BRIEFLY, one would answer no; socialism does not necessarily mean only one working class party, nor does it preclude the existence of organised political opposition expressed in electoral contests and in other ways.

However, such an answer does little to penetrate the problem which is one of great complexity, as the socialist transformation of capitalist society cannot be measured in the same terms as the “normal” changes of government people have been used to in Australia.

It is not unknown for a change of government to take place every year, or even more frequently. But it is not credible to imagine that an election would introduce socialism in September, another vote it out in March, have it reintroduced in June, and changed back to capitalism in December. This is not specially because of lack of democratic processes, but because fundamental social change requires not just a vote, but a deep-going sentiment for change and a level of political awareness and activity many times greater than that to which Australians are accustomed.

A brief reference to the experiences of some other countries will illustrate this, and provide material to probe the question. The Russian socialist revolution of November, 1917, was preceded by a bourgeois revolution in March, and a violent suppression of the socialist forces in July. It was followed by a new military attack by Germany and then by a civil war and wars of intervention lasting three to four years.

During 1917, the mass sentiment swung strongly towards Lenin's party, the Bolsheviks, who won (away from the Mensheviks and
Socialist Revolutionaries), a majority in the Soviets which had sprung up in the March revolution. These Soviets were directly elected committees of workers, peasants and soldiers which existed as a power alongside the only partially democratic parliament or Duma.

A number of revolutionary groups which had previously split away rejoined the Bolsheviks during this period—a coalition of forces, it could be said, amalgamated into one party. The second Congress of Soviets met on November 7, 1917, and decided to take power into its hands, passing decrees on peace and land to the tillers, which were the main demands of the people, along with a tackling of the food problem. The Bolsheviks, who won the majority in the Soviets, adopted the program of the Socialist Revolutionaries—the party of the peasants—on the land question rather than their own, in order to cement the alliance of peasants and workers.

Lenin said: “Touching on the question of an alliance between the Bolshevik workers and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries whom many peasants at present trust, I argued in my speech that this alliance can be an ‘honest coalition’, an honest alliance, for there is no radical divergence of interests between the wage workers and the working exploited peasants”. (Dec. 1, 1918, Collected Works, Vol. 26, p. 333.)

The Left Socialist Revolutionaries, although supporting the Bolsheviks in this Congress, refused at that time to become part of a coalition government. However, in December they joined the government. They withdrew in March when the Congress of Soviets ratified the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty with Germany. They waged a bitter campaign against this peace, and in July organised the assassination of the German ambassador, Mirbach, in Moscow, and began an armed attack on the government. This more or less coincided with other counter-revolutionary outbreaks, the beginning of the intervention of the 14 imperialist states, and a devastating famine.

One eminent non-marxist historian, Professor E. Carr, describes the party situation as it had developed by 1922 in these terms: “The fiction of a legal opposition was, however, long since dead. Its demise cannot fairly be laid at the door of one party. If it was true that the Bolshevik regime was not prepared after the first few months to tolerate an organised opposition, it was equally true that no opposition party was prepared to remain within legal

In Czechoslovakia on the eve of liberation from the Nazis in 1944, the Communist Party asked the other Czech parties to join them in a post-war coalition government based on a common program including: punishment of collaborators with the Germans by confiscation of their property and prohibition of the political parties with which they had been associated; nationalisation of banks and insurance companies and 51% government ownership in heavy industry; and distribution among the peasants of land confiscated from collaborators.

However, differences gradually emerged, their essence being over whether Czechoslovakia would continue on the path it was pursuing—towards socialism—or whether it would reverse direction and go back towards capitalism. A constitutional crisis was deliberately precipitated by resignation of twelve pro-capitalist ministers, and the refusal of President Benes to replace them with new appointees proposed by the government majority.

In this state of paralysis of the machinery of government, a huge conference of representatives of works councils (trade union branches in the factories) was called, which by 7,900 votes to 10 supported the government, set up action committees, and called for a general strike to force the President to act constitutionally. This he finally did, accepting the resignations and appointing replacements nominated by the prime minister.

