The following article raising some views on the basis of socialist strategy is taken from a contribution to discussion at the Queensland State Conference of the Communist Party held in Brisbane on June 14-15, 1969.

SOON, the Communist Party of Australia will be 50 years old. If we make a very sweeping generalisation, we could say that the first 25 years were, with exceptions, years of growth, while the second 25, again with qualifications, have been marked by decline. What do the next 25 years hold? What are the main trends of today, the deeper processes going on in Australia and the world which have to be taken into account and understood if we are once again to advance? These are questions which revolutionaries such as we are must have the courage to look squarely in the face as a precondition for the elaboration of a viable revolutionary strategy. Similar questions face the whole Left, though in different ways, and it is by boldly tackling the problems we see facing ourselves that we can make the most effective contribution to the advance of the Left as a whole.

Consciousness of the depth of these problems already began to develop in the period leading up to our 21st Congress in 1967 partly as a response to the mass stirrings of the early 60's. Since that time these have grown into powerful spontaneous movements of many millions of people throughout the world. Without such mass spontaneous movements, which express the fact that deeply felt aspirations and needs are stirring the minds and tugging at the hearts of people at the grass-roots, revolutionaries face little but tough slogging. But once such movements begin to reveal themselves, revolutionaries, provided they understand their sources and springs, have the possibility of influencing them in a revolutionary direction. But if this is to occur much study is essential both of revolutionary theory and the experience of the mass movements, as well as their interaction. But often, and over quite a long period, we have been held back from this necessary effort by a conceit that we really “knew it all,” by a static or dogmatic understanding of the valuable insights we had which negatived even those, turning them into their opposite; or we have taken the “easy” way out of
following others instead of accepting the responsibility of making our own analysis and thereby not only advancing our own activity, but also helping to enrich the world store of revolutionary knowledge from which we could in turn draw sustenance. Here I wish to advance some views to help in the process of solution of these problems.

It seems to me that four main features of the world we at present live in have particularly to be taken into account. They are related and interact of course, and are presented separately only for purpose of exposition. They are:

The transition from the monopoly capitalism described by Lenin to what is variously called State Monopoly Capitalism, neo-capitalism, or post-industrial society.

The onset of the scientific and industrial revolution which is associated with the above.

The sweep of the national liberation movements.

The existence and powerful influence of a socialist sector of the world.

In Australia it would be necessary to add such particulars as the great industrial and mining expansion, the extensive migration, and the enormous influx of foreign, particularly United States capital, and our rather special position in the world vis-a-vis Asia with all this implies concerning policies and attitudes. I do not intend to try to deal with these here, and will concentrate mainly on the first two of the four points outlined above.

Lenin placed the period of transition from ‘free competition’ capitalism to monopoly capitalism, or imperialism, in the last decade of the 19th century. While certain features of this new stage of capitalism were noted and taken into account from then on, it was roughly 20 years before the substance of these changes and their meaning for revolutionary perspective and strategy were theoretically summed up (Lenin’s Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism was written in 1916 and published in 1917). Even so, this was only a little over 30 years after the death of Marx; it is now 45 years since the death of Lenin, and during that time even bigger changes have taken place than in the previous period, and are happening at an accelerated rate, but they have not been similarly grasped theoretically by the communists, and new young left ideologists (recall how young Marx and Lenin were when they conceived the germs of their main ideas) have been more sensitive to the new needs of new times, undeveloped though many of their ideas are.
Some of the main features of this modern stage of capitalist development have been described in more recent years (locally, see for example the article by Bernie Taft in the first issue of Australian Left Review, June 1966, and the paper by John Playford at the Left Action Conference). They include the almost complete dominance of monopolies in the economy (and the accompanying relative decline in small enterprises and an enormous absolute reduction in the number of farmers); the qualitatively new and higher level of State intervention in the economy and in social life generally; the enormous growth in the military; the increasing interchange in personnel between industry, government and military; the more or less complete transition from individual entrepreneurs to managers; great expansion of production and, despite recessions and other economic problems, the avoidance of world-wide and deep crises such as that of 1929. The size of enterprises and institutions of all kinds has grown as a consequence, while the nature and use of the mass media has also reached a qualitatively new level. It is a complex and highly integrated society, "one bloody lump", in which the individual members and even whole groups feel their remoteness, powerlessness, lostness, alienation. And now, after a period of "adjustment", these features of modern society, despite a general rise in material standards often quite considerable, are impelling increasing numbers in diverse spheres of life into dissent and rebellion, particularly on issues which may be broadly described as of a democratic nature.

