Anti-war Perspectives
—A Communist View

PERSPECTIVES for the anti-war movement have to be considered against the background of the perspectives of continuing war and preparations for war by the Australian ruling class and the imperialist system of which it is part. Since the second world war, Australian armed forces have taken part in wars in Korea, Malaya, Vietnam and Indo-China. More or less continuously, Australia has been involved in military operations for 20 years. These have all been imperialist in character and of a specific type—wars fought in Asia, wars fought to maintain colonialism, even if in new forms.

Why is colonialism so important to imperialism? The answer to this question is vital in estimating the future perspectives for the anti-war movement. If colonialism is not decisive for imperialism, then those people may be correct who say “The Vietnam war was an error of judgment, a mistaken policy, by US administrations”. It would be possible for more enlightened administrations to avoid similar mistakes in the future. Indeed, this is official ALP mythology, in which Mr. Whitlam casts himself as the best Australian friend of the United States, a counsellor to the sane, humanitarian part of the US Establishment, which accidentally and with the best of motives somehow slid into the Vietnam morass.

This article’s thesis is that colonialism is essential to imperialism, a condition of the latter’s existence. Since Australia is part of this system, we confront a continuing future of involvement in...
colonial wars and counter-insurgencies. These can be both “other’s” wars and “our own” — a possible war against the developing national liberation movement in New Guinea.

Sukarno once described Dutch imperialism as a giant snake whose head devoured the resources of Indonesia, digesting and shitting them out as gold in Holland. This is a valid description of the world imperialist system which devours an increasing share of the world’s natural and human resources. The United States alone consumes nearly half of the non-socialist world’s raw materials — its oil, its metals, even its food. Japan, West Germany, Britain and a few other capitalist powers together consume most of the rest.

Excretion from this consumption produces pollution, destruction of the environment in the consuming countries. This is punishment for depletion and destruction of the environment in the neo-colonial areas from which resources are extracted mercilessly and with ever-increasing technological skill (as Conzinc-Rio Tinto is doing so efficiently in Bougainville). As though this were not enough, the imperialist powers develop new techniques of war which destroy the environment, as in the defoliation, burning and mass bombing of Vietnam.

Imperialism and exploited countries, as the dialectical opposites within the unity — the capitalist world — have, of course, far more complex relationships. These include export of capital; partial industrialisation of the colonies; political, cultural and ideological relationships. But their sum total, their essence, is an unequal relationship, in which one dominates, the other is oppressed; one profits, the other is exploited. This relationship is vital to one side to imperialism.

Because colonialism is so decisive for imperialism, new forms of colonialism, dependence and exploitation have developed over the past quarter-century. But underlying all these is the same open, naked brute force by which the imperialist system was established and maintained over the last 300 years. And this force is always used, whenever it appears to have a remote chance of success. Forms of this force may vary, from economic pressure, bribery and flattery to coups engineered or utilised by the CIA or its equivalents. The last resort is war, whether declared or not, usually one that begins as a civil war for liberation of the country from a pro-imperialist ruling group.

Since 1945, the struggle between imperialism and its opponents has not ceased. It has been bitter and bloody; it has not ended and gives no sign of ending. Analysing its results is not just a
recital of facile victories for the "progressive forces". The Chinese revolution was victorious, the greatest strategic defeat for imperialism; the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was founded; in Korea, the American armed forces suffered the deep trauma of their first unsuccessful war, foreshadowing the greater blow they have taken and are still taking in Indo-China. In Latin America, Cuba has decisively broken with imperialism; Chile, Bolivia and some other nations are moving towards confrontation of US domination.

As against this, imperialism has also scored successes. Their biggest was Indonesia — others were, for example, Iran, Guatemala, the Congo, Ghana, Brazil, Dominica, and there are others, too. Besides these successes planned and won by imperialism, the anti-imperialist struggle has been affected by the serious differences between the socialist countries, in the international communist movement, and within other anti-imperialist forces also.

Just the same, the world-wide struggle clearly runs against imperialism. This is most dramatically shown in Vietnam, and now the whole of Indo-China, where the United States' extension of the war has only worsened its military-political strategic situation. We have perhaps become too familiar with the amazing truth that all the might of US imperialism cannot win victory in Indo-China. Indeed, the opposite is true; US aggression there has been counter-productive, accentuating all the internal contradictions and antagonisms of American society, including growing moral and political disintegration of the US armed forces in Vietnam.

