As I saw the Sixties

IT IS DIFFICULT to describe events and struggles with which one has been intimately associated. The memory can be very selective even with ‘neutral’ incidents. Nevertheless it seems worth trying to outline how my own thinking developed in the CPA in the '60's, even if only to provide a point of reference (or a chopping block) for others who may be able to set the record straighter.

The question arises: since we have now been examining many questions that should have been followed through in 1956, why was this not done at the time? Without attempting a complete analysis, two things particularly weighed with me at the time. The exposure of many of the crimes of stalinism was undoubtedly a very bold step. It both opened up great possibilities for advance and appeared as evidence of good intentions on the part of the CPSU leaders, given time and sympathetic understanding, to make a break with all that had been wrong and restore the ideals and norms we believed in, at the same time arming us against the pitfalls\(^1\).

\(^1\) That the ‘secret report’ was more or less authentic I had little doubt, and that we had shared an outlook which would have led to similar harsh treatment of dissidents had we been in power seemed evident to me, and I said so at a Central Committee meeting in 1956. However, since we had not been in power, no one in Australia had suffered in such a way, and that the dangers we had to avoid were revealed seemed more or less sufficient.

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Reinforcing this readiness to ‘get on with the job’ was the influence of the Chinese views at the time. Their analyses were against an emotional and simplistic negation of Stalin and of all that had transpired, and were posed in very reasoned terms. The three years, 1951-54, I and others spent in China made a deep emotional and intellectual impact. To experience, even if only by proximity, the creative energy, spirit of self-sacrifice and mass involvement of a great revolution, and hear at first hand analyses by people who had taken part, is to add a new dimension for people from a country like Australia where nothing like that has ever happened. The Chinese lecturers we had, and the cadres we met, evidenced considerable flexibility of thought and non-dogmatism (or anti-dogmatism), especially when compared with the Soviet lecturers (we had both). One incident in particular springs to mind. Our Soviet lecturer on political economy was very lucid in explaining the main ideas traditionally held of Marxist political economy. But on actual economic issues thinking was very narrow. For example, we came into conflict over the question of living standards in post-war Australia. Readily responding to Chinese exhortation to ‘study the concrete situation’ and ‘seek truth from the facts’, we had set about combing through the materials (year books, some history books and party publications) we had brought with us. These materials drove us, against dogma and inclination be it said, to the conclusion that some increase in material living standards had been won in the post-war period.

Anyway, our Soviet lecturer insisted that the bourgeoisie and the reformists were very cunning and that we had fallen for their propaganda. We stuck to our guns, and he finally asked for the evidence, so we spent a large part of one vacation documenting it all, allowing for price rises, hours of work, etc., and coming to the same conclusion. We handed in the report, but nothing was said, and only after continual prompting and pressure did we get a reply some months later: “I’m glad that you have studied the circum-

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3 Whether these statements represented the full views of the Chinese, or contained some element of tactics and calculation as now seems possible, of course one cannot know for sure. But the view that vast historical changes involve mistakes and suffering as a more or less inevitable by-product, and other arguments advanced were powerful considerations with me.

4 This was even more evident upon our return to Australia. It took me a long time indeed to get used to the outlook and scale of spending that I now found prevailing even after only 3½ years.
stances in your own country and hope you will continue to do so when you return." No discussion of the issues involved or the 'principles' that had been rammed down our throats before. On the other hand, while rather cautious about openly disagreeing with the Russians at that stage, our Chinese lecturer on political economy had readily agreed that such a thing could occur, and that it did not contradict what Marx himself had said (of course the Russians knew this too, but said it couldn't happen in the period of imperialism).

Particularly noticeable, though hard to specify precisely, was the 'culture' and its differences from ours. Not so much the outward differences, which are of course very striking, but, for example, the emphasis on things of the mind and emotions. This is hard to define also, but it stood out in marked contrast to our Australian brashness, lack of consideration for dignity and feelings, and over-riding emphasis on 'objective causes' with much playing down of 'subjective' ones, which we had thought to be one of the main hallmarks of 'Marxism-Leninism'.