Now let us turn to the scientific and technological revolution, with which these developments are intimately bound up. The question to be answered about this revolution is whether it is but a continuation, even though at a much higher level, of the process of mechanisation which has been a feature of capitalism for over a hundred years following the industrial revolution, or does it mark something qualitatively new? I think we must answer the latter. In my opinion, by far the most profound analysis of this question is contained in the book Civilisation at the Crossroads written by the Czech philosopher Radovan Richta in conjunction with a large research team, and published in Australia by ALR. Very briefly their thesis may be summed up as follows: from the rise of capitalism up to the onset of the scientific and technological revolution, the main feature and mainspring of development has been in the mechanical side of the productive forces. In the period of hand manufacture, the various processes previously performed by the one craftsman were divided up into separate operations performed with hand tools by unskilled or semi-skilled labor. These processes were then mechanised to continually higher degrees, but the labor remained basically unskilled and semi-skilled (for example, the modern assembly line). There was a growth in the number
of skilled workers and technical personnel, but these remained quite ancillary to the main trend of a growing number and "weight" of machines attended by an unskilled and semi-skilled work force.

Basically, what is different about the scientific and technological revolution is that this introduces and makes essential a change primarily in the human factor which for centuries had remained virtually unchanged. Today science (basic research, applied science, technology) is becoming the essential factor not only in production itself, but also in services, administration etc., few spheres of social life remaining unaffected. The leading character of basic research is shown in one aspect in the calculation of a Soviet scientist that every rouble invested in such research yields annually, on the average, a surplus of 50%. And increasingly the possibility and need arises for man to stand outside the direct production process instead of being tied to it in the (often brutal and dehumanising) way he previously was.

The mass development and application of science in all its aspects means a large scale and deep transformation of the human factor in production and social life generally. And such revolutionary changes cannot but create new tensions and intensify some old ones, when they are introduced into a society where the power of capital, with its authoritarianism, its bureaucracy, its exploitative and essentially anti-human ethos, holds sway.

Education in these circumstances develops its own contradictions, with revolutionary potential, if understood. I pass over such important questions as the material or financial needs of education which deeply move many people of all ages when future prospects of individuals depend so heavily on the availability of education, to still deeper contradictions arising from the education process itself. An education which has to produce developed, rational and creative human beings cannot but have a certain humanist content and, despite the best efforts of establishments to imbue education with their own class values and rear super-skilled conformists, they send forth growing numbers of people in greater and greater contradiction to the social realities of our society. Many may be integrated into the existing society, but this does not entirely remove the contradictions, and a growing minority of the dissenting and rebellious are to be seen. When this stream flows into and meets the intensified contradictions generated within state monopoly capitalism as outlined above, the possibility of revolutionary social explosions is created. Particularly to be found is a new emphasis on the "old" democratic rights, and the rise of new democratic demands, whether for "workers' control", "student power", "black power" or other forms of demands for the recognition of the rights of national minorities, of the exploited and oppressed. The strength
of mass response to the jailing of Clarrie O'Shea over the penal clauses issue is one expression of the spontaneous and potentially revolutionary sentiment which is being generated within modern society (nor should it be forgotten that two other democratic issues — the Communist Party Dissolution Act and Referendum, in 1950-51, and the amendments to the Crimes Act in 1960 — also generated two of the biggest struggles of the post-war years).

