1949 to 1956

STALINISM
OR INDEPENDENCE?

by Jack Blake

Jack Blake, at the Communists and the Labour Movement Conference in Melbourne last year, presented a paper analysing the events surrounding the so-called "Consolidation Statement" of the CPA in 1954. Following the conference, the National Committee of the CPA appointed a sub-committee to examine the issues raised by Jack Blake's paper. This sub-committee reported to the last National Committee meeting, held on April 4-5. The NC adopted the sub-committee's report unanimously.

We publish below the full text of Jack Blake's paper and, following it, the resolution adopted by the NC.

Early in 1949 the central leadership of the CPA outlined a Communist Party electoral strategy of fielding a team of candidates large enough to present the Communist Party as the only real alternative to the Chifley Labor government. The disastrous CPA policy on the coal strike flowed from that strategy.

In an interview with the press the general secretary Sharkey stated that in the hypothetical event of the Soviet Army entering Australia in pursuit of an aggressor, Australian workers would welcome the Red Army. He was sentenced to three years' jail for sedition.
In December the Labor government was defeated. The Liberal-Country Party coalition headed by Menzies won a majority, formed the government, and immediately launched a fierce campaign against the Communist Party and the trade unions.

In the middle of 1950 the Korean war broke out. North Korean troops overran most of South Korea. American armed forces under the United Nations flag advanced to the Chinese border, violated Chinese air space, and threatened to use atomic bombs. The Chinese army crossed the Yalu River and swept the American forces back across the 38th parallel.

Before the end of 1950 and into the first quarter of 1951 the Communist Party was an illegal organisation. The Communist Party Dissolution Bill had passed through all stages in the federal parliament and had become the law of the land.

Stalinism

I know there is a large body of work on the nature of stalinism but for the purpose of this paper I have in mind two aspects:

1. The degree to which the CPA (like all other communist parties) operated along the lines of Stalin’s CPSU: Bureaucratically centralised, dogmatic, authoritarian, and intolerant of views not in accord with the official line.

2. The extent to which the party followed or supported various policies or acts of the CPSU.

There was a connection between these two but they were not the same, and the one did not necessarily include the other. The first aspect, the nature of the party and how it operated, was always the most important.

In this period all CPA leaders were stalinists. The CPA was a stalinist party as were most other communist parties.

One view about this matter in our context is that the root of the problem lay in the failure of the CPA to concern itself with Australian problems. This view is hard to sustain. The CPA has always been concerned about such basic economic problems as wages, prices, working hours and conditions.

In wider areas, the CPA elaborated policies on capitalist monopolies, the national debt, banking, currency reform, direct and indirect taxation, water conservation, afforestation, education, housing, and public health. In the immediate post-war period detailed municipal programs were worked out. The 1944-45 program on Aborigines, of which Tom Wright was one of the main architects, was ahead of anything else at the time.

I don’t think that this is where the problem lies, but rather in our concept of the nature of the revolution in prospect in Australia, in the orientation which stemmed from that, and the stalinist nature of the party associated with both concept and orientation.

The resolution of early 1954 titled Consolidation removed Henry and Blake from the CC secretariat on charges of attempting to impose a Left sectarian policy on the party, factionalism, and conducting a struggle for power within the party. This resolution is still the official view, and it is therefore useful as a frame of reference to examine some issues, policies, and the role of different personalities.

As I am one of the central figures involved there is a danger of bias and special pleading. I draw this possibility to your attention.

During 1949 both Sharkey and Dixon were critical of the party’s peace activity. Sharkey said there was still no peace movement in NSW. At the end of 1949 Blake was placed in charge of this sphere of work; he translated a Russian version of a speech by Palmiro Togliatti and published it in the Communist Review, February 1950.

In the article, Togliatti urged the workers to place the defence of peace in the centre of their activity, the broad peace movement embracing all democratic strata of people should become a real political force in each country. The development of this broad
popular movement would simplify for the people the creation of governments which would put an end to war preparations, develop peaceful economic construction and raise living standards.

