FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS, the anti-war struggle has been in theory and practice one of the over-riding preoccupations of the Communist Party of Australia. Throughout the period, the line of the Australian ruling authorities has been that the “peace movement” or “anti-war movement” has always been merely a “Communist front”, based on the capture of “dupes” by the wily Communists in the service of a “foreign power” or, more recently, simply for “treasonable” motives.

The threadbare character of this tactical propaganda line should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the activity of the CPA has, indeed, been important in the anti-war movement which may be said to have grown on three elements: the deep-rooted unwillingness of the majority of Australians to be dragged into what are seen to be imperialist wars or great-power struggles; the conscious political work of the CPA; and the conscious effort — for political, moral or religious reasons — of other groups and individuals. In the past 20 years, both the first and third factors have greatly increased. The weight of the CPA (in any case reduced in numbers) has therefore relatively declined in this movement, though it remains important. On the other hand, changes in the CPA’s attitude to the anti-war struggle (as to many other concepts, aims and methods of action) may be advancing the quality of its influence in this movement. Certainly the inception of the post-1945 anti-war movement in an organised form nationally, in 1949-50, owed much to the work of the communists, in practical partnership with a number of prominent non-communist individual citizens who had shown concern about the drift of the international situation at the time. The communists, too, were reacting to the situation, in a quite specific way.

It is not possible here to examine the origins of the post World War 2 East-West military confrontation which burst on the world in the “Berlin crisis” of early 1948. Suffice it to say that the readjustment of Great Power relationships following the temporary elimination of Germany, Japan and Italy as powers and the upsurge of revolutionary activity in certain colonial and other areas, were quickly seen by the UK, US and French leaders as requiring emergency action in the interests of imperialist perspectives. Berlin

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heated the medium anti-Soviet tone in western official and press circles to a full-scale anti-Soviet campaign in the UK, USA, France and Australia. At that time, as the writer personally verified, US forces in West Germany were intensively preparing for war against, and talking about “occupation” of, the USSR. Behind all this was the fundamental fact of the US atomic weapons monopoly. The use of the A-Bomb against the USSR was being openly canvassed. At the same time, the USSR was in a difficult time of restoration after massive human and material sacrifices in the course of the victory over Nazism.

In this truly serious situation, the Stalin leadership in the USSR estimated that a major international political effort was required to delay the threatening new war by impeding US utilisation of its military superiority to serve the “containment” policy of the Truman-Dulles leadership. In late 1948 an international meeting of left intellectuals in Warsaw, initiated the “World Congress of the Partisans of Peace” in Paris in April-May, 1949. An Australian delegation went to Paris, consisting almost entirely of communists. Delegations were stated to represent people of 72 countries. The Congress concluded that:

There was a serious danger of war, following the betrayal by the imperialist powers of the UN Charter and other agreements, and their turn to rearma-ment and military blocs.

There must be a ban on atomic weapons and other mass destruction weapons, international control of the use of atomic energy, and arms limitation.

Peace and freedom required national independence and peaceful cooperation of all peoples, with self-determination.

Setting up an International Committee, the Congress launched an international movement for “defence of peace in the world,” which would set out to impose peace on those who wanted war, through “the permanent threat of popular force.”

Soon after, a USSR Conference of Peace fully endorsed the Paris decisions, rejected western charges of Soviet aggressiveness and bluntly accused Anglo-American imperialism of preparing a new atomic war “against the entire human race”. Before 1949 was out, peace councils were being set up in some Australian states with the help of the activity of delegates back from Paris. CPA general secretary L. Sharkey calling for the extension of mass peace organisations to all states said: “We Communists do not want to ‘boss’ such a movement or order it about, nor define its policy or dictate its tactics; we want to see a broad mobilisation of peace-lovers fighting on a broad programme, directed against aggression in the interest of the overwhelming majority of mankind. The Communist Party will take its full share of the work of such a movement and give its fullest support to it.” (Communist Review, Oct. 1949.)