From such Chinese sources came a deepening of knowledge and an expansion in the range of thought which was entirely necessary and beneficial. But at the same time this took place (or appeared to take place)\(^5\) within the already accepted framework of what was recognised as 'Marxism-Leninism', and thus, by another door, reinforced the more or less closed system of ideas then accepted as constituting it. Errors — or creative additions — were thought of as occurring within an essentially known, correct and basically complete system of ideas into which everything could be either fitted (good; proletarian) or excluded (bad; bourgeois). Thus the Chinese experience, while tremendous in impact and on the whole positive and liberating of thought, in another way served to reinforce the concept of Marxism-Leninism as a set of established and final truths and thus acted as a delaying force for the re-thinking that had eventually to get under way. This ambivalence is, I believe, a key to some apparent inconsistencies in developments in the 60's.

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\(^5\) To what extent the Chinese then accepted the prevailing (Stalinist) conception of 'Marxism-Leninism', and to what extent they just went along with it in the circumstances of the time while having their own ideas (subsequently developed) is problematical, and to say this is neither to condone nor condemn. For a useful examination see *Marxism & Asia* by d'Encausse and Schram.

The Chinese position was, in many cases, really creative, even if not sufficiently rationalised in traditional marxist or other theoretical terms. But it is not good enough to force things into a mould because that is what people expect, or because to do otherwise would initially place one at a disadvantage in polemics. This is one of the factors which has been at work to transform marxism into dogma and religious-type mystification.
This also coloured greatly consideration of the real relations between the CPSU and the CPC. 'Marxism-Leninism' made a fundamental division between socialist countries and such communist parties impossible. Thus many of us were still naive enough to see in the final document of the 81 parties conference in 1960 a proof that, despite differences, there could be no final split. The fact that almost immediately this wishful thinking was exposed forced a deeper consideration. When things came to something of a head at the 22nd Congress of the CPSU in 1962 (when the Chinese walked out, and paid ostentatious tribute to Stalin) it seemed to me that, although errors of both could be pointed out, the CPSU was acting more reasonably, still attempting to do the right thing about 'de-stalinisation' and giving proper emphasis to avoidance of nuclear war which the Chinese seemed to treat in cavalier fashion.

But much more important were the issues mainly affecting our perspectives, policies and practices in Australia. These having been brought from China, through Hill and his supporters, to the stage of "you must choose one or the other", did the great service of posing fundamental questions as to what it was that we, as communists, really stood for.

For example there was a great deal of argument about two peace organisations existing in Melbourne, and as to whether we should work for their amalgamation. From this apparently trivial argument it gradually became clear that the central issue was whether our prime consideration was to have a peace organisation of such a nature that ultimately we could be confident of the decisions it would make (a particular case being whether or not the peace movement should criticise the Soviet H-bomb tests in 1961). Thus the issue was were such mass movements (however wide in themselves from time to time) to be regarded as essentially 'front' organisations in the manner described by some of our critics; or were we, while participating in and doing all we could to influence policy in the direction we thought best, to do this in recognition that there were other views that had to be respected, and that ours had no special claim to recognition beyond their cogency and the respect, earned on the basis of performance, in which our members were held.

Similar issues emerged in regard to our own organisation. For example, was it right that a (or the) leader of an organisation should exercise the right of selection of people for positions, irrespect-

6 The same issues came up increasingly also in regard to international organisations (trade union, youth, women, peace).
ive of the views of others, on the grounds of 'loyalty'? This in turn raised further questions as to the existing form of organisation of the Party. Whether actively sought or not, there was an inbuilt disposition to give rise to an entrenched group whose position could not really be challenged short of an upheaval of the whole organisation, with the actual tendency being for all to regard direction from the top and conformity as 'correct'. Underpinning this were various theoretical and political propositions which had to be (or were) accepted as irrefutable axioms and/or starting points and as not open to questioning. This in turn led to the fundamental question of the approach to marxism itself, put still more clearly at a later date by Hill: "Marxism is a set of propositions (concerning the Party, the state, the dictatorship of the proletariat, violence, philosophy, etc.), you either accept them or you don't." No room for science here, no room for a marxist approach in the spirit of Marx himself or of Lenin, no room for a genuine theory indispensable to a revolutionary movement.

