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## The Communist Party of Australia and the Comintern

By the time the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) had been established at a meeting on 30 October 1920 in Sydney, Australia had a population of over four million people contained in urban centres which were concentrated mainly on the south-east of the large island continent. Australians enjoyed a relatively prosperous economy based mainly on rural and mining industries with a small but growing industrial sector sustaining that commodity-based economy. Australia was opened to European settlement in 1788 with the establishment of a British colony in Sydney. The following waves of British settlers displaced the Aboriginal community which had occupied the island continent for more than 40,000 years. Further British settlement saw the establishment of coastal cities in other parts of Australia and by the 1830s there were six independent colonial states each functioning with its own governmental apparatus.

All the characteristics of a modern economy were in place by the end of the nineteenth century with each colony possessing its own railway network, educational, legal institutions and separate small armies and navies. The six colonies established a federal government in 1901 known as the Australian Commonwealth Government. This new national government was to be located in a new purpose-built city named Canberra, the local aboriginal name for "meeting place". It was never intended that this seventh government would become powerful enough to overarch the six individual governments. However two world wars and economic events have witnessed the transfer of considerable administrative and financial powers to the central government at the expense of state governments.

Australia was fortunate in being a colony of Britain in that it became enmeshed in the large British trading empire that was directed from London and which, for a time, dominated the world's economy. The Australian pound equalled the British pound and the bulk of Australia's exports were readily sold through British markets. Australian wheat, wool, gold and non-ferrous metals were traded by British firms for sale in British or European markets. Australia, in return, obtained all of its consumer goods, machinery and capital from Britain. This firm economic relationship with Britain also explains why all the British institutions such as those dealing with the law, politics or education were replicated in all the Australian states.

### Development of the Labour Movement in Australia

The Australian labour movement commenced with the establishment of craft unions in the 1850s and the founding by them of Trades and Labour Councils in each large city. Industrial unions were soon after established by the unskilled workers such as the agricultural labourers, waterside workers, miners and seamen. By the turn of the century these unions joined to establish Labor Parties to contest seats in the State parliaments in order to give the working class a voice in their government. This development was very successful and by the early twentieth century Labor Parties were forming governments in their own right in the States and the new Commonwealth sphere. The existing socialist parties assisted in the early establishment of these Labor Parties in the expectation that socialist policies would be included in the new parties' programmes. This did occur initially, but on winning increasing numbers of seats, particularly in middle class areas, the socialist proposals were dropped and links with the socialists severed.

The Labor Party governments soon learned that politics was the art of the possible and began compromising or abandoning policies that were closer to the hearts of their own trade union supporters. Disillusionment soon followed in labour movement circles and



the nascent Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), established in Australia by 1910, captured some labour movement support with the proposal that social and economic change could be better achieved through direct trade union action.<sup>1</sup> The "Direct Actionist" element of the IWW that formed the Chicago group under Bill Haywood was established in Australia by 1913 and preached more firmly the abandonment of any hope for change through the parliamentary process. The Direct Action IWW was basically Marxist and looked for working class victories through the formation of the One Big Union (OBU). Its roots were in the trade union militancy of the United States where workers actually had to fight with guns to obtain their just rights. Similar devices had to be used by these American workers to hold these hard-won rights against the organised resistance of the employers working through the parliaments, the law courts, the police and the state militias or the Federal army.

The IWW had a considerable impact on the public and the Labor movement. In some ways it conditioned political activists to accept the CPA when it was established in Australia. Like the IWW, it preached the concept of Marxian class warfare, it looked for economic change outside of the parliamentary process and it drew its inspiration and organisational methods from a non-British source, the newly emerged Soviet state. It was not surprising that many members of the IWW, which had been banned by the Australian government in 1916 and 1917 in a special Act of parliament, were active in the establishment of the CPA. Indeed when the Comintern was established in March 1919 the "IWW of Australia" (then out of existence) was invited to its foundation conference. By coincidence a former Australian IWWite, Paul Freeman, who had been deported for his IWW sympathies, was in the Soviet Union when the Second Congress of the Comintern was held. He claimed to represent the Australian IWW and while he was not granted voting rights he won the support of some Soviet leaders.<sup>2</sup>

Among the Marxists, socialists and disenchanted Labor Party activists who came together to establish the Communist Party were Russian immigrants. Many of these were political activists who had migrated to Australia via Vladivostock in the late nineteenth centuries. Most had settled in the state of Queensland and found work in mining or sugar cane cutting.<sup>3</sup> They established an IWW local at Cairns, a Russian language newspaper, *Knowledge and Unity*, and a Union of Russian Communist workers at Brisbane. Peter Simonoff, selected by the Russian immigrants to be their Consul General to the new Bolshevik government, after the Czarist consul-general had resigned the position, was instrumental in providing resources for the founding of the CPA.<sup>4</sup> Thomas Sergeiev, an active Bolshevik whose *nom de guerre* was Artem, returned to Russia in 1917 to become a member of the Central Committee, a Commissar and President of the Miners Union. He was involved in the argument about which of the two CPAs should be officially recognised by the Third International in 1921.

Soon after the founding of the CPA in October 1920, ideological division split it apart, making recognition by the third Comintern Congress in June and July 1921 much more difficult. The two factions that emerged from the split consisted of the Australian

<sup>1</sup> For a review of the rise and fall of the IWW in Australia, see Frank Cain "The IWW in Australia" in *Papers Delivered at 1991 Whitlam Labour History Conference*, forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> Alistair Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia, A Short History*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1969, p. 14, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Cain, "Some Aspects of Australian-Soviet Relations from 1800 to 1960" in *The Journal of Communist Studies*, Vol. 7, December 1991, No. 4, pp. 501-521.

<sup>4</sup> For Simonoff's role in introducing Lenin's writings to Australia see Roger Coates "Lenin's Impact on Australia" in *Australian Left Review*, No. 24, April-May 1970, pp. 26-30.