The astounding fact of the US failure in Indo-China is one of the great realities of world politics today. It is striking proof that the world-wide national liberation revolutions are an irreversible historical feature of our times, affecting the whole course of world development. It is also true that the Vietnamese and Indo-China national revolutionary wars are succeeding only against great odds. Imperialist barbarism, both technologically refined and also directly mediated by a total war policy which differs little from Nazi or Japanese "kill all, burn all" strategy, is inflicting a dreadful cost upon the people. There is no moral difference between Lidice and My Lai; even the inhuman theory of racist superiority is no less strongly operative.

The heroic achievements of the Vietnamese people, their strategic and moral superiority, must not cause any relaxation of action against the war and support for their struggle. It is precisely the imperialist character of the US and its war which leads to the stubborn search for new US strategies and tactics, the latest being the so-called "Vietnamisation". This is an effort...
to reduce US casualties while still searching for victory; it is the latest in a chain of strategies which have had to be discarded. This one, too, will lead to failure; but only given continued and rising world-wide action against the war, in co-ordination with the Vietnamese people’s fight.

Stubborn persistence with aggression in Vietnam cannot be explained only by efforts to “save face”, whether by Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson or Nixon, except insofar as face-saving is understood as essential to maintaining imperialist domination. From this flows the further conclusion that even ultimate defeat in Indo-China will not end the policies that led to the war there. For these, too, are the product of the nature of imperialism, its inner laws of development and its dependence upon world power and capacity to exploit beyond the boundaries of the imperialist powers.

Continuing US reverses in Indo-China have forced an agonising reappraisal of imperialist policy; and not only in the United States. Japan, Britain, Australia and other imperialist countries are also forced to develop new policies. In these, every imperialist power pushes its own interests as well as joining against the threat of revolution. The shape of these policies is already forming. Japanese monopoly capitalism, already embarking upon an economic imperialist expansion, is fast re-militarising. Urged on by the United States, it is searching for political ways of dividing and smashing popular opposition to all-out militarisation, to force through necessary changes in the Constitution.

A new imperialist strategic concept is emerging — the US-Japanese alliance to dominate the Pacific and maintain imperialist influence in Asia. Using Japanese economic power and investment, along with already-established American economic influence and political power, Australia is to be integrated economically and militarily in an imperialist “Pacific Triangle”, Singapore and Malaya are to remain imperialist bases, and military-fascist Indonesia is to be built up as another part of the imperialist chain. The already close economic ties between Britain, Australia and South Africa are to be gradually developed into a political-military alliance, starting with British use of South African naval facilities. Using as a pretext the alleged Soviet “penetration” of the Indian Ocean, the real objective is to hold back the national liberation revolutions in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The hope is to retain within the imperialist system all those countries whose resources and markets are so vital to imperialism.

The Australian ruling class is vitally concerned in these plans, economically and politically as well as ideologically. Gorton’s
puerile posturings at the Singapore Commonwealth Conference are explicable not just because he is a white supremacist, fearful of the colonial races. This is certainly true, but the causes lie deeper, in the nature of monopoly-capitalist Australia. Australia is an industrialised capitalist country; it is a colonial power and it also has imperialist economic aims (while at the same time it is dependent upon the vastly more powerful Japanese and American capitalisms) Australian capitalism's economic and political aims have inevitably developed in the context of Oceania and Asia; they also have inevitable limitations of economic, political and military power. These have produced a specific Australian ruling class ideology — racist, at once fearful and arrogant, and always dependent upon a great imperialist power.

It is this dependence which has already led Australia into wars and aggression in Asia; it has caused a wasteful and inflationary military expenditure which amounts to some five thousand million dollars over the past 20 years. This dependence has resulted in establishment of secret American military bases directly connected with aggressive war plans. It has reduced Australia's already very limited capacity for independent initiative in foreign policy, preventing, for example, recognition of the People's Republic of China. In 1964, this theory of dependence brought the Menzies Government to the decision to intervene in Vietnam, first reintroducing conscription to get the force needed. This decision, announced in 1965, was made quite blithely, without any forebodings of its results — because it seemed absurd to think of anything but an easy victory once the United States was going all-out.

