The President of the Communist Party in Victoria stresses the influence of world conditions and development of mass struggle on the perspectives of socialism without civil war and the flowering of democracy.

IN THEIR DRAFT CHARTER of Democratic Rights the Communists set forth their aim of a socialist Australia with full freedom of political activity for all sections of people. This freedom would operate on the basis of public ownership and control of the means of production; a democratised army, police and public service; a democratised press, radio and television; and active involvement of working people in the administration of the government and the economy. In other words, the special dominant power of private monopoly capital would have been wiped out, making real freedom possible for the mass of the people. Freedom would be subject only, says the draft Charter, to “the constitution and laws,” to the curbing of “attempts by undemocratic minorities to impose their will by force,” and to the banning of “advocacy of war, violence and race hatred.” “Freedom of speech, assembly, religion, press, travel, artistic expression and respect for the rights of minorities” would be guaranteed in the constitution.

To declare such an aim is important. It is also vitally important to create the conditions under which the aim can be realised in practice. If socialism in Australia were to be born out of conditions of war and repression, as in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, then we, like the people of those countries, would need to restrict the liberties of the overthrown forces for a long period. The hope of attaining our program without such a long intervening period depends above all on the carrying out of the transition to socialism without civil war or large-scale violence. Even a peaceful transition will not ensure, of course, against all “attempts by undemocratic minorities to impose their will by force,” but it should limit the seriousness of these attempts and the support they could secure.

The hope of a peaceful transition depends on many factors, chiefly: 1 preservation and widening of our democratic liberties;
2 a favorable world balance of forces; and 3 powerful united struggle against the forces of monopoly capitalism within our country. Recent world developments have made a peaceful transition far more possible. The desire of Communists has always been that the people should find a peaceful road forward but ruling minorities have resorted to violence.

We have named as the first condition of a peaceful transition the preservation and widening of our democratic liberties. The draft Charter refers rightly to "our firm democratic traditions." By and large, the Australian people have always had strong democratic sentiments. Twice they have astounded the world with an unexpected referendum result (defeat of conscription for overseas service in face of the tremendous win-the-war propaganda of 1916 and 1917, and defeat of Menzies' "anti-Communist" referendum proposals at the height of McCarthyism in the USA). The same democratic spirit has recently animated large bodies of workers in many remarkable industrial struggles despite massive penalties under the arbitration laws. The repressive policies of Australian ruling circles have been met by many successful struggles against censorship, passport bans, speaking bans and the like.

To defend and develop our traditional liberties — to reaffirm the right to strike, to abolish the penal laws against strikers, to stop the imprisonment of conscientious objectors to the war in Vietnam, to stop inquisitorial laws and repressive police actions, to win proportional representation in parliamentary elections, to win a real say for trade unions in the carrying through of technological changes and in the running of factories, and above all to expose the propaganda of "anti-communism" on which nearly all attacks on democratic liberty are based — this is the first necessity for a peaceful transition to socialism in Australia. Failure in this could mean fascism, the blocking of the peaceful road forward, and the necessity to overthrow the ruling minority by force and to keep it down by force afterwards. The greatest menace to our democratic liberties is war, particularly aggressive war fought in foreign countries like Vietnam. War of this kind becomes increasingly unpopular as it proceeds and leads inevitably to attempts by the government to stifle its opponents. We see the onset of such attempts now. For this reason our success or failure in the struggle for peace — in particular, at this moment, the struggle against conscription and the coming call-ups and the imprisonment of youths refusing service — helps to determine our whole path to socialism and the whole character of Australian socialist society in its early stages.
More is needed, however, than preserving the liberty to struggle. What is needed above all is the struggle itself, the most powerful struggle by wide sections of the people against the power of monopoly capital in all its manifestations — not only its warmongering and its attacks on liberties but its wage-cutting, its industrial autocracy, its arbitration machinery, its control over the State. The struggle will have to develop a breadth and a power sufficient in a time of crisis to paralyse the wealthy class from waging a violent resistance. It would be unreal to think of a peaceful transition except through an overwhelming gathering of strength by the people and the crippling of the power of action by the wealthy minority. The religion of this minority is greed and it will never voluntarily give up its vast possessions.

Can a wealthy class in fact be paralysed from taking action? Professor Salvemini, historian of Italian fascism, in his book, *The Fascist Dictatorship*, speaking of the situation in September 1920, when the workers had occupied the main factories of Northern Italy; when the Socialist Party had won a third of the seats in parliament a year before and had been increasing its support since; when the government could no longer count on the troops and when the fascist bands had not yet developed in strength, says: “Had the leaders of the General Confederation of Labor and of the Socialist Party wished to strike a decisive blow, here was the opportunity... The bankers and the big industrialists and big landlords waited for the socialist revolution as sheep wait to be led to the slaughter.” It was the workers’ own rightwing leadership (or the dominant right-wing element within it) which threw away the chance of an almost bloodless victory. (No Communist Party existed in Italy at that time). A coalition of left-wing forces including a powerful Communist Party and combining parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggle could use such a situation very differently.

