The 1969 Conference for Left Action: Marxist theory and practice in Australia's new left

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Contents

Abstract

The 1969 Left Action Conference brought together 800 people of the Old and New Lefts to discuss revolutionary strategies, like "self-management" and "workers' control" made popular in the French uprising of 1968. The thesis provides a snapshot of a unique period of Australian history.

I examine the conference debates to understand theory and practice in 1960s Australia, after tracing the development of a new movement of Marxist radicals. Impatient for revolution, could the new left generation challenge conservative Australia and the Stalinist communist parties?

The period 1967-1969 is a window on a radical experience which made a significant contribution to the overhaul of the conservative and repressive ways of 1950s Australia.

Marxism revived, alongside a liberatory politics; the key element – anti-Stalinism, anti-domination, anti-manipulation, power and control inspired hope.

After the conference new struggles and new debates flourished; an anti-war Moratorium movement united social forces to fight conscription and war and created a new momentum for change. Unfortunately political organisation then fragmented.

The thesis draws on the experiences of the time to assess success and failure and the relevance of old and new ideas.

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

Abbreviations

ALP	Australian Labor Party
ALR	Australian Left Review
ARM	Australian Revolutionary Marxists
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
CPA (ML)	Communist Party of Australia (Marxist Leninist)
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
FI	Fourth International
IML	International Marxist League
MLC	Monash Labor Club
MRM	Melbourne Revolutionary Marxists
PCI	Communist Party of Italy
PCF	Communist Party of France
RSA	Revolutionary Socialist Alliance
RSSA	Revolutionary Socialist Students Alliance
SDA	Society/Students for Democratic Action
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society
SWP	Socialist Workers Party
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VAC	Vietnam Action Committee/Campaign

Introduction

The Left Action Conference provides a window on the process of radicalisation which began among young students of the New Left in the mid-1960s. Internationally the 1960s New Left, and its Australian component, campaigned for a *morally* better world; they employed innovative tactics to win local battles, a radical reformism. That evolved from 1966/67 into more militant strategies when they failed to make an impact on society, as the anti-conscription Australian Labor Party (ALP) lost the 1966 federal election and after police attacked student anti-war demonstrators. Civil disobedience on a mass scale to win civil liberties, democratic rights and an end to conscription became the order of their day.

Revolutionary strategies to overturn capitalism were discussed more widely from 1968, when explosive events illustrated, in the eyes of radicalising students, that revolution was *possible*. In January that year the "Tet Offensive" by the Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF) pushed back US forces, indicating the US would not win their war, and that small countries could defeat the largest imperialist power in history. In May a revolutionary working class uprising took place in France, and the President fled to Germany. By August the Czech people rose up against the USSR; when Russian tanks rolled in to crush the struggle, worldwide condemnation caused crises in western communist parties, especially Australia and Italy. Leading new left activists supported Marxism, but not Stalinism, and attempted to revamp Marxism and Leninism to challenge the communist parties, which had played a negative role undermining the French uprising. This coincided with the shift to the left by the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) and against Stalinism. An ageing CPA, which had seen its membership decline from 23,000 in 1945 to 5,300 by 1965, adopted radical practices to influence the new left forces. (Davidson 1969: 170).

The 1969 Conference for Left Action (also called the Left Action Conference) was a broad left event called to discuss socialist strategies to change Australian society. More than 800 people attended when it took place over the Easter weekend, from 4-7 April 1969. It was an intense affair and included additional side events, fringe meetings, caucus meetings and social events. The success of the conference is possibly surprising to people looking back and certainly for those at the time, looking forward. The conference was initiated by the CPA in late 1968. There is no party in Australia today

equivalent to the CP nor is there a recent similar political context. Some of the new left[1] leaders were re-considering collaboration with the Old Left, the label for traditional parties.

This thesis examines this moment in Australian history in order to assess the role of the left and its success in mobilising opposition to the war in Vietnam and capitalism, and building radical socialist organisation. Unlike other studies of the period, I situate the conference in an analysis of the new left groups in the years between 1967 and 1969 to understand their contribution, strengths and weaknesses. While the thesis does not examine the period after 1969, it is clear that left wing struggle expanded; in particular, workers joined in, their industrial action building wider confidence for social movements and for radical reforms. By placing this short period within a longer view (1960 – 1972), it becomes clear that the radical period after 1969 would not have happened had there not been the period of radicalisation and political clarification beforehand.