Blake then sought to convince the party organisations to place the struggle for peace in the centre of their activity. At a CC meeting in July 1950, he criticised Henry and the CC members from Victoria and Queensland for hindering a united Communist Party approach to this basic line of policy. He urged action to secure signatures to the petition against atomic weapons as a way of getting party members to carry out political work on a wide scale; the party should merge with the broad mass movement as its most vigorous fighting core.4

Towards the end of 1950 Audrey Blake proposed the organisation of a mass delegation with a dance group as its cultural core, to attend the Berlin Youth Festival in the following year. Henry, the CC secretariat member responsible for youth activity, gave full support to the proposal. In Victoria, Hill was strongly opposed and that was the beginning of a long campaign by Hill against Audrey Blake. But the Youth Festival campaign took on a mass character and was a success. The dance group fulfilled the role of mass organiser and 134 Australian delegates went to the Berlin Youth Festival.

Early in 1951 Hill drew Henry into his campaign against Audrey Blake. Henry delivered a two hours long attack against her at a specially convened Political Committee meeting, based on material supplied to him by Hill. The meeting placed the entire matter in the hands of the Control Commission. After a long and detailed investigation, the only charge the Commission found to be substantiated was that Audrey Blake was inclined to be impetuous. Already, on the day after he had delivered his blast against Audrey Blake, Henry realised he had been conned by Hill.

By mid-1950, because of the Korean war and Menzies’ drive to outlaw the party, the atmosphere in the party was that of a besieged fortress. Blake sought to turn the vision of party members outwards, toward the broad movement for peace which, at the same time, would provide the best conditions for defeating Menzies’ attacks on democratic liberties, and for the struggle for the economic interests of the working people. He described the Labor Party as a bourgeois agency in the labor movement, at the same time insisting that a people’s movement for peace could not be built without the active participation of thousands of Labor Party members and supporters.

The Communist Party’s broad popular campaign for a ‘NO’ vote in the 1951 referendum has, at times, been contrasted to Blake’s sectarian methods. This ignores the fact that it was Blake who had the party responsibility for the nationwide referendum campaign; he helped the initiators of the popular cultural forms used in the campaign — street theatre, songs, parodies, cartoon strips, etc. His work in this field, as published in the Communist Review, was later attacked as an introduction of stalinism into literature and art.

The 1954 resolution contains only one paragraph referring to Henry, and that reference is only in general terms. The detailed charges are against Blake; Henry is associated by the linkage "Blake and Henry". The views of these two on economism early in 1951 (actually I have been unable to discover any views expressed by Henry on economism) are given as an example of the sectarianism of Blake and Henry. In fact, the discussion on economism was directed against the sectarian influence which the economist trend had on the policies of the CPA.5

The suggestion that the campaign against economism was the exclusive province of Blake and Henry (against the majority of the party leadership) is not supported by the evidence. The general secretary of the party, Sharkey, supported this campaign. At the 16th Congress in 1951, Sharkey said:

The campaign waged against economism and sectarianism will prove valuable in helping the party to recover lost ground and go far beyond past achievements .... the aspect .... of Lenin’s criticism of economism .... most important for us is that which showed there were other and at least equally important starting points for the struggle of the proletariat than purely economic; in present conditions, the various aspects of the fight for peace, the Five Power Pact, peace in Korea, against the rearming of Japan and conscription of the youth.
On the same subject the president of the party, Dixon, said in August 1951:

Economism is right opportunism, it is a deviation towards the Labor Party ... the fight against economism is the fight against reformist ideology and methods which limit and narrow the trade union struggle, hinder the fight for unity within the working class movement.6

Speaking on the success of the campaign for a 'NO' vote in the 1951 referendum, Dixon said:

In these ways the traditional economism and narrowness of the trade union movement, a scourge which continues to afflict even the trade unions under progressive leadership received a heavy blow.7

There was nothing in what Blake said about economism to suggest that unions should neglect economic issues. That struggles about wages, working hours, conditions, prices and other economic demands of the workers were of fundamental importance was stressed.

Another cited example of Blake’s sectarian record was his suggestion, in answer to a question at a party cadres meeting, that the party should consider giving second preference votes to candidates who were peace supporters, rather than to Labor Party candidates. This proposal, it was said, was connected with his erroneous ideas on the two-party system.

