However political life is defined, in a parliamentary political system, parliament and parliamentary institutions occupy a central place. Under parliamentary governments in many countries, but especially those of Western Europe and those that have developed within the former British imperial system, working people have sought to advance their ideals and pursue their needs by passing laws through parliament. Even where workers have established viable trade unions, they have commonly sought to use an existing parliamentary political system to achieve some of their immediate and long-term goals.

This approach has periodically been challenged by a belief in various forms of direct action. Workers' organisations, however, have continued to exert pressure on parliament, and the rest of the state system, side-by-side with taking direct action. Moreover, when non-parliamentary movements based on direct public action have formed, a part — often a considerable part — of their impact has been felt at the parliamentary level. People's movements and parliamentary life have been closely bound together.

**Australian society**

Australian society, after 1788, evolved from a particular set of conditions which was determined, firstly, by a British colonial experience. Alongside the legacy of convictism, the Australian political and state system grew out of the existing British system, and was very largely influenced by liberal, radical and democratic currents from Britain. The evolution of Australian political culture was the result of the continuing struggle between the dominant conservative current and opposing reforming currents. The contending forces fought things out at different levels, socially, ideologically, and above all, ultimately, in parliamentary contest. The parliament often became the final focus of social and political conflict. The resulting laws, and other legal acts,
summarised for a time the state of play, the balance between the contending forces.

In this context, at a certain point, influenced to some degree by socialist notions, the central colonial trade union bodies formed distinct parliamentary labor parties, which eventually coalesced into the Australian Labor Party. The Australian trade unions, as a whole, in this respect were ahead of their British counterparts, and the formation of the Labor Party represented a jump in the political consciousness of the working class, although this consciousness was largely a parliament-oriented consciousness. Political action was regarded essentially as parliamentary action.

The trade unions sought to reform and even revolutionise society by passing laws through parliament. By this means, and by the institution of other means, such as industrial arbitration enforced through specially constituted courts, boards and commissions, it was thought that the state could be captured and put to work in the interests of labour. As the Defence Committee, which acted as the NSW central trade union body during the 1890 Maritime Strike, explained:

A still more important lesson, learnt in the hour of defeat is this. That whilst we must go on ever increasing our capacity for fighting as we have fought before, the time has now come when trade-unionists must use the Parliamentary machinery that in the past has used them. We are still some distance.... from the blind end of our industrial lane. Until we reach that end we shall stand in need of the strike and the boycott. But the trumpet notes .... are eventually political. Once the worker determines .... that the very basis of modern industry is antagonistic to his welfare .... he must set about the work of reform where it seems that reform alone can be obtained — and that is in Parliament .... We must secure a substantial representation in Parliament .... The next general elections must yield us the balance of power; future contests must give us an absolute majority in Parliament .... 'Politics' is a game we must decline to play. For us Parliamentary life will be a real and perhaps a bitter warfare .... We have come out of the conflict a United Labor Party ....

This statement expresses much of the thinking of Australian trade unionists about parliament and parliamentary democracy. Political power resides in parliament, it asserted. If a Labor Party secured a substantial representation in parliament, it could affect significantly the power relations in society. With a substantial representation in parliament, and more so with an absolute majority, trade unionists could use the parliamentary machinery to bring about reform 'where it seems that reform can alone be obtained'. There was no suggestion, however, that parliament could deal with all situations; until 'the end' unionists would need the strike and the boycott. But by 1895 a growing body of trade unionists believed that compulsory arbitration could best deal with industrial disputes. And by the early 1900s this view had become the majority, but never universal, opinion.

The remarkable persistence of the views summarised in the last paragraph is an outstanding fact of Australian life, and despite often bitter experience and fierce argument, the political consciousness of the Australian working class has remained doggedly parliamentary. Attempts to win large-scale support for alternatives to parliamentary democracy have failed. In a striking way the almost completely uncritical identification of the Australian Labor Party, from its earliest days, with parliamentary democracy reflects the hold parliamentary ideology has over the bulk of ordinary Australians. L.F. Crisp briefly analysed the nature of this almost natural state of affairs thus:

An institution, the Australian Labour (sic) Party — thoroughly constitutional and parliamentary in its approach to its aims — was built on a particular conception of democracy which reached deep into British history. That conception can be traced back through Chartism at least as far as the thought of more radical groups concerned in the Cromwellian Revolution.