Socialist Party (ASP) group (the oldest socialist party in Australia) and a newer group, identified by the names of its leaders, the Garden-Earsman group (J.S. 'Jock' Garden and W.P. Earsman) or alternatively, because of their trade union connections, as the Trades Hall Reds. Each conducted its own newspaper. The SPA group changed the title of its paper from *International Socialist* to *International Communist* and the Garden-Earsman group established the *Australian Communist*. Each sent delegates to seek recognition as the Australian Communist Party both at the Third Congress of the Comintern in 1921 and the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU) or Profintern. Sergeiev supported the SPA group. This included Paul Freeman who had attended the previous year. However, both Freeman and Sergeiev were killed in an aero-rail accident and another delegate was badly injured.<sup>5</sup> This did not settle the dispute between the two factions regarding recognition of the Comintern as the real CPA. After failed unity discussions in Sydney, Garden's group was recognised by the Comintern in August 1922. This clear signal resulted in the collapse of the ASP, and its members flocked to the CPA taking ASP's furniture and piano with them.<sup>6</sup>

### Early Days of the CPA

With support from socialists, former IWWorkers and trade unionists, the CPA established branches in most Australian capital cities. But by 1925 most of these had collapsed. In Sydney, however, the Garden-led party prospered. Garden was responsible for having the CPA integrated into the Sydney Trades and Labor Council which was the co-ordinating body for most Sydney trade unions. Although inspired by Lenin's *State and Revolution*, the CPA was readily accepted by the industrial trade unions such as the miners, seamen and transport workers. It was an amicable arrangement, and although it coincided with the Comintern policy of establishing a united front with other working class groups, it was based more on Australian historical tradition where trade unions accepted extreme left groups into their company if only to maintain a fire of radicalism in their centres.

The CPA grew rapidly in membership amounting to over 1000 by 1922. This rapid growth and its then close relationship to the labour movement led Garden to make the boast at the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in 1922 that the CPA held the power to direct nearly 400,000 workers and that it was in full control of the executive of the Labour Council of NSW. Garden was indulging in exaggeration and although the three Australian delegates were received by Lenin who expressed an interest in the condition of the Australian Party it is not known whether his interest was aroused more by Garden's economy with the truth.<sup>7</sup>

Certainly Garden's hyperbole produced extensive ramification at home. He was viewed with great suspicion by the NSW press, which was certainly no friend of labour, and his Moscow remarks were fully reported in near-hysterical terms. The ALP and the more cautious elements of the labour movement thereafter hastily distanced themselves from the CPA and by 1924 all communists were barred from membership of the ALP in all states. Those unions in NSW that remained associated with the Garden-dominated Labour Council were refused affiliation with the ALP.

<sup>5</sup> For the Report of W.P. Earsman to the Central Executive on the Third Congress of the Comintern see Roger Coates (ed.) "The Earsman Report" in *Australian Left Review*, No. 27, Oct-Nov. 1978.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour, The Left in Australia 1919-1939*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1981, pp. 58-61.

<sup>7</sup> "Chronological Notes on the History of the Communist Party", Rawlinson Papers, ANU Archives of Business and Labour, Canberra, N57/350.



Little of these developments were known in Moscow. From the viewpoint of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), the CPA was judged to be "inactive", its paper, *Workers Weekly* (previously the *Australian Communist*) to be "flat" and uninteresting, and the CPA considered to be a problem child. At the Fifth Congress of the Comintern in 1924 attention had been given to the strengthening and Bolshevisation of all its sections. Australia, in particular, was regarded as a weak case, in fact, "one of the weakest sections of the Communist International". The CPA was ordered to "take immediate steps to remedy this deplorable condition of affairs". It was ordered to prepare a comprehensive report of its activities, its membership numbers, its newspaper preparation and, finally, to provide "a survey of the general situation and progress of the class struggle".<sup>8</sup>

### Comintern Learns About Australia

Ignorance of Australian affairs in Moscow was caused partly by the problems of communication. It took three months for letters and literature to be delivered because mails had to be passed through London. The Australian government had also established a rigid system of postal censorship by which all communist journals, regardless of the country of origin, were seized from the post and destroyed under specially prepared Customs regulations. This surveillance was overseen by Australia's internal security police, the Commonwealth Investigation Branch of the Attorney-General's Department.<sup>9</sup> By 1927 over 128 individual communist publications were proscribed from entering Australia.<sup>10</sup> By November 1928, E.M. Higgins on behalf of the CPA and R.F. Griffin on behalf of the New Zealand CP were writing to the ECCI suggesting that a courier service be established between Moscow and their countries in order to evade the restrictions imposed by the postal authorities and the controls on the importation of literature. They suggested the recruitment of merchant-sailors and the provision of funding to maintain them while awaiting ships to assist them in their courier work. It appears that measures of this nature were implemented by the Comintern on a limited basis.<sup>11</sup>

The intention behind this request was more to obtain news and information about international affairs in relation to communists or labour activities. That is economic and working class news that would not have been selected for distribution by the cable news services of those days. The actual outcome of this arrangement was that Australia was knitted more closely into the Comintern apparatus. The days when the leaders of the CPA could direct affairs in an informal way and in the style they believed best suited Australian events, were drawing to a close.

This lack of knowledge about CPA affairs was partly corrected by having CPA members attend the Congresses or Plenums of the Comintern and then to remain in Moscow to provide information to the standing committees in the Comintern. These were composed of Party members from various countries who prepared position papers about their respective countries. Recommendations emerged from these meetings about what action should be taken to solve particular Party problems in the light of the most

<sup>8</sup> Memo to the Communist Party of Australia, Central Committee, n.d. Australia seemed to have been represented only by Dora Montefiore on the nomination of H.L. Denford, Secretary CPA, Comintern Papers, Mitchell Library, hereafter Comintern papers.

<sup>9</sup> Frank Cain, *Political Surveillance*, chapter 7.

<sup>10</sup> "List of Publications On Which Delivery Has Been Refused, submitted by Mr Pratten in answer to Mr P.E. Coleman in the Australian Parliament", 27 October 1927 in Comintern Papers.

<sup>11</sup> Higgins and Griffin to Secretariat ECCI 18 November 1918, Comintern Papers.

recent Comintern policy. By the mid-twenties the Lenin School had been established for the training of various nationals to be potential leaders. Australia was initially considered by the Comintern officials to be a type of branch of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), but neither the British nor the Australians were agreeable to this arrangement. Nevertheless, Australian affairs were discussed in the British Secretariat of the Comintern where the British communist, Bell, was the chairman, and Hector Ross from the CPA presented papers on the condition of the Party. Evidence indicates that he made annual trips to the Comintern to report on Australian events.<sup>12</sup> Later an Anglo-American Secretariat was established which included Australia. This Secretariat contained a Bureau where events affecting the respective countries were more thoroughly analysed and recommendation for action prepared.<sup>13</sup>

Another Comintern source of information about the CPA was the reports presented to the RILU either at its congresses or in other discussion centres. Details about internal CPA struggles were presented in prepared papers at these meetings and the Comintern was thus able to compile a complete picture of the issues and personalities that conditioned the workings of the CPA. Other papers presented at Comintern meetings discussed the economic structure of Australia and the various strikes and industrial actions undertaken by the trade unions.<sup>14</sup> By this means a complete picture of the Australian economy, the capitalist processes and the particular struggles of the working class was laid before the Comintern and the various officials drawn from the several countries that made up the policy-preparation bodies of that institution.

