

Steve Cooper comments on Brian Aarons' article "Labor Rules OK" and Bernie Taft's "Marxism is Open Ended" which were published in ALR 83.

**Steve
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WHY LEFT DECLINE?

I would like to comment on a couple of matters which puzzled me in the March issue of ALR.

In the article "Labor Rules O.K." there was no analysis of why, despite the downswing in the economic cycle which began in 1974 and was deepening again in 1982, the decline in the left (as distinct from labor or labor left) has continued. For example, the Senate vote for the CPA in South Australia was about one in a thousand voters and the SPA Senate vote in New South Wales was somewhere in the same order. Shouldn't such an analysis be made in a left journal? I think that the Senate vote in 1949, in the depths of the Stalin era and after some years of the very morbid first cold war, was about 1.8 percent. Support during the war (the period of 1941 to 1945) was undoubtedly higher.

The second puzzling matter was the impression created by Bernie Taft that the reading of Marx was not encouraged in the "old" days ("little" encouragement). This is not true in relation to CPA leaders, even though, in retrospect, they moved within limitations connected with the awestruck acceptance of Stalin's opinions, especially from 1930 to 1956. Symptomatic was that CPA headquarters was not known as "Stalin House": but as "Marx House"; while the central education system was "Marx School".

Whatever their shortcomings, and these were serious, Miles and Sharkey, and the three successive administrators of Marx School in the mid and late '40s (a formative period for several older present leaders) expressed delight on finding students who diligently studied Marx and Engels in the original. In Melbourne, Blake and others took a similar position. This does not mean that all students were diligently reading Marx and Engels in the original. But this is a cultural thing. Many were not of that bent, or found Marx and Engels hard to follow.

During the Second World War, not much material by Marx and Engels came to Australia from Soviet publishing houses, but there was a

stockpile left over from 1939 for the twenty thousand new members. Also reprints were made on newsprint of basic material such as the *Manifesto*, *Wage Labor and Capital*, *Value Price and Profit*, *Origin of the Family* etc. Basic books such as *Capital* were available through libraries, or the CPA's own library. The *Communist Review* did not ignore Marx and Engels either.

Immediately after the war bookshops received adequate numbers of cheap reprints of *Capital*, *Anti-Duhring*, and very cheap paperback editions of the *Manifesto* and the economic pamphlets, *The 18th Brumaire*, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, *Origin of the Family* and other writings. There were also impressive volumes of Lenin's works.

All these existed. Members were encouraged to read them. Who then discouraged them? Who didn't encourage them?

In my view the problem was that there was a co-existence of these with such "bibles" as Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism* and the *Short History of the CPSU(B)* and a sectarian interpretation of some of Lenin's works. There was also a mechanical application, the "forgetting" of some of Marx's views where these conflicted with Stalin's and a playing down of Lenin's efforts against bureaucracy, although that effort had succeeded in the 1920s. It might be more accurate to say that the writings of Marx and Engels were befuddled rather than little encouraged.

Note: Steve Cooper also wrote that it was wrong of ALR to term George Orwell an "international brigader" since he was not a member of the International Brigade and that because Orwell's book *Homage to Catalonia*, written after his time in Spain during the Spanish Civil War was pessimistic in outlook.

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