Results

The conference agenda reflected the political priorities of its various participants, emphasising practical strategies rather than social analysis. While a number of resolutions were discussed and considered for voting, the main purpose of the conference was to bring disparate forces together and begin a collaborative process, rather than strategic or ideological formal agreement. This was, after all, the first time Old and New lefts would formally come together in one venue for purposes of political clarification, and there were clear results.

The left was boosted after leading the successful May mass strike, soon after the conference; the strike provided the key force for the release of tramways union official, Clarrie O'Shea, from jail, neutralising of the anti-union penal powers. The conference formed the theoretical and practical impetus for a workers' control movement and a further conference in August to discuss and plan initiatives to guide militant workers;

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[1] There were two "New Left" formations – in the 1950s dissidents who left the CPA after 1956 events were the first "New Left". I refer to the Australian 1960s layer as "new left" or the "second new left". I use "New Left" to refer to the general phenomenon. As well, there were student groups in the 1960s called "New Left Clubs". I leave the US movement as "New Left". Where I cite other authors I retain their form in quotes, for example the conference press release speaks of a dialogue between the "New Left and the Old Left" (See Chapter 3).

CPA newspaper *Tribune* (9 April 1969) reported that a key aim of the April conference had been 'the need to develop Left co-operation to popularise the concept of workers' control and self-management'. (*Tribune* 1969). Perhaps the most important outcome would be the co-operation formed to achieve the mass anti-war rallies of 1970, the Moratorium. The conference also furthered the development of anti-capitalist critiques of Australia, helping to start a process to fill an important gap in left wing theoretical analysis. From 1969 a number of symposia, conferences, books, magazines took up theoretical discussions around left critiques of Australian capitalism. Positive reappraisals of Marxism and Leninism, usually based on a Gramscian framework, were discussed at the conference and beyond; Trotskyism found a new acceptance.

Party organisation did not gain to the same extent, as the left fragmented further after the conference. While many activists would join the ALP and assist the election of the Whitlam government in 1972, the radical left remained divided in small groupings; the CP would recruit few radical youth before 1972. It seems the period was an impossible opportunity for radical politics in Australia – while radical groups (Society for Democratic Action (SDA) in Brisbane, Resistance in Sydney, Monash Labor Club in Melbourne) found themselves at the centre of around 500 activists (apart from the CPA), in each major city, they would not develop a theoretical unity sufficient to build an alternative radical national party. The political clarification around questions of self-management, revolutionary Marxism and Leninism, which happened at this time, was more likely to lead to ideological divisions and sectarianism than unity. This situation reflects the nature of the new heterogeneous Marxist left in Australia. My conclusions are based on detailed analysis of the debates of the conference after compiling a brief historical record of the politics of the various left trends between 1967 and 1969.

Literature Review

Histories of the Australian revolutionaries in the New Left phenomenon are rare, but important texts exist which analyse various aspects of the ideas and practice of the time. Because this thesis attempts to evaluate the role of Marxist organisations, using a focus of the conference in 1969, my review of the available literature focuses on texts which examine strategies of key Marxists. I have examined many partial histories and each group's own literature, where possible, and augmented material from secondary sources with primary sources, including copies of relevant papers delivered at the conference

and other memorabilia of the conference. I have read the available *Arena* and *Australian Left Review* journals, and *International* magazines published between 1964 and 1971 (in original hard copy) and relevant *Tribune* articles (on microfiche). Many leaflets, magazines and articles were made available (online) courtesy of the websites, including: *International Socialism* journal (http://www.isj.org.uk) and the *Marxists Internet Archive* (http://www.marxists.org), *Reason in Revolt* (http://www.reasoninrevolt.net.au), *Brisbane Discussion Circle* (http://bdc.radicaltimes). While I have seldom quoted from these texts directly, they all assisted me to develop an understanding of the ideas and practice of radical activists in the period. For a time I immersed myself in the material of the period, as well as in discussions with various activists.