A further condition for peaceful transition is even more basic. It is the turning of the world balance in favor of socialism and against capitalism. This is already occurring on a grand scale. The socialist countries have consistently averaged a faster growth of industrial production than the countries of capitalism. With their new economic reforms they are overcoming the decline in rate of growth which was mainly evident about 1962-63 and have shot ahead to new and faster rates (the Soviet Union and East European countries averaging about 10 per cent in 1967). Economic power is the basis of political influence, and the faster rate of increase of Soviet production has opened the way, not only to important improvements in living standards, but to really massive economic or military assistance to other countries
— Vietnam, Cuba, India, the Arab countries for example. The socialist world, accounting now for over 40 per cent of the world's production, has already made imperialist intervention in other countries harder.

Combined with the rise of the socialist world has come another heavy blow to the imperialists — the mass uprising of the oppressed colonial peoples, the majority of which have now won their political independence while others are battling for their freedom arms in hand like the Vietnamese and the people of Southern Africa. This, too, has tipped the world scales heavily against imperialism. The coming victory of the Vietnamese people will tip them further still — and the many years of attempts by the imperialists to reverse the forward movement by destroying the anti-imperialist governments of the vital Middle East oil region have so far ended in failure. The successes of the rightwing military coups in Indonesia, Ghana and Greece are contrary to the general historical movement which is a forward one. Workers' and students' actions inside the imperialist countries are also helping the whole anti-imperialist advance on a world scale.

Earlier the transition to a socialist Australia could hardly have been accomplished without full-scale Anglo-American military intervention. (Don't we remember the swift British military intervention in British Guiana and the classic statement of the British Colonial Secretary of the day that "His Majesty's Government will never permit the establishment of a Communist Government in any part of the British Empire"?) But now, with American forces suffering major defeat in Asia and the British forces being withdrawn from "east of Suez," this armed intervention may be avoidable. This is thanks to the long struggles and sacrifices of the people of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries and of the oppressed colonies and former colonies to all of whom we owe an eternal debt of gratitude.

In all work it is important to recognise fully the power of monopoly capital and its virtual dictatorship over our so-called "democratic" society. That is why I would regard the first part of the draft Charter as of crucial importance. The people's struggle for larger democratic liberties is carried out in a society which is a democracy "only for the minority, only for the possessing classes, only for the rich" (Lenin). The people's struggle can sometimes be powerful enough to affect State policy. But in general the monopolies not only rule the economy, they rule the State. To serve the people's needs, a radically new State machinery will have to be constructed.
We know of all the big business lobbying in Canberra; corruption in direct and less direct forms; and the growing personal union between monopoly and governments (the same wealthy families appear in the Cabinet room and in the board meetings of the main companies). Big business wields a mighty power through its ownership of press, radio and television, and also through direct blackmail, exercised particularly by the great banks which are the very heart and centre of the whole monopoly structure.

Can we forget that in 1931 the Commonwealth Bank Board, then composed of representatives of Big Business and private banking, forced the Federal and all State Governments into a drastic cut of pensions, social services and public servants' wages by threatening to withdraw necessary credits and plunge the governments into bankruptcy? And that in 1947 the National Bank, through its then vice-chairman Sir Frank Clarke, helped to kill the Bank Nationalisation Bill by using the Liberal majority in an undemocratic Victorian Legislative Council (led by Sir Frank Clarke) to throw out the Cain Labor Government?

Only if we fully recognise this virtual monopoly dictatorship will we be able to rally the necessary forces to end it and prevent its resurgence. And only by recognising it will we be able to take a balanced view of restrictions placed on the dispossessed forces of the old order in existing socialist societies. These societies arose from conditions of war and fascism, terror and torture. To attain to a full socialist democracy embracing the whole people they have had to pioneer a long and difficult course never charted previously. At each step mistakes could arise, either from a premature lowering of guard against internal and external conspiracies, or from delays in democratisation, limiting the benefits of socialism and giving needless opportunities to the enemy.

Big advances in democratisation have been made in the last decade. They would have been more rapid but for imperialist threats, the danger of the nazi revival, CIA activities, etc. They would also have been more rapid but for the distortions of the later Stalin period which involved repressions that were excessive, arbitrary and often aimed at very fine revolutionaries who merely held different opinions. Carry-over of the effects of these distortions is the main reason justifying measured criticism by Communists in other countries when restrictive actions appear unjustifiable. In voicing this criticism we should always recognise — and show that we recognise — the great difficulties faced by the pioneers of socialism in the lands where it has so far been built and the incalculable debt we owe to these pioneers for the job they have done and are now doing.