strategy for socialist revolution

brian aarons

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This article attempts to deal theoretically with the essential components and aspects of a socialist strategy and to apply these principles to Australian circumstances. It is hoped to take up some of the more fundamental theoretical questions and more specific analyses and examples in a future article.

* * * * *

"Attention, therefore, must be devoted principally to raising the workers to the level of revolutionaries; it is not at all our task to descend to the level of the working masses as the Economists wish to do, or to the level of the 'average worker' as Svoboda desires to do .........."


Any revolutionary strategy which is not just a collection of abstract formulae must contain five main elements:

1. A theory about society and social change: a view about how changes occur in society, how they might occur in a particular society, how and in what conditions ruling classes are overthrown.

2. A political theory: a conception and view of politics which guides the day-to-day political practice of a party, its cadres and members.

3. An analysis of the specific society: for a revolutionary, both elements of this analysis -- the present situation and the likely future course of events -- are essential.
4. A conception (model) of the socialist society aimed for: only by a clear view of the ultimate goal of political involvement and struggle can a revolutionary movement orient its struggles and see the relation of its political practice to the given circumstances in which it works. The type of socialist society aimed for affects the strategy and practice adopted.

5. A plan of action: based on the above four elements, any revolutionary party must have a plan which guides its work, sets its priorities and gives it a yardstick by which to measure and assess its work. The plan is the strategy proper, but without the framework and analyses provided by the first four points, it means little.

All five elements are essential to, and together make up, a revolutionary strategy. In general, incorrect or inadequate strategies are characterised by omission of one or more of the above elements, by exaggerated emphasis on one or some of them and/or outright errors on one or more points.

The essence of the revolutionary strategy elaborated by the CPA over the last seven years can be expressed as follows:

"Counter-hegemony plus the possibility of (and preparation for) a revolutionary situation."

This (admittedly over-simplified) formula sums up the two essential aspects of the revolutionary process on which a revolutionary party must base itself. If either aspect is ignored or down-graded, a party falls into either idealist (or gradualist) propagandising or leftist posturing.

"Counter-hegemony" expresses the subjective aspect of the revolutionary process: the necessity for mass preparation by winning people to an alternative view of the world for which they are prepared to fight because of their discontent with the existing state of affairs. Only if a basic core force has been won to this socialist world view, and only if this world view has achieved some mass standing, will the revolutionary movement be able to utilise a crisis and win vast numbers to its program for resolving the crisis.

"The possibility of a revolutionary situation" expresses the objective aspect: the need for a sharp social crisis before the possibility of the overthrow of the capitalist class can be opened up, and the transition to socialism accomplished. Against those who in essence deny the possibility of such crises, and/or the possibility of turning them into revolutionary situations by a favourable balance of forces plus correct revolutionary intervention, we declare that such crises are both possible and essential for the transition to socialism to occur.

The manner in which such a crisis may occur cannot of course be specified, but "spontaneous" mass upsurges as in France in May 1968, or capitalist challenge to a "peacefully" elected left government are possible forms.

The combination of the two parts of this formula is as essential as each part, and should be seen in a dialectical and dynamic way, not as a static sum. What this means is that the two elements interact with each other, e.g. counter-hegemonic work helps to decide whether and how a social crisis develops.

[The socialist traditions of the French workers was an important factor in their response to the student demonstrations and the one-day general strike on May 13, 1968.]

Moreover, the relative importance of each varies with time and the given circumstances. Clearly, a revolutionary party in conditions such as the present has as its main aim counter-hegemonic work to build a mass base of support. If we act as if we already had such a base, and rely on a coming crisis, we commit a dangerous error.

Examining the five elements in more detail:

1. "To say, however, that ideologists (i.e. politically conscious leaders) cannot divert the movement from the path determined by the interaction of environment and elements is to ignore the simple truth that the conscious element participates in this interaction and in the determination of the path."

The formula “counter-hegemony plus the possibility of a revolutionary situation” bases itself on a view of the social process which recognises two aspects and components of social development: the “spontaneous” and the “conscious”. Much could be written about the definitions of, differences between and inter-relations of these two aspects, and I will elaborate in more detail on these points in a future article.