The tighter Comintern direction, under which the CPA was to operate as a result of these analytical procedures in Moscow, lay in the future. Meanwhile, under Garden's initiative, the CPA nominated five candidates for the New South Wales (NSW) parliamentary elections in 1925. The electorates were then multi-member and the CPA while contesting directly against the ALP considered itself to be in a position to collect votes that might have been cast as informal or otherwise lost to the ALP. The ALP perceived it as disloyal competition. The outcome was a dismal result for the CPA. Garden, the more popular candidate, received no more than 317 votes. It should be noted, however, that the CPA had no electoral experience, little funds and few electoral workers. The CPA viewed the election in a more positive light claiming that it gained fifty new members and increased sales for its paper.

The mid-twenties can be seen as an important formative period in the CPA's history. It was clear that the working class was not prepared to give it mass electoral support and the policy of "boring from within" had been countered by the ALP barring CPA members from membership and preventing, where possible, the affiliation of trade unions that had CPA links to the ALP. The tactics used by socialist parties and the IWW of allying with the ALP and trade unions to lead them on a more radical path were now inappropriate. Garden's tactics of riding two horses simultaneously was no longer viable and Garden moved out of the CPA and returned to the ALP which offered a better chance for implementing political change and providing him with a permanent career. But he continued his links with the CPA and when his new political mentor, Jack Lang, the ALP political leader in NSW and a firm opponent of the CPA required assistance to counter the moves by other right-wing groups to displace him, Garden could call on the CPA members and sympathisers remaining in the official labour movement to support Lang against his foes. Garden also retained his connection with

<sup>12</sup> "Political Report on Australia to the British Secretariat", 15 April 1926 and "Report by Hector Ross on internal events in the CPA for 1924 and 1925", Comintern Papers.

<sup>13</sup> See "Minutes of the British Secretariat", 15 April 1926 and "Report by Hector Ross on Internal Events in the CPA for 1924 and 1925", Comintern Papers.

<sup>14</sup> See for example "Reports of Comrades Jeffrey and Ryan RILU IV Congress Delegates", 10 April 1928, Comintern Papers.



the Australian branch of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat (PPTUS) which was another important but independent planet in the communist's world solar system.

By 1925 CPA membership had fallen to 280 and one of the party's leading but capricious theoreticians, Guido Baracchi, moved to have the Party liquidated and its members join the ALP. He had returned from Germany in 1924 where he had worked with *Imprecorr* and in Australia he became Political Secretary and edited the CPA's monthly journal *The Communist* in which he published this stunning proposal. Copies of the journal had to be retrieved to stop the unorthodox proposal being read by Party members. Baracchi thereafter left Australia to travel once more overseas. Other leaders resigned or were pushed out of the party. One was C.W. Baker who had been Secretary of the Party and editor of its paper. He began supplementing his income by taking cash orders for spectacles at CPA meetings and then failing to deliver the glasses or return the cash. The CPA had to repay the discontented clients.<sup>15</sup>

Into this management gap stepped Jack Kavanagh in 1925. He was of Irish birth and had arrived in Sydney from Canada in 1925 where he had been involved in the establishment of the Canadian Communist Party. For the following two years Kavanagh adopted the policy of increasing the knowledge of communist ideology throughout the Party by means of his editorship of the *Workers Weekly* and by establishing political classes in all branches. He did not break entirely with the previous Garden line of working in conjunction with the trade union system and the ALP. Indeed some of his supporters on the Executive Committee of the Party suggested establishing a CPA dominated faction within Garden's group in the NSW labour movement. They admitted that this might represent a desertion of the more pure Comintern isolationist principles but it held to a more important principle expressed in the statement that: "the CP cannot ignore a mass Party like the ALP, we must give a leadership to and organise the left wing elements within it."<sup>16</sup>

#### Australia Learns About the Comintern

Two factors were in train, however, that were to bring the CPA more into the Comintern's firm orbit. One was the recruiting work conducted in Queensland among the miners and meatworkers by the paid organiser, H. Moxon, sent by the CPA executive. He raised the Party membership there to 200 thereby expanding national Party membership to 500. This provided him with an electoral base to be elected to the CPA executive in Sydney. He became a firm exponent of the Comintern's centralising policies and managed over the succeeding years to rid the executive of those who had previously adopted a less doctrinaire line.

The second factor was the despatch to Australia of political trouble shooters by the Comintern. These men were charged with settling the problems identified in the CPA by the several study circles that were conducted in Moscow by the Comintern. R.W. Robson, a CPGB member, was sent on a Comintern inspection tour in 1927. He addressed the CPA Congress in December that year and spoke to numerous Party members about the inadequacies of the Party. He reported to the Comintern in April 1928 of the "almost complete absence of organised Party work in the unions as such" and that what little had been done was due to "the energy of individual comrades occupying prominent or key positions in the TU movement". The Comintern had sent draft theses on the Australian position to the CPA and these were accepted by the Party leaders. Robson oversaw the implementation of these theses involving the appointment of a Presidium of three bodies to replace what he described as the "previous non-functioning organisations". The new ones were Agitprop under E.M. Higgins (also editor of *Workers Weekly*), the Trade Union Department under Jack Kavanagh, and

<sup>15</sup> Minutes of British Secretariat, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Reports of Comrades Jeffrey and Ryan, op. cit., p. 7.

Organisation under the General Secretary Tom Wright. The CPA leaders agreed with Robson that this new organisation would be better suited to implement "the broad principles of the Party's work in the mass organisation of the working class". The details of how this was to be done, however, were to be prepared by the Comintern, and the Australian officials were to await further instructions.

Robson was typical of managerial experts sent to another English speaking country to put things right. They become self-proclaimed experts after one week. Coming from the CPGB with a stint in Moscow was a poor preparation for him. The CPA then had approximately 500 members. There were no branches in the smaller and less industrialised states and in the second largest industrialised state, Victoria, special demographic and cultural factors had prevented the labour movement and its political arm from becoming a strong force, thereby hindering the development of an active CPA. Robson only dimly understood the problems facing the CPA in Australia such as large distances between cities, differing political cultures in each state and the shortage of finance. The closing paragraph of his Comintern report shows only a vague appreciation of those questions:

Owing to the isolation of the Party in relation to other Parties and the CI [Communist International] together with past bad traditions and inexperienced leaders, the CEC of the CP of A stands in need of frequent advice and assistance.<sup>17</sup>