Working class parliamentary political ideology did not originate in the Labor Party; rather the source of the ideology lies deep in
the beginnings of Australian political culture. Thus, the origins and character of the Labor Party can be traced to a parliamentary political ideology, although Labor methods and Labor organisation have significantly affected the development of the parliamentary political system in Australia.5

II

In his later years, Arthur Calwell, shaped by Catholic, nationalist and socialist ideas but basically mainstream Labor6, writing of the great strikes of the 1890s, said:

The use by governments of the police to break strikes seemed to show that the state was not only on the side of the wealthy, but was, in fact, an instrument of oppression against the workers. The lesson was obvious. The workers must form their own party to influence the affairs of state and, if possible, win power in the state.7

However, Calwell believed that the state was generally neutral. Although it might be an instrument of the wealthy, the state could be taken over by the workers. Adopting a view essentially the same as the 1890 Defence Committee, Calwell asserted that the Labor Party was formed as a party of unionists to seek the betterment of workers’ conditions through parliamentary action. The goals were the improvement of the workers’ lot; greater political and social equality; and provision of social welfare. And the workers’ success in sending representatives to parliament, obtaining rapid and substantial reforms and influencing government policy as a whole, led willy-nilly to a concentration on the day-to-day parliamentary struggle and the electoral work needed to form governments.

Concluding what he thought about the Labor Party and the state, Calwell said:

What emerges is a picture of a party consciously and deliberately using the machinery of the state in the interests of those it represented. A frank recognition of the role of the state as a means of social progress is what distinguishes the Labor Party from all others. The great measures .... were based upon this central doctrine: that the state belonged to the people and should be used freely and consciously by the people as the instrument for their own betterment and progress .... It (the Labor Party) was, then, a party committed to the radical reform of the existing system — parliament and the courts.7

Calwell’s views were very clearly stated and are fairly representative of the Labor Party’s traditional approach to politics and the state. Fundamentally, the Labor Party upholds the value of parliamentary government because it believes that a democratic parliament is the most effective instrument for securing rapid and substantial reforms, and that political democracy is best served by a parliamentary system of government.9

Parliamentary limitations

However, not all Labor Party publicists have had such a complete commitment to parliament. Some, while recognising its value as a democratic forum and basis for government, have been conscious of its limitations and the flaws in its very nature. J.F. Cairns, for instance, argued that if the aims and policies of workers were formed outside parliament by workers themselves and then taken undiluted into parliament by their representatives, the workers could use the political power of parliament against corporate property. Parliamentary activity could thus be added to activities such as industrial action, meetings, demonstrations, publishing and broadcasting etc. — but not made into a substitute for them. However, direct workers’ representation could not be attained without overcoming the very real problems that stood in the way of such a goal.10

In his book, The Quiet Revolution, Dr Cairns argued that the workers were faced and broken (in 1890-91) not by the employers but by the police, the army and the courts, acting as agents of the employers and the property system.11 In The Quiet Revolution and elsewhere Cairns examined the basis of social power in its relation to the state.12 He identified the social power base in the control
Power is first of all (the) power of the State .... and it is (the) power of the autocratic units of .... the means of production that .... at present determines exercise of power by the State .... But the most extensive and significant power today is not State power, it is the continuing exercise of power .... in the means of production and elsewhere, which not only touches the lives of the people continuously, but in fact always determines the exercise of power in the end by the State.13

Without achieving complete clarity, Dr Cairns emphasised the relationship between the state and class power, and in *The Quiet Revolution* he further developed his analysis of this relationship.14 For Cairns, the state had a wider meaning than the meaning that some other Labor Party publicists have adopted; it included — along with parliament — police forces, the armed forces, law courts and the public service.