The scientific and technological revolution has yet another dimension in that it is the means by which an abundance of material wealth is created. There is already a relative abundance compared with pre-war for example, and it is already clear that if there is not an absolute abundance today, there surely can be tomorrow. This poses quite new possibilities, perspectives and moral imperatives. For example, if the causes of tuberculosis are not known or no cure is available, deaths from the disease are terrible and tragic, but no moral question arises. But if the causes are known and the cure is available but is not provided to those suffering from the disease, this is not only terrible and tragic, but has the new dimension that it is morally wrong, and cannot but arouse growing indignation. Likewise with poverty and deprivation. In a poverty stricken society it is better to have shared poverty, rather than having rich and very poor. But poverty as such will be inevitable. But when, as is the case today, we have or clearly have the potential for adequate provision for all, to have about a million poor in Australia is a crying injustice and completely immoral. Similarly it is entirely wrong for children of workers to be deprived of higher education, for Aborigines to be forced to live as they do, for pensioners and many who fall sick to suffer as is the case today.

The question of wage rates for the vast majority of workers also takes on a new aspect in these circumstances, which is expressed in embryonic form by the growing demand for a real living wage, in place of the cheese-paring calculations and demands which are measured in a few miserable dollars. The union movement, working class political organisations and all workers should re-structure their approaches to make a decent living wage in accordance with today's possibilities, a recognised priority call on the national product.

Other questions too need to be looked at anew in the same light. For example the new President of the Australian Academy of Sciences has declared that pollution of the environment is a greater menace than the population explosion, and similar warnings of possible disaster are echoed in a recent report of the United Nations.

But is this unavoidable? Is it right? Have we not already the
possibility that the needs of the development of human beings should be put in first place in public policy? And on the other hand, does not the character of the scientific and technological revolution briefly described above also demand that they be put in first place? When the creativity and all-round development of human beings is becoming the main condition of economic and social advance, are not losses in the human factor the most costly losses of all? Not only capitalists, but many others have been conditioned to look at such questions in a purely economic way. Thus when it becomes a question of mining mineral sands on the beaches, the loss of so many million dollars of output is put in the forefront, and the warnings of conservationists and others that this may destroy natural beauties, wildlife and the ecological balance are dismissed as being of secondary importance, or even as idealistic sentimentality. But if such activities lead to reduced human potentialities and development through an adverse effect on the environment, in the new conditions of today this could result in many times the economic losses that would result if the project were rejected.

This may seem to be putting economic losses in the first place, but this is done only by way of illustration. The real point is that the scientific and technological revolution, which makes possible the solution of man's economic problems by the creation of abundance, is rendering the old way of looking at things quite outmoded. Humanism — the placing of the needs of human beings in the first place as the foundation of society and social policy and the development of the individual to the full for his own sake — has been for thousands of years the dream of the greatest thinkers and visionaries. Today, the possibility is within our grasp for the first time; and furthermore, those societies which pass over or reject this possibility will fall behind, because to give priority to the needs of human beings is the new necessity for bringing the scientific and technological revolution to full fruition.

Thus each particular issue arising in social life under capitalism, whether it be concerned with wages, pensions, health services, education, town planning, control of the environment, democratic rights and in particular the elimination or at least drastic reduction of alienation by ensuring that in factories, institutions, educational establishments localities etc., the people involved have the power of control over their own activities and lives, can and must be related to larger questions of the social structure, to the question of the imperative need and moral urge for the revolutionary transformation of society.

This linking of particular and immediate issues arising spontaneously in life with the social structure as a whole and the need for
its transformation, in association with mass action has always been the key to the development of revolutionary consciousness. It is not that this has exactly been forgotten by communists and other revolutionaries in the past period, when socialist consciousness has tended to decline, but rather that the way in which this had been more or less effectively done in the past was no longer working as before because it was no longer in accord with conditions, and the new conditions had not been subjected to an adequate marxist analysis.

For example, speaking very generally, up to the post war period the actual poverty of the vast mass of people was a central fact of existence. This was partly due to, and compounded by, the permanent unemployment rarely falling below 8-10% and in the depression of the 'thirties rising to 30-40% for years on end. Thus the directly economic issues were stark, were quite easily related to the wider social questions and the issue of revolutionary transformation. It was not that the issues were purely economic; on the contrary, they were economic, political and moral all at once. But the readiness with which the transition could be made from consciousness of them as economic questions to a considerable degree of socialist consciousness obscured deeper questions — alienation for example — so that, when these other aspects began to emerge to the forefront this was "foreign territory" for many, and the failure of the old formulas led to loss of elan and orientation.