There was the problem of 'peaceful transition to socialism' and how it might be conceived of in Australian conditions. Orientations on this can be varied, including a Labor Party type parliamentary road such as is taken up, I believe by the present 'opposition'. This is nonsense, but to open up one's mind to the question of transition to socialism without civil war is not. The problem was repeatedly discussed from many angles, including the structure of the modern capitalist state, questions of 'hegemony' and 'counter-hegemony', and the tactics of mass struggle and so on, resulting in the analysis in the Statement of Aims adopted at the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party (see pages 21-24 of this statement).

There was the attitude to the Labor Party, admittedly a very complex question which it is impossible to examine to any great extent here. But perhaps this complexity is part of the basic point. The Hill opposition at that time wanted to confine the whole of it within the narrow framework of the discredited 'main-blow' theory developed by Stalin at a certain stage. The present oppo-

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7 One such issue was Hill's "appointment" of Vida Little as Metropolitan Secretary in Victoria, despite almost unanimous opposition from others, including from Hill supporters.

8 From an early publication of the CPA (Marxist-Leninist).

9 "... the decision to withdraw the troops must be made, in the final washup, by a government and not by some queer form of workers' control." — from Australian Socialist No. 2, in an article condemning the leftism of the anti-war movement.

10 See for example Foundations of Leninism Chapter 7, and The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists.
sition tends to confine it in the limits of tailing behind the Labor Party in the name of the 'united front', foregoing any really independent revolutionary initiative and acting as though a Labor Government elected on this basis in present circumstances is the main content of socialist activity (see footnote 9).

At this period it appeared to most observers and probably a considerable proportion of Party members, that the struggle was in essence one of choosing whom to follow, whom to regard as the fountain head of Marxist-Leninist wisdom and the main architect of world socialist strategy and main force for ending imperialism—the Soviet Union or China. Though I know of no-one who can claim to have known what was to come, what we were really doing was facing up to the need to think out our position for ourselves. This was a slow process because, as I have pointed out, the previous framework was still accepted; but there was now an inner preparedness to go beyond it should experience or rational thought so indicate.

It was in this spirit that publication of the Communist Review ended in May 1966 and the Australian Left Review was initiated. Improvement had to be fought for step by step, but there was now no issue put beyond the pale of discussion as too 'difficult' or 'inconvenient' either before or after a number of non-communists joined the editorial board.

The fact that the struggle did represent at bottom a turn to independent thought and an independent position on socialist strategy in Australia and internationally, also became clear in relatively small ways at this time in our relations with the CPSU. The Jewish question arose once again, and although there was more in it than I for one was conscious of at the time, there was readiness to consider the facts, so far as they could be ascertained, though there was also the readiness and disposition to give a generous benefit of the doubt on the basis that the CPSU was working, against difficulties, to overcome the legacy of problems it had inherited from Tsarism and Stalinism. There was the criticism of the way in which Khrushchov was removed and 'unpersoned'. There was criticism on the basis of the evidence of reversal of a previous trend and strengthening of an undemocratic and unsocialist attitude on the question of freedom in the artistic and intellectual spheres, and on democracy in general.

Nevertheless, speaking for myself, I then still believed that the CPSU was basically on a course which was going in the right direction. It was in this frame of mind that I visited the Soviet
Union in 1965 on my way to Cuba and Chile together with Pete Thomas to attend the 13th Congress of the CP of Chile. This was the period in which the long discussion on the economic reforms was coming to a climax, and we aimed to get further clarity about it, and if possible to interview Professor Liberman, one of the main proponents of the reforms.