There are no comprehensive political analyses of the conference, apart from one short unpublished academic work, a BA (Hons) essay of Tim Briedis; the essay, "The Conference for Left Action, Easter 1969" is a brief but thorough examination of the available sources held within the Communist Party of Australia Records, 1920-1987, at the Mitchell Library in Sydney (Briedis 2010a). He was able to listen to audiotapes of the conference, unavailable to me, and so could interpret the atmosphere as well as content of speeches and discussion from the floor. His evaluation of the politics of the conference speeches is short, whereas I have attempted a more detailed examination from my reading of the papers (in hard copy). Briedis recognises the conference as '… a significant part of the process of renewal …' for the CPA, a trajectory influenced by their relationship with the New Left but also by their own decline (Briedis 2010a). He argues that the conference also '… helped facilitate … diffuse processes of struggle'; saying that there are lessons for the present-day in that the new left attempt to establish an intellectual counter-hegemony and create organic intellectuals remains relevant to activists. His focus is on the CPA and suggests that the experience indicates political organisations are capable of change, as shown by the extent that New Left attitudes affected the CPA at the time, while recognising the potential for a shift in the other direction in response to conservative conditions (by 1977, the CPA had shifted considerably to the right). However, he does not critically evaluate the rest of the left.

Other texts that refer to the conference are reviewed here. New left Marxist Ken Mansell's thesis, *The Yeast is Red*, written in 1994, focuses on the Melbourne revolutionary Marxists who emerged from the new left milieu, and continued to participate '… in the strategy typical of new leftists – the struggle to control the

circumstances of their own lives was oriented to the occupation of space – and, like the new leftists elsewhere, their activities were met with a concerted, and often violent, reaction by the establishment.' (Mansell 1994: 45). He argues that the conference was a catalyst for fragmentation of an otherwise diverse but united revolutionary left. In 1969, the Revolutionary Socialist Alliance (RSA) conference (in January) and the Left Action Conference brought the left together in major strategic debates, but, according to Mansell, that year would also see the undermining of a strong solidarity between Melbourne and Brisbane new left activists, because of the role of the CPA and the Maoist CPA (Marxist Leninist). Some were drawn into the orbit of the CPA, including, until early 1970, the Brisbane SDA leaders (Mansell 1994: 84). He says that the short period of radicalism ends in the 'failure and fragmentation of the new left', concluding that a diverse but unified revolutionary socialist left, nationally, became fragmented in late 1969 (Mansell 1994: 92-94). The "Old Left" parties (CPA and CPA (ML)) had together pulled off a "generational coup" (Mansell 1994: 82).

After tracing the activities on Monash campus, Mansell examines the Monash Labor Club (MLC) after the establishment of the off-campus radical centre, The Bakery, in Prahran from 1968 when the MLC grew to 300 members (Mansell 1994: 31-38). Mansell implies that the period had a 'superficial resemblance to France', and the new left was a collective progenitor for a range of movements with Marxist ideas at the centre along with other notions and theories; but the Marxists failed to take a potential social movement forward. He argues: '[t] he possibility of an indigenous radicalism (or Marxism) would have required the unification of the new critical theories (such as those of Marcuse) with the practice of class struggle.' (Mansell 1994: 94).

A comprehensive history of the student left, from the perspective of a participant in the more recent post-70s campus struggles, was written by Graham Hastings, called *It Can't Happen Here: A Political History of Australian Student Activism* (Hastings 2003). It focuses on activist politics of the student left, particularly in Adelaide, although he provides useful background material explaining the general political debates of the period from the early 1960s until 2000, a broad sweep but replete with immense detail in its 325 pages. Hastings acknowledges the CP's shift away from Stalinism and to the left at the time of the Left Action Conference, arguing that the CP was hampered by 'its desire to maintain respectable protest … and keep the ALP, trade unions and churches on side', and underestimated the role of civil disobedience (Hastings 2003: 26). Like other commentators he analyses this period as failure for the

CP, mainly seeing results in terms of recruitment of youth, which did not happen until the early 1970s. Hastings emphasises and details the radicals' practical methodologies; his work shows that 1968-1970 was a period when revolutionary ideas were being clarified by a kind of vanguard of activists and that only after 1970 did the revolutionary movement of students *and* workers become a mass phenomenon and sought ideas far to the left of the CP. Thus, the conference occurred before the radicalisation of workers.

Of relevance to this thesis is the discussion of why and how a section of students, nationally, became aware of themselves as '… an intellectual moral force distinct from the Conservatives and the Old Lefts …' and shifted from the '… liberal humanist moralism of the American civil rights movement …' to revolutionary Marxism. He also argues that the key turning point was 1966/67 (federal election and police brutality), as well as collecting funds for the NLF in 1967 by the Monash LC; and reports that in 1966 the first conscript was killed in Vietnam, and the first draft resister appeared in public. The 4,000-strong July 4 protest in 1968 outside the US Consulate in Melbourne was seen as a turning point for off-campus student protest (55 were arrested). Hastings explains that while hundreds supported the revolutionary student groups in the late 1960s, thousands would become a base for revolutionary politics after the mass mobilisations of the Moratorium in 1970 (Hastings 2003: 39-40).