Briefly, the “spontaneous” means the more “objective” aspects of the political-social process: those processes and events which occur independent of the wishes and thinking of particular social groups (e.g. classes and parties).

What is spontaneous from one point of view is not necessarily spontaneous from another. As far as the CPA (say) is concerned, there are clearly many events which occur in our society independent of what we may wish or desire. These are “objective” processes from our point of view. On the other hand, many of these events are the product of the interactions between the conscious or unconscious wishes and intentions of various individuals and groups (in which, as Engels pointed out in his Letter to Bloch, no one person or group ever gets quite what they wanted, and may in fact achieve the opposite of what they intended). Insofar as this is the case, the given events have a “subjective” i.e. “conscious” component.

The more unconscious motivations decide the events, the more the “objective” aspect intrudes. This is also the case with the intervention of rules of behaviour enforced or promoted by society at large and the very underlying logic of the system.

The revolutionary party consciously intervenes, on the basis of its theory, program and strategy in the ongoing flow of “objective” (to it) social events. From time to time, the oppressed classes and strata will act “spontaneously” from the party’s viewpoint. In the new situation presented by the occurrence of “spontaneous” mass actions (or they may be “objective” economic events, or conscious actions, taken by the ruling class, governments, or other political parties), the party can choose to intervene in various ways. It is the nature and quality of its intervention which are the conscious element in the revolutionary process. The degree to which the actions proposed by the party are taken up by vast masses determines how effective and influential its conscious intervention will be to the subsequent course of events.

The counter-hegemonic/conscious aspect of revolutionary work also becomes, via mass agitation and propaganda, a part of the spontaneous/objective aspect because the nature, quality and influence of this propaganda and agitation will, in fact, play a part in determining the future course of “spontaneous” events. The “sowing” of revolutionary ideas, if they fall on fertile ground (and they will only do so if they express and tap in action people’s felt needs and wishes) will always be a useful activity which will often only show its results in unexpected “spontaneous” actions. Continual revolutionary mass work over a long period of time “leavens” the social ferment and thereby plays its own part in the bringing about of spontaneous upsurges.

The “possibility of a revolutionary situation” relates to the “objective” (“spontaneous”) aspect. It expresses a belief that the objective processes of capitalism are based on an underlying logic and dynamics which regularly impels the system towards objective crises of various kinds (economic, political, ideological, ecological, etc.). The occurrence of these “objective” crises make possible a corresponding “subjective” crisis, i.e. a “spontaneous” upsurge of vast masses of people. This possibility clearly relies on an analysis of the fundamental contradictions and “injustices” of the capitalist system (see point 3). It is the existence of these (due to the logic and dynamic of the system, which also includes its inability to deal fundamentally with its problems) which make it quite rational and “scientific” to conclude that such crises and upsurges are possible and likely.

This view of social change differs from that implicit in both rightist and leftist strategies. Unlike the former it teaches the revolutionary activist to expect the unexpected (i.e. crises and abrupt changes of mass consciousness); unlike the latter it teaches us not to rely on these alone, but to patiently prepare by working for shifts, no matter how small, in mass opinion, by participating with the oppressed in the experience of struggle according to the possibilities at the time.

Behind both “leftism” and “rightism” lie the same mistake: a failure to see the role of the “conscious element” (i.e. the
interaction of a revolutionary force with clear aims) as a necessary ingredient in the revolutionary process. This mistake is approached from different sides, but a common theoretical (mis)conception underlies both: a dissociation of the final socialist objective from the daily struggle. The rightist does not believe it possible to “consciously intervene” in the daily struggle from the perspective of the final goal; the leftist does not believe it necessary to do so. [For a further discussion see the Editorial Comment, ALR No. 35]

2. “In one word it (Revolutionary Social-Democracy) subordinates the struggle for reforms to the revolutionary struggle for freedom and for Socialism, as a part to the whole.”


