Anglo-Australian company in the American model. As Clinton Fernandes has revealed, Rio Tinto is two-thirds owned by US based investors. Along with other big Australian based corporations with similar US ownership levels (BHP for one) those with controlling levels of equity in Rio Tinto dictate the policies and practices of the corporation and its associated entities. The connections between US capital and Australian based companies go broader and deeper than what Shortis's analysis uncovers in this chapter.

The adoption of the American economic model, according to Shortis, does not have to be an inevitability for Australia. There are alternatives. Here she cites New Zealand as a possible positive alternative. 'In New Zealand, "just transitions" policies are moving the country away from reliance on fossil fuels, without leaving people behind.' (p. 133) Not only does this move people

away from dependence on fossil fuels but the policies help improve people's lives and provide better jobs.

Another positive example Shortis suggests can be found in 'the European Union Green Deal, or circular economy, which is attempting to replace the American growth-at-all-costs model for something more human, sustainable and caring.' (p.133) The alternatives to the American economic model, which Shortis asserts is the model that Australian governments adopt, arguably do have some positive benefits. However, they have to be seen for what they really are; attempts at reforming some of the perceived bad aspects of capitalism without addressing the root cause of the problems, namely capitalism itself.

The limitations of Shortis's left liberal outlook are apparent in her chapter 'Shared Money', which, as is shown from the discussion above, constrains her understanding of capitalism, its primary role in global climate change and the trashing of Indigenous peoples' cultures among other things. Her claim that Australian governments adopt American economic values because they identify those values as a good fit with Australia's national economic interests, is too simplistic a reading of the political and economic dependency that the Australian ruling class and the Australian capitalist economy has with the dominant US imperialist power.

Elsewhere in the book Shortis is on firmer ground. Her grasp of the history of the shared relationship between the US and Australia is very good, with numerous examples furnished of the craven and unquestioning support that Australian bourgeois politicians and governments have given to US initiated wars. In chapter three, 'Shared Wars' Shortis runs through the record from Menzies to Morrison. Support for the US's armed conflicts goes without saying in Australian ruling class circles. Shortis:

No matter the context, no matter the president, no matter the country involved, the Australian government has *always* done that. The degree to which the American



military industrial complex has captured Australia is almost unparalleled elsewhere in the world. Since the Korean War in the 1950s, Australia has been one of the few countries to blindly trail America into each conflict. Our governments' collective refusal to reckon with this legacy – to really confront the morality of American wars and our enthusiastic participation in them – has helped perpetuate American imperialism and led to the unnecessary, violent deaths of millions of people. (p.63 italics in original)

The ANZUS Treaty is talismanic for Australian governments, bourgeois politicians, and officials. The treaty, as interpreted by the above and assorted pundits, means we can only rely on American protection in the event of conflict if we commit fully to the US imperial project. The rationale goes that we Australians cannot expect American military protection if we do not show that we are good alliance partners. Shortis points out that in 2020 during Trump's presidency 'the United States came within a whisker of war with Iran'.

The Morrison government would have been drawn into that conflict if it had eventuated, meaning that 'Australians would have been sent to kill people and to die in the name of perpetuating American global supremacy. Again.' (p.69)

Such servile clinging to a treaty which does not guarantee that the US will come to Australia's aid militarily in the event of conflict has to be addressed, Shortis argues. What Australia should do regarding its foreign and defence policies is not straightforward however:

... this book is not a call to just trash the treaty and start again. Even in the unlikely

event that ANZUS disappeared tomorrow, if the United States went to war with China (or almost any other country) the day after, the Australian government would undoubtedly still follow. If ANZUS goes but the structures of Australian foreign policy and American power remain, nothing much will change. (p.231)

What to do then? Shortis suggests that there must be a rethinking about Australia's exceptional friendship with the United States. Such a rethinking must go beyond just ANZUS. 'It means rethinking the nature of democracy, and

what genuine democratic engagement and accountability might look like'. (p.232) While sentiments such as these are laudable they underline the limits of Shortis's outlook. The problems of the Australian ruling class's subservience to US imperialism are detailed in the book with eloquence, yet there is no proposal or programme put forward for how the Australian people can actually reverse said subservience to and dependence on US imperialism.