In August 1952, in a carefully considered report on tactics for parliamentary elections due in the following year, Dixon said:

... in the course of the elections we shall strive to strengthen the people’s movement. Hence, the Communist Party will support non-party people’s candidates who come forward with a genuine policy of peace and in defence of the needs of the people. In the elections, as at all times, our aim is to build a firm united front with the Labor Party workers. We will, therefore, continue to give our second preferences to ALP candidates.8

Here the problem which Blake had about second preferences was simply shifted by Dixon to first preference votes. What effect would communist advocacy of Vote I for peace candidates rather than ALP candidates have on the united front?

As to erroneous views about the two-party system, it was Sharkey, in the article "The Labor Party Crisis", which is said to be non-sectarian and definitive on the ALP, who said:

The ALP...is not a workers’ party...it is a two-class party based also on the middle class, on the ‘Australian manufacturer’ whose interests it fostered against overseas capital ... (it is) the second party of capitalism, part of the two-party system of controlling the masses, an essential part of the capitalist set up ...9 (my emphasis — J.B.)

The two-party system, the swing of the Lib-Lab pendulum, has always been a problem for Australian communists discussing parliamentary elections.

Do these references to the recorded position of various CPA leaders leave us with no more complications than to decide who was the chief wrongdoer? That is the simple path, but it does not help us resolve the problem about what was happening and why.

The record is clear enough and sufficiently well documented to make possible an evaluation of the processes at work in the period.

Blake’s work throughout 1950 was directed to taking the CPA onto a new course, giving it a new orientation. In the process he operated within the established stalinist framework. He made no sudden leap from a stalinist to a non-stalinist position: most of his policy proposals which broke away from stalinism were put forward in stalinist terms. His suggestion that the committees or councils of the broad popular movement might assume some of the characteristics of Soviets was part of this process of groping for new ways in old terms.

In the field of educational work within the party, members were encouraged to think for themselves. One of the texts used was Stalin’s History of the CPSU, yet in the lively discussions which took place the focus was on Australian problems, and those discussions spilled over into the branches.

The author of a recent book referring to the period is generally critical and hostile, but he remarks on the spirit of excitement which developed in the party in those years.10
In his speech to the 16th Congress, Blake was celebrating this development of inner party democracy:

This was also shown by the number of lively discussions which developed on strategic questions, the nature of the peace movement, economism and sectarianism. At times these controversies were rather hair-raising but we must not let that horrify us .... Expressions of horror at mistakes made by comrades in theoretical discussion would only strangle such discussions and the ideological growth which results from such discussions when related to action.11

By early 1951 this changed orientation and direction had taken hold within the party. Communists had acquired experience in conducting political work among wider sections of the people and their fighting spirit was much higher than it had been only a year before. More than 200,000 signatures had been secured against the atomic bomb, and these had to be won in a mass educational struggle because of the fierce cold war.

Basically it was this new orientation and direction that was codified in the new CPA program drafted in the first half of 1951 and adopted by the 16th Congress in August 1951.

The program declared the struggle to maintain peace to be the most pressing task of the time and the Communist Party would therefore devote its main energies to it. It called for the development of a broad people’s movement to struggle for peace, democracy and the vital interests of the working people.

This people’s movement, through a combination of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary action would lead to the winning of people’s power and a people’s government. The first act of this people’s government would be to replace the dangerous policy of war with a policy of peace; it would then take economic measures opening the way to the building of socialism.

This program left large and vital political areas in darkness. Many problems and contradictions between one part and another had not been thought through. How, for example, could ‘Our parliaments be filled with true representatives of the people’s movement’ if communist candidates gave their preference votes to ALP candidates while at the same time saying that the Labor Party supported the war drive and was the second party of capitalism?

How could the broad organised people’s movement effect the parliamentary side of its activity, select its candidates for parliament and have them elected? How could the councils, committees, or other leading bodies of this broad people’s movement be so all-embracing as to win parliamentary power and wield extra-parliamentary power? Or should each of these leading bodies of the people’s movement confine itself to a limited field of interest while some overarching authority (maybe the CPA) would give these diverse movements a common political direction towards a ‘People’s Government of Peace’?