From that fateful decision has come a purposeful move towards militarisation of Australian society, towards increased authoritarianism and repression of opposition. The point is that this militarisation and this repression are not accidental, but the result both of the general ideology and deliberate policy of the Liberal-Country Party Government. Not that the government expected the opposition they got, to which their authoritarianism is the classical response. Nor, for that matter, did most activists in the anti-war movement expect as much either, when they began the first demonstrations and propaganda activity against the Vietnam war and conscription.

The anti-war movement has come a long way since 1965; yet it still has its main task ahead. This is true of the Vietnam war, whose impact transformed the existing peace movement into the more militant anti-war movement which opposes not the general threat of war and nuclear weapons, but a particular war in
which its own government is accomplice and participant. Yet the war and the killing still go on, and even beyond Vietnam the pattern of a continuing imperialist strategy is emerging more clearly. The anti-war movement is a response to this imperialist strategy, and its breadth and vigour is an encouraging fact of Australian political reality in a country where consciousness about imperialism is neither high nor widespread.

The character of this anti-war movement needs sober analysis and thought, if its immediate and future tasks are to be tackled and fulfilled. It is a coalition of social classes and political trends. Its main mass base is among students and youth, but it also draws important forces from industrial and white collar workers, from middle and even upper class groupings. Co-existing within the coalition, co-operating in big actions like the Moratorium campaigns, are different political and ideological trends. Along with Christian and other pacifism, there are various revolutionary marxist tendencies, and there is also a strong liberal-bourgeois influence. Labor Party activists, left and centre, are involved in the movement, and so are those of the Australia Party. There are communists, maoists, trotskyites, anarchists and libertarians. All of these contribute, in varying degrees, to the organisational and propaganda work of the movement; all bring their ideas into the movement and seek to influence its actions.

This diversity of ideas and influences give the movement its breadth and its strength and its new quality as a vigorous, democratic and genuinely non-exclusive movement. Diversity also raises problems and issues of great importance for the movement’s future, which needs to be examined and resolved in the course of action. The following are views on some of these questions.

The anti-war movement must be broad and non-exclusive.

In its very nature, which is its strength, the anti-war movement must be open to all who oppose war and its consequences. The motivations for this opposition may be (and are) varied, ranging from those who are opposed to all wars in principle (and this means to national liberation wars, too); to those who are opposed only to imperialist wars; those who think that the US war in Vietnam is just a mistake in policy, an aberration inconsistent with the rest of American foreign policy. All these views have a place in the movement—objectively, since they are actually there, and also subjectively, since they can play a part in the struggle against the actual war policy of the government. It should also be added that people holding different views are also capable of changing them under the impact of experience and
action. This has in fact happened; the movement has reached new levels of understanding and broad consensus about attitudes to the National Liberation Front and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam.

A new question has come to the fore: should the movement be confined to those who are consciously and directly anti-imperialist? This paper has argued that the anti-war movement is the result of imperialism and its policies, and that the whole logic of its action is towards a conscious anti-imperialist stance. However, the movement should not exclude those who have not yet reached this realisation, for this would reduce its sweep. Here it is not primarily a question of leaders, 'important people"; it is above all a matter of masses of people, whose action is decisive and whose ideas have to develop before they will act.

Still another question is discussed: should not the anti-war movement be open only to revolutionaries, since the main cause of war is imperialism and only revolution can destroy imperialism? Only those with a rigidly schematic view of both revolution and of internationalist responsibility to the Vietnamese revolution would advance this proposition. The anti-war movement is a powerful force in capitalist societies like Australia because it unites people of widely differing views in forms of action against war, with objectives that fall short of social revolution. It may be that experience of the struggle against war will lead a movement to revolutionary action. One probable approach to an Australian revolutionary situation may well be through future defeats and calamitous results of the imperialist policies followed by the Australian ruling class. A great deal of experience and action is necessary before this can be envisaged as possible.

Concretely and urgently, the fight to withdraw Australian troops and oppose the Vietnam war is part of this experience. Revolutionaries who seek to confine the anti-war movement to those who agree with them do no service either to the movement itself, or to the Australian revolution.