Overall, *Our Exceptional Friend ...* is a worthy addition to the critical literature on Australian foreign policy, ANZUS and Australian ruling class servility to US imperialism. Shortis may have improved the book if she had examined Clinton Fernandes's and Vince Scappatura's contributions to the field (somewhat surprisingly there's no mention of either of them in her bibliography). The limitations that come with a left liberal outlook should also be borne in mind by more class conscious prospective readers. Even with those caveats, this book is worth reading for those of us committed to bringing about an independent, socialist Australia.



# From the Archives:

## E.F Hill – An Undated Report to the Central Committee of the CPA (M-L):

*The following article is a report made by Chairman E.F ‘Ted’ Hill to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist). Although the report is undated, from various references in this document, it was probably written in late 1973 or early 1974. We publish it for what it reveals about Comrade Hill’s leadership of the Party ideologically, politically and organisationally. All footnotes are the work of the editors.*

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I should like to set down some thoughts on the current situation. I am not attempting to formulate them in an exact way but to put them forward for consideration and discussion and so as to stimulate an exchange of views.

Chairman Mao said apropos of China in admittedly a situation very different from that in Australia “...the spreading and deepening of the study of Marxism-Leninism presents a big problem demanding an early solution which is possible only through concentrated effort.”<sup>16</sup> My opinion is that the study of Marxism-Leninism in Australia presents a big problem which demands a concentrated effort right now and particularly by the leading comrades.

There is a recurring problem in this as to what is meant by study. I venture to suggest that even in the case of some very leading comrades, only when a Marxist-Leninist classic is read in a collective reading do they do any Marxist-Leninist reading. The fact that they then do some reading is good but it emphasises what they don’t do. My opinion is that it is absolutely critical that we build up a core of comrades who have some reasonable grip of Marxism-Leninism. This is particularly urgent. It won’t be done in a day and it won’t be done by learning things by rote or by reading alone. None of this is to over-look that there are a growing number of earnest students of Marxism-Leninism who are studying in the correct way.

I mention the correct way because the influx of students into the movement has brought certain traits of these students. The influx in itself is a good thing provided we know the problems associated with it. There are students who have read quite a bit of Marxism-Leninism and speak and write about it with great authority. Some of them have read a lot without I think, really grasping the essence of it. Some move from one thing to another. It becomes all the rage. Some of these students actually I think, have an intimidating effect on others. Yet they are often wrong.

Their understanding is often arbitrary and subjective. We may take the study of the *Orientation of the Youth Movement*.<sup>17</sup> It stresses the position of the working class. Some however asserted their agreement with it and quoted from it, yet acted in a way contrary to it or rationalized it to suit their own subjective position. They really (I mean in essence) denied the leading role of the working class and asserted and practiced the leading role of revolutionary students, failing to understand that the leading role of the working class arises from the working class’s objective position under capitalism. Far from discouraging student activity, we encourage it and, in my opinion, correctly. But we must

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<sup>16</sup> Mao Zedong, The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War, Selected Works, Vol 2 p. 209

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_14.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_14.htm)



understand the trend to which I have referred, understand that it persists and will persist and arise in new forms. Thus, the study of this Marxist classic was not wholly correct. It was studied in a one-sided way.

Then there is the familiar urging to integrate the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism into the concrete conditions of Australia. There is a truth and a most important truth. There are many people who accept it and affirm it. That is good. But it is not done merely by repeating it or using it as a method of exhortation. Chairman Mao said of the equally good statement “linking theory with practice” – “merely talking about linking theory and practice without actually doing anything about it is of no use, even if one goes on talking for a hundred years”.<sup>18</sup> This is so in Australia.

**When we talk of the leading role of the working class we are talking about the specific role of the specific Australian working class in the specific situation in Australia. In fact, the expression “leading role of the working class” is a scientific expression and not a popular expression. Its mere repetition or affirmation has some use no doubt, but its actual practice is another matter.**

Recently I participated in a discussion with some young comrades who in my opinion correctly rebelled against the endless repetition of this phrase. Then they produced a public document dealing with Australia’s struggle for independence. They certainly did not use the phrase “the leading role of the working class” (correctly, I think) but what the content of their document did was in my opinion to effectively negate the leading role of the working class. It reviewed the independence struggles in Australia in recent times but they were mainly petty bourgeois struggles whereas those with real working class content were omitted. There was no need to say anything in terms about the leading role of the working class could and should have been made clear by the very fact of a number of important struggles. The document was produced by exceedingly good comrades but I think their omission of struggles in which the working class was in fact decisive was not accidental: it expressed their real state of mind. These comrades are good readers of Marxism-Leninism. Thus the problem of real understanding of its essence is quite a large one. How to make it effective is the question.