The key feature of the above theory is that it sees revolution as a process. It starts from the given situation, but acts on that situation from the perspective of its final goal. Unlike the ultra-left, it does not have an “all or nothing” approach but sees the importance of winning positions in all areas and branches of society by “daily slogging”. But unlike the “right”, it does not confine itself to reformist movements and demands until the “great day” of an easy socialist victory arrives by itself, but seeks always to contest capitalist society in all its aspects. This means that a key criterion of revolutionary work is how effectively it shakes the existing ideological and social order. This approach does not bow down before numbers -- its aim is always to involve vast numbers, but not just on any demands. From a socialist perspective it seeks always to find, by concrete analysis and involvement in the mass movement, the demands which both articulate a deeply felt need (even if only amongst a small section) and project further than the existing level of consciousness and action. The Moratorium, the Women’s Liberation Movement, the Springbok campaign, and the Builders’ Laborers all illustrate this principle very well.

Political methods and approaches following from this strategy and guiding daily political activity include:

a) The main focus is on raising the consciousness and awareness of masses. All political activities (e.g. the contesting and winning of union positions) should be seen as means to this end, not ends in themselves. Therefore, the criterion for genuinely revolutionary work is whether it attempts to advance mass consciousness to the best level possible in the given circumstances (and naturally what is to be regarded as possible must be concretely analysed in each case -- but the analysis must include the role of the revolutionary forces).

b) An important tactical principle is to “push back the limits of the possible” [Gorz] to show that change is possible and what the conditions are for achieving change. And it is important to realise that what is possible and what is not cannot be predicted in advance with any certainty. Anyone who knows what the workers and people think will realise that the formulas and prescriptions of the left grouplets about what “must” be done are so much hot air. But those who exaggerate the low mass level, and are afraid to advance propositions and forms of action which might not find mass acceptance very quickly lapse into reformist and conservative methods of work. Between left adventurism and conservatism there is a lot of ground, in which it is possible to seek advanced action and raise advanced demands and ideas, yet still preserve a mass position whether these ideas and actions always succeed or not.

c) The political role of a revolutionary movement must be to pose and fight for the total alternative to the wrongs and injustices of the existing system and as the pole of attraction for all those discontented with the existing order.

d) We recognise the seeming “paradox” of revolutionary politics: revolutionaries need to be involved in partial and reforming movements in non-revolutionary periods precisely in order to be in the best position to influence masses in a revolutionary direction during more opportune periods. (And also because we support reforms which benefit people, because we stand for, and should be seen to stand for, a better life for the oppressed).

e) To overcome this paradox we attempt to find and raise transitional demands in the mass movements: i.e. demands which tap the deepest problems of capitalism, which seem “just” and reasonable in a reformist context yet which the system finds it very difficult to contain.
f) We reject the assumption common to much communist work in the past, that the biggest movements are necessarily mobilised by the “broadest”, lowest common denominator demands. In specific circumstances this may be the case, and a concrete analysis may lead us to mobilise such movements around such demands. But on the whole recent experience indicates that the biggest movements are often mobilised around advanced demands and advanced forms of action. [The Moratorium and Springbok campaigns are examples]. Why? Because if the demands express a real mass feeling (a necessary condition) then radical forms of action which are seen to be effective will often have more appeal than forms which are seen to be of limited effectiveness. [Thus the Moratorium occupation of the streets was seen to be more effective, and therefore worthwhile, than a week-end or evening march.]

g) It is not always true that the biggest actions are the best. There is room and necessity for advanced actions by conscious forces alongside the broader mass movement, and an advanced action by a small group of workers (such as a work-in, an occupation or whatever) must be valued for the experience it gives them, within limits irrespective of the attitude of other workers.

h) We value above all those movements, small or large, which are a challenge to the existing order. The aims and demands of a movement, so long as it involves people in addition to the existing revolutionary movement, may be as important as the numbers involved. The essential thing is the type of experience it gives those involved, and the likely future consequences. A work-in of 20 workers may actually contribute more to the building of the revolutionary movement and the spreading of socialist and radical ideas (remembering that those 20 workers will transmit their experiences and ideas to others) than a routine strike for more pay by thousands.

i) It is important to grasp that immediate success and popularity are not the only indicators of correct revolutionary work. “Failure” as viewed from an immediate perspective may be success in the longer term. It is often better to take things further, raise radically new ideas, whether this gains a favourable response or not, than to simply tell people what they are used to hearing and already know.

j) All the above is predicated on a sensible approach to mass revolutionary politics, based on a grasp of the correct methods for attracting support and interest rather than repelling it. The art of how to put ideas across is important, and distinguishes a revolutionary approach from a sectarian one, which shouts slogans at people (whether the context is appropriate or not) rather than explaining ideas to them on the basis of their own experience.

k) All revolutionary political methods are relative to time, place and circumstance. And there are two general conditions which “set the background” for a given practice: the “politics of the given period” and the “politics of the sharp turn”.