Connected with this whole area of difference but spreading across the spectrum of protagonists of various ideas, are differences about the movement's tactics. These are wide and varied, but they may be generalised into the following: advanced or broad actions; within the "law" as interpreted by the authorities, or confronting the "law"; violent or peaceful; should all action be directed towards changing policy through parliamentary elections, or are these quite irrelevant? The movement's experience has thrown light upon and even answered some of these questions; others remain. Since the authorities unleash violence when facing
mass peaceful confrontation, the theory of "provoking" violence is somewhat irrelevant, though still advanced by some.

The movement has reached a general agreement that its character is essentially extra-parliamentary, a movement of challenge, seeking to impose its will upon governments from outside, through demonstrations, strikes, mass involvement. There are still varied attitudes to parliamentary elections, whether these are seen as the final answer (simplified, "elect a Labor government to end Australia's part in the war"), or as an area of anti-war propaganda. The test for the theory of a Labor government as the way to end the war still lies ahead; this paper suggests that extra-parliamentary action would remain decisive. It also suggests that participation in elections to make the war a political issue is necessary for the anti-war movement, both as an entity and by the political groupings which are part of it.

The argument about "advanced" and "broad" actions continues, with some from either side sticking to the exclusive view of "either or". In practice, the movement has developed both forms more or less successfully, and practice proves that advanced actions do not detract from breadth. Indeed, were it not for advanced actions the movement would not have developed, for the first demonstrations, five years or more ago, were all "advanced" in the light of mass opinion then. Those who argue against advanced actions "because public opinion is repelled" in fact condemn the movement to lag behind mass consciousness, when its task is above all to lift mass consciousness.

The main test of advanced actions is whether they help to develop broad and powerful mass actions. While there is room for debate about whether this or that advanced action helps or hinders the movement's breadth, the principle should be established that advanced actions are essential and effective. Seamen's Union refusal to work Jeparit and Boonaroo was an advanced action, at the time viewed by some as too far out in front, although it was a limited action. It is now seen as a turning point in the struggle, an example which should be repeated in other industries, adapted to their particular conditions and situations.

Workers' movement decisive: Stop Work to Stop the War.

Advances made by the anti-war movement are real and even inspiring, given its starting point. Yet only the complacent and easily satisfied can be content with what has been achieved. This is true for all areas of the movement, even for students and youth, where the best results have been recorded. The really decisive area for concentration is the workers' movement, where the prob-
items are great and the need is for patient, persistent and studied work to grapple with the obstacles to advance. These obstacles are ideological, political and also tactical, and come to the heart of the tasks which have to be tackled if the movement is to make a big new step forward in a mass way. Time and space allow only brief comments on some major questions.

First, what are some of the main features in people’s thinking which allow the country’s rulers to pursue the war of aggression in Vietnam, and its general strategy of militarism and hostility to the national liberation revolutions in Asia (and in Africa and Latin America too, though these do not so directly impinge on Australia)?

In my opinion, the main ideological weapon is racialism, mixed with anti-communism. This is expressed in a more or less “refined and subtle” manner in the slogans “Stop China’s Southward Thrust” and “Fight them over there instead of fighting them here”. These are the main catchcries of reactionary politicians, whether they are Liberal-Country Party, DLP, or some in the Labor Party. They are also the stock-in-trade of the Nazis and other extreme right groupings. What has to be understood is that these slogans have some appeal to all social strata, including the working class, playing upon the most backward prejudices and fears, the result of integration with values which have been inculcated into people’s consciousness for generations and centuries.

Much more effective ideological work and campaigning, and particularly more consistent effort, is needed to confront and defeat these ideas. It becomes clear, from the mouths of politicians like Dickie and Gorton, that preservation of “White Australia” and condemnation of “multi-racialism” is going to be more and more the trump card of the imperialists. The United Nations has designated 1971 as a year of action against racialism and the anti-war movement and its component parts should be active in developing activity against the Vietnam war, which is a racist war of genocide against an Asian people by the US and Australia (and its racist character is not hidden by the use of some Asian puppets as auxiliaries in the war).