Then we may take the various controversies that have occurred among the young people. They set up the Y.C.L.<sup>19</sup> For a time to them it was the last word in organisation and activity. Then they became dissatisfied with it and they formed the W.S.A.<sup>20</sup> Then some of them became dissatisfied with that and they talk of forming still another organisation.<sup>21</sup> Each step was accompanied by “theoretical” justification and charges and counter charges. But doesn’t it really show a politically subjective solution of problems? It seems to me it fails to recognise facts and problems or proceeds on a partial recognition of facts and problems and fails to recognise the protracted character of the struggle and its many sides. To solve the half-understood problem, schemes of organisation or propaganda are arbitrarily invented in someone’s mind and then imposed on the facts or attempted to be imposed on the facts. I use the word schemes deliberately because schemes they are. The facts of struggle

<sup>18</sup> Mao Zedong, Rectify the Party’s Style of work, Selected Works, Vol 3 p. 43

<sup>19</sup> The Young Communist League was established and promoted by Albert Langer who had played a very positive role in drawing the youth movement in Melbourne towards the Party. However, the Y.C.L. was a mistake, and not supported outside Victoria. Langer later attacked Hill and the Party and established the Red Eureka Movement, a “left” opportunist action that brought division to the anti-imperialist independence movement.

<sup>20</sup> Worker Student Alliance was a mass organisation in which the Party had great influence. It existed in several States. Its role was very positive in many different fields of struggle.

<sup>21</sup> Presumably Hill refers to the Australian Independence Movement which was formed around this time.



however have a nasty habit of rejecting the scheme or preconceived idea and that leads to a recognition that something is wrong and in turn that leads to recrimination and counter recrimination. At one stage the whole solution was seen as a propaganda one – just assert, propagandise the solution and the problem will be solved. In consequence an organisation geared only to produce propaganda must necessarily arise. Or the solution is seen as organising a demonstration.

**All this takes one side of a problem and elevates that side to the fore. What it shows is a weakness in Marxism-Leninism which teaches respect for facts, the primacy of facts and the all-sided character of struggle. Struggle has many, many aspects. The demonstration, seen as so overwhelmingly important by some of our comrades, is, if appropriate still only one fact of a much more extensive and all-embracing struggle. No doubt the protracted and long-term character of struggle is more difficult for the young to understand than it was for the older. Nonetheless the theory of 'one-blowism' is a dangerous theory.**

In the anti-Nazi struggle<sup>22</sup> some of our comrades allowed the WSA to be manoeuvred into a position of isolation. They correctly raised the anti-Nazi slogan but incorrectly believed they and they alone could carry the struggle through. It was the old closed-door struggle “which means fighting single-handed in desperate combat against a formidable enemy”.<sup>23</sup> Why does this arise? Because our comrades do not think sufficiently in a Marxist-Leninist way: they do not sufficiently grasp dialectics. They agree in words on uniting all who can be united but do not do it sufficiently. They proceed from case to case without an overall perspective of struggle which involves many allies, many sides. They get manoeuvred into fighting on the enemy’s ground. Their errors arise from enthusiasm and courage. They are wonderful people. I am sure we can have confidence in their development. Our own Marxist-Leninist grip has got to be strengthened both to assist them and to set an example and to learn from them.

There is too, quite an influence of Guevaraist methods and line. It takes the form of a few elite thinking they are the whole struggle – a partial failure to work hard at rousing the people. It produces acts of semi-adventurism, semi-provocation, acts divorced from mass activity. Last year I got to hear of some action to be taken against a car. I personally told two of the people concerned that it was politically wrong and why it was politically wrong. Nonetheless it happened. I cannot say if the two concerned were responsible – I very much doubt it because I am sure I convinced one of them. Then we have examples in printed material, and we had examples in the course of a court demonstration. Well, it was wrong in my opinion. Certainly we accept force but it is mass force, people’s force, which develops step-by-step, not force divorced from the masses, individual isolated acts of semi-terrorism. Lenin explained all this and the whole emphasis with Chairman Mao is on mass, people’s struggle. We have to recognise that Guevara’s influence lives on. A handful of the elite will never solve the problem of the independence struggle in Australia. The only way to combat this tendency is by strengthening

<sup>22</sup> Throughout 1971-3, the Worker-Student Alliance in Melbourne conducted a militant struggle against thugs from the Australian Nazi Party. The Nazis sought to intimidate anti-war and revolutionary activists. In June 1972, WSA members attacked the headquarters of the Nazi Party in suburban St. Albans. Over a number of months, police tracked the identities of those involved, arresting 7 people in December 1972. When they appeared at the Sunshine Court on February 26, 1973, supporters of the 7 held an anti-fascist rally which was attacked by the police with a further dozen arrests. Among those arrested outside the court and subsequently gaoled in August was Waterside Workers Federation member Harry Bocquet. WWF members struck in protest against his gaoling from Thursday August 23 to Monday 27 August.