These were some of the blank spots in the programmatic statement of the CPA which various leaders, in the process of their practical activity, were compelled to think about. The views expressed at different times by Sharkey, Dixon, Henry, Blake and others reflected the way each saw the areas in the totality calling for the greatest emphasis. Neither singly nor collectively were these leaders able to think these problems through. Indeed, has this changed very much to this day?

In the latter part of 1951 Audrey Blake was the initiator and the main driving force of the Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship held in Sydney, March 1952. In that campaign she had the full support and backing of Henry on behalf of the CC of the CPA.

Menzies, following his defeat in the referendum, sought other means to suppress the democratic rights of the trade unions and the progressive democratic movement. The full weight of government propaganda and of the secret police were turned against the Youth Carnival. As halls, sports grounds and other venues were booked, the secret police immediately followed up with intimidation of local councils and owners, forcing them to cancel bookings.

A mass democratic movement in support of the Youth Carnival developed. That movement won a great victory over the powerful repressive forces arrayed against
it. The victory of the Youth Carnival was a celebration of democracy for peace. A letter to Audrey Blake reads in part:

On behalf of the members of the Sydney District Committee, Sydney organisers, Section Committee members and others from our Sydney District, we wish to convey our heartfelt congratulations on your magnificent report to the 8th National Congress of the EYL ....

.... We can assure you that your inspiration .... during the great campaign for the Carnival has helped us considerably to understand not only what is necessary, but also the ways and means of organising the young people in the struggle.

H. Hatfield (Secretary) L. Donald (Chairman).12

In September 1953 a major event was the national Peace Convention attended by 1,000 delegates in Sydney.

Within the CPA in the campaign in support of the Convention, Blake sought to have the efforts of communists directed into the area beyond the circle of communist influence; to people, movements and organisations who did not agree with the Communist Party but who were concerned about war and peace. Communists should listen to these people, respect their views, negotiate with them, encourage them to act on the basis of their own beliefs and their level of concern for preventing war and preserving peace.

While making their own views known, our members should make no attempt to impose their views on others. There should be no "numbers game", no attempt to fix people into organisation, people themselves should decide when and what organisation was needed, there should be no attempts to push through resolutions on simple majority votes. Seen to be very active, not only should communists not indulge in any kind of manipulation, it should be clearly seen that communists were not manipulating.13

This required of the communists a further breaking out of the closed circle of like minds, a broadening of vision and the development of abilities to conduct rational discourse. The process met with an enthusiastic response among our members in NSW and other states. In Victoria, Hill prevented the concept in its totality from reaching the members of the party.

Two examples show the difference:

1. The new kind of practice called for patience and time. In NSW and other states, there was a steady build-up of delegate registrations. From Victoria there was a sudden rush of delegates only in the last ten days of the campaign.

2. In a Commission at the Convention, Victorian delegates tried to force through a resolution demanding the immediate admission of China to the United Nations (demonstrating that those delegates were unaware of the practice in other states). Communist delegates from NSW and other states prevailed upon the Victorians not to press their resolution.

On this question, the Findings of the Convention said:

A solution to the problems in the Pacific area required the settling of the problem of Chinese representation at the United Nations. We recognise that there is a substantial section of the public opinion in favour of the recognition of People's China. Unanimity on this question could not be attained in the relevant Commission of this Convention. But the spirit of the discussion carried the implication that in the interests of world peace this question must be faced with a view to finding a negotiated settlement of the present dispute.14

In the Communist Party, Blake's charge that Hill had prevented the Victorian communists from taking the path followed in the rest of Australia, was rejected, and this led through to the Consolidation event.

Some ten years later, when he no longer felt any need for constraint, Hill made his position clear on the twin questions of the party and the peace movement:

No one should be admitted to our party until he has been thoroughly scrutinised for it is certain that the secret police are far more concerned about us than about the revisionists .... our basic organisations must be self-contained — we do not want any one person except perhaps the topmost leadership knowing all the party members or knowing the party members outside his sphere.