The first expresses the necessity to establish the general trend of the given period, in both its long-term and short-term aspects. Is the given period one in which offensive or defensive methods are applicable, and on a short or long term basis? Is the revolutionary movement on the ebb (or flow), or is capitalism?

The second expresses the necessity to be ready to switch abruptly from the politics appropriate to one period and set of circumstances to that of another, when the circumstances themselves change.

Each of these, of course, relies on a concrete analysis of the short and long term trends of the given period. This leads to the next point.

3. The analysis of the given social conditions and the underlying dynamics determining their direction of evolution and change is essential to a revolutionary politics which is concerned with an effective intervention in real history. The (relative) validity and all-sidedness of the analysis are as important as the fact of doing it. Those “marxists” with a wrong, or one-sided, incomplete analysis may be as dangerous and ineffectual as utopians and idealists who proceed from what they wish, not from a political interaction with the real forces of history and society.

In general, the contradictions and injustices of capitalist society throw up mass movements in various spheres in response to a particular type or example of oppression. Each
of these develops its own analysis of what’s wrong with society, and almost invariably this analysis reflects and grasps only the particular oppression and injustice with which the movement is concerned. It is the task of revolutionary socialism to understand each example in its own right, to understand the deeper causes of the oppression and the changes in the ideology, structures and values of society necessary to remove that oppression. It is also its task to relate the particular oppression to the sum total of oppression, to bring an understanding of the particular movement to the general movement, and of the general movement to the activists of each particular one. This can only be done by an all-sided and deep analysis and understanding of the social formation and social conditions, and in particular of the important and determining dynamics.

So to provide the most effective basis for revolutionary activity, the analysis must grasp all aspects of the crisis of capitalism and also bring out the main sources and springs of the crisis and of the various movements which spring up in response to it.

There are three main areas of the analysis:

a) The general features of capitalist development common to all advanced capitalist countries

b) The particular features of the given capitalist society

c) The specific political situation and context in which a particular revolutionary movement works.

In the space available, it is possible only to make a number of key points. [The documents of the last three CPA Congresses make these and other points in a more extended way and are worthy of study. Some of the points below (particularly the scientific-technological revolution) are also dealt with in a more extensive way by Eric Aarons in an article on socialist strategy in ALR No. 4, 1969.]

a) Worldwide capitalist development since the war has been marked by these features:

* The transition from “monopoly capitalism” to what is variously called state monopoly capitalism, neo-capitalism, late capitalism, post-scarcity or post-industrial society. This has been marked by a qualitatively new level, and

ew new forms of state intervention in the economy and social life generally, as an overall planning and co-ordinating centre. The state rises above the separate capitalist interests precisely to serve each and everyone the better.

* State intervention and the reorganisation of the structural features of capitalist economy and society, are a necessary strategy for the system to maintain itself against the contradictions, imbalances and centrifugal forces (economic, social, cultural and psychological) which threaten to blow it apart. Developing as a necessary adjunct to this intervention has been the increasingly sophisticated use of “social engineering” tools by economists, psychologists and social scientists who “plan for profit” and serve the interests of capital rather than of people.

* The scientific and technological revolution which has had an enormous impact on both economic and social features of industrial society. Science (basic research, applied science, technology) has become an essential factor in production and all related spheres of social life (and many others as well). Not only has this impacted the growth and development of the economy (above all by making necessary a change in the human factor in production) but it has also changed many other aspects of social life which will have an important bearing on future developments and changes. For instance, one can point to the communications revolution, made possible by scientific and technical developments in electronics, which has wrought massive changes in the forms and types of information exchange with many consequences, one of which is the ability of the capitalist controllers to manipulate mass opinion and emotions via the mass media.