<sup>23</sup> Mao Zedong, On Tactics Against Japanese Imperialism, Selected Works Vol 1, p. 163



understanding of Marxism-Leninism and particularly the idea that it is the people and the people alone who make history and it is not Guevara or a handful of Guevaraists. To overcome this trend is itself a long-term struggle – the whole thing is complicated by the fact that the exponents of it deny their adherence to Guevara or they do not recognise they are unconscious followers of Guevara. They do not put a label on. This makes it all the more necessary to wage the struggle for the supremacy of Marxism-Leninism.

Within Australia-China friendly organisations there are arguments. We wrote a document on it last year. But it appears that within the body there must be a strong Marxist-Leninist grip. It is not a Communist Party but the correct tactics and policy can only be determined by Marxism-Leninism. There is no doubt that history in Australia shows that this type of organisation for some reason attracts the particular attention of the state forces. Agents foment trouble. That trouble is made easier to stir up when incorrect policies, tactics and wrong personal attitudes are taken up. Yet people with quite long experience simply pay insufficient attention to Marxism-Leninism. They proceed from case to case. Some go to the right. The instinctive revolt of the left leads to personal arguments rather than calm examination. A couple of us had a talk to one person. He said quite frankly that he had been persuaded, somewhat against his will, to join the Party and that he really knew nothing about Communism and hadn't sought to find out. This seems to me to show a misunderstanding of what is involved in Party membership, what is involved after a person joins the Party. This person who is quite honest exercises great influence in the circles concerned. Yet he proceeds from case to case and without a Marxist-Leninist perspective. I would say he is influenced by revisionism but quite honestly. When he was asked about briefing delegations of visitors, he said that the process of appropriate political briefing had never been explained to him and he certainly had not done it but had concentrated on narrow questions of clothes, behaviour, etc. He has a petty bourgeois, semi-intellectual background. It seems to me that with such people really energetic measures need to be taken to get them equipped with at least some Marxism-Leninism. Otherwise, what hope is there?

Amongst the Chinese community is a great debate. One side issued a several-page document devoted almost exclusively to attacking another. It contained virtually nothing of policy to unite overseas Chinese. There has been lobbying and counter lobbying, intrigue and counter intrigue. Yet it ought to be clear that the overriding question is the exposition of a policy of united support for the motherland. True, all sorts of people are jumping on the bandwagon. They will only be sorted out if a correct policy is put forward and correct tactics are followed.

Within the working class the arguments take a different form. The rumours are put about that some of our best comrades are leaving us and joining the Labor Party or some other Party. News Weekly, Nation Review, the Daily Press, have published attacks on us. Prominence is given to people like Brown and Sendy.<sup>24</sup>

In short, the upheaval in the world is reflected within Australia. In order that we handle it correctly we must strengthen our own Marxism-Leninism and our knowledge of Chairman Mao.

There are particular problems. They bear, I think, on the matters I have raised above but I will comment on them separately.

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<sup>24</sup> J.J. Brown was a member of the CPA. He was State secretary and federal president of the ARU until 1975, when he was appointed to the board of the Victorian Railways. John Sendy was National President of the CPA from 1972 to 1974. Brown was interviewed in the capitalist press on January 26 1973 about how he had 'mellowed' and was no longer a 'red firebrand'.