Experiences were mixed, but not altogether unfavorable. It proved possible to visit Kharkov to see Professor Liberman, with whom we had a long interview, in the presence of a battery of 'watchdog' party officials, which restricted the range of the discussion though it was valuable nonetheless. There were useful discussions with factory managements, but an exasperating inability to get answered key questions, particularly on the 'whys' of the past position and the implications of the reforms beyond the purely economic. There was apparently quite free discussion among and with the interpreters and officials we met on freedom of the arts, with quite different opinions being given (how meaningful these differences were is hard to say). I expressed the view on return that although problems of democracy had in no way been resolved, nor was the orientation in the direction we felt necessary, the economic foundation required political democratisation. For the economic reforms involved decentralisation of authority, and the drawing into meaningful consultation and control of the rank and file on the job as Lenin had strongly emphasised, and the discussion of real issues instead of sloganising and rhetoric. (I think the main reason why the reforms have run into something of a bog is because these consequences are unacceptable to the leadership.) Such changes at grassroots level, while not automatically bringing any changes at political level, would nevertheless, I believed, build up such pressures that these would come in time. Later events have shown that these hopes have not materialised, and that the course is a different one. (The pressures still exist, and are slowly building up, but there is no evidence I know of to support hopes for any substantial change in the immediately foreseeable future.)

There was one important incident prior to leaving. We returned to the Soviet Union after a month spent in Cuba and Chile, and were almost immediately read the long statement of the Chinese issued in November 1965. There followed a special discussion with a leading figure of the International Department, who suggested that our Party might consider making an extensive reply to and criticism of this attack on the CPSU. We replied that our party

policy on the question was that renewal of polemics on an interna-
tional plane at that time would serve no good purpose; that the thing
to do was to continue to press for concerted action against imper-
rialism in Vietnam and elsewhere, and that we did not think our
Central Committee would agree to depart from this standpoint.

After much argument back and forth we finally expressed the view
that although our policy on this question was unlikely to be altered,
there was room within it for some discussion on the situation — the
events in Indonesia for example — which would permit some refer-
ence to some of the issues raised in the Chinese blast. This, was
brusquely dismissed, and it became clear that what was proposed
was that the CPSU would supply us with the article they wanted—
a ‘big’ article, which would ‘earn us a big reputation in the inter-
national movement’. The way in which the proposition was ap-
proached left the clear implication that this was not an unusual way
of doing things, and that other ‘big’ international articles had often
been arranged in the same way.12 (The Duclos article on Browder
in 1946 springs to mind.)

So it was becoming increasingly clear that we were ‘on our own’
in grappling with the actual problems we were encountering, and
that no succour was to be expected from bold new deeds or theoreti-
cal generalisations from the Soviet Union, or the ‘International
Movement’.13 At the same time social and political developments
proceeded apace throughout the world, including in Australia where

12 Being hard-headed about it, one supposes that it is only to be expected that
the CPSU (not it alone of course) would regard such a proposition as being
‘worth a try’, particularly since they felt that we ‘supported them against China’. However there was more to it than that. Besides the fact of having other parties
fire the bullets the CPSU had made, it was unacceptable to them to have the
party concerned make its own statements. We were treated to lengthy discourses
on the long friendship between our two parties, in an unavailing attempt to
get us to be more compliant. And, although it was 18 degrees centigrade below
freezing when we left Moscow a day or two later, the social atmosphere was
even more frigid. This was perhaps not the beginning of the dissatisfaction of
the CPSU with the new leadership of the Australian party, but I believe it was
a long step on the road. And there was increasing evidence subsequently of
pressures and sallies against the leadership, which increased further as issues
became clearer to us, and we became more outspoken and as we began to tackle
somewhat more deeply the theoretical and strategical issues facing us. The
above incident was of course fully reported on to the Political Committee, which
unanimously endorsed the stand we had taken.

13 We were encountering (and were to continue to do so) the problems of
inertia, bureaucracy and of ‘vested interests’ by individuals and groups of
people in their own ‘jobs’, ‘empires’, etc., in trying to reorganise on a more
limited and more realistic basis, and get our financial and property affairs on
an even and efficient keel. Such experiences on our tiny scale gave some apprecia-
tion of how enormous such problems may become when multiplied by a million
or ten million . . .!
a new wave of political dissent and activism was beginning, affecting particularly students and intellectuals. If the scale of this was small compared with the United States and other countries, it was nonetheless very noticeable, not to say welcome in the Australian context, after quiescence which, with a few interruptions, had lasted so frustratingly long.