**Parliament and soviets**

Another Labor publicist, R.S. Ross, a socialist editor and organiser of the early years of this century, had reservations about the muddles and blunders in the exercise of legislative and administrative power. Nevertheless, in 1920, he argued that the existing industrial and parliamentary machinery was acceptable to most Australians. It was as natural for Australians as soviets might be for Russians. Ross recognised the Soviet system of government as 'one of the world's towering advents', but he thought it would be better to use the existing set-up in Australia as the framework of a socialist state and social system. Parliament could be bent to whatever we wish .... bent to basic, militant and economically reconstructive purposes .... Political democracy is not all-sufficing — but it is, like nationalisation, an integral part of Socialism. ... we may not safely let it go .... We .... cannot tinker and tamper with hard-won freedoms. We are for liberty of thought and for free speech — never for a disenfranchising plan that even in our hands will begin with the exploiter and recoil upon ourselves by giving openings to one faction to strangle another. Instead of less, we want more Democracy, and upon this principle .... we can bend Parliament to our purposes and set up a knitted unionism capable of freeing us .... 15

More recently Peter Wilenski has written critically of the tendency in the Labor Party, that sees a Labor government as the sole centre of power. Such a view, he asserts, fails to take into account the fact that the government is only "one of the sources of power in a capitalist society". In a very perceptive essay on the Whitlam government's successes and failures, he examined particularly the limitations of "parliamentary government acting through the State apparatus". While the Whitlam government innovated in a few areas of administration, according to Wilenski, it did not alter the basic structure or nature of the bureaucracy. "There continued to be a considerable adherence to the view of a public service equally able to serve both political sides".16 Wilenski, drawing on the report of the Coombs Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration, and no doubt his own experience, knowledgeably indicated the inherent conservatism and self-serving nature of much of the bureaucracy. As well as suggesting some steps to reform the public service in order to make it more responsive to Labor initiatives, he stressed the absolute priority of the Labor Party establishing real roots in the community in order to develop public sympathy and support, and to develop strategies to avoid or overcome the resistance of many sections of the people.

**Grassroots struggle**

Another recent writer, R.W. Connell, dealing with an Australian strategy for socialism, and referring to the need to wage a complex and constantly changing struggle at the grassroots, has pointed to the relative ineffectiveness of the Labor Party because of its predominantly parliamentary character: A party organised mainly to fight elections...
as the Labor Party is now, will not be very effective.... The preoccupation with electoral politics must change. Not that we can abandon parliamentary action; rather it should be simply the tip of the iceberg. It is down at the point of immediate class conflict—at work..., in neighbourhoods..., that the movements energies must focus.17

However, it is notable that even a most up-to-date Labor theorist, such as Connell, fails to deal comprehensively with class power and the wider aspects of the state. In dealing with the transition to socialism, establishing a socialist hegemony is largely restricted to the cultural domain, and concern with the state is mainly confined to the problem of meeting ruling-class responses to an increasing scale of socialist pressure. There is little discussion of the state as such, as a complex of political power, people, processes and institutions; nor, in a parliamentary state, of parliament's position at the centre of this complex; nor of the need for socialists to confront the state and intervene wherever possible, encroaching on and eroding capitalist hegemony in all its centres of power.

Thus, different Labor Party views on the state emerge, the dominant one following the original trade union conception. According to this view the Australian state is equated very largely with the existing parliamentary government, perhaps with the addition of the courts. In this pre-eminent Labor judgment, the state is essentially neutral. In 1890 it was on the side of the wealthy, but through the processes of parliamentary democracy, the state could just as easily be used to promote the people's welfare and social progress. Democratic socialism, to the Labor Party, means the reform of the existing system by the use of weapons provided by that system.

Labor views

The dominant Labor Party approach to the state depends on acceptance of the central role of parliament. It falls short of recognising that the modern parliamentary state is a sophisticated complex. Secondary Labor Party views, such as those of Wilenski and Cairns, qualify the basic approach and extend the discussion of the state more broadly.

Wilenski focuses especially on the state apparatus and the problems of a parliamentary government faced with a largely conservative and unreformed public service. But neither the mainstream approach nor the radical position grapple with the complexity of the modern parliamentary state. Although, in a parliamentary state, parliament may be the principal means of marshalling the consent of the governed, the modern state complex is composed of much more: governmental (executive) power; the armed services; the public service, and other officials and state employees, the court-prison system and police agencies. In addition, the state complex overlaps into such centres of social and class power as the education system, religious institutions, the media and voluntary and professional welfare services.

Although the Labor Party, in pursuing its aims, accepted the central role of parliament, it always linked its broad social objectives with the need for democratic parliamentary reform. The Labor Party sought to build on the limited responsible government achieved by nineteenth-century radicals and sought to develop democratic responsible government. Right from the beginnings of its activity the Labor Party sought to clear away the obstacles to the realisation of this aim. The abolition of undemocratic upper houses and the securing of electoral reforms were planks in the earliest party platforms.19 The Labor Party adopted the philosophy that parliamentary governments should be made or unmade purely on the basis of a majority in the more democratically elected (popular) house of parliament. Members of the government had to be members of parliament, predominantly members of the popular house, where an upper house still existed.