John Murphy's book, *Harvest of fear: A history of Australia's Vietnam War*, is an academic analysis of the war and the anti-war opposition which de-mythologizes much of established Australian folklore (Murphy 1993). In particular, it helps the reader understand the end of the war, from the Tet Offensive in 1968 onwards, and the complex reasons behind Australian involvement. It is clear that Australia (the Menzies government) was a keen advocate of military intervention. Participation was dependent on foreign policy considerations that the US would be more likely to remain actively involved in the Asia-Pacific region, hopefully providing security for Australia. However, the government argued publicly that engagement was necessary on the basis of defeating a "communist" (read: "Chinese") threat from the north. The US intervened for "Cold War" reasons, to restrict USSR influence in Asia. Murphy argues Labor was ambivalent on the war and was concerned, privately, that the US had made a mistake; while strongly opposing conscription. However, they preferred bipartisan support for the government's actions, until the US changed their position during 1968 and considered reducing their troops. From August 1969 public opinion shifted away from the war and conscription, and Labor was able to march in step improving their vote in

the October 1969 federal elections.

Murphy shows that little of this was understood by the left because of the paucity of local political analysis; the majority in the left thought Australia just followed the US into Vietnam and had little knowledge of the experience in Vietnam. Most of the left agreed with the CP's analysis that the primary divide in Australia was between big foreign multinationals and the "people" – a collective of small business, a middle class and white-collar and blue-collar workers; the Maoists were among the most extreme nationalists. Few understood how opinion was divided at the top of society and how debate on Vietnam in particular was stifled within the "Cold War Consensus". Murphy provides a summary of the New Left and their politics, arguing that most saw things through a Marcusean prism opposing technology, bureaucracy, and the dehumanization of capitalism, and most ideas suffered from a mix of ambiguous meanings. He identifies a major contradiction which arose around the support for Third World revolution and nationalisms which often meant the left supported dictatorial regimes, like Cuba; and peasants became Marcusean marginals.

However, Murphy's summary of the New Left provides too little detail to appreciate strengths and weaknesses. The book discusses the conference as a significant attempt by a declining CPA to work with the radical student left, but does not analyse the discussions; he recognises it as a step which enabled the coalition building for the future Vietnam Moratorium. Murphy tends to undervalue the contribution of the radicals in his contradictory summary of the outcomes of the period. He states: 'If the key features of the moratorium of May 1970 were its size and apparent unity, these reflected less the fiery vision of the "ultra-left" than the more prosaic strategy of the moderates.' (Murphy 1993: 258). And yet, he says, on the same page, that this first march also: '… reflected the collapse of a conservative hegemony which had constrained civil society and militated against vital public discourse. Hence the importance in the Moratorium of the themes of dissent and participatory democracy.' It seems both the radical and the "prosaic" were essential to the Moratorium's success, which underlines the importance of the contributions at the Left Action Conference, and in building it, of *both* the new left and the Old Left Marxists.

Lani Russell's PhD thesis of 1999, "Today the Students, Tomorrow the Workers! Radical Student Politics and the Australian Labour Movement 1960-1972", examines

the Left Action Conference as part of the CP attempts to re-legitimise the party within the left. Her thesis situates the conference in the radical period, taking the reader beyond 1969, so we can see the outcomes of left action. The CP leadership offered key New Left leaders major concessions, supporting radical proposals at the conference, like Brian Laver's motion to support an NLF victory. Later, they even offered half the political positions on the party leadership body, to Laver, Humphrey McQueen and others, as well as half control of *Tribune* (Russell 1999: 274). Her analysis shows that the party leaders were impressed with the results, although few recruits were made at this time, while other leading activists, like Bob Gould and Doug White, were cynical. Russell also posits the basic question about CP intentions: '… at a deeper level the conference highlighted the contradictions in the Party's strategy: did it want to lead the movement, or not? If so, on what basis? In his autobiography, Eric Aarons indicates that for some party leaders, openness to these new forces was not seen as flowing from theory itself, but rather represented a recognition of a fatal paradigmatic crisis and the hope that by introducing new elements a new paradigm might slowly become apparent.' (Russell 1999: 295).