* The realisation, due to economic growth and the scientific-technological revolution, of the potential to produce material abundance for all. Alongside this goes continued unequal distribution of wealth and the domination of “consumerist” priorities which operate in the interests of profit, not real social needs. The contradiction between the possibility of abundance for all and the glaring inequalities of wealth, not to speak of
the ecological and social consequences of wasteful production and consumption in many areas, is one of the major ideological problems for neo-capitalism.

* The process of profit-oriented and profit-motivated growth has produced also a major unexpected “side-effect” which is assuming increasing importance: the ecological-environmental crisis. Capitalism is unwilling, and probably unable, to do anything basic to solve this crisis, since it is incapable of planning except in the interests of profit. The crisis has both an objective aspect (since society ultimately depends on nature for its existence and well-being) and a subjective aspect (since people are beginning to mobilise against environmental destruction, growth and planning for profit, and for a better quality of life and selected growth based on human needs).

* In the last decade there have appeared increasing tendencies for an authoritarian “counter-revolution” to preserve the system against the objective and subjective developments which threaten it. From the coup in Greece to the Watergate tragi-comedy, the growth of repressive, authoritarian and “undemocratic” methods are symptoms of a developing crisis which can only be staved off by increasing control over all aspects of social life. The bourgeoisie always prefers to rule in a “democratic” way; the fact that it finds this more difficult as time goes on is an indication that its manoeuvre space is decreasing. This tendency also makes all struggle for “democratic” and liberation demands an important aspect of the revolutionary dynamic.

All the above developments and many more, are indications that the post-war period of capitalist expansion and consolidation is drawing to a close and has been replaced by a period of maturing crisis on all fronts. The evidence for this lies not only in “objective” analysis, but also in the growth of mass movements and struggles over a host of issues and demands.

If we are to influence these movements in a revolutionary direction we must understand two things: the fact of developing crisis for capitalism, and the main features and extent of that crisis; and the essential content of each of the movements.

The first point provides us with a general strategic orientation: whether the crisis matures slowly for quite some time or has major effects more quickly, our political practice, methods of work and habits of thought have to be attuned to the fact that the present period is characterised by problems for capitalism and growth of the revolutionary and radical forces, not vice versa.

The second point shows the need for a concrete analysis of the main features of this crisis and of the movements which have sprung up in response to it, if the revolutionary forces are to have their maximum impact.

b) The main general features of Australian capitalism is that while it exhibits all the objective and subjective trends and contradictions common to advanced capitalist countries it does so in a hitherto muted way.

Economically, Australian capitalism has been able to provide a relatively high standard of living. Australia was one of the last countries to be affected by inflation and the monetary crisis, and levels of unemployment are still very low.

Australia has never experienced (except for the depression) a severe social crisis, such as war on its territory, which would have shaken the hold of capitalist hegemony on a section of the Australian workers.

Basically, the Australian ruling class has had the ability and manoeuvre space to make concessions and introduce reforms in order to head off a more basic challenge by movements demanding change.

Australia shares many of the economic-social-cultural-political features common to other Anglo-Saxon nations. The rise of Britain as the world’s first capitalist power and its ability to conquer territories rich in natural resources led to economic might and wellbeing for it, and also the implantation of economically and technically developed societies in very favourable natural environments (USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand). This combination produced circumstances of relatively high living standards and a consequent tendency for the class struggle to take reformist forms, even where there was a high degree of militancy. Important also are the culture and traditions of the working class movement, passed on from the British and developing in the favourable circumstances. These traditions are dominated by reformism.
c) The specific political situation in which the Australian revolutionary socialist movement has to work is the product of the above historical and contemporary factors. The concrete application of strategic and tactical principles must proceed from the given situation, and its historical roots if a clear plan and a viable practice are to emerge.

It is no use relying on the experiences and methods of parties and groups which work in different types of societies or in different circumstances. The methods appropriate to a party which already has a large mass base will not apply directly to one which does not, and the immediate tasks will therefore be different.