These and subsequent events confirmed Czechoslovakia on the socialist course. There is still a coalition government, comprising the party formed from amalgamation of the Communists and the Social Democrats, along with the Socialist Party, the People’s Party, and the Party of Slovak Reconstruction. The opposition parties brought about their own political destruction in two parts—one by collaboration with the Nazis, the other by failure to succeed in a political crisis of their own creation.

Another experience worth considering is the popular front which developed in France from 1934—the response of the communists and other working class and democratic forces to the sufferings inflicted by the depression and the menace of fascism and war.

On July 14, 1935, the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille which signified victory for the French Revolution of 1789, and fol-
following a series of bitter political conflicts, a great rally was organised by the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, the Radical Socialist Party, the main trade unions and many other anti-fascist organisations, leading to the People's Front Program, issued in January, 1936. This program of a fighting coalition demanded the dissolution of the fascist organisations, the cleansing of public life, repeal of restrictions on freedom of the press, full liberty for trade unions, improvements in education, collective security for peace, nationalisation of war industries, rises in pay, a 40 hour week, regulation of banking, and many other demands. Part of this program was realised by a later government, although the rot in the propertied classes had gone too far to prevent the debacle in the face of the German invasion.

However, the experiences of the struggle in France, as well as in other countries led to a decisive turn in the world communist movement from conceptions which had developed to one degree or another of the communists winning alone in the face of everyone else as it were, to the re-assertion of the ideas of a united front between the communist parties and other parties based on the working class, and a people's front composed of those forces and other classes, strata and groups within capitalist society.

These ideas, in no essential different from present conceptions of a “coalition of left forces” for the achievement of particular demands, and programs, and as a transitional form towards socialism, were developed by Dimitrov in his famous report to the 7th Congress of the Communist International in July, 1935, which exerted enormous influence in these directions on the outlook of communists all over the world.

It should also be recalled that in the founding document of communism, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels said: “The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working class parties”; “they labor everywhere for the union and agreement of the democratic parties of all countries”; and declared the aim to be “conquest of political power of the proletariat” and “to win the battle of democracy”.

Recently, in Finland, a coalition government was formed in which the People's Democratic Alliance (another coalition in which the Communist Party is the main force) has three ministers, the other parties to the coalition being the Social Democrats and the Agrarian Union (now renamed Centre Party).

The program of the coalition, with the exception of agricultural policy, is in general in the interests of the workers and others on
both domestic issues and foreign policy. The coalition, and the program around which it was formed, emerged only after long political struggle and negotiations, with many ups and downs. And alongside political developments have been important moves towards unity and more representative leadership in the trade unions.

One conclusion drawn by the Finnish communists (at their fourteenth congress recently) is that it is essential to closely define their attitude to the existing democratic institutions, civil liberties, and the multi-party system, both during the transition to socialism and after its triumph. Australian communists are tackling these questions in connection with their 21st Congress to be held in June, 1967.

While Australian communists have a number of achievements to their credit in this field as in others, and their position is usually violently distorted in the mass media, there are grounds for pointing to the failure to think through consistently some questions affecting political democracy, particularly their implications regarding political parties and political opposition. One of the reasons for this failing is the tendency to oversimplify the relation between classes and parties, to make absolute the general truth that different parties represent the interests of different classes.

What Lenin said in his article, *The Three Sources and Three Components of Marxism* is as true today as it was in 1913: “People always were and always will be the victims of deceit and self-deceit in politics until they learn to discover the interests of some class or other behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises” (and the phrases, declarations and promises are, of course, usually uttered, made or offered by political parties).

However, the class structure of society is not so simple, and still less is the relation between classes and parties. One can therefore speak only in an abstract sense of “one party for one class”, and of there being only one party possible in the classless society of socialism. This is important also because it is only too easy to put a “class enemy” label on differing views, thus opening the way for use of decree or of force instead of reasoned debate and democratic processes to settle the issue. But there are and always will be in response to new situations, new ideas, values, and even fairly rapidly passing fancies, which need avenues of expression. Ideological means should be the first and main method of combating old, reactionary or degenerate ideas, with coercion used
only when democratic norms are violated, and then by well-defined legal processes, except in emergency situations which every state, capitalist or socialist, past or present, has reserved the right and retained the means to deal with.