Peace movement:

The peace bodies headed by revisionists — no less revisionists because some of them wear a clerical collar — are paralysing the peace forces and confusing the people.15
Confirmation of the estimate of the Peace Convention given in this paper can be found in a booklet *The Road to Peace* by the Reverend Eric Owen who interviewed Menzies during the Convention campaign. Owen was shown material seized from Blake’s office by security police in a raid early in the campaign; and he maintained a vigilant watch for communist manipulation through all stages. In his booklet he says:

*On the questions of basic policy .... they (the communists) neither sought, nor had any determining influence. The Findings alone are clear proof of the fact that from the point of view of democratic procedure and principle in this convention the behaviour of any communists who might have been associated with it was impeccable.*

Well then, what are they up to? What is their aim? Frankly I am compelled to accept the conclusion that they wanted us to succeed in our attempt to discover areas of agreement among people of widely differing political and religious convictions. They wanted the Convention to be a success.16

So the evidence does not support the charges made in the Consolidation resolution insofar as they refer to responsibilities or acts of Blake and Henry exclusively. Hill’s opening attack against Blake at the six day Consolidation session charged Blake with right opportunism and hiding the face of the party. But there were obvious difficulties in reconciling a finding along those lines with the Party Program. The question is why Sharkey proceeded (Hill opened, but it was Sharkey who pushed it through to the end).17

Two things point to the possible reason:

First, at the 16th Congress the only criticism made by Sharkey which clearly referred to Blake concerned the use in party education of the *Elementary Course in Philosophy* by Politzer.18 Second, in the immediate aftermath of Consolidation the only sphere of work from which Blake was removed was party education. The critical, creative discussion which he promoted in this field was replaced by the Chinese method of deep ideological introspection and self-criticism which encouraged docility and an acceptance of dogmatic or received ideas.

This suggests that Sharkey felt that these processes threatened the nature of the party and he acted accordingly. He believed Blake could still play his part in developing the broad peace movement. In August 1954, in a speech to cultural activists, Sharkey recommended the peace movement of the time as a model of the broad non-sectarian lines to be emulated.19 However, inner-party democracy and the broad popular democratic movement were inseparable twins; the party was not equipped to help the one to grow without the other.

In April 1956 a meeting of fifty people from trade unions, cultural and scientific groups, business and professional men and women, clergy and Quakers, decided to hold an Australian Assembly for peace in Sydney in September of that year.

Urging the CPA to support this peace initiative, Blake said that for all Australians with the cause of peace at heart, the key question of the day was the participation of the Labor Party in the work of the Assembly and in the peace movement. "The important thing," he said, "in our relations with the Labor Party is for us to really move out to meet each other, to seek out and find the points of agreement, and the basis for mutual understanding ... We need to place at the very basis of the relations between our two parties that which draws us together."20

The Assembly for Peace did have the largest participation of the Labor Party up to that time. But there was minimal support from the CPA leadership for that campaign. Just afterwards, a Queensland member of the Central Committee, Max Julius, said: "Being sent to work in any field of activity that Blake is associated with is like being sent to the salt mines in Siberia."

Following the 20th Congress of the CPSU the stand which Blake took was directed against the stalinism in the Australian party. In addition to his self-critical statements on the matter of Lysenko and on the Soviet Jewish doctors published in *Tribune*, he declared:

*I believe it our duty to examine every aspect of our work in the light of the lead given by the CPSU. Above all, I think we need in a critical and self-critical manner to examine our methods of work and leadership to eliminate dogmatic methods and practices, letting ourselves be governed by likes or dislikes of personalities, using positions in an overbearing and*
bureaucratic manner, instead of reasoned argument to secure conviction. Struggle against such manifestations of the cult of the individual can only have the greatest tonic effect on the health of the party and develop the creative talents and initiative of all our members.21

Blake took the opportunity to inform the secretariat that he repudiated the Consolidation resolution of 1954. He also declared his opposition to the line of the leadership on the questions of stalinism and on the events in Hungary. Having made his views known, but recognising he was in a minority of one on the CC, he voluntarily undertook to reserve his opinions on these matters. Speaking at the CC meeting Blake did not refer to the report of Sharkey or that of Hill with which he disagreed.22

He spoke about the peace movement. During the final session of the meeting Sam Aarons said from the rostrum that every speaker at the meeting had endorsed the report of Sharkey, with one important exception — J.D. Blake. Blake was compelled to return to the rostrum and give a short explanation of his views on Stalinism and on Hungary.

