HOW to win the majority of the Australian people to their ideas is a problem always confronting communists. In facing it, the influence of art and literature on people’s thoughts and feelings has to be borne in mind.

On the one hand care is needed not to apply marxist standards narrowly, to recognise that there will always be many trends in art, and that art can only flourish in a free atmosphere. On the other hand, if the “battle of ideas” is to be waged seriously, it must be recognised that the arts, through their appeal to people’s minds and emotions, do affect how they will look upon life and how they will tackle life’s problems.

Think to what extent most people are influenced—for the most part badly—by all that comes over TV and radio and through cheap magazines in the form of stories, pictures or music of one kind or another! Any party or any people setting out to build socialism or communism is bound to take a keen interest in how the arts develop and help guide their course.

This matter was discussed at the recent congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Communist Party of Australia disagreed—rightly, I believe—with the penal measures taken at that time against the writers Sinyavsky and Daniel. But on two matters the CPSU was unquestionably right: its great aim of the winning of communism depends above all on the battle between capitalist and communist ideas; and that the world of art deeply affects people’s outlook (especially with the Soviet people who are such very keen book readers, concert and theatre goers.)

What are the capitalist ideas which the Soviet people have to overcome? Capitalism breeds in people the ideas of shoving others around, enlarging one’s own power, feathering one’s own nest. It
is a dog-eat-dog, devil-take-the-hindmost system, the most war-making system of history, a system that treats human life very cheaply. That is true despite all the fine thoughts and feelings of people within the capitalist society who do not accept the prevailing ideas and morals.

The Russian Revolution struck a blow at old ideas and habits. It helped to make millions of very fine men and women. The socialist system, aided by Soviet education, encouraged co-operative instead of selfish qualities. The Soviet people, inspired by their revolution, have faced incredible difficulties and dangers, built socialism, transformed their country, and smashed Hitler's armies, showing their great moral fibre.

But it takes time for old ideas and habits to die out among a whole people—ideas and habits that came, in this case, not only from the "bourgeois" profit-making system but from tsarism and feudalism also—ideas and habits that gained a certain new lease of life from the cult of Stalin which involved the mass hero-worship—and therefore the emulation by many—of a leader who was wrongfully using power in many directions.

As Marx said in 1865: "What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations but, on the contrary, as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from the womb of which it came." (Critique of the Gotha Program.)

In 1960, when I was last in the Soviet Union, there was already a deep absorption in the whole question of the development of human beings so that the nation would be fitted to operate a fully-developed communist society. In such a society all will work according to their ability and receive according to their needs. Income will not vary according to work done. In place of the present combination of material and moral incentives to work, there will be only the moral incentive—love of work and one's sense of duty to one's fellow-citizens. To build a nation of socially-minded, cultured men and women who will give of their best for that moral incentive—that is an even bigger task than the building of an economy that will provide in abundance the many-sided needs of all citizens.

Wherever we went in the Soviet Union in 1960—to universities and boarding schools, to factories with their advanced "communist
labor” teams and automated workshops with their special problems—this human question seemed already uppermost in the minds of leading Soviet citizens.

It may at first sight seem disappointing, in reading the Soviet Congress reports, to see, along with the pride taken in the “moulding of the new Soviet man,” the emphasis still laid on combating “alien ideology,” on more attention to the upbringing of youth, on the existence of a certain minority of young people who “want to keep aloof from a busy life” and “tend to remain the dependants of others,” on the existence of communists who “think that Party membership gives them certain privileges” and so on. But human beings change on the whole more slowly than their economic surroundings—a fact many of us did not previously realise fully enough. The battle for people’s minds takes a long time, and it is good to see a frank statement of the difficulties and of the determination to overcome them.

Let us now turn to the question: how have capitalist ideas expressed themselves in the arts? The early period of capitalism when it took the field as a liberating force against the old feudal order, saw a wealth of great art—Renaissance painting, the great English classical novelists, the great classical schools of music, etc.

But this art got more and more crushed out in the ruthless profit-making scramble of the modern factory. Capitalism more and more “drowned all fervor and sentiment in the icy waters of egotistical calculation” (Marx and Engels, Communist Manifesto): Of all social systems in history it became the most hostile to art. It made man the appendage of a machine, sucked up his vital energies in soulless production, and then offered easy gratification of his starved instincts in cheap thrillers and love stories, films of sex and violence, yellow press sensationalism, etc. Despite this there has been a great output of serious art in this century, some of it of high quality, because capitalism has never fully conquered the minds of the artist or of the people.

Some of the art of the later capitalist period has been marked by retreat from the world and from the problems of real life. Some of it has been of interest only to a small coterie and not to the people. Some of it is marked by pessimism and lack of faith in the future.

Where such art dominates it will help to win acceptance for the world as it is. It will serve the purposes of the rich. What
is needed is an art and literature that will serve the people, rouse their finer human feelings, their interest in life's problems and love of their fellow human beings, and give them faith in themselves and in the future of humanity.