The first half-year or so called for concentration of CPA effort literally on the convincing and mobilising of the communists them-
selves, and large numbers of ex-communists and close supporters. However, the main activists including some of the numerous Communist trade union officials threw themselves into the task with vigor and effect. There were obvious reasons for this. Firstly, the main cadre of party activists were people who despite the euphoria of the wartime alliance of forces had not forgotten the '30s. War threats against the USSR, first land of socialism, were something they understood and responded to, in an almost automatic reflex. Secondly, the Chinese revolution, with its final success, had sent a wave of confidence in the future throughout the world communist movement. And at home in Australia, the election of the Menzies Government on an anti-communist policy gave Australian communists a sense of immediate crisis that was, to many, a spur to action.

An early instrument of mobilisation of communists into new mass contact for the peace movement was a 7-point Peace Ballot based on the Paris policies, for which scores of thousands of signatures were collected in organised drives. This purely Australian initiative was soon superseded by the world launching of the “Stockholm Appeal” for the banning of nuclear weapons, a one-point demand from the new international committee of the peace movement. This led to an unprecedented world signature campaign which, before the end of 1950, had yielded some 600 million signatures. It undoubtedly alerted far more millions of people to the danger of nuclear war than did the actual use of the Bomb itself on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In Australia, the extraordinary figure of 200,000 signatures was reached, very largely as a result of work by CPA members. In the same period, Australia had seen the first of its own mass, representative peace conferences. The Australian Peace Congress, held in Melbourne in April, 1950, with the attendance of that most controversial of clerics, the Dean of Canterbury, long-time publicist for Soviet socialism, was a very big and successful operation underwritten by the CPA. One of its mass rallies drew 12,000 people to the Melbourne Exhibition Hall.

Yet the movement, having mobilised those in and near the CPA, was nevertheless politically narrow, and it was under hostile pressure which rapidly increased with the introduction of the Menzies Government’s Communist Party Dissolution Bill. The peace movement, was in effect, the conscious Left and at that time this consisted almost entirely of communists and their supporters. The savagery of the anti-communist campaign let loose when, in June, 1950, the Korean war broke out, came close to isolating the CPA in Australia, though it did not prevent small groups of communists from staging defiant demonstrations against US and British imperialism on the streets of Melbourne and elsewhere, while communist-led seamen announced a ban on shipment of war materials to Korea.
It was a defensive situation for the communists, both internationally and in Australia. As the struggle around Menzies’ Red Bill developed, the CPA’s greatest need was for allies on any issue. Both the political movements for peace and for democratic rights were not unhelpful in this regard, but the ultimate defeat of the anti-communist legislation in the 1951 referendum flowed mainly from the activisation of the non-communist left and centre forces of the trade unions and Labor Party, both of which had been cruelly attacked by Menzies and the extreme anti-communist “grouper” forces in the labor movement.

A major effect of this experience was that the slogans of defensive success took deep root in communist thinking. The defence of peace became “the main task” of the communists. Unity of diverse forces around points of agreement — and the conscious setting aside of points of disagreement — became the principal method. There was intensive study and discussion by responsible communists about this. A 1952 world congress for peace in Vienna displayed notable success in the uniting of certain social-democratic and other non-communist political forces with communists by means of prolonged negotiations between “people of goodwill”. The Australian delegation which included communists, and non-party left people (also a middle-aged woman who, years later, publicly admitted she was a Security agent in the delegation) brought back this concept. Later, in 1953 the Convention on Peace and War in Sydney proved a considerable turning point in uniting people in various labor and religious circles with communists and other militants of the trade unions, in a degree of agreement that was a genuine product of negotiation and mutual respect. The slogan of that Convention was “Negotiation must displace war.”