It is easily seen how closely connected with the anti-war move­ment are other issues about which movements are developing: support for the Aborigines’ struggle for their rights as a people (they are indigenous “non-Caucasians” who would be debarred from immigrating, but since they are here and extermination has failed, the rulers hopefully want them to be “assimilated”); the developing New Guinea liberation movement which could become a central
issue for the anti-war movement and for all anti-imperialist Aus­
tralians; real support for the anti-apartheid struggle in South
Africa, which is certain to become a key issue in Australian
political life.

This conference should discuss the actual experience of anti-war
activists in factory and workplace, analysing it and suggesting
ways to lift its level. Structure of the unions and realities of
leadership in many, demand creative and democratic methods
of work, based upon conviction, not relying upon top direction or
formal decisions. The concept Stop Work to Stop the War will
not be realised unless there is a deeper conviction about two
things: that the war is wrong and deeply opposed to workers’
interests; that stopping work is an effective means of protesting and
forcing a change.

Experience shows that only relatively few unions and workplaces
have adopted majority decisions to stop work in the two Morar­
toriums. But in many decisions were taken to support the right
of workers to leave the jobs, and to defend this right. Perhaps
this should be extended further, working for a broad united appeal
from union activists for this type of limited action, as a step
towards full industry stoppages.

The anti-war movement should aim at building a wide network
of anti-war and anti-conscription committees in the workplaces.
These should be serviced by specialised publicity directed to issues
of concern to workers, linking the anti-war struggle with the eco­
nomic, industrial and democratic issues which workers face in
their work and struggles. These include war as one cause of
high prices and inflation; taxation; the effects of war, war prepara­
tions and militarisation upon all areas of social life, material and
moral. Special publicity should be issued to immigrant workers,
in various languages.

Those industries directly related to the war could be selected
for special concentration, all the more because these are so often
offshoots of multi-national corporations, usually dominated by US
corporations. While actions from outside are useful, the main need
is to develop activists within. Persistence and patience are impor­
tant in this, as in the industrial field as a whole. Creation of a
substantial core of anti-war activists in industry and the unions
should be first priority of the movement, if it is serious in moving
to a new stage of mass involvement and challenge to the war
policy.

The main responsibility for tackling this task must certainly be
shouldered by the anti-war activists within the workers’ move-
ment, and this means first the left. The left in the workers' movement has a proud tradition of fighting for internationalism. This tradition must be updated and developed in the new conditions of a permanent direct and growing involvement of Australia in imperialist wars and strategy. A bolder, more fearless and principled stand has to be taken by everyone who stands on the left in the workers' movement. Otherwise, all the struggles for improved conditions and workers' demands will be swamped in the militarist offensive.

Specific problems bringing the workers' movement directly into the anti-war struggle raise some general issues for the movement as a whole. One is the need for grass roots activity wherever people live, work, are socially active or can be reached. Central demonstrations, big or small; meetings, rallies, speeches, talk-ins, debates; publicity, posters and newspapers—all are essential features of the movement. Equally important are the less spectacular and apparently humdrum actions of talking to people individually, through canvassing or other ways; decentralising the movement's activities and bringing them directly into the lives of people everywhere.

Two other issues advanced for discussion are: establishment of close relations with the Japanese anti-war movement and development of a mass campaign against Pine Gap and other secret US military bases in Australia. Enough has been said here about the special significance of Japan for imperialist strategy and for Australia. The two anti-war movements should come closer to fight against full-scale revival of Japanese military imperialism. This is probably more important for the Australian than the Japanese, but the Japanese movement is also interested in cooperation and co-ordination, against the Vietnam war as against Japanese militarism. Pine Gap, other existing bases and possible future installations should be vigorously opposed and campaigned against, by public exposure, advanced actions and working towards a mass demand for their removal.

Perspectives for the anti-war movement, to sum up, are a probably long and certainly bitter struggle against a powerful and entrenched enemy, imperialism, which generates and needs war. There is no short or easy path to victory in the struggle and all possible forces must be drawn into the fight and many-sided tactics and methods of action employed. Yet the past few years have shown that the anti-war movement is advancing to the centre of Australian political struggle and can generate mass enthusiasm and commitment in face of its opponents, despite their apparent superiority in control and material power.