III

Since the 1975 political crisis and the constitutional coup against the Whitlam government, the Labor Party has responded with many new policies that reflect public opinion on the need for constitutional change. Although stopping short of the policy
of such bodies as Citizens for Democracy, which calls for a new and democratic constitution, the ALP has adopted several proposals for change that go a long way in that direction.

Specifically and immediately, the Labor Party proposes that the Australian constitution should be amended to guarantee that a government supported by a majority of the House of Representatives should govern (responsible government); guarantee the right to vote and the principle of one-vote one-value; ensure that the Senate has not power to reject, defer or otherwise block money bills; provide that the Senate may delay, but not reject any other proposed law for up to six months; define and limit the powers of the governor-general so that he or she acts in accordance with the advice of the government enjoying the confidence of the House of Representatives; and enable the Australian parliament to make laws to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms including an Australian Bill of Rights. Finally, the ALP has declared that a Labor government would support and fund a people's popularly elected convention to involve the Australian people to the maximum extent possible in the process of constitutional change.20

As part of a plan to achieve more democratic and more efficient government, the Labor Party has proposed the expansion and development of the Senate Committee system to review government activity, the development of legislation committees in the House of Representatives and the provision of adequate machinery for the initiation and consideration of non-government legislation in both Houses. Other proposed reforms include reform of electoral laws and voting procedures, now to include proportional representation through multi-member electorates, the declaration of financial interests of politicians and political journalists, public funding of elections and the disclosure of the sources of political finance.21

Since the overthrow of the Whitlam government the Labor Party has developed some elaborate machinery-of-government policies that very largely reflect the experience and lessons of the 1972-75 period. While the main thrust of these policies is directed towards the achievement of efficient and effective government, some attention has been paid to making the machinery of government more democratic, more responsive and more accountable. Enhanced parliamentary scrutiny of the implementation of policies and laws is one means proposed to achieve this end. Acknowledging a grave weakness of the Whitlam government-in-office, the Labor Party now states its belief in a thorough public explanation of government policies and the provision of channels to enable Party, trade union and public feedback to reach the government.22

However, when it comes to the public service, the heart of the state machine, the ALP emphasises ways of making a career service more adaptive and more flexible rather than ways of democratising the bureaucracy. Nevertheless, it does propose that a Labor government would guard against an exclusive elite group gaining administrative dominance, first by instituting a more flexible system of appointing department heads, secondly by appointing officials on secondment or contract, and thirdly, by providing an exchange of personnel between the public service and other areas of expertise and experience. In addition, while maintaining the merit principle in selection, it would seek to ensure a rapid increase of representation at senior levels of the public service of such under-represented sections of the workforce as women, migrants and Aboriginal Australians. Accountability would be fostered by decentralising and delegating the capacity to take decisions, thus encouraging individual initiative and responsibility within the public service. But public participation is to be restricted to the existence of representative advisory boards and community access to government information through freedom of information legislation.23

IV

Depending as it does on election, and
despite the limitations of representative government, parliament is the most democratic part of the modern state complex; it is the part most susceptible to community pressure. Apart from the influence that is exerted through the ballot box, citizens have a range of democratic procedures open to them: writing letters to politicians and government ministers; interviewing politicians and ministers; presenting petitions; observing in the parliamentary public gallery; forming deputations, including mass deputations; organising marches and demonstrations, etc.

Nowadays at the municipal level of government there is a growing practice of public participation in council committees and in full council meetings, with direct dialogue between the public and their elected representatives. It is now becoming less true that people only participate once every three years or so by deciding whom their representatives will be, although public participation has a very long way to go.

Any form of representative democracy, including representative political democracy, has, by its very nature, built-in obstacles to thorough-going participation by the electorate. There is a presumption that once the voters have deposited their marked ballot papers in the box, their part in the actual business of government is more or less complete. In the case of parliamentary government, after the votes are counted and the electoral process is complete, it is assumed that representative bodies — parliament, cabinet, etc. — with the help of public servants — elaborate and formulate policies and make and carry out decisions. How, then to extend responsibility and to provide checks and balances that come directly from the public?