Whatever the reasons why it may have come about, there are dangers, hitherto underestimated, from a certain weakening of safeguards and of checks and balances when there is only one party. This does not refer mainly to the now clear violations of the Stalin period, but rather to the lack of mutual supervision and control which could be beneficially supplied by the long-term existence of separate parties and groups within a coalition sharing the same basic socialist program.

Of course, a certain composition of a coalition cannot be decreed, still less can it be decreed that it must remain static. There will inevitably be competition and the flux arising therefrom. But to regard the existence and expression of differing views as the norm instead of the exception is a sign of health and vigor. If these are stifled, or even only somewhat clogged, there results a degree of stagnation which holds society back.

All socialist countries—in differing degrees—are grappling with, or must grapple with this problem, the existence and emerging solution of which testifies to the fact that socialist ideology and the socialist system are, by and large, out of their youthful stage and are entering the period of maturity.

Another reason for shortcomings of Australian communists in this field has been a tendency (sometimes strong and at other times much less so) to take the Russian experience as identical with marxism, as a universal truth applicable everywhere. Also, in the main correctly defending the victorious island of socialism, beset and assaulted in every side, the communists were incorrectly drawn towards justifying the one party set-up which had resulted as the theoretically inevitable outcome, and thus, at least implicitly, as necessarily applying in Australia, too.

This led, from time to time, to inadequate attention to the Australian traditions in political democracy and institutions. “From time to time” is said deliberately, as there is a great deal of which to be proud in the Communist Party’s record of seeking to define, of defending and promoting the Australian democratic temper and tradition against attacks by governments, arbitration and other courts, profit-motivated owners of mass media, and sycophants hoping for some crumbs from the rich table of American capital. It was, understandably enough, the prerogative of the first repre-
sentative of the Australian establishment, Harold Holt, to so
desert any semblance of an independent Australian position as to
proclaim—and act—“all the way with LBJ”.

But the shortcomings have been there, and are not disposed of
by references, however valid in themselves, to the limited super­
ficial, or even sham nature of many of the democratic rights pre­
vailing in Australia and other capitalist countries. People are
deeply attached to the measure of actual freedom they have, and
will vigorously defend it; they are not moved by abstract discourses
on the superiority of socialist over bourgeois democracy. Socialist
democracy must be, and must be seen to be, superior in all depart­
ments and not just some, and there are no compelling or long­
term reasons which prevent this.

This includes the right of dissent in all fields, including polit­
ically, and embraced in that is the right of political opposition, not
just differences of opinion within the forces for socialism. No
principle in the theory of the state or in marxism as a whole
which precludes this is known to this writer. The principle is that
when the will of the majority is for social change, the minority
must respect that will. If they do not, laws expressing that will,
and enforcement of those laws, is necessary and justified, and will
be actively supported as such, including by many who at present
cannot readily envisage such situations, how they are to be re­
solved, and what their own reactions to them would be.

Those who may be inclined to query the proposition from the
opposite point of view should take into account that ownership of
the mass media will no longer be decided by possession of wealth;
that new, vigorous democrats and socialists will occupy positions of
authority in the machinery of government; and that references to
the use of parliamentary forms in the transition to socialism can
hardly be made real to Australians without recognition of the right
of opposition.

In Australian conditions a coalition of left forces is a long-term
project. But the issues press—Vietnam, foreign control of Aus­
tralia, the gap between performance and modern possibility, the
tawdry and often false values of official society. This willy-nilly
brings together diverse forces embracing also those who care nothing
for a coalition of left forces or even oppose it. This includes,
despite false Liberal, DLP and right-wing claims to the contrary
the Labor Party left, who do not yet favor any coalition, and
certainly not one with the Communists. Communists believe, how­
ever that the logic of the situation and the course of events will
compel a re-assessment on their part.