For the purpose of his concluding address Sharkey had the microphone moved to a position directly in front of Blake's table, now deserted by everyone else who had been sitting around it. Sharkey's closing address was a violent attack on Blake whom he said had politically deteriorated, and whom he described as the chief disruptor in the party and the leader of all the other disruptors and revisionists.

Realising that reserved or not, he was not to be allowed to have any opinion of his own, Blake resigned from the CC and from all positions of responsibility he still held in the party. (Audrey Blake had already resigned from all leading positions.)

So, at that time, far from following the example of the CPSU, the independent course of the CPA was Stalinist. At a time of thaw in the Soviet Union, the CPA was taken into a Stalinist deep-freeze. The retrogression which began with Consolidation was now in full flood. Discussion was suppressed, independent creative thinkers were hounded and expelled. Many more were "invited" to leave the party, others departed without invitation. After the expulsion of Helen Palmer the party maintained for a time surveillance of her home to check her visitors. That was what was described as a "great discussion in the party".23

Later, Sharkey said: "We lost a handful of people who went out of the party because they succumbed to revisionist ideology".24 Actually, in the previous year just over 26 per cent or more than a quarter of the members were pushed out or left the party in the manner described.

By 1958 the party had close ties with the Chinese Communist Party, primarily because that party was opposed to de-Stalinising. Only in 1961 did Sharkey, under CPSU pressure to choose, decide to align the CPA on the CPSU side. This was not due to any change of heart about Stalinism, but because it was doubtful whether a majority of the then remaining CPA members would have supported a move to the China side in opposition to the Soviet Union.

Following its condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 the CPA suffered further divisions. The slogan was still "Build the Party". But the membership continued steadily to decline.

This has not been an easy story to tell, but if it provides some insights into the profound effect the inner-party struggle can have on the party and on our relations with the mass movement, it will have been worth while.

FOOTNOTES
2 Tribune, March 10, 1954.
The CC resolution offered a strange explanation of the 'factionalism' of Blake and Henry. It said there was no factional organisation, but some party members supported Blake and some Henry. This implies that these leaders should have made sure their views gained no support from members if they wished to avoid the charge of factionalism.

The draft of the Consolidation resolution submitted to the Political Committee for final approval did not include the clause removing Blake and Henry from the secretariat. Blake's statement did not include any admission of factionalism; for that reason it was declared unacceptable. Sharkey then moved the additional clause providing for the removal of Blake and Henry from the secretariat.
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The CC resolution offered a strange explanation of the ‘factionalism’ of Blake and Henry. It said there was no factional organisation, but some party members supported Blake and some Henry. This implies that these leaders should have made sure their views gained no support from members if they wished to avoid the charge of factionalism.

The draft of the Consolidation resolution submitted to the Political Committee for final approval did not include the clause removing Blake and Henry from the secretariat. Blake’s statement did not include any admission of factionalism; for that reason it was declared unacceptable. Sharkey then moved the additional clause providing for the removal of Blake and Henry from the secretariat.
At the conference, Communists and the Labour Movement, August 23 and 24, 1980, Jack Blake in a paper "1949 to 1956 — Stalinism or Independence" raised publicly his views about the history of the Party leading up to the so-called Consolidation Statement of 1954 and the period following it. In this paper Comrade Blake examined the political background to the adoption of the statement "For Party Consolidation" by the Central Committee of the CPA in February 1954 and some of the issues that arose in 1949, 1950, and 1951, these being the years to which the Consolidation Statement principally referred.