Robson's visit had one positive effect. It demonstrated to the Australians the Comintern's growing interest in the CPA and that it might contribute funds to its functioning. This understanding was expressed in a letter from the CPA to the Secretariat of the ECCI on 2 October 1928. It requested the despatch of a representative to work with the Australian Party as an instructor for a period of at least a year (the previous representative, Robson, was dismissed as having remained two months and doing little more than investigate). It also sought the appointment of a permanent spokesman for the CPA at the Comintern who could attend to Australian questions. It pointed out that the CPA should not be subordinate to the CPGB, but because Australia was essentially a Pacific country "whose problems must be considered from the point of view of Pacific developments", it should be "attached to a Pacific or Eastern Department of the CI". The letter concluded on the more essential point (contained in the cryptic note) "financial assistance to the amount stated in the budget-report to the Anglo-American Secretariat."<sup>18</sup>

Becoming more dependent on the Comintern, however, meant being tied more closely to its dictates. Although the Garden-led CPA had demonstrated in 1925 the futility of the CPA's campaigning in elections, the Comintern thought better. In February 1928 it suggested to the CPA that it contest the 1929 Queensland state elections against the ALP. The Comintern had reached this decision in the Political Secretariat of the ECCI on 27 February 1928. The Comintern declared that the working class of Queensland was dissatisfied with the McCormack ALP government and that the CPA stand candidates in three electorates in order to demonstrate "this dissatisfaction and to compel that government to include in its policies working class demands".<sup>19</sup> Again the result was dismal for the CPA. It won exactly 0.74 per cent of the total vote. Probably unbeknown to their US comrades, the Kavanagh-led Party was adopting the same policy as the Lovestone-led US Party. This was that "Australia was an exception" and that it would miss the economic crisis and that Moscow was too far away to understand the local problems. They argued that the working class was in retreat and that the

<sup>17</sup> "Material for Sekretariat, Report on the Situation of the Australian Communist Party by R.W. Robson", 19 April 1928, Comintern Papers.

<sup>18</sup> "Confidential Report to the Secretariat, ECCI", 2 October 1928, Comintern Papers.

<sup>19</sup> Records of the Polisecretariat of the EC of the CI, 27 February 1928, L5615/4, Comintern Papers.



election of a Labor government might help the working class to regain some breathing space.<sup>20</sup>

### The Third Period

The outcome of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in July 1928 with its adoption of the third period phase in communist doctrine has been regarded as being highly significant in the history of world communism. The reports carried back to Australia, however, reflected little of the Comintern change of direction. E.M. Higgins attended for the CPA and presented his report of events to the CPA Congress in December 1928. He seemed to perceive little shift in Comintern policy. He reported how communism would intensify its rejection of the ideas that change could be achieved through the trade union movement. Such pronouncements were not new. Listeners could have imagined that they had been transformed back to a 1913 IWW Direct Actionist rally. Higgins boldly reported that the decisions of the Sixth Congress would mean that "the CPA would have to abandon any idea that we can transform the Labor Party into a Workers' Party". As an "independent revolutionary force" the CPA would have to "win away from the existing leadership the masses who are not yet clear as to the part which is being played by reformist leaders". It was the familiar curse being pronounced on the ALP and the Australian trade unions. Higgins may have deliberately ignored the significance of the Sixth Congress. Alternatively, he may have genuinely perceived it not to be a new shift in direction. Whatever the explanation, the majority of the CPA executive did not seem to appreciate that the Comintern would insist on closer conformity from the CPA.

The importance of the change in Comintern strategy was brought home to the CPA executive the next year. Again it was related to the nomination of communist candidates in parliamentary elections. In 1929 the ECCI cabled the CPA with instructions to nominate candidates at the Commonwealth parliamentary elections to be held in October 1929. A majority on the CPA executive decided to take no action nor to reveal the Comintern instruction to the Party. Two new executive members, H. Moxon and L. Sharkey, seemed to sense the importance of the instruction or the significance of the changed times. After losing in the executive vote on the issue they cabled the Comintern on 26 September to report the executive's refusal to act. The Comintern asked the executive for an explanation. The CPA executive replied by cable on 12 October saying that the imminence of the election prevented action being taken in time.<sup>21</sup> The result of the election was that the ALP took government from the conservative party.

This success of the ALP only seemed to firm the resolve of the Comintern and their two doctrinaire followers, Moxon and Sharkey, to punish the executive majority for its transgressions. In a cable of 19 December 1929 signed by Thaelman, Semard, Kuusinen and Pollitt, to the CPA executive, Moxon and Sharkey were praised for their support of the Comintern line against the executive majority. The Comintern cable opened with the declaration, "In Australia [there is an] unparalleled capitalist offensive against working class, large sections workers already defeated with aid [of] capitalists agents, allies [of the] ALP and trade union bureaucrats". The criticism by Moxon and Sharkey of the CPA executive was declared to be "perfectly sound and necessary" and that the "CEC [Central Executive Committee of the CPA] arguments [in] defence [of] its opportunistic policy completely refuted by events only proves correctness [of the] policy of [the] International".<sup>22</sup> The CPA was never to be the same after this event. Decision-making that might contradict or ignore the Comintern direction thereafter

<sup>20</sup> "Chronological Notes on the History of the Communist Party", p. 5, Rawlinson Papers, ANU Archives of Business and Labour, Canberra, N57/350.

<sup>21</sup> Statement by H.J. Moxon and L. Sharkey to CPA 1929 Annual Conference, N57/373, Rawlings Collection, ANU Archives of Business and Labour.

<sup>22</sup> Cable from the ECCI Secretariat, 19 December 1929, Comintern Papers.



ceased. Elections for the executive were held soon after and Moxon and Sharkey mobilised their supporters to have Kavanagh and his followers voted off the executive. Not satisfied with that, they had him and others expelled from the Party. The departure of Kavanagh and his associates marked the end of a loose alliance that had always characterised the relationships in the Australian labour movement between it and left-radicals. Thereafter the left-radicals in the form of the CPA would establish their own programme and the labour movement would have to react to it. Through these developments, the CPA came more firmly under the control of the strategists and planners who were drawn together in Moscow in the Comintern apparatus.<sup>23</sup>

By the end of the 1920s the Comintern seems to have accumulated information from a variety of sources about the CPA either directly or from unsolicited sources. One CPA member named Shelley informed the Comintern in a letter of 31 October 1928 that Kavanagh's organising activities were becoming progressively weaker, that Moxon was a "maniac", and that sales of *Workers Weekly* had declined from seventy five dozen to thirty five dozen per edition. Moxon himself was soon to be deposed.<sup>24</sup> His defeat of Kavanagh while matching Comintern policy seemed to over-inflate his ego. A later report described him as being unable to give up his "vendetta" against particular party officials which "led to interference with the consolidation of Party ranks".<sup>25</sup> The Comintern had decided to take a firmer grip on Australian Party affairs and selected a CPUSA member, Harry M. Wicks, for posting to Australia to straighten up Party matters. He had originally gone to Moscow with the USA delegation to settle a dispute with the Comintern over the application of the Sixth congress decision. Wicks originally supported the argument of Lovestone, the Secretary of the CPUSA, that America need not conform to the Comintern's new policy because it was "exceptional". He remained in Moscow to work with the Anglo-American section of the Comintern and on the eve of his departure for the US was sent to Australia, arriving early in April 1930.<sup>26</sup> He adopted the name of Herbert Moore as a means of confusing the US and Australian political intelligence agents. As a measure for correcting the "right errors" he had Kavanagh expelled and Moxon deposed and he appointed the Queensland Party official, J.B. Miles, as National Secretary.