Escalation of the Vietnam war by US imperialism in 1965 made a worldwide impact on the revolutionary movement, and in Australia too. That this was a central issue was recognised right from the outset (and even before this), and at times in those early days the communists were almost alone in their campaigning, which deserves a recognition it seldom gets. But as other forces, especially the students, increasingly entered the struggle, the limitations of what the party was able to do in its existing ideological and organisational state became increasingly apparent.

The industrial field, main focus of activity of the communists over the years, was also now arousing dissatisfaction on account of narrowness, conservatism and timidity, and those problems were highlighted as the mass movement over living standards, democratic rights and the Vietnam war developed. Probably the penal clauses issue illustrates this best. Already in the metal trades struggle of 1967-8 it was being urged that the penal clauses be defied. In February 1969 the National Committee estimated that the situation was ripe for a challenge. This fell largely on deaf ears among communist union officials, yet in May one of the greatest mass movements Australia has seen erupted. Most of these officials showed great resistance to any new ideas or even the revival of interest in traditional Leninist ideas of 'workers' control'. Obsolete union structures, authoritarian outlooks and bureaucratic procedures were grimly held on to. This situation — a product of the party's outlook and practices, not a specific of union officials — thus also began to be subjected to prolonged scrutiny, debate and struggle, which both benefited from and contributed to the general reassessment (see the 22nd Congress document Modern Unionism and the Workers' Movement).

Internationally, also, a new complicated upheaval was affecting China — the cultural revolution — while in May 1968 the great upheaval in France showed that revolutionary potential in modern capitalist society could not be written off as some were suggesting, while also exposing still more fundamentally the unsolved problems

14 Many factors contributed to this, a key one being emphasis on the importance of official positions, often irrespective of the quality of the work done and rank and file development.
of theory, strategy and organisation of the communist parties.\textsuperscript{15} Such new social and political currents in the capitalist and socialist world posed additional knotty problems of theory and orientation. The relatively quite few active minded critics in and outside the party did considerable service in pressing those questions. And even if their strictures were often argued against in a way that probably appeared as rejection, this was mainly because answers alternative to the traditional ones were not readily forthcoming at the time, while our own thinking still revolved mainly in the same framework; nevertheless they were listened to more seriously than they themselves perhaps thought.

In this period, in party discussions, such critics or those who took their cue from them, would often say: we should make a study of class changes, the quality of life, or what have you. Because the need for this was already accepted, this became rather off-putting after a while. I used to think to myself, and sometimes say, “Well, why don’t you bloody well do it; who’s stopping you?” for the number of serious studies of the issues (as distinct from opinions, correct or not, taken ‘off the top of the head’) was small indeed. Of course this basically constituted a severe criticism of what the party had come to be. We were inwardly quite prepared to grapple with issues without setting uncrossable lines in advance as we had previously. But precisely because of this past tradition we were neither well-equipped ourselves to actually do so, nor more than marginally in touch with those who were, even if only within particular fields.

A number of us therefore, quite independently forced to the same conclusion, determined that we must bend ourselves to the task, however daunting. It was in fact discussed at meetings and a decision made, though no doubt many would have regarded it as merely another of innumerable pious resolutions to ‘study more deeply’. For myself, I set out to make some study of philosophy, which was of great interest to me in general, besides inevitably sticking its tousled head at some stage or other into all the other subjects.

During 1966 I had discussions with a number of academic philosophers about trends and (if any) their relation to marxist philosophy. Naturally these discussions did not go very deep but, besides reinforcing my views on the narrow, inward-looking nature and consequent barrenness of much of philosophy treated purely as

\textsuperscript{15} We were by no means satisfied with the stand of the French CP, and also took issue with those who, often in an anti-communist spirit, sloganised about revolutionary situations instead of analysing. In between these stools we sometimes lapsed into the previous stand of blind solidarity between communist parties.
an academic discipline (whereas for me ‘philosophising’ should be a human activity bound up with all other — especially revolutionary, activity) were most beneficial.