The position of China gives rise to controversy. There are those who say that China's relations with the USA are revisionist, that China has gone the same way as the Soviet Union, that she has gone soft, etc. etc. There are not many who put it into actual words – more perhaps than I at first thought. But this type of thinking is a definite influence. It introduces uncertainty and doubt and lack of confidence. It influences some people even when they do not like to put it into words. This seems to me a left politically subjective trend. It arises from a weakness in Marxism-Leninism. Lenin explained the theoretical basis of the possibility of victory of socialism in one country (which is the root of the problem) as lying in the law of uneven development of capitalism. Perhaps it is easier for some of us to understand this having gone through the struggle in the thirties and World War II. Of course, it is no good our reproaching people who hold this view with their weakness in Marxism-Leninism - we must be able to put it in a way that they understand the Marxist-Leninist case. For my own part I have no doubt at all of the correctness of China's position: if I did have doubt, I would say so and I think any of our comrades who do have doubts should say so. A problem will never be solved by denying it exists when in fact it does exist. As you know I move around the movement and amongst the people quite a lot. I have been rather surprised in a couple of conversations to hear it asserted that nowadays the Chinese do not attack and criticize U.S. imperialism. In one case this was said to me by a Party member of long standing. Just in order to demonstrate the complete inaccuracy of it I went to *Hsinhua* [Xinhua - ed.] and No. 10 of *Peking Review* and marked them out on this very matter. In fact, the comrade's assertion was quite wrong. How is it that such a good person can say this? It is because he has an arbitrary politically subjective attitude that blinds him to the facts. He has got the preconceived idea that it was wrong for China to have Nixon.<sup>25</sup> In the old days we would have wiped him off as "off the line". This is no good. I explained to him as best I could the law of the uneven development of capitalism, the position of US imperialism and Soviet imperialism, the question of peaceful coexistence. I explained to him that in the very first conversation I ever had with Chairman Mao he had stressed to me the importance of dialectics and that this lay at the root of the problem. I use this example because it illustrates what I mean by getting some real grip of Marxism-Leninism. Moreover, we are aware there is an international trend of criticism of China on this matter. We cannot take up the attitude that China is correct just because it is China, but we can and must analyse it from a Marxist-Leninist standpoint. It is in that light or in the light of my understanding of Marxism-Leninism that I have no doubt that China is correct.

There is the other tendency that agreement between China and the U.S.A. feeds revisionist trends. I believe that it does. It arises from a misunderstanding that there has been compromise on ideologies. This is a right standpoint and personally I think it is the stronger and the main danger. As I said in another connection, all sorts of people are jumping on the bandwagon. Suddenly we become a little popular in some quarters. People seek us out. We become "important". My view is that certain people with revisionist ideas find their ideas strengthened, find "justification" for them in China's position.

So, I think both the left and right tendencies have emerged more sharply in recent times and they penetrate our ranks and the circles around them. That must emphasise the need for us ourselves to work very hard at Marxism-Leninism and its integration into Australian conditions. I mean all of us without exception. We too have a law of our own uneven development.

The question of relations between governments and relations between peoples or between the people of a given country and the government of that country was written about by Lenin and particularly by Chairman Mao. It all ought to be studied. The relationship between the U.S.

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<sup>25</sup> Nixon visited China in February 1972



government and the Chinese government is an entirely different thing from the relationship between the peoples of China and the people of the U.S.A. Similarly, in Australia. We are very happy that there are diplomatic relations between Australia and China. It helps in every way. While it may affect us tactically, it makes no basic difference to the relations between the Australian people and the Whitlam government – one of struggle, nor does it affect, for example, our close relations of friendship with the Chinese Party.

The advent of the Whitlam government gives rise to two trends - a left which dispassionately condemns everything it does and a right which accepts what it does. Again, this is rarely put into so many words. But there are these two tendencies. Our position must be that the nature of social democracy does not change and it has not changed. Tactically we must take into account the faith some workers and people have in the labor party. Where too the labor party does something good, we cannot arbitrarily condemn it. That would be just plain silly and would not assist the process of awakening that is going on and will go on. To be uncritical would be equally silly. It is a complicated situation. Again, I think the main danger is to the right.

When there is a right tendency those who have a “left” position or a correct position either instinctively or consciously rebel against the right and vice versa. But sometimes without seeing the real political problem or analysing it they fly off the handle. So, you get abuse of the right as revisionist and the left as dogmatist, sectarian and so on. Obviously the real question is a careful Marxist-Leninist analysis that seeks to correct both the “left” and the right. Merely because someone goes to the “left” doesn’t make him a scoundrel. It is clear that in correcting a “left” error commonly there is a tendency to go to the right, and in correcting a right error commonly there is a tendency to go to the left. All this is borne out by history including our own history. Only strict adherence to Marxism-Leninism prevents errors.