Somewhat similarly, in the pre-war period the violent, repressive and bestial nature of capitalism was starkly manifestd in the worldwide phenomenon of fascism. While this is still to be seen, and by no means to be discounted as a possibility anywhere, what has been described as "repressive tolerance" has been more common: a stifling conformist sense of powerlessness to change anything, supplemented of course wherever necessary by direct repression. Once again, the old formulas were no longer adequate for the raising of socialist consciousness, and their inadequacy contributed to the faltering in morale and loss of orientation mentioned above. When to all this is added the fact that the socialist alternative as presented by the Soviet Union was "purer" and appeared more attractive than it did later with the revelations concerning the Stalin period, and the continued problems of the advance of socialist democracy, the new tasks of developing revolutionary consciousness became great indeed.

These problems, particularly the first, have also I believe been a main source of the current difficulties of the trade unions whose importance and value was more directly seen and more deeply felt in the earlier period. Today the trade unions need to expand their understanding, their vision and the scope of their activities to
meet the new conditions of life under state monopoly capitalism in the throes of the scientific and technological revolution. Unfortunately the trade unions' conservative side, which was a problem even before, is far more prominent than it was, and the consciousness of the need for overcoming it and the means for doing so was not sufficiently realised, including by communists and other forces of the Left in the unions.

Similar considerations apply in the case of reformism, which is clearly suffering a continually deepening crisis all over the world. Reformism seldom has displayed any depth in its understanding of capitalist society, but this did not matter so much in the starker conditions of the earlier period, when an absolutely small improvement in wages, conditions or social services was relatively quite significant. Today, when masses of people are feeling new needs, or old ones in a new way requiring a deeper understanding of social life and a more revolutionary approach if they are to be satisfied, and when various reforms and a certain increase in living standards may occur anyway, even under conservative governments, reformism becomes increasingly ineffectual and unattractive.

As I have said above, we need not feel too superior; we also have much to criticise in ourselves for having been so slow to realise the nature of the problem we face, even though the problem is basically different since our revolutionary disposition and marxist theory contains the elements for transforming our situation.

The Model of Socialism

One of the questions here is the model of socialism we project. This has become a matter of contention in recent times, when many claims have been made that there is "only one socialism", (which can only mean the one we've got, the one that exists). But that this is not so will become clear from considering some of the main tasks which practically all the socialist revolutions up to date have had to concern themselves with:

Elimination of the remnants of feudalism; land and freedom to the peasants (in a number of cases, of course, feudalism was more than a remnant).

Concentration of the main means of production — quite small in extent — in the hands of the state; concentration of the small surplus from agriculture and industry in the hands of the state for further expansion in the means of production; in general a great expansion of the role of the state in social life.

Bringing about a change from the predominance of small
production, trade etc., by nationalisation, co-operation and collectivisation.

On the basis of the above to gradually reduce or eliminate the endemic poverty.

But compare these tasks with the problems we face, as does any developed capitalist country today:

We have no feudalism, no peasants to free, the land question is quite different.

There has already been a great expansion of the role of the state in social life, and while the main means of production will initially have to be taken over by the state in all probability, the main question will not be the centralisation of state power, but rather its decentralisation as a part of self-management.

The mass of small agricultural producers has already been eliminated, and the remainder form a very small and still diminishing proportion of the population; other small producers and traders have also been reduced absolutely, and even more in their weight in the economy.

Instead of grinding poverty there is relative abundance, and the possibility of rapid elimination of the poverty and deprivation which remain.

It can readily be seen that these circumstances pose quite new tasks of economics, politics and organisation compared with what had to be tackled before. I have already mentioned that in a number of fields at least the task may be to reduce rather than increase the power of the state in favor of decentralisation, development of self-management and autonomy. Certainly the "all-powerful" state is no longer either attractive or necessary. Changes here would entail a modified role for a revolutionary party or coalition — certainly all power would not be concentrated in its hands —, authoritarian decision on ideas (censorship of ideas and information) would be increasingly out of place, and the development of dialogue and the ferment of ideas would replace tendencies to a congealed system of doctrines.

The above are some of the considerations which, it seems to me, must enter into discussion of the problems of socialist strategy.