The despatch of Wicks to Australia was not the only manifestation of the Comintern's increased attention in Australian affairs. It has been suggested that the Comintern was planning to use Australia as a base for strengthening its presence in China and Asia. A more likely explanation is the greater number of Australians on the Anglo-American Secretariat of the EECI. By the middle of 1932 that secretariat contained nine members: two were Australian, Orr and Emery; and a third, Shields, from Britain, was knowledgeable of Australian affairs.<sup>27</sup> A document titled "Resolution of Situation in Australia and Tasks of CPA" was issued under the German title often used by the ECCI as *Protokoll Nr 93* on 23 October 1930.<sup>28</sup> In June 1930 the Plenum of the Comintern had approved a thesis "Australia's Part in World Revolution". This pointed to the indications of the collapse of capitalism in Australia, the failure of Labor Party

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed analysis of the intervention of the ECCI into CPA affairs over this issue see Barbara Curthoys, "The Communist Party and the Communist International (1927-1929)", *Labour History* (Sydney), forthcoming.

<sup>24</sup> Letter from Shelley to Comintern, 31 October 1928, Comintern Papers.

<sup>25</sup> Report by W. Orr to Comintern, 20 June 1932, Comintern Papers.

<sup>26</sup> Ralph Gibson, *The People Stand Up*, Red Rooster Press, Melbourne, 1983, p. 66.

<sup>27</sup> Minutes of Bureau Meeting, Anglo-American Secretariat, August 17, 1932, Comintern Papers.

<sup>28</sup> "Resolution of the Situation in Australia and Tasks of CPA", *Protokoll Nr 93*, der Sitzung der Politischen Kommission des Pol. Sekr. des PKKI on 23 October 1930.



strategies introduced by the Australian ALP government or the NSW ALP government, the "high tariff fake" and the plight of the farmers. The move towards establishing a mass party under the Plenum's direction was viewed as the means for engaging in the final struggles against capitalism.<sup>29</sup>

Wicks energetically introduced the system of democratic centralism. The factory or locality cell was to be the basic unit, but they were not to be allowed to communicate with each other. By a system of collegiate election, one body elected representatives to another body and ultimate power was held in the three centres of power. These were the Political Bureau, the Organisational Bureau and the Party Secretariat. Communication with the Comintern was controlled by a mini-Secretariat within the Political Bureau. The new leaders of the CPA, as the historian, Frank Farrell, has pointed out, were secure and impossible to remove so long as they stayed friendly with Moscow. While they interpreted whatever was the current Comintern stand they were free from change.<sup>30</sup>

Wicks left Australia for the US in April 1931. He was judged by CPA officials to have made a theoretical and organisational contribution to the CPA but to have also "lapsed into his original leftism" and to have "made mistakes in relation to the Labor Party and the unions due partly to his US background".<sup>31</sup> This was a curious judgement because Wicks himself later wrote that his task in Australia was to remove the rightist elements who were being influenced by older members still attached to their earlier socialistic ideas.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Militant Minority and the Move to the United Front**

The establishment of Militant Minority (MM) groups within trade unions had been adopted as a policy by the Comintern in 1921. It was considered to be preferable to the more fruitless alternative of destroying the established trade unions. The tactic was not new in the Australian labour movement. It was known as "boring from within" and had been attempted, but only at a moderate level, by the Detroit faction of the IWW. For a new and left-radical organisation it was the only means of winning support in the more democratically-based trade union system. These MM groups affiliated with the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) and for a short while so did the NSW Trades and Labour Council. Lacking members and leadership skills, the CPA was slow in establishing MM groups. The CPA leadership also believed they could exert greater influence through their being members of the Trades and Labour Councils to which they had been elected by trade unions.<sup>33</sup>

The onset of the Great Depression led to a series of strikes in response to employers reducing wages and conditions as a means of lowering their costs to match their reduced incomes. These strikes by timber workers, miners and others failed in the face of the employers closing their mills or mines and locking-out the workers.

It became the policy of the CPA, particularly after Kavanagh was deposed, to establish MM groups in mines and factories in order to provide leadership for the workers against circumstances that seemed to have no ready or obvious solution. The more radical MM philosophy did win support, particularly in the black coal mining districts of NSW. It also represented a shift in CPA policy from "working from above" to

<sup>29</sup> "Chronological Notes on the History of the Communist Party", Rawlinson Papers, ANU Archives of Business and Labour, N57/350.

<sup>30</sup> Frank Farrell, *International Socialism*, p. 83.

<sup>31</sup> Ralph Gibson, *The People*, p. 67.

<sup>32</sup> Alistair Davidson, *The Communist Party*, p. 51.

<sup>33</sup> Alistair Davidson, *The Communist Party*, p. 56.



"working from below" with the CPA leaders having to work in factories and mines in order to recruit and propagandize.

The exercise of greater authority by the Comintern over the CPA extended also to the MM groups as they became more mobilised. An example of this oversight occurred after the MM held a conference on 19 and 20 July 1929 in the Sydney Trades Hall under the title "All-in Conference of the Militant Minority Movement". It discussed a wide range of issues, but it fell under the heavy condemnation of the ECCI Political Secretariat.<sup>34</sup> The Conference was judged to be a failure by the Secretariat and a five page analysis of errors was sent to Sydney on 30 March 1930. Because many of the comments displayed a knowledge of local factors, it was apparent that much of it was written by CPA officials then attached to the Secretariat. The Central Committee of the CPA was instructed to undertake, with all vigour, the establishment of a more energetic MM executive. This was to oversee more intensive agitation in every factory, mine or workshop by the "revolutionary trade union opposition groups" who were to lead the "struggles of the workers against the capitalists and the social fascist labour bureaucracy". Each factory MM group would join in holding a district conference of "Trade Union Opposition Committees". A national conference was then to be held based on these district groups.

