THE 1966 general election was hardly a turning point for the left in Australia. The results confirmed that an era, a stage begun in the 1890's, is at an end. The socialist movement has been at the crossroads for some time but it can hardly delay choosing its future path very much longer. What is perhaps clearer as a result of the elections is that one apparent way forward—the restatement of the best of Australian labor movement traditions without taking into account present day reality—does not exist. The exponents of this point of view from the Trade Union Defence Committee to Mr. Chamberlain have shown their sincerity and principle, but have not shown that progress can realistically be made from their position. The fighting stand on a left Australian Labor Party platform, seen often by socialists as the way to win elections, has been tried and found not successful.

The old argument that “the swinging vote can be won when the labor movement is united actively and vigorously campaigning on a policy which constitutes a clear challenge to the Liberals” (L. Aarons: Labor Movement at the Crossroads, p.19) has come out a bit damaged. But maybe such a viewpoint takes for granted a static class position, and one of the statements which underpins this tactical claim—“by and large, Australia’s 1,900,000 industrial workers are solid, thick-and-thin voters for the Labor Party”—is no longer obviously true.

Of course, it may be said that winning elections is not the only purpose of those wanting social change; the platform on which the elections are won is even more important. On the other hand social changes are brought about by the action of large numbers of people. The important analysis is one which looks at
the policies, voting, and movements in the elections from the viewpoint of how immediate and long-term reforms are to be brought about. The controllers of the mass media, with the support of the right in the labor movement, are setting about the formation of a modern ALP which may well help solve some of the problems of capitalism as the Wilson Government seems to be doing in England; but this is worthless to socialists.

Detailed studies of the voting have yet to be made, but the developments in Victoria on a gross scale seem clear enough. The ALP vote in general was down. The seat lost, Lalor, showed a marked drop in the labor vote in the working class areas of the western suburbs of Melbourne. There was a Liberal absolute majority for the first time in Bruce which includes large working class areas, in some of which the Liberal member topped the poll, again for the first time. The new party, the Liberal Reform Group, polled surprisingly well, and polled better in “middle-class” electorates such as Latrobe, than in the more working-class areas of Corio, Lalor and Batman. The seat of Yarra, held by Dr. Cairns, contains two state seats one of which is blue-ribbon ALP and the other is Liberal held. There was a small increase in the ALP vote in the Liberal area; and a large decline in the industrial working-class districts. Of course these are trends only. The old industrial suburbs are still predominantly Labor-voting, the non-industrial and most newer suburbs Liberal. To the trends shown by the figures can be added the observations of many actively interested in politics of two marked movements among voters. In the universities, schools, and among the intelligentsia generally there appeared to be a swing against the government; some who had voted Liberal for years before were voting Labor particularly on the issues of conscription and Vietnam. On the other hand a swing away from Labor was apparent in the factories and on the building jobs.

Voting trends may be of little significance, often being influenced by quite temporary factors—some commentators have chosen Mr. Calwell’s age as a vital factor. The trend in this case is significant because it supports what would be expected from a marxist analysis. The classic formulation of Karl Marx, that “social being determines consciousness” is not the same as one sometimes assumed, “that relationship to the means of production determines consciousness.” The social being of members of the working class includes more than the relationships associated with work. Leisure-time relationships do not necessarily, and in fact at present do not, reinforce the ideology which could be expected to arise from work relationships. The changes coincide with the shift in emphasis from production to salesmanship, and the growth of the mass media. To work out in detail the influences which have led to
the weakening of the old class consciousness of the industrial workers and the direction which new forms of thought will take will be a difficult task. It is sufficient for the moment to see that this destruction is theoretically inevitable, and in practice is occurring. To build one's hopes for socialism on expectations of the industrial working class acting according to some classical statements is as utopian as the views of those early socialists who hoped to persuade the wealthy of the correctness of their plans for social ownership and the redistribution of wealth. This is not to say that the old working class will play no part. It certainly will, even on the score of numbers, although arguments based on the numbers of trade unionists have about as little significance in themselves as the arguments of 80 years ago which were based on the number of peasants in Tsarist Russia.

Fortunately social change is not at an end because of the corrosion of the old working class ideology. As has been said often enough the 1966 election was fought on issues to an extent and with a heat rare in Australia. But as the results showed the vigor of the battle was not reflected in an increased working class consciousness, nor were the contending classes in the main those on the battlefields of yesteryear. The issue of conscription and of aggression against a small and freedom seeking nation were primarily issues of individualism, of the rights of individuals to decide whether or not they should kill or be killed, of how far a government has the right to dispose of its citizens, of whether other individuals regardless of the color of their skins, of their ideologies also have the right to live. A friendly critic some months ago criticised the Communist Party pamphlet on Vietnam for its failure to put the struggle of the Vietnamese in the context of the world revolutionary struggle, instead of which it emphasised the national independence struggle and the patriotism of the people. This critic was basing himself on a working-class outlook. Politically it is more sensible and opportune to take the line of the CPA pamphlet, but maybe we should also be looking at why the line of working-class internationalism and solidarity is no longer so strongly stressed.