Another requirement of the search for unity for peace at the time was the deliberate setting aside by the CPA of revolutionary and class slogans or super-militant forms of activity that might impede the search for unity at any level, for peace. Such activity as selling or circulating communist newspapers or leaflets outside or inside any kind of peace meeting was strongly discouraged in the party as the worst kind of “sectarianism” — the worst political crime of that period. When helping to formulate statements or slogans for peace organisations, communists avoided all reference to “class struggle” or other traditional militant terms, while the idea of striking for peace was simply not discussed. With one or two exceptions, the activities of the mass movement for peace in the whole decade of the 1950’s comprised conferences, meetings, propaganda through films and, above all, words. In 1954, Sydney wharfies held up the Radnor over a cargo of barbed wire for French use in Indo China, but generally in these years there was much discussion and propa-
ganda about self-determination but little talk and less action about "international solidarity". This contrasted with the confident pre-coal-strike period of 1949 when Lance Sharkey had been jailed for 2 years for saying defiantly to the press that Australian communists would give support to Soviet forces if they entered Australia in pursuit of aggressors. Demonstration-type activity was confined to the small, defiant efforts of 1950 and some activities in the 1952 Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship.

The CPA continued to discuss the problems of revolution in the context of marxist study classes of the classics, inevitably with emphasis on the lessons of the mid-thirties and the united front against fascism. In the earlier years, there continued some effort by some communist leaders to relate the struggle for peace with the revolutionary task of the party, in Communist Review articles, for example. There was even speculation on the potential of the then proliferating peace committees in localities and some jobs as future "soviets". However, these committees were generally narrow groups consisting largely of communists and close supporters. In Tribune (16/9/53), J. D. Blake, in a very clear outline of the CPA attitude to "unity for peace", wrote "Our view is that lasting peace and peaceful competition between different social systems will clearly establish the superiority of socialism over capitalism and this will aid our advance to socialism in Australia."

Cumulatively then in very few years after the high levels of challenging militancy in the railway and coal strike years of 1948-49, the CPA became pushed into a defensive orientation to "unity in action for peace" at any level required, and — to facilitate this — had in effect abandoned open discussion or projection of socialist revolutionary concepts in any but formal terms — "the ultimate socialist aim", etc. In recent years, it has become fashionable in some left circles to scorn this as the "lowest common denominator" policies of the CPA. In fact it was the highest common denominator that could be found between diverse viewpoints — but it was nevertheless often very low-level at that, from the point of view of the social revolutionary.

There was, however, an aspect of policy on which the CPA never made a concession until as late as 1961. That was the refusal to be party to any statement which explicitly or by implication criticised the policies of the Soviet Union, China or other communist country. The fact that this position could be sustained for so long deserves more detailed study. Certainly some significant non-communist individual leaders in peace committees, in Melbourne for example, resigned when, at the onset of the Korean war, the communists refused to concede that any fraction of the blame might lie elsewhere but in Washington. But for a number of years there appeared to be
no conflict between the words and actions of the communist governed
countries, in contrast to those of the imperialist powers, so that
the issue rarely arose. Things changed somewhat with Hungary,
1956, and the breakdown in China of the “Let 100 flowers bloom”
policy, in 1958. A number of individual communists active in the
peace movement of those years refused to condone these respective
Soviet and Chinese policies and took independent critical actions
which usually led to their departure from the party’s ranks. However,
the CPA itself conceded nothing on these issues, a fact which
testifies to the continuance then in Australian communist minds of
the monolithic concept of the world communist movement long after
the CPSU 20th Congress exposures of the crimes and distortions of
the Stalin era.

By the time a degree of US-Soviet nuclear balance had
become apparent, another aspect of the threat of general war had
developed. This was the US encirclement of China. This had, of
course, been a growing element for several years from the victory
of the Chinese revolution. The Korean war, the US-dictated Japanese
Peace Treaty of 1951, the permanent stationing of the US 7th Fleet
in the Taiwan Strait, Australian dispatch of troops for counter-
revolutionary duty in Malaya — all were steps in this process, as
was the Australian Government’s refusal to accord diplomatic recogni-
tion to the Chinese revolutionary People’s Government.