The Secretariat's judgements were long on rhetoric and proposals for organisational structures, but short on knowing how the CPA inter-related with other Communist Parties of the British Dominions. The Secretariat, for example, instructed that the CPA should establish close contact with the British MM groups and those in other British colonies and Dominions "with a view to establishing a united front against British imperialism".<sup>35</sup> In reality Australia was so far distant from other Dominions that it was probably easier for the CPA officialdom to maintain contact with the Russian workers than it was with the Canadian or South African workers.

Wicks arrived in Sydney following the appearance of these reprimands and in the reports he sent to the Comintern he dutifully stressed how he was revamping the MM groups and strengthening links with the RILU.<sup>36</sup> The MM contained 3,000 members by December 1932 of which 80 per cent were in factory groups. He seemed to be unaware of the difficulties then facing the Australian workers. A series of coal mine lock-outs had been in progress at that time and the unions, militant or otherwise, had no success in having them re-opened. Coal sales had fallen due to the greater use of electricity and oil-fired ships together with a decline in export sales to China or India where local coal mines were being developed. The mine owners were under no personal necessity to re-open the mines. Riots, attacks by police, miners being killed or wounded all followed. When coal stocks had declined and further orders were received, the mine owners re-opened the mines and employed the workers on the old conditions.

The basic causes of these industrial actions were to be found in changing technology, changing world trade and commodity oversupply. Further radicalizing of the workers was not a solution to problems created by more global factors. This was apparent to the ALP and trade union leaders and it was possibly perceived as such by many in the CPA

<sup>34</sup> Report of All-In Conference of the Militant Minority Movement, Friday 19th and Saturday 20th July 1929, Comintern Papers.

<sup>35</sup> Report by Political Secretariat ECCI, Communist Fraction of the RILU to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Australia, 30 March 1930, Comintern Papers.

<sup>36</sup> Herbert Moore to the Secretariat of the Comintern, 25 May 1930 and Herbert Moore to the Org. Department, Secretariat of the Comintern 25 July 1930, Comintern Papers.



as well. However, their more sectarian fixations prevented them from expressing the insights they may have developed along these lines.

By 1932 an Australia Commission had been established within the Political Secretariat of the ECCI. Its members prepared analyses and resolutions of the Australian situation. On 17 August 1932 this Commission agreed to prepare a set of resolutions to be presented to the Bureau of the Secretariat by 1 September 1932. Meetings preceded the discussions about the resolutions which were then put in final shape on the eve of the Bureau meeting. They included resolutions on "Lessons of Strike Struggles, Trade Union Resolution and Resolution on the Building of the Party". The Commission consisted of Mingulin, Orr, Gerhardt and Rozhnov. Orr was the only person known to be an Australian. Code names were often used in the ECCI and there may have been Australians in the remaining three.<sup>37</sup> Further analysis of the Comintern members will help to settle such a question. In any case it was unlikely that this Commission could have made any meaningful suggestion to the CPA for actions to pursue in Australia. Reliant on no more than newspaper items and reports from senior Party officials, the Commission's suggestions could extend little beyond basic generalities.

By 1934 the reality of Australian remoteness from Europe seemed to have been accepted by the Comintern. In a report of 23 November 1934 from the ECCI to the CPA the Australian officials were urged to act more unilaterally. The CPA was instructed to exercise "the utmost leadership and self-initiative in the solution of its problems" and that it should "rapidly solve the question of cadres, of organisational and ideological growth of the Party". Generalities thereafter prevailed such as expanding the MM organisation more widely and enlarging the distribution for the MM paper *Red Leader* and the CPA weekly paper *Workers Weekly*.

This more accommodating response to Australia's isolation seems to have been dictated not so much by geography but more by the Comintern's moving towards the united front policy. Little more than a brief mention of this new policy occurred in this November instruction. The term, "Comintern United Front manifesto of March 1933" was quoted with very little elaboration and the CPA was invited to develop "most energetically the united front activity on specific issues".

The new policy was officially adopted at the Seventh Comintern Congress in 1935 and by 26 August 1935 the application of this programme to Australia was being discussed by the Anglo-American Secretariat of the ECCI. Sharkey was the Australian representative by this time and the other members were Ercoli, Mingulin, Billett, Andrews and Riley, although Riley was soon to leave the Lenin School and return home. The recommendations emerging from this discussion, after the acceptance that an Australian congress be held following the holding of a Plenum by the Central Committee of the CPA, was that more training resources be devoted to the CPA. To this end it was agreed that more Australian students were to be sent to the Lenin School; that a Special course be established to cater for 10 or 12 Australian and New Zealand students for the 1936 term; that the CPA be assisted to organise a National School; that the CPA send a responsible person to work in the ECCI with the choice of position left to the Secretariat; and, finally, that the CPA send an official to New Zealand to help its CP discuss the application of the Seventh World Congress.<sup>38</sup>

Sharkey reported at the 1935 CPA Congress of the resolutions of the Seventh Comintern Congress stressing the three themes of establishing a united front with the

<sup>37</sup> "Plan of Work of Australian Commission", 17 August 1932, Comintern Papers.

<sup>38</sup> "Organisational Proposals for CP of Australia, August 26, 1935, Confidential", Comintern Papers.

ALP; fighting fascism at home; and preparing for a fascist war abroad. With frequent references to Dimitrov, Sharkey concluded his report with the remarks:

Today, in the Social Democratic parties throughout the world there is a differentiation caused by the tremendous urge of the workers to struggle against capitalism, war and fascism and this reflected itself in the ranks of the Social-Democratic leaders.<sup>39</sup>

By 1937 affairs seemed to be going well for the CPA. The changing times in Australia with slow economic recovery did little to dampen the bitter memories of hunger and helplessness felt by many Australian families. The predictions by the CPA that the Great Depression marked a period when capitalism had been on the brink of collapse were now more acceptable to many Australians, however unorthodox it appeared against the more conventional explanations such as those published in the national press. Nor was the slow emergence from the depression any cause to think that the actual collapse had been averted. The growing support for the CPA was reported to the Comintern and it was explained that such rapid expansion created organisational problems for the Party because several of its leaders had been elected as trade union officials thereby removing them from the management of CPA affairs. The solution to the problem was seen from Moscow to be in "the establishment of a National training School in Australia or else bringing over here quite a number of Australian comrades to give them training. In Australia only nine comrades have been through the Lenin School."