It is time to look at the characteristics of the ideology of the intelligentsia, which is growing in numbers and has already as a group shown its opposition to the ruling class policies on more than one issue. The questions which interest us are of course as to what basis there is for anti-capitalism to be developed, and what form of social system is in line with the ideology of this class. The viewpoint and actions of Bill White, the anti-conscription hero, are typical of the views of the members of the social group which is now the government's main concern. At his final and successful appeal against conscription Bill White said, "people are responsible
for suffering and must accept the responsibility for it . . . No matter what part you take in the war, you are still responsible for your actions in participating." The theme of individual responsibility, a respect for the humanity of others, a refusal to hand over one's moral obligations or power to make decisions to another, is characteristic.

The ideology arises from the style of life of the group, where decisions must be made on the basis of knowledge and not on the basis of authority, where what is correct cannot be determined by the machine, the public service regulations, history or the organisation. The ideology is not that of the old-style industrial worker nor of the familiar public servant or white collar worker although it is not necessarily in contradiction with either. It is that of the highly and flexibly skilled person, most strongly at present represented in university trained workers but now developing on a larger scale as teachers' colleges, technical colleges and other institutions have abandoned the training by rule of the old apprenticeship styles. While as a percentage of the work force this class (or stratum) holds only a minor position it is rapidly growing. Just as in the days when the working class was setting the pattern its ideology was adopted or imitated by thousands of others, particularly intellectuals, so the viewpoint of the intelligentsia is adopted by many who are formally outside it. In part this is assisted by a practice long adopted by the advertising media of fostering an "individualism" based on the pseudo-choice of various shoddy consumer products.

By various legal means, and better co-ordination of effort, Australia's rulers have managed to reduce the role of the organisations of the working class. They have been assisted by the decline of some of the industries in which the workers were once most militant. Finding that opposition is coming from new sources, more conscious members of the Liberal governments and their extreme right supporters have moved. Thus Brian Dixon, a footballer and a Victorian member of parliament, with the full and cynically given support of the Bulletin's radical-right journalist Brian Buckley, has launched an attack on the Victorian universities, with strong hints at government intervention.

But while it is satisfying from an anti-government point of view to see the development of new militancy, it is not obvious this logically leads to socialism, at least as usually envisaged. To use an example, teachers who oppose bureaucratic and restrictive administration, in their union as well as the department, are not likely to be attracted to the idea of a social system characterised by large centrally administered organisations. Socialism in most countries is still of course at the stage theorised as the dictatorship of the
proletariat, the ruling ideas those of state collective socialism, and ideology appropriate to the working class. While, leaving aside the unnecessary exaggerations and distortions this is perfectly in harmony with marxism since socialism must be based on real social forces, it is not the only form of socialism which is possible.

Marx was not interested in perpetuating the rule of the working class. In his day it was the obvious means by which classes would be abolished. The end of capitalism may be brought about in a different style today. In many ways the ideology of the new opposition has a resemblance to that of the old anarchists, in the emphasis on individualism and the abomination of the rule of authority. Although the resemblance is real it is not complete; authority is not opposed in a destructive manner, but its scope is made narrow. The old anarchism was based upon a social class which was disappearing, that of the individual handicraft workers, in some countries peasants, and recent additions to the industrial working class. Its futility was what could be expected of a class doomed by history. The modern individualist rebel trend is certainly not in this category. It is interesting that in the USA an alliance seems to be developing between the students and the hitherto unorganised working class groups, particularly the Negroes. In Cuba the dictatorial regime was overthrown by an alliance of intellectuals and the very poor, and in which the organised working class played an important but subsidiary role. The alliances and co-operation between progressive groups in Australia will no doubt take forms which are not yet known.

The Soviet Union, or any of the other socialist countries, is not a model socialist state for progressive minded people in the advanced capitalist countries, although its achievements can be respected and admired. Nor is a centralised party which demands a large commitment, in terms of the right to determine policy on behalf of its members over a wide field, the sort of revolutionary party that is needed. Lenin's conception of the party was determined by the conditions of his country, one of which was the need for working class organisation and ideology in a country where the working class was small in size and non-working class influences were great. His ideas of organisation cannot be applied as they stand to a different class structure. While the Communist Party has made many changes in organisation in the last few years, the impression has been that they are pragmatic adaptions not underpinned by new theoretical considerations. The 1966 election will not have been a total loss if the lessons of long term applicability for organisation, policy and the meaning of social change are learnt. New forces for social reform have emerged, and new formulations of socialist ideology, and new conceptions of the unity of progressive forces are required.