They (a) made me confront the question of defining (or re-defining) for myself what marxist philosophy actually was16, (b) showed that marxist philosophy as understood from its Soviet development was not taken very seriously — and not just mainly because proletarian pearls were rejected by bourgeois swine; (c) led me to read many more books (a number of them recommended by my philosopher acquaintances) than for many years past, and to do so both more critically and more open-mindedly than is the wont of those who feel they already know, basically at least, the answers to the problems they are reading about; (d) along with rejection of a good deal, aroused great interest in a number of lines of thought, and gave rise to the reflection that, although one could rationalise to oneself that non-marxists were often ‘forced to think in a marxist way’, this did not settle what ‘a marxist way’ actually was. And, most importantly, led me to the conclusion that there was no likelihood that the burgeoning knowledge in this and other fields could be squeezed without damaging surgery into any glass slipper, however elegant, and that the easy mental divisions into ‘bourgeois’ and ‘proletarian’ ideology we were in the habit of making was a major aspect of confining thought within old pre-determined bounds and could no longer be accepted in that form.17

16 This re-examination could not of course be confined to philosophy, but had to be extended to marxism as a whole. A sprinkling of people in various countries had realised this long before and produced valuable works of which most of us were blissfully ignorant at the time. There is now an increasing number engaged in the task, and this holds out the prospect that a new stage in the endeavour may be reached in the not too distant future.

17 These views (which were not necessarily only mine) were raised at CC meetings and incorporated in the documents of the 21st Congress. They may not seem much, and in themselves are not, but are crucial in the context of the traditions of communist parties. To a degree at least the CPSU and those now clearly identified as conservatives in the party felt some unease about these sorts of things. By their own lights they were thus more discerning about the ‘winds of change’ than some other critics who, from right and left were insisting that ‘nothing was changed’.

I also undertook some re-study of Marx’s political ideas for the centenary celebrations of the publication of the first volume of “Capital” (1967), study for the dialogue with Christians which took place about this time, of class structure for a projected book of essays (1968), a re-study of Chinese developments following the end of the Cultural Revolution (1969), and of Lenin’s works for the centenary of his birth (1970), and work on the ‘Aims’ document for the 22nd Congress (1970)) .

All these studies confirmed in general terms the conclusion outlined above, and heightened appreciation of the fact that the problems had to be tackled more deeply yet. This was the main reason I have taken ‘sabbatical leave’ to do whatever I can to contribute to this further study.
At the same time other key issues related to the party came under scrutiny. For example, one party rule and ‘the leading role of the party’ connected with it. Secrecy; it was brought home to us that we had spent an enormous amount of time guarding non-existent or unprotectable ‘secrets’. This was connected with our view of the 1917 revolution and bolshevik experience as the basic model, and our onesided approach to the state and the way capitalist rule is maintained (later linking up with the discussion of Gramsci and counter-hegemony). Party organisation related to the above. The significance and nature of changes in the economy and the progress of the scientific and technological revolution, changes in class structure, etc.

The 1967 (21st) Congress dealt with all these and other questions, although our treatment was only beginning to penetrate the surface, since understanding was still superficial. But, perhaps for this reason, the lack of understanding displayed throughout the party of what was really involved — no particular surprise this — and the difficulty of reorientating thinking and action, brought home once again the sterility of many previous practices and approaches and realisation of how great the problems of renovation and renewal were.

Perhaps the key question over-all was that of democracy. This was raised from everything we touched. Questions of bourgeois and proletarian ideology in the sense described above; free discussion of theoretical, scientific and artistic ideas; questions of the one party state, and one ‘official’ state ideology; of secrecy and the necessary limitation on democracy that accompanies it; free discussion of political issues, etc. The pre-congress discussion was completely free, and this upset the CPSU particularly, because things previously unsaid in communist publications could be said about them as well as us. Even with all this emphasis on democracy there was still room for a rank and file delegate at Congress to propose that we set out to define our attitude to democracy in a charter of democratic rights, and for such a proposal to raise all sorts of controversy from that Congress through to the next.