Other signs of growth were reported to the ECCI in the expansion of CPA newspapers. In Victoria the CPA was publishing the *Workers Voice* twice a week, in Western Australia the *Workers Star* was published while the national CPA paper, *Workers Weekly*, was published twice weekly. The Tuesday edition sold 11,000 copies and the Friday edition 18,000 copies.<sup>40</sup> A. London, the CPA member then in Moscow, later reported to the ECCI Secretariat that membership by 1937 stood at 4,000 with the Young Communist League containing 200 members. The industrialised state of Victoria, the second largest in Australia with 1,800,000 people and where the CPA had been slow in becoming established, had 950 members.<sup>41</sup>

By September 1937 Australian affairs seemed to be under discussion in the Small Commission of the ECCI Secretariat where topics on Australian affairs were analysed and articles prepared for publication in the *International Press Correspondence*. The members included Newman from South Africa, Ryan from the USA, Arnot from the UK, London from Australia and four others - Marty, Francis, Bloomfield and Brigadier, from unidentified countries. A note of remoteness marked this Small Commission as well. London, for example, was instructed to "study here his own country and in addition New Zealand. For example, the farmers and land question in Australia, revolutionary and progressive traditions of Australia etc". Whoever set the question for London seemed to be unaware that "farmers and the land question" was not a central problem for Australia nor a key issue for the CPA. Thanks to the existence of the Country Party, which governed in coalition with the leading conservative party at the national level and in several states, the farmers were well taken care of and received more of the national government's spending than their numbers justified. A more relevant activity (not, however, without the mention of the Comintern's fixation on Trotsky) was set for the Small Commission to be completed within two days. This was "to prepare a seminal letter to the Party

- 1) On the International Questions (Spain, China, war danger etc.
- 2) Some inner-Party questions and Trotskyism

<sup>39</sup> "Report by L. Sharkey on 7th World Congress CI", Comintern Papers.

<sup>40</sup> "Meeting of Secretariat on the Australian Question. Confidential", 11 July 1937, Comintern Papers.

<sup>41</sup> "Report by Comrade London", 27 September 1937, Comintern Papers.



3) On any other questions"

Of the three the first could have, and indeed should have been the focus of the Commission's total attention.<sup>42</sup>

### Japanese Militarism and the Coming of War

The CPA functioned on three fronts: the industrial front via the MM leading to the election of CPA members to the executives of the larger unions; the cultural front via the Friends of the Soviet Union (FOSU) which by 1935 had a membership of nearly 7,500 and its paper, *Soviets Today*, a distribution of 20,000 copies; and the international front via the Movement Against War and Fascism (MAWAF). The MM was disbanded in 1935 at the suggestion of the Comintern because it hindered the establishment of the united front with the ALP and its counterparts in other countries. The CPA viewed this dissolution as a victory proclaiming that the Militant Minority had become the majority in the trade union system. Its paper, *Red Leader*, was renamed to the less provocative title of *Union Leader*. However, it was the MAWAF which captured the attention of the public. Such an outcome showed that the CPA's policies could harmonise with the mood of a significant proportion of the public even though it had not been established with that intention. The Movement was established by Willi Muenzenberg and Henri Barbusse in Amsterdam in 1932 and it was taken up by the Comintern in response to the suppression of the German Communist party by the Nazis at that time.<sup>43</sup>

As the 1930s progressed, the MAWAF in Australia focussed more on the possible military threat to Australia from a heavily armed and imperialistic Japan. However, the trend of looking north from Australia for friends or foes had already been initiated by the CPA. It had previously supported issues that reminded Australia of the reality of its geographical closeness to Asia. The CPA joined with the Hands Off China campaign in 1926 when it appeared that Britain was about to engage in military action, in which Australia might also become involved, as it despatched troops to Hong Kong and Shanghai in response to successful military actions in that region by the Kuomintang (KMT) and its Chinese Communist party (CCP) partners. The KMT had been given material aid and leadership support by the Comintern which made it a potential force in China. By October 1927 the Kuomintang had split and the threats to the European centres in China had subsided. The CCP was forced to retreat to the north of China to escape from the savage attacks of its former ally.

CPA support for the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat (PPTUS) also helped to remind Australians of the realities of Australia's location in the Pacific. The Australian labour movement had initiated the idea of a Pan-Pacific Conference of all labour organisations in the region and in August 1926 a poorly attended conference of regional bodies was held in Sydney. The RILU was represented and it took up the initiative announced at Sydney of holding the 1927 conference in Hankow. The RILU dominated that conference with Lozovsky appearing as head of the RILU and Russian trade unionists. The Australian government barred Australian delegates attending but the conference resolved to establish a Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat in Shanghai and the CPA member, Jack Ryan, became its first chairman in 1928. The Secretariat established a paper, the *Pan-Pacific Worker*, which was published in Sydney from April 1928 under the editorship of Jock Garden, the former CPA member, with Jack Ryan as assistant editor. It commenced as a bi-weekly and became a monthly in April 1929. Under the Third Period of CPA policy Wicks and Sharkey took over the paper and it ceased publication early in 1932.<sup>44</sup> The PPTUS thereafter became firmly

<sup>42</sup> "Decisions on Australian Question. Confidential, 27 September 1937", Comintern Papers.

<sup>43</sup> Frank Farrell, *International Socialism*, p. 214.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 5, pp. 180-200.

enmeshed in the RILU orbit. The episode did, however, introduce a generation of trade unionists to the notion that Australia could play an important part in the international labour movement.

While interest may have been aroused among the left in Australia about Pacific affairs by these events, there was little response to the Japanese invasion of the Chinese territory of Manchuria in 1931 and the establishment of the puppet state of Manchukuo. When the Japanese began to push south into the Chinese coastal regions in July 1937 there was greater world interest, particularly in response to the heavy civilian casualties caused by the Japanese bombing of cities and the horrific Japanese reprisal killings after they had captured Nanking.

At a meeting of the Secretariat of the Comintern on 23 September 1937 the threat of Japanese aggression against not only China but also Australia was discussed. The resolution emanating from this meeting opened with the assertion "Japanese imperialism is attacking China and threatens to attack Australia. To defend the independence of China is to defend Australia. A victory for China will be a blow against Japanese militarism, a blow in the interests of Australia". China was to be aided by establishing a committee for the defence of the Chinese against Japanese aggression and by pressing the Australian government "to stop all forms of assistance which they are now rendering to Japan". This meant stopping iron ore exports to Japan (the government banned Japanese exploration of iron ore deposits at Yampi Sound in Western Australia in May 1938, but only to preserve them for the possible use of the Australian steel manufacturer, Broken Hill Propriety (BHP). Stopping scrap metal exports to Japan, by "mobilising the metal workers, the railroad and waterside worker" as well as wheat and other commodities and also stopping imports of Japanese cotton and rayon goods.<sup>45</sup>