The specific situation faced by the communists in Australia is one in which the stability of Australian capitalism has now become subject to the same de-stabilising forces as other advanced capitalist societies: inflation, monetary crisis (through the effects of the integrated world economy which has, and will increasingly impact local developments), the necessity to introduce OECD-type planning, and the growth of mass movements posing challenges to capitalist society on a number of levels. It is also one where there is virtually complete domination of capitalist ideology in either its conservative or reformist variants. Naturally, it is very important to distinguish between reactionary-conservative ideas and reformist ideas, for the latter express a desire on the part of workers and others for an improvement in their conditions, which at this stage they believe can be obtained within the system. Some left-reformist ideas do pose a challenge to capitalist rule, and there are sections of the working class where these ideas are strong. There is also some support for socialism. However, the fact must be faced that conservatism (i.e. outright support for capitalism) commands the support of roughly half the population and reformism commands most of the other half.

Thus the ideas of socialism and of the need for a profound social transformation have to be argued for (and demonstrated in action) from the ground up. This has to be done at two levels: the advanced and the "popular". A "base" of convinced and active support for socialism (and specifically for the program, strategy and policies of the CPA) has to be won amongst the activists and militants of the workers' and women's movements and of all the other liberation, radical and progressive movements. This first step of winning some active forces is very important in our present situation, and would pay big dividends in the long run in terms of mass connections and the ability to transmit ideas and policies to wider audiences. Parallel with this attempt to win an active force must be a concerted effort to popularise the ideas of socialism and the policies of the CPA.

Alongside this immediate task must be the preparation of the party and the revolutionary forces for abrupt changes in the political situation, either generally or in one sector (strong and deep-going action may be taken in a given sector by workers who are generally under reformist influence). Without this preparedness to intervene in any sphere at every opportunity, large or small, the history of the movement will be one of lost opportunities.

While never ceasing this counter-hegemonic and preparatory work, whose strategic aim is always to "push back the limits of the possible" within the given situation (no matter how unfavourable this may be or seem to be), a revolutionary party must also be prepared to await the maturing of more favourable conditions before it can come fully into its own and the full fruit of its work be judged.

The specific political situation of the CPA also includes the facts of its own history, with all the strengths and weaknesses that has left us. Unlike other revolutionary groups our history has given us a mass base of sorts and a real influence in the workers' movement. On the other hand, it has left us with the legacy of past mistakes, by far the worst of which is the identification with Stalinism and with the faults of the socialist-based nations. This is a very real problem (and whatever may say, the fact is that events such as persecution of Soviet dissidents do concern the "average worker").

This question is of great importance to us especially because of the democratic traditions of the Australian working class. Our culture and politics make the issue of socialist democracy a crucial one. There is a further reason for its importance. For whatever reasons (and I believe these were more in the nature of objective difficulties than in the subjective errors of the party) the CPA never
broke through to political hegemony over a section of the working class. This fact of history means that we are a small revolutionary party, with limited resources and limited political audience. It is therefore easy for political opponents to misrepresent our position, and doubly necessary for us to seize every opportunity to make our position crystal clear (As indeed on all issues of concern to people). This leads on to the next point.

4. It is not possible here to expand at length about the relation between our "model" of socialism and our strategy and political work. However, four points should be made:

* The majority of those who want social change today will not be convinced by abstract statements that "socialism will make it better". They will want something more concrete and detailed if they are to be convinced that socialism represents a credible alternative to the ills of capitalism. It is not enough for us to demonstrate the inadequacies of capitalism (most workers and other oppressed strata are well aware of these); we have to show, in discussion and action, that another course is possible.

* This has been made even more necessary by the existence of "negative models". Whatever their positive achievements, the negative features of the socialist-based countries provide convenient anti-symbols for capitalist ideologues and propagandists. There can be little doubt that this has had a devastating effect on the socialist cause in the advanced capitalist nations.

* Elaboration of the model of socialism is essential for a counter-hegemonic strategy. Great emphasis must be placed on the dissemination and popularisation of the socialist alternative to all aspects of capitalist society. However, this alternative will not be accepted simply by argumentation, debate and discussion (although these are more important than many allow). Its very strength depends to a large degree on the extent to which it links up with the everyday experience of people – that is, the extent to which it explains their problems and offers a convincing alternative in such a way that inchoate feelings, thoughts and wishes crystallise and are understood when socialist ideas are put.