There were some who were misled by the emphasis on democracy into concluding that concentration on these issues meant a turn in the direction of ‘rightism’ and even ‘liberalism’. It may be that there were elements of this, but the essential point was that a changed attitude on intellectual freedom and democracy in the party and in the future socialist society was a basic precondition for breaking out of the old conceptions and practices, which in their
totality were actually 'stalinism'. And following through the issue of democracy has led increasingly to more radical and revolutionary conceptions concerning participatory democracy, workers' control, etc., and prompted re-examination of attitudes to 'leadership' and bureaucracy both within the party and the mass movement. These and other issues were taken still further at the 22nd Congress.

From the above it will be evident that the issue of Czechoslovakia, while indeed a fundamental turning point, in no way caused the developments in Australia, but only put the seal on what had already been basically accomplished internally. That is why there was no hesitation and why few members of the executive had any doubts about the outcome of the repeated discussions that took place. Nevertheless the Czechoslovak issue certainly forced the pace, deepened the appreciation of problems and make inevitable the de facto split now existing. It also drove home the barren circularity of the argumentation and thought within which we had allowed ourselves to be confined for so long. This is difficult to describe, as there are many points on the wheel, and wheels within wheels, but essentially it goes something like this:

* The CPSU wouldn't do it unless it was right; they must have had a good reason, they are closer, they know more (including from intelligence reports they can't discuss); they have the most experience and they are best versed in marxism-leninism.

* Marxism-leninism teaches that the central question in the period of imperialism is the dictatorship of the proletariat; enemies must be crushed; democracy is a class question; it is all a matter of class stand; class stand entails that the Soviet Union be supported at all costs.

* Internationalism is a fundamental aspect of class stand; we must unite to fight the class enemy; they (five Warsaw pact powers) have united so they are fighting the class enemy; fifty parties can't be wrong; it is nationalism to oppose the views of the majority of communist parties.

* The CIA is always active; they would like to see Czechoslovakia separated from the Soviet Union; Dubcek and Co. are criticising the Soviet Union and won't accept their 'advice' and leadership, therefore they are doing objectively what the CIA wants.

* The past proves that the Soviet Union was right; they defeated fascism; fascism was raising its head again in Hungary in 1956; If you supported them then, you should now; if you don't now, you are putting the integrity of your own past in question; you
have always adopted marxism-leninism and a class stand before; don’t take a step back now.

And so on, and so forth, without getting to the substance of issues. It will be apparent that any one of the points or sub-points on the circle can serve as starting points to get on the same old exercise in circularity. And while put baldly as above it may seem singularly unconvincing, there is no doubt that this argumentation has a very compelling quality for those who have spent half or more of a lifetime fighting self-sacrificingly and passionately, if often mistakenly, along these lines for what they believed. One of the main points about it is that it is circular — that is, it can only be escaped from by refusing to stand within that circle. And this of course is difficult; firstly because things are never completely black and white and individual facts can be found to support one or other of the points. Secondly and mainly because it requires a qualitative step in outlook as a whole — both a return to and bold development of the revolutionary content and spirit of marxism.

The Communist Party of Australia has decisively, if by no means completely, broken out of its old circle and habits of thought, and set out on a course which is clear enough in its main outlines, though incomplete, lacking in theoretical depth, and suffering from the opacities of the present complex stage of capitalist and world developments.

Which are the most basic and lasting currents in world processes and politics is not something to dogmatise about, but I have the feeling that the next few years, and fairly certainly the 70’s are likely to crystallise things again after the present period of ‘solution’ or ‘fluidity’. All sorts of new movements, political formations and theoretical developments are possible, probably very different from the past.

Some see in this present stage the dissolution of ‘a way of life’ and the overturning of ‘all that we hold dear’, with catastrophe as the inevitable outcome of such a course. There are even not a few others on the left who from a pro-Chinese, ‘new left’ or nihilist position also want to confine thought in (somewhat different) closed circles. But we feel that what we hold dear are our ideals for the future development of society into a fundamentally more human state than exists anywhere at present. That this requires revolution in capitalist society and far-reaching change in most existing socialist societies we have no doubt. And we believe that this cannot be accomplished without considerable theoretical development and powerful practical action — to which we will contribute all we are capable of.