There has been a great wealth of art during this century carrying a militant working class message or waging battle against war, fascism, race discrimination and other social evils. Hundreds of examples come to mind, from Mayakovsky poems to the recent wave of American folk songs, from *Power Without Glory* and Counihan paintings to plays of Bernard Shaw and films of Chaplin. But there has also been much very fine “uncommitted art,” or even art of other ideologies such as that of Graham Greene, of the kind that gives some strong image of life and so heightens interest in life, stirs the imagination and deepens human feelings. All these varieties of art can help humanity on its path forward.

Art does influence the political struggle from the very fact that it influences people's thoughts and feelings. But we should not over-simplify the question as we have often done. The bearing of art on politics, while sometimes direct, is often roundabout or remote. Furthermore the best creative art can only develop in conditions of freedom. We should therefore give careful thought to the question how to influence art and literature.

We should not seek to establish a single trend in art as was attempted in the days of Stalin (The Soviet Union has since moved away from this idea). Co-existence of different schools of art, music and literature is healthy and is needed for them to flourish. As a general rule it should be our aim to help art workers to become good communists, or at any rate to become humane and progressive people, then help them to follow their own artistic courses.

Take the modernist trends for example. Judah Waten has commented that the communists in Europe, by adopting a more understanding attitude to these trends, have largely broken down the barriers dividing them from many younger artists and writers. He urges study of these modern artists and writers who, whatever their weaknesses, have captured some essential features of modern life and can talk to modern audiences.

Or take the creators of the “art of beauty”, those who portray beauty for its own sake and rejoice in it. Years ago Upton Sinclair,
in the nobly intended but far too rigid analysis made in his book *Mammonart* (in which he wiped out such artists as Shakespeare and Raphael by a stroke of the pen) condemned the “art of beauty” as offering an escape from real problems. He called it “the gas barrage of the Haves against the Have-nots.” But the best of such art can ennoble man by evoking his finest feelings. It may even sometimes have a strong political bearing. The best of Australian landscape painting, for example, by inspiring a love of our country, can help in the struggle to preserve it from alien domination which is one of the main struggles of our time.

“Socialist realism”, understood in its broad sense as a concern with real human life and problems reflecting the socialist outlook of a writer or artist, represents a high ideal of art. But we should not expect it to be the sole trend in art. Still less should we interpret it narrowly as we often used to do. There is need for wider discussion of the idea of “socialist realism”, its true meaning and implications.

Symbolism, stylistm, even sometimes abstract art, may convey the essence of reality and therefore help people to grapple better with reality. Should we condemn the symbolism of Eisenstein or the ballet? Or the stylsm of the ever-popular Peking Opera? Or the element of abstractness in Picasso?

We can even go too far in our call for optimistic art,—for the “positive Hero”. For the victorious finish. Some bitterly tragic works help to unmask conventional morality—Hardy’s *Tess of the Durbevilles* or Ibsen’s *Ghosts* for example. Others, despite their almost continuous tragedy, show how love of life persists despite all, are an affirmation of faith in life, like Mulk Raj Anand’s *Coolie*. Some tragic works make one feel more intimately, and therefore perceive more truly, the inevitable calamities of history, like Cino Alegri’s *Broad and Alien is the World*. Humanism will always inspire. The pessimism to be abhorred is the pessimism that becomes cynical and inhuman.

Even where we judge art to have harmful social effects, we should not seek to suppress or censor it. Public opinion—which in a socialist society is in the main healthily developed, without the degrading influences from the commercial controllers of mass media—should be allowed its free play in art and literary matters. A healthy public opinion is the real answer to bad literature and bad art. (Curbs may be essential, of course, in times of revolution-
ary crisis or when the working majority, having taken power, is facing conspiracy or violence from the dispossessed millionaires and their backers in the first years of socialist rule).

Certainly artists need criticism — free criticism from many standpoints — and communists should be the first to encourage criticism, from a marxist standpoint, of the subject matter, form and style of art and literature. Experience suggests that the State or leading party in a socialist society should itself be sparing in art and literary criticism, or it may savor of dictation, and will then tend to cramp and frustrate the artist and discourage his initiative. In general, artists and writers and their organisations and journals, along with the general public, should be the critics.

We should remember, too, that artists who are not themselves revolutionaries may have a great enlightening and uplifting effect on society and play an important part in creating revolutionaries. Witness the great work of the conservative Balzac and the unpractical pacifist Tolstoy (highly praised by Engels and Lenin respectively). Sweeping attacks on past culture, as by the Chinese “Red Guards,” are certainly no part of marxism-leninism.

In general it is true, as Plekhanov put it, that “an artist of proven talent will increase considerably the forcefulness of his work by steeping himself in the great emancipatory ideas of our time.” A socialist society has the finest soil for creative art — a very high standard of art performance, an unrivalled art public, the door wide open for all with artistic talents, and a widespread understanding of marxism to serve as the foundation both of creative work and for sound critical judgments. It has the inspiration of great deeds done and a new world in the making. There is no doubting the abundance of fine and great creative art which will finally pour forth from all socialist societies as the difficulties of the pioneering years are overcome.

But art and literature play a big part also in our own social struggle. There is the art which helps the struggle and the art which hinders it, the art that ennobles and the art that degrades, the art that is effective and the art that is ineffective.

By the right kind of criticism, and above all, by encouragement to creative art generally, the fight against monopoly and imperialism and war can be strengthened in no small measure, and the ground prepared for the building of socialism and finally communism in our own country.