* Finally, the model of socialism should express the real as well as the ideal. That is, not only should it express the ideals we strive for, but it should also express real possibilities and tendencies of development. We stand for a self-managed socialism not simply because we think that would best suit the interests and needs of the vast majority. We believe it also expresses the "objective needs" of advanced industrial society and the subjective wishes and desires of people who strive for liberation. Self-management and its associated transitional concept of workers' control express real desires as shown in the real events of our time.

5. On the basis of all the above considerations, it is necessary for a serious revolutionary party to establish a political and organisational plan. As already stressed, this must aim to connect the goals and aims of the party to the given situation and existing struggles. It is sheer wishful thinking to evolve plans which would be more appropriate for mass parties with a large following – the plans must be based on what is "possible" (in the revolutionary sense of the word) in the given conditions. The plan must also see clearly the stages which have to be passed through on the road to a mass revolutionary party, and state the tasks appropriate to each stage.
At this stage, the central concern of the plan must be to establish the CPA as a political force. The present strengths of the party lie in it being an industrial and “movement” party, involved in and connected with all significant class and radical struggles. But it is not a political force in the sense of having mass support for its political program. Hence the main immediate task is to enter into mass activity with the aim not only of raising advanced ideas and “transitional” demands where possible, but also with the aim of popularising the CPA’s socialist policies and program.

It goes without saying that a prior condition for doing this is the developing of policies and a program which express the basis of counter-hegemony in all spheres and aspects of social life. Without these the party is politically unarmed and has little to offer apart from its (admittedly important and essential) practical guidance to the movements. Such policies can only be developed by close involvement in struggle, but they must be developed if the most is to be made of such involvement.

Once the party possesses a clear program and concrete policies, it becomes possible to make our mass connections mean something, and it gives party activists a basis and a perspective from which to work to establish the party as a political force.

The main areas of strategic importance in which such policies should be developed include:

* Economic questions -- a socialist economic policy
* Ecology-environment
* Women’s liberation and the whole spectrum of sexual and interpersonal relationships
* Anti-racism
* The distribution of power and control, and relations of authority and domination in society
* Health, seen as the total well-being of the individual
* Education and the production and dissemination of information (including the mass media).

Furthermore, attention must be given to encouraging the development of movements which express broad and challenging demands, and which link together various sectors of the working class and radical movements. This will not be easy, for the tendency to single-issue and particularist movements is strong, and revolutionaries must be involved in all these. But there has to be a strategic perspective of developing such movements.

The question of attitude to the Labor Government is evidently involved in all these issues singly, and as a whole. The only point I wish to make here is that our approach to it in general and over particular issues and events must stem from our policies and perspectives, not from a strategic concern to preserve the Labor Government at all costs. For instance, in the struggle over health policies, it would be far better if the CPA had its own socialist health policy with which to enter the debate, then from that perspective it could defend Labor’s policy against attacks from the right while advancing its own alternatives as best of all. This is the essence of a counter-hegemonic strategy as opposed to a pragmatic one. Nor is general reference to a “socialist health policy”, nationalised medicine, drug companies, etc. adequate -- any more than “equal pay” etc. is an adequate expression of a socialist attitude to the liberation of women. It must be a penetrating in-depth analysis.

On the organisational level, it is clear that our main task is to build the party quantitatively and qualitatively. Thus, much attention must be paid to winning the conscious and advanced activists. In the present situation it is worth paying a deal of attention to this task, as every recruit is a valuable addition towards the construction of a basic “force” without which our political work cannot be carried out.

In all ways, the present period should be seen as one in which the revolutionary forces are laying a foundation and building a base from which to work in the event of more favourable circumstances. Our political methods are based also on the belief that the power of capitalism is on the decline and that the revolutionary movement is once more on the upsurge, after a long period of decline. It would be a tragic mistake to either misread this tendency of the coming period or to jump the stage of our immediate tasks.