Local government

In some local government councils that have opened up their meetings, such as Leichhardt and Sydney councils in New South Wales, the public may quiz both councillors and council officers on policy and administration. Public discussion is facilitated; the possibility of not only voicing objections but also making proposals with the help of technical assistance is created. Practical proposals have to be costed, and a further logical step is for the public to look at all aspects of finance — to inspect the books and participate in the preparation of budgets. To extend this activity to parliaments and governments may appear more difficult. But already there are certain rights of participation in parliamentary inquiries. The next step is to enlarge the area of public participation in ways comparable to some of the methods now beginning to be used in local government.

Despite provisions of this sort for direct public intervention, the gap between the electorate and the political representatives of the electorate remains very real. Whatever is done it is difficult to see how this gap can be entirely closed in the short term. Until there are far greater social and educational opportunities, and consequently richer all-round individual development, there is little likelihood of everybody being willing or ready to step into the various roles of government.

There are many obvious problems. Individuals have to be politically alert and willing to undertake the demands and burdens of political life. Government needs to be economic and efficient as well as democratic. There has to be the opportunity for citizens to become competent in the work and skills of government. On the other hand, the skilled and competent may decline into bureaucratic routine, or worse — into incompetence, privilege and corruption.

Limited tenure

What arrangements can be made to make these difficulties smaller, with the possibility that they may eventually disappear? There are no certainties of success in such a complex field, but in recent times in various movements and organisational structures, there has been some support for the principle of holding office for a limited time in representative and executive positions. Could this principle be applied usefully to parliament and government? And the public service and other administrative services? The idea is not new, of course. The Levellers
proposed it in England at least as far back as 1647. In the *Agreement of the People*, a draft for a new, more democratic constitution, the leftwing in the revolutionary parliamentary army wanted parliaments to be elected annually. Given some form of representative political system, the Levellers believed that this would make the people's representatives as accountable as could be reasonably expected. To create a further check on a gap developing between representatives and electorate, members elected to one parliament were not to be eligible to sit in the next two succeeding parliaments.\(^2\) The current program of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) proposes that representatives in governing bodies should hold office for a limited time, be subject to recall and receive an average income.

The length of parliament's term of office, restrictions on the number of terms of office a member serves, and a time limit on participation in government, are all matters that need to be carefully considered. If the present three-year term of a parliament is maintained, what sort of limit should be placed on the number of terms a member may serve? Should the tenure of the member be limited to one, two or three terms, or not at all?\(^3\) And how should the problem of government membership be handled? Should membership of a government be limited to one or two terms? Such questions raise a multitude of problems about representation in general and parliamentary government in particular. There are, for example, the human dynamics of corporate bodies such as parliament and its political parties: the unwritten agenda of the recognition of individual talent and skill, the personal and political integrity of political figures, psychological, emotional and intellectual readiness and the value of experience in the development of skill and competence. Such matters can be overrated, and often are. However, given the present state of human development and public attitudes to incompetent or inefficient government, in considering limited tenure in public or administrative office, they cannot be brushed aside.

Much more effort is needed to develop responsible government and to extend the areas of government and administration subject to public accountability. A greater degree of intervention by citizens in the state and the state apparatus is feasible and desirable. Nor is this a new idea.\(^2\) An early Australian example occurred during the stormy diggers' movement on the Victorian goldfields, that culminated in the Eureka rebellion in 1854. The Gold Fields Act of 1855, passed after the Commission of Inquiry into Eureka had reported, provided for goldfields’ courts with a government-appointed chairman but court members elected every six months by those holding the miner’s right. For a time, these substantially elected courts exercised a great deal of power. The appointment by the diggers on the Castlemaine (Mt Alexander) field of “Peoples Commissioners” as distinct from government and gold commissioners was another historically important development of the goldrush period of Australian history.\(^2\)

Most public officials including the police, court and prison officials, and other public servants, are part of career services. The peace-time armed forces are also professional. What to do about greater public control of the more obviously coercive forces of the state apparatus seems an awkward problem. It is not of much practical value to propose that they be “smashed”, but suggesting useful measures of public intervention to democratise the repressive organs of the state is no simple or easy matter. Devising a practical, widely acceptable program in this area goes beyond my present purpose and there is no suggestion here of a completely worked-out policy.