This contribution publicly put before the Party the need for a re-examination of this matter. The National Committee at its meeting in November 1980 appointed a commission consisting of comrades Eric Aarons, Elliott Johnston and Bernie Taft to investigate the issue and make recommendations about it to a subsequent National Committee meeting.

The commission examined a number of documents and interviewed as many surviving close participants of those events as it could.

Among the problems it faced was that of the four members of the Secretariat during the period 1950-54 only Comrade Jack Blake is still living (the other members were comrades Sharkey, Dixon and Henry). Of the members of the Political Committee of the C.C. which conducted a six day discussion which led to the Consolidation Statement, only comrades Laurie Aarons John Hughes, Ted Bacon, Ernie Campbell, Claude Jones and Ted Hill are still living. Of these the Commission interviewed Ted...
Bacon, Claude Jones and Laurie Aarons, Ted Hill refused to be interviewed on this matter. The Commission also interviewed comrade Ralph Gibson and had available transcripts of the taped recollections of John Hughes.

The Commission also had a discussion with Jack and Audrey Blake. It reached the following conclusions:

In the opinion of the Commission there is no doubt that during the year 1949-51 the Party made many sectarian errors and that its political line was affected mainly by Leftism. The Commission understands that the Party many years ago itself reached that conclusion.

Comrades Blake and Henry shared responsibility for these errors, but basically they were errors of the leadership as a whole. In the opinion of the Commission there are no adequate grounds for particularly singling out these two comrades in the way that was done in the Consolidation Statement.

Comrades Blake and Henry were singled out in what was a collective position, irrespective of the different attitudes which may have been adopted by individual secretariat, PC and CC members on particular questions.

Comrade Jack Blake, and in a somewhat different way comrade Audrey Blake, were in fact victims of an inner Party struggle which was taking place at the time.

The Commission did not consider it to be its task to analyse the nature and causes of that inner Party struggle but rather to correct an injustice which it believes was done to comrades Jack and Audrey Blake.

The Consolidation Statement was accompanied by written self-criticisms from Comrades Blake and Henry. Comrade Blake explained to the Commission the circumstances which led him to make that self criticism. In line with the atmosphere and expectations prevailing in the international communist movement and the CPA at that time, the comrades were subjected to extraordinary moral pressure to submit to and accept the majority view. In the course of the six day meeting of the Political Committee, other comrades raised criticism of Comrade Blake’s work which seemed to him to substantiate his responsibility for sectarian errors. The collective pressure caused Comrade Blake to wrestle with himself to accept the substance of these criticisms.

The Commission believes that the pressures on comrades criticised to conform in this way were wrong and inimical to the pursuit of the truth about issues.

It is also apparent that in these discussions there was an absence of self criticism by other comrades concerning their part in the errors of 1949-1951, and this no doubt contributed to a failure on the part of all to see the errors of Comrades Blake and Henry in their proper perspective as part of a general Left trend. Nor were the efforts of Comrade Blake to broaden his approach to the mass movement and overcome sectarianism adequately recognised.

Comrade Blake informed the Commission that after the 20th Congress and the Hungarian events of 1956, he had told the Secretariat that he repudiated the Consolidation Statement.

In 1966 in a discussion with comrades Laurie Aarons and Richard Dixon, Comrade Blake again indicated that he rejected the Consolidation Statement and the self criticism which he made at that time.

The Political Committee in a discussion in January, 1967, posed the question: “should the Consolidation Statement and the events of those years be made a subject for open discussion by the Central Committee?”

It decided “that if the events of 1949-50 and the Consolidation Statement were re-opened and discussed it would bring out little that is new and helpful”.

Comrade Henry who was still alive at the time and whose opinion was sought was opposed to the matter being re-opened.

Although the Commission holds that our past experience deserves the deepest study on an on-going basis, it believes that the Consolidation Statement is an inappropriate background and starting point for a re-examination of that period of Party history because of its concern with individuals and because it does not set out to analyse the errors of 1949-51 as a whole.

We believe however that it is proper that the National Committee should correct an injustice that was done by the Party to a former leader who has devoted his whole life to the struggles and aspirations of the working people of our country and who has made a significant and lasting contribution to the work of the Communist Party of Australia.