It was highly unlikely that such a programme could be implemented, but the passage of events, in which the CPA was an important player, ensured that a shipload of pig-iron being imported by the Japanese steel maker, Mitsui, from the BHP steel plant at Port Kembla in New South Wales was stopped. The Waterside Workers Federation by this time had at least two CPA members on its executive, James Healey and Edward Roach. When the British steamer, *Dalfram*, sailed to Port Kembla to collect 7,000 tonnes of pig-iron in November 1938 the local waterside workers refused to load it. Their objection to its export was that it would be used to kill Chinese civilians and would also be used against Australians in a future Japanese attack. They claimed that they were complying with Article 16 of the League of Nations Covenant declaring Japan to be an aggressor nation. The ban only applied to the *Dalfram* and the pig-iron, but BHP responded by ceasing to ship out other steel products through the port and on 22 December locked-out 4,000 workers from its steel plant at Port Kembla. There were various issues at stake, the leading one being the growing radicalisation of the industrial trade unions. But the effect of the ban and ensuing lock-out focussed the Australian public's attention on the threat to Australia of Japanese militarism. The waterside workers and others were clearly responding to an anti-Japanese militarist mood. The CPA and the Comintern resolution (if that is what triggered the affair) touched a responsive chord in working class attitudes. The Australian government and its Attorney-General, Robert Menzies, insisted on the export of the pig-iron while acknowledging the ban on iron ore exports and the demand from British and Australian steel fabricators for as much steel as they could obtain. Menzies thereby earned the sobriquet "Pig-iron Bob" and the reputation as a friend of Japanese militarism as a

<sup>45</sup> "For Help to China", Resolution of Meeting of Secretariat, 23 September 1937, Comintern Papers.



result.<sup>46</sup> His deep dislike of the CPA came to influence much of his long succeeding political career.

The MAWAF mobilised support for the Spanish government in its civil war against the Franco-led fascists. The International Labor Defence (ILD) also assisted to raise \$42,000. for civilian aid and fifty seven Australians served in the International Brigade of whom thirty four were killed. The involvement of the Comintern in this civil war is demonstrated by the appearance of military records and discharge certificates of some of these Australian volunteers appearing in the Comintern papers released to Australia. When the major war against fascism commenced in September 1939, the dominance of the Comintern link to the CPA caused much soul-searching in CPA ranks. The Party made the best of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact by claiming that it ensured the neutrality of Japan, which was the benefit of Australia, and meant "that British and French forces do not have to fight in the Pacific as well as in Europe, at the same time." The CPA did not preach opposition to the war, but demanded that all war industries should be nationalised and the war not used to reduce the national standard of living. Britain and France were condemned for their appeasement of Hitler and for not seriously pursuing an anti-German treaty with the Soviet Union.<sup>47</sup>

The Menzies conservative government banned the CPA (it thereby shared the same fate as the IWW in WWI) but it continued to function underground until 1942 when the new ALP government lifted the ban. But the attack on the CPA was not just a war-time matter. The Conservative government had attempted to have the CPA declared an illegal organisation in 1932 and the court appeal against this dragged on until May 1932 when the banning attempt was abandoned.<sup>48</sup> Deprived of contact with the Comintern, functioning as an underground Party and ostensibly swimming against the tide of support for the war, the CPA managed to hold its members and by September 1943 it had expanded to 20,000. The invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 by the Nazis marked the return of the CPA into the mainstream of Australian political life, but it also marked the end of the Comintern.

### **Towards a Summary of CPA-Comintern Relations**

In summarising the two decades of CPA-Comintern relations it can be observed that on the basis of the few Comintern documents available, the Comintern did not - except for the Third Period - cast a great influence on CPA affairs. It took some five years for the Party to appreciate that its best opportunity for advancement lay in organising the industrial unions and winning the support of their members as being effective, honest and intelligent leaders. Given the background of most of the Party leaders in trade union industrial affairs, this was a natural path for the CPA to take. On a political basis, the Comintern seemed a very remote institution and out of touch with the reality of the Australian industrial and economic life. The Comintern did, however, provide an element of internationalism and it could be asserted that the Australian labour movement would have been less aware and less of a participant in working-class international affairs if it were not the CPA front groups which owed their origins in the main to the Comintern.

<sup>46</sup> See Rupert Lockwood, *War on the Waterfront, Menzies, Japan and the Pig-Iron Dispute*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1987, for a full account of this affair although the Comintern is not mentioned. For a wider discussion of the non-aggression pact and Comintern directions to the CPA see Barbara Curthoys, "The Comintern, the CPA and the Non-Aggression Pact" in *People's Choice*, Vol. 1, No. 3, May 1992.

<sup>47</sup> "Declaration to the Central Committee of the Communist Party on War, (Sept. 3rd, 1939)", Comintern Papers.

<sup>48</sup> Frank Cain, *Political Surveillance*, Chapter 8.



Indeed there was a price to pay for the Comintern connection. In the perception held by the non-Labour forces, the Comintern was viewed as regicidal, atheistic and the antithesis of everything British, and the CPA had to devote its scarce resources to countering the effect of the more extremist of these views. In an attempt to hobble the CPA in the 1930s the government attempted in September 1935 to prosecute the FOSU and its paper *Soviets Today* for acting as an "unlawful association" within the terms of the Commonwealth Crimes Act. Saner counsels prevailed and the government abandoned the prosecution in May 1937. It was the CPA's connection with the Soviet Union that the government adopted as the main target for its assault on the CPA. This back door approach to the problem was an appropriate tactic for those times. Following the Great War, the agenda makers in Australia greatly promoted British culture, manners and practices. The growth of Australian nationalism evident in the 1890s and into the new century was severely set back as was the recognition that other nations could provide models for Australia to follow whether they were in the USA or the USSR.<sup>49</sup> The CPA envisaged the Soviet model's being grafted to the Australian reality. In presenting an alternative to the unquestioned British way of doing things, the CPA alienated many in the Australian working class and middle class. However, it did make a sizeable majority aware that the Comintern connection pointed to a world beyond Britain from which lessons could be learned and essential verities demonstrated. And its main lesson was that fascism of the Italian, German and Japanese variety was about to change the face of the world forever.

### Sources

Davidson's book, mentioned in the footnotes, is the single, if now dated, history of the CPA written by a non-CPA member. However, neither this nor the many books published by CPA activists discuss the Comintern Connection. In recent years a small window on this topic has been opened through the efforts of Barbara Curthoys, who obtained from Moscow microfilmed copies of some Comintern documents relating to the CPA. This small collection, however, contains little actual Comintern material. It is composed mainly of reports and minutes of CPA Conventions, its Political Bureau meetings and copies of cyclostyled MM and factory newsletters. It is to be hoped that the Moscow guardians of these papers will be willing to release more of these documents to help better understand and to measure the impact of the Comintern on the CPA.

<sup>49</sup> Frank Cain, "Some Aspects of Australian-Soviet Relations from 1800 to 1960" in *The Journal of Communist Studies*, Vol. 7, December 1992. No. 4, pp. 511-513.