**Armed forces**

One traditional approach of socialists and anarchists has been to establish alternate or substitute armed forces — a democratic militia, a people's army or a red guard. The regiments of the victorious, revolutionary parliamentary army of 1647 appointed Agitators, delegates of the army rank and file, to negotiate the army’s pay grievances and
Belief in the social necessity of some degree of repression is part of the "common sense" that dominates much social and individual thought and action. As the recent struggle to liberalise the NSW prisons and other corrective institutions has shown quite clearly, prison officers can often draw on this fund of beliefs by taking or threatening to take industrial action. It is ideological domination as much as anything else that stands in the way of progressive change in the more coercive part of the state forces (or the state apparatus as a whole). Until and unless, liberalising and progressive forces can contend effectively at all levels with a "common sense" belief in the need for repression, the achievement of major changes will continue to be fraught with immense difficulties. To confront fully the problem of such "common sense" of course means to face and out-face all the belief- and opinion-forming forces and institutions in society — the government machine, the media, the family, educational bodies, religious institutions, welfare organisations, etc. This is indeed a formidable task that calls for the unbending effort of all channels of progressive and socialist thought.

Today in the advanced capitalist countries such as Australia, socialism may come about through a long-term and conscious process which starts with the development and application of a coherent program of reforms. However, the transition from capitalism to socialism cannot come about through an imperceptible and unplanned process of piecemeal reforms. (Ultimate capitalist power will not be whittled away bit by bit.) What will be gradual is the preparatory phase, setting in motion a process which leads to a trial of strength and will.29

What is crucial in a class confrontation is the degree of public mobilisation achieved. In order to effectively mobilise the majority of the community in a crisis, there must be a steady development of a broad public alliance for democratic social change. In the growth of such an alliance a major task of the socialist
forces will be to mount an effective challenge to the dominance of conservative ideas, beliefs and values. Very largely the strength and resilience of the opinion insisting on social change will depend on the prior dissemination and consolidation of democratic and socialist ideas and values. Only in this way can an effective will be generated, remaining firm in a trial of strength. If temporarily defeated, it will be strong enough and united enough to make a critical appraisal of the situation, advancing to another but more significant confrontation until a basic and fundamental change occurs.

The preparatory phase

Among the most effective ways to disseminate democratic and socialist values, to tip the balance towards a new social ethos, is through oppositional policies of the preparatory phase. But such preparatory oppositional policies cannot aim at anti-capitalist reforms which are incompatible with the survival of the capitalist system, for example, nationalisation of all the important centres of economic power; such policies would already assume a public opinion sufficiently politically mature to ensure an immediate socialist victory. However, we should not conclude that a democratic and socialist strategy of reforms can or must be limited to isolated or partial democratic reforms without socialist content or perspective.

What distinguishes a socialist strategy of reforms from an unplanned process of piecemeal reforms is less the character of a given reform or programmatic objective than the presence or absence of organic connections between a series or program of reforms. Other distinguishing features would be a built-in rhythm and pattern to the reforms, and the presence or absence of the will to profit from the displacement of the social and political equilibrium. In other words, central to a socialist program is a sense of vision, an end-in-view. Essential to this vision is the dedication and conviction to follow a clearly-defined route and not to be readily pushed off course.

Socialism and democracy

Socialism consists of democratising all spheres of life. In Australia political-democratic consciousness is at a relatively high level. The public believes that political and legal rights exist. There is a limited acceptance of majority rule. What does not exist is a general acceptance of public intervention in all spheres of society, for instance, the workplace and the economy, the machinery of state, social institutions (educational, health, welfare, religious, etc.), the family and sexuality. The preparatory phase consists in the step-by-step spelling out of what greater democracy means.

From such a process what is lacking is a significant section of the public seriously committed to a coherent socialist strategy and program. The central difficulty of moving from matters of political democracy and the rule of law to acceptance of democratic rules in the workplace, and in the overall economic and social system, lies in concretely connecting the independent but scattered forces of socialism with that part of the community whose main political representative is the Labor Party, and broadly developing neo-socialist consciousness in the direction of a unified movement of labor and socialism.