These were all, to one degree or another, real political issues in
Australian life; in a certain sense, they were more real than the
general threat of nuclear war between the USA and the USSR. It is
then hardly surprising that some signs appeared of tactical conflict
over the two aspects of the war threat, inside the Australian anti-war
movement. In 1951, for example, following the success of the world
Stockholm Appeal against A bombs, the World Peace Movement
tried again with a signature appeal for a Five Power Peace Pact.
The CPA leadership fully supported an Australian Peace Council
decision to campaign for this. However, some CPA activists pro-
minent in the peace organisations argued for priority to be given
to a campaign against the Japanese Peace Treaty, which was seen
as designed to consolidate Japan as a US strategic base country vis
a vis China. But the CPA top leadership insisted on the priority of
the world campaign which, in fact, was less effective than the Stock-
holm Appeal, because it was vague, unrealistic, and had less human
appeal. Certainly it tailed off in Australia.

But meanwhile, in Melbourne, of three fulltime CPA activists who
had argued briefly in favour of concentration on the Pacific war
danger, one was transferred to Sydney and the second was sent into
industry, thus dissipating what was seen by the then Victorian leader-
ship of the CPA as a potentially dangerous nationalist group. In
Sydney, on the other hand, a new peace organisation was set up, the Committee for Peace in the Pacific, working parallel to the Peace Council which campaigned for the World Movement's policies. Both these Sydney committees were actively supported by the CPA.

This was the first sign of an issue which slowly developed as a point of debate both within the CPA and in the peace organisations themselves up to, and including, the World Peace Council. It was variously expressed as world centralised leadership versus regionalism; or a world movement based on a rigid formal structure versus a movement flexible in form and structure in accordance with conditions. In retrospect it could be seen perhaps as a conflict between adherence to the Soviet viewpoint, and policies and methods arising out of national and regional conditions and needs. However, the issue did not become sharp. Behind all this, however, the movement's struggle against the US-British anti-China military policy inexorably developed.

The Australian Labor Party split in 1954 and the subsequent shift of the ALP federally towards some of the positions of the general anti-war movement led to a marked growth of interest in China's international rights, among Australian Laborites of both industrial and political wings. Despite the immediate confusion in the CPA and among other peace movement activists over Hungary and China's "100 flowers", resistance to US policy on China and Vietnam grew and was a major factor in developing official trade union participation in the anti-war movement to a peak that has not since been equalled. This process, an important and interesting one in itself, expanded from the modest NSW Trade Union Peace Week of 1954 (when the slogan "Peace is Trade Union Business" was born) to the 1959 national peace congress in Melbourne, which included a special trade union component conference sponsored and conducted by the ACTU, with the late Jim Kenny, then NSW Labor Council Secretary, presiding.

Side by side with the growth of the China Question in the sights of the anti-war movement came the influence of greater World Peace Movement stress on the "possibility of peaceful coexistence of countries with differing social systems", and that movement's reflection of the Soviet campaign for an agreement to prohibit atmospheric nuclear test explosions. It was a confusing period for Australian communists though the CPA officially sought to support all these policies. In fact, there were underlying conflicts between Krushchev's "Camp David" version of peaceful coexistence and the traditional revolutionary approach to it, which both the Chinese and Australian parties tended to favor. Further, the Soviet and Chinese disagreement over deployment of Soviet nuclear weapons which climaxed in the late 'fifties and led to an urgent Chinese nuclear program was
in sharp conflict with the test-ban campaign for a ban of nuclear testing which had become a major theme for the movement. However, what made possible a certain Australian rationalisation of all this was that, from the Australian people's viewpoint, all three issues were realistic: no war on China, peaceful coexistence, and a nuclear test ban. Few Australian communists at the time would have realised (about 1958-59) that already their practice in the anti-war movement was heading towards a position independent of both the two main communist powers.