The position too of the Soviet Union is a factor in this. I think there are a few people around us who in their hearts don’t (perhaps can’t is the word) accept the position that the Soviet Union is an imperialist power. It complicates the whole understanding of the international situation. A comrade said to me that he could not accept the Chinese position that the Soviet Union was a menace to the people of the world. He is not the only one. Another comrade objected to *Vanguard* quoting the capitalist press when it spoke of the Soviet Union’s imperialist position. Yet we have no difficulty in seeing the imperialist position of the Soviet Union. The trend of which I have spoken I am sure does have an influence and it has grown a little lately. Maybe it is because of increased Soviet activity in Australia. It needs us to recognise it and deal with it. It has its difficulties like everything else and I think our people look for all-embracing formulas that will prove the imperialist character of the Soviet Union. But no matter how convincing to us, the Soviet revisionists and their followers produce an “explanation”. It never explains but it confuses people. All this too feeds the right tendency. Again it can only be effectively explained from a sound Marxist-Leninist point of view.

**In our domestic situation inflation, unemployment and all other problems can really only be explained by Marxism-Leninism. It requires concrete explanation – not abstraction: real explanation. It requires explanation in terms of integrating the truth of Marxism-Leninism with Australia’s economy and not just repeating that. How many can explain it? Only we can cut through the mystery. Similarly unemployment and all other problems.**



There has been criticism of *Vanguard*, demands that it be popularised. Some say it should learn from *Tribune* or the New Zealand *People's Voice*.<sup>26</sup> My idea of this is that we must strive to make *Vanguard* more acceptable while maintaining firmly its Marxist-Leninist-Mao Tsetung principle. As long as I can remember there has been this argument – the demand to make the paper popular. In one form (and this form in my opinion influences some of the present critics) this is really a demand to change its content from Marxism-Leninism. We got one long letter that criticised *Vanguard*. It was useful. But it really wasn't a criticism – it was a different line. It included, for example, a demand for support for homosexuality.<sup>27</sup> That was only one example. Its general line was that we were too uncompromising. But another form of criticism has I think a great deal in it. That is, we should try to put our ideas in a simpler way, run more in the way of interviews, direct news of struggle, improve the layout. These things I think we should do.

There is a comment I would like to make on sectarianism. Sectarianism is, I think, a word with a particular history in Australia. Dixon<sup>28</sup> was always saying we had to combat sectarianism. It is correct that we have to combat sectarianism but what Dixon meant was to combat the correct left political line. If we go politically too far left then left must be put in inverted commas and we must combat the "left" line. It is an incorrect political line. No doubt it can lead to organizational sectarianism. Some of the criticism of "sectarianism" proceeds from a Dixon standpoint. Sectarianism as I understand it is really concerned with organisation and relations between people. But because of Australian history I think we need to watch this use of these words and see where someone wants to combat sectarianism (he may be quite correct) just what it is he is talking about.

I am sorry to have been so long. Perhaps it will do good. I think all these matters of controversy arise out of a changing world and internal situation. The problems to which they give rise must be resolved with everyone having ease of mind (as in our constitution). In fact, we must fight hard for ease of mind. But they will only be solved if we take a firm grip of Marxism-Leninism.

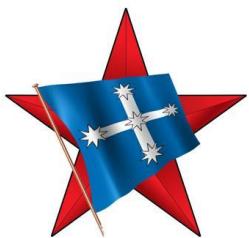
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<sup>26</sup> Tribune was the paper of the CPA; People's Voice was the paper of the CPNZ.

<sup>27</sup> Comrade Hill belonged to that generation of Australians for many of whom homosexuality was an unnatural perversion. Additionally, protection of the Party from the police and ASIO, before the large-scale voluntary "outing" of homosexuals, meant that gay Communists were seen as vulnerable to being blackmailed by the State. Hill's statement must be seen in that context. However, it was not a uniform view across the whole of the organisation. For example, Marjorie Johnston was an openly gay member of the CPA, and prominent as a peace activist. There were no objections when she left the CPA in protest against its revisionism and joined the CPA (M-L). (Her brother Elliott remained in the CPA and led the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.) There was no formal, agreed policy on gays and lesbians joining the Party, which led to some confusing inconsistencies. Two young gay men who joined the Party in one city in the early 70s, were deprived of their membership when they moved to another city, because they were gay. In the present era, the Party respects the sexual preferences and gender identities of its members. The Party program states: "Diversity of the working class is a great strength. The Party welcomes that diversity in its own ranks. It fights for a society where mutual respect exists between all races and genders, where racism and gender inequalities are not tolerated, where gender identities and sexual preferences are respected. The Party upholds these standards amongst its membership."

<sup>28</sup> Richard Dixon was National President of the CPA from 1948 to 1972





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