A major obstacle in developing neo-socialist consciousness is the Labor Party's conception of socialism which is based on the ideology of a mixed economy with public and
private sectors. The ALP favors democratic socialisation of the economy but only to the extent necessary to prevent exploitation. As Peter Wilenski has pointed out, this is an ambivalent formula. Although he doesn’t adopt a marxist position himself, Wilenski stresses that marxism postulates that all forms of wage labour are inherently exploitative. And as far as public ownership is concerned, it is not enough to advocate the redistribution of wealth and income to achieve equality. While Wilenski concedes that common ownership of the means of production is not a sufficient condition for the attainment of liberty, democracy, equality and social co-operation, might it not be a necessary condition? He goes on to argue most ably that there are clear limits on the degree of equality and democracy attainable in a mixed economy.

Labor Party socialism

The development of Labor Party socialism, Professor Wilenski argues, needs both a deeper analysis and a bolder party style. The analysis does not lie in abandoning the long-term aim of bringing major portions of the economy — the commanding heights — under some form of common ownership and democratic control but in clarifying Labor’s aims, both to the party membership and the electorate. A bolder Labor Party style would recognise that a program of reforms often raises issues that run counter to the dominant societal beliefs and values, and threatens structural changes that affect the balance of political power in society.

In order to meet these challenges, the Labor Party must, Wilenski says, undertake the difficult and painstaking job of attempting to slowly change the predominant cultural and political values in the community; it must devote much time, energy and resources to shifting to the left the points around which the "middle ground" forms. But to achieve this aim, the party must be far better organised and must redirect a major part of its activities; it must become a party that practises politics all the year round; and to succeed in this goal it would need a large, committed and politically educated membership. A top priority would be effective political education, not just within the party structure but in such public areas as the women’s movement and the trade union movement.

Australia society in 1975 reached a significant turning point — a major political crisis and the overthrow of an elected government by constitutional coup. But because of the forces arrayed against each other, it was hardly a trial of strength. There was no serious challenge to prevailing values and capitalist domination. Not surprisingly Labor had no plan to meet the crisis. The mainstream of the party, gripped by constitutional and parliamentary values that militated against the building of an effective public awareness of the possibility and need for fundamental social change, had never seriously contemplated such a situation. It believed in a steady but gradual advance and had no concept of radically changing society. As a party, the ALP had little idea of the complexity and magnitude of the tasks facing a serious socialist movement.

Labor rethinking

Over the last five or six years some Labor Party theorists have begun to examine at least some of the problems presented by the conservative forces in implementing Labor’s program. This rethinking has led to a major rewriting of significant sections of the ALP’s platform, and there has even been some public discussion of Labor’s strategy and tactics, and the party’s more general possibilities. Neal Blewett’s paper "A Constitutional Strategy for Labor in 1981" read at the first National Conference of Labor Lawyers held in Adelaide in June-July 1979 is perhaps one of the more notable attempts to deal seriously with some aspects of Labor’s problems.

Formerly a professor of politics and currently a South Australian Member of the House of Representatives, Dr Blewett was trying to get the Labor Party to consider a ground-plan to deal with a possible rerun of 1975 if the ALP won the 1980 election. In the upshot, Labor just failed in 1980; however, a one- or two-percentage-point swing in 1983
could lead to a test of strength next time. 1984 is only two years away.

In his paper, Dr Blewett proposed a plan to deal with possible/probable Senate obstruction/mutilation of Labor's legislative program, the use of senatorial veto to block supply and ultimately to threaten the existence of any Labor government. The plan consisted of a package of measures designed to hit the conservatives for six right at the outset of Labor's term of office. The early introduction of legislation on some of the more popular but controversial items in the Labor government's social program, for example, the reintroduction of Medibank, would be part of the plan. An Appropriations Bill (supply) providing for the basic costs of government for three years (with an adjustments clause for inflation), a wide range of electoral reforms and three key constitutional amendments (simultaneous elections of the Senate and the House of Representatives; the abolition of the Senate's veto over supply; and a change in the conditions for constitutional amendment to a simple majority of the electorate plus, perhaps, a majority of votes in not less than half the states) would be other parts of the package.

Double dissolution

All this was to be done in the context of actively preparing for a double dissolution of both houses of parliament if Senate obstruction occurred and the requirements for a dissolution were met. (Surprisingly, Blewett does not contemplate the active intervention of the governor-general; he does not include reform of the governor-general's powers in his package.) Finally, Dr Blewett called for the will "to resist the premature destruction of a Hayden government" and the imperative need to canvass and prepare a strategy to express this will.