However, in this regard, the real tests of CPA integrity were still to come. The first and least known came in November 1961 when the Soviet Union violated the atmospheric test ban treaty with a series of Arctic test explosions, that were explained as a warning to the west in connection with a temporary crisis in Germany. This brought a crunch in peace organisations in Australia, as doubtless in many other countries. In the NSW body's executive, two communist members debated the matter for hours with other (non-communist) members who insisted that there must be a statement including a criticism of the Soviet act. The debate had to continue a second night, by which time the two members had convinced the CPA leadership that such a statement would have to be accepted or "unity for peace" would suffer a profound setback. The statement issued in the name of the Peace Committee scarcely caused a ripple, yet foreshadowed for the Party, too, the end of automatic defence in public of Soviet — or Chinese or any other policy formulated overseas.

Progress by the CPA towards a position of independent marxist judgment of the international situation was temporarily delayed (but fundamentally accelerated) by the open outbreak of the China-Soviet dispute and, in the same period, the US-Soviet confrontation over rockets in Cuba which imperatively demanded internationalist support of the Cuban and Soviet positions, against US imperialism, irrespective of definite reservations felt by many about some aspects of Soviet tactics and great power methods in the crisis. The CPA's early tendency to judge the Pacific war danger through the ideas of the Chinese leadership also was ended. The pre-eminent questions of the slowly increasing Australian involvement in Vietnam and the rapid expansion of the Menzies Government's war program (e.g. the 1963 order for the F111's) were becoming the starting point of CPA anti-war thinking. It needed only the US-Australian decisions for big-scale combat intervention in Vietnam in early 1965, together with Australian conscription for service abroad, to culminate that process.

That intervention, historic for all Australians, fundamentally changed the situation of the Australian anti-war movement, which
thenceforth was operating in a country with a military combat involvement in a clear-cut, imperialist, counter-revolutionary war. The “theoretical” anti-war struggles of the previous 15 years were finished. And because Vietnam also brought with it the spread of dissent, youthful scepticism and radicalisation, and the emergence of significant left groups other than the CPA itself, 1965 also meant that the long night of CPA defencism was ending.

No longer were words the main form of struggle. The first Vietnam demonstrations began, at the US Consulate, the first draft cards were burned — in both cases the initiators included the young communists of the then Eureka Youth League. Other groups joined in and soon bigger and bigger street demonstrations and sitdowns were occurring. The CPA found that new, young groups (e.g. Vietnam Action Campaign, precursor of Resistance) mainly student based — were raising revolutionary slogans in the anti-war movement, and were criticising the limited “pacifist” slogans still common in demonstrations. To some extent prodded by these groups, the CPA’s re-examination of its own basic revolutionary task began, both because this was required by the struggle against the Australian counter-revolutionary war and because the proliferating left and anti-war movements made more offensive action a realistic perspective. The other, even more basic element of the same situation was that for the first time the movement began to expand in a spontaneous way. It began to become genuinely a mass movement.

Its leadership and impetus continued to depend largely on the political left but now this was a plurality rather than a CPA monopoly. The experience of the most recent phase, the Moratorium Movement of 1970, suggests that the interaction of these left forces — despite the difficulties and antagonistic relations that have sometimes existed — is helping to carry the movement forward.

Recent experience has shown conflict of views on the left and sometimes vigorous debate in anti-war committees on how to advance the mass anti-war movement towards a conscious anti-imperialist and revolutionary position. Leninist concepts elaborated in 1915 of struggle against any government waging imperialist war by the revolutionaries in that country — including the concept of transforming military defeats into defeat of the government and revolutionary defeat of the capitalist system — have particular force today in countries, such as Australia, committed to extended counter-revolutionary, imperialist war of intervention in Vietnam and other parts of S.E. Asia. Furthermore, the kind of proletarian internationalist solidarity in words and deeds, legal and illegal, that helped the struggling Bolsheviks to maintain power against the interventionists of 1918-21 is called for today in support of the Indo-China revolutionaries.
While these issues have already been raised as a political line and in material action by the communists and some others, it cannot be said that any of the Left forces have squarely faced up to their responsibility in this respect. Debate has tended to centre on whether, at a given point of the anti-war movement's development (e.g. in this year's Moratoriums), this or that explicitly anti-imperialist policy formulation or slogan can be imposed on the whole movement. Some left individuals or groups are concerned with accusing others of being inconsistent anti-imperialists if they oppose such imposition.