There are four outstanding features of Dr Blewett's theorising: it is a major step forward for a prominent Labor Party MP to articulate publicly his or her advance thoughts on such a topic; secondly, Dr Blewett's approach is fairly narrowly parliamentary and constitutional — there is no consideration of the roles of united public action behind such a policy; thirdly, Dr Blewett shows no realisation of the manifold opportunities for a conservative backlash and the problems of dealing with it; and, fourthly, there has been a deafening silence following the publication of his plan — no canvassing or public preparation for such a strategy — partly, no doubt, because the largely pragmatic centre of the party is fearful of the consequences of public discussion.

As this essay has argued, Labor's constitutionalism arises from the relative moderation of Australian political culture. Nevertheless, at the very heart of Labor politics lie the values of the parliamentary state, and there is something like a symbiotic relationship between the ALP and the Australian public in this area. But recently Labor Party theorists have been re-examining this constitutionalism and the need for reform of some aspects of the functioning of the parliamentary state. They see partially at least the connection and interaction between social reform and constitutional reform. Nonetheless, there are grave weaknesses in their approach and, unless there are corrections, these weaknesses will ultimately undermine Labor's position. Any trial of strength between Labor and anti-Labor will be so much less effective when restricted by Labor's traditional constitutionalism.

New and broader constitutionalism

What is needed is a new and broader constitutionalism which begins with but goes beyond the orthodox constitutionalism of the parliamentary state. Such a broader constitutionalism would subsume constitutional orthodoxy, but many factors would be in play: the oppositional policies of the preparatory phase, social reform and broadly conducted dissemination of democratic and socialist ideas and values, everything tied together, a rhythm and pattern to it all.

In Part IV above I attempted to sketch an outline of this new and broader constitutionalism. It involves more than the
sort of public intervention envisaged by Labor's 1979 commitment to the calling of a publicly financed popularly elected people's convention to initiate constitutional change, important as this pledge is. Grassroots, long-term public intervention would be needed to back up this beginning. In this work socialists outside the Labor Party would have an important part to play. Outside socialists are sometimes able to develop the theory of democracy and socialism in ways that escape Labor Party theorists. They are often determined and self-sacrificing in their dedication to democratic practice and socialist aims. They think about an oppositional strategy and do a lot to develop oppositional movements.

In carrying forward what Antonio Gramsci called a "war of position" from the preparatory phase to the test of strength, a de facto unity of the forces of labor and socialism is of great importance. A two-pronged alliance would enable the development of an oppositional policy on a wide front. Within this alliance the forging of links between independent socialist ideas and Labor policy and initiatives would play a key role. While seeking to develop the socialist project independently but not disruptively, the merging of the separate actions of the parts into broadly based action would be a vital step towards the consolidation of an oppositional strategy for social change and socialism.

References and Notes

9. It is assumed throughout this essay that a popular assembly of more or less freely elected representatives of the electorate mediates the distribution of political power to various institutions, and that these institutions ultimately derive their authority from a majority of the elected representatives in the assembly. For recent accounts of parliamentary government in Australia, see Hugh V. Emy, The Politics of Australian Democracy, 2nd edn (Melbourne, 1978) especially Chapters 6, 7 and 8, and Patrick Weller and Dean Jaensch (eds) Responsible Government in Australia (Melbourne, 1980), passim.
15. R.S. Ross, Revolution in Russia and Australia (Melbourne, 1920), pp.6, 10, 49, 56-7.
18. I realise this may be a contentious view.
25. The Sydney District of the CPA policy for Local Government and Community Politics proposes
that the maximum time in office of elected councillors should be three three-year terms (i.e. nine years.)


27. G. Serle, *The Golden Age: A History of the Colony of Victoria 1851-1861* (Melbourne, 1963), pp.106, 177-8, 221-2. For the payment of a pound a year, the digger had legal rights in his claim and, as a leaseholder of crown land, the right to vote. This arrangement preceded the adult male suffrage of 1857.


29. This part owes a lot to Rosa Luxemburg and Andre Gorz. See Mary Alice Walters (ed), *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (New York, 1970), p.77;


32. Dr. Blewett’s analysis, in some respects, has been by-passed by events. His argument was predicated on preparing for the worst — a Liberal-NCP coalition senate majority — but this now seems pretty unlikely. However, there were many factors at work in 1975, and some or all of them could recur in the future.

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