Of course, any anti-war movement in a country waging an imperialist war is objectively anti-imperialist. The Moratorium movement, particularly as seen in September, is a genuine mass movement of a quality not seen before in the Australian anti-war movement. It is uniting in militant action around common aims a really large number of people with diverse views on many political and other questions. This is raising sharply new problems of leadership of such a movement in effective, advanced forms of action. The left forces, including the communists, may already be restricting the development of this movement because of tendencies to cling to political attitudes, tactics and forms of action that were appropriate to the narrower, pre-Moratorium movement which consisted of more like-minded people. If so, this needs urgent correction since it is the Left, in the first place, that must ensure that the movement is well-led and that it develops rapidly.

Although there is a significant radicalisation of large new forces, particularly of young people as a result of the more clumsy steps by the Establishment towards use of coercive arms of the State against the movement, the rapid physical growth of the mass movement means that the CPA and other conscious, organised Left groups are becoming a relatively smaller part of the anti-war forces. The fact that they may have a clear, or clearer, anti-imperialist and revolutionary view unfortunately does not mean that the mass Moratorium movement will yet accept the view for its slogans, which are at present: withdrawal of all foreign troops, withdrawal of all support of the Saigon regime, abolition of conscription. (To these must now be added as a major element the assertion of the democratic right of the movement to use the streets to demonstrate for the achievement of the aims.) These slogans have succeeded in uniting large and diverse forces in militant, demonstrative and — to a degree — strike action in some industries, universities and schools. However, only the blind would say that the possibilities of mass mobilisation in support of these slogans, and the slogan "Stop Work to Stop the War" have yet been even adequately tackled, let alone exhausted.
The Left vanguard forces are, and should be, at the same time explaining the imperialist and counter-revolutionary character of the war, the nature of the imperialist system giving rise to it, and the need and possibility of overthrowing that system in our own country in order, finally, to end Australian involvement in any such predatory wars and to build a socialist society. Further, it has been shown that various forms of demonstrative action around explicitly anti-imperialist slogans can usefully be mounted by the advanced forces, even by quite small groups or individuals, provided that these are designed so as to serve a useful ideological purpose (e.g. various Vietnam demonstrations, July 4 actions, Stock Exchange raids, some occupations of National Service departments, some courtroom denunciations etc.). Despite the cries of “adventurism” from more conservative parts of the Left, and “anarchy” from the Establishment and the reformist Right, most of these efforts are useful and need to be extended, while ensuring that they do not degenerate into violent provocation or pointless confrontation that damages the mass movement or is rejected by the entire mass movement because it is incomprehensible.

But such advanced activity and propaganda is not able to be adopted by a mass movement that is still in the process of rapid growth outward among quite new and inexperienced forces — still learning, for example, that Australian policemen are really capable of planning to unleash violence and to be excessively brutal in the process. The Left’s concepts, slogans and advanced actions should influence and involve greater and greater sections of the mass movement, and should be freely discussed and canvassed in the mass movement’s gatherings, but should not be allowed to impede mass discussion of widening effective action around more limited, but objectively anti-imperialist slogans. For it is only such effective mass action that will actually end the imperialist war and imperialist system, when experience and political conviction lead the movement to the necessity of going beyond present slogans. The vanguard forces have got to be able to judge the political needs and capacity of the whole mass movement at a given time, and not just its leading or sponsoring committees which are invariably composed of the relatively advanced. The recent (September) experiences, encouraging as they are, point not to a judgment that the present scale of movement could adopt explicitly revolutionary slogans and race to victory, but rather to the great need to bring a much larger mass of people, particularly of the workers, into united, more varied and more effective activity around approximately the present slogans, while greatly improving the quality of the ideological influence and the mutual collaboration of the various elements of the revolutionary vanguard.