She goes some way to fill an important gap of the history of working class struggle, to indicate the wealth of political struggle by unionists at the time, for example the CP-led battles on a range of issues including democratic rights and against the penal powers, for Aboriginal rights and against the deportation of refugees, against various wars, and eventually the Vietnam issue and struggle around equal pay for women, later the Green Bans campaign. While the Australian union movement had already experienced many political and economic struggles before the mid-50s, there was a decline in activity in the late 1950s and early 60s because of a combination of anti-strike laws and economic boom. As strike figures recover from 1967 they were often over economic demands and short-lived. After 1968, the Marxist left could point to more examples of industrial action, including the January 1968 national postal strike to which some student activists gave direct support, attempts by some unionists to defy the penal powers leading up to the successful mass strike of May 1969 to support jailed union leader Clarrie O'Shea.

Russell's thesis provides a national overview of the experience of students and workers as participants in social movements, providing a comprehensive history of the Australian left and trade unions, while also evaluating New Social Movement (NSM) theory (Russell 1999). Both student and worker activists (both non-aligned and aligned with various Marxist parties) shared various common political goals and methodologies

– broadly defined as reformist or revolutionary – within the social movements. Within this history, she evaluates the role of the various Marxist groups and also traces the trajectory of non-Marxist new left politics. She examines NSM theory, which, she argues, is based on non-revolutionary ideas and rejects the centrality of class, being strongly influenced by the pessimism of Marcuse's analysis. The proponents of what came to be known as the New Social Movements (NSMs), such as Alain Touraine, argue that '…the working class might at best be one of an ensemble of progressive forces.' (Russell 1999: 24). Many NSM theorists situate a "middle class" as the central force for change, but, Russell argues, they often confuse class location for the activists and mistake white collar workers for middle class people (Russell 1999: 26-30). However, the Marxist left in 1969 saw the working class as central, as debated at the Left Action Conference. After 1969 Laver developed deep misgivings about the CP; Russell's thesis includes a quote by Brian Laver: "… the Communist Party took up self-management … and they made it Point 62A – not a central point of power…" (Russell 1999: 289). Laver's point clarifies that the paradigm for a new party accepted in the CP would not be a party led by the working class fighting for workers' power.

Kristy Yeats' thesis, *The Australian New Left, 1956-1972*, includes an analysis of the intellectual contribution of the older New Left post-1956 and the new left of the 1960s and 70s; published in 2009, she details the evolution of the New Left phenomenon, internationally and in Australia (Yeats 2009). The Left Action Conference is mentioned as part of the process of attempts to unite the left and then, its resultant divisiveness, as the CPA attempts to relate to the younger left; Yeats develops the complicated history of the new left groups. According to Yeats, Ian Turner, who left the CPA after 1956, argued that the student left did not relate to the labour movement and 'failed to embody a proselytising force, except within their own generation and by example' (Yeats 2009: 271). However, the key idea of the radical movement after 1968 was "self-management" borrowed from the French "autogestation" after the May 68 events – of the campuses ("Student Power") and workplaces ("Workers' Control") – which became an international goal. She builds on both Mansell and Russell as well as adding a large section on the role of women and the movement which grew out of the new left as the Women's Liberation Movement (Yeats 2009).

The new ideas she identifies are an emphasis on culture as a driver of social relations, which both new left's would explore, and a rejection of middle class values and life-style to focus on personal responsibility; this idea was taken up by both SDS and the

Marxist left (Yeats 2009: 264-76). The catch-cry, "the personal is political", taken up vigorously by the women's movement, actually originated with the new left (Yeats 2009: 225). Initially, the most widely held explanation for capitalism was Marcuse's. While his name was raised on the banners (alongside the names of Mao and Marx) of occupying students in Rome in March 1968 as they forced the closure of their university (Kurlansky 2005: 108-9), only SDS and a section of SDA would support him here. However, as Yeats observes, the key feature of the second New Left, as an international phenomenon, was its intellectual diversity but that, within that, the Australian "movement" was unique, and it 'both *pre-figured* and *embodied* the rapid change of post-World War 2 society …' (Emphasis in original) (Yeats 2009: 7).

Yeats also argues that the new left were weakened by their underdeveloped political theory and isolation, and reports that in its first edition Editorial of April 1972, *Intervention* – a magazine published by Marxists around the CP – argued that the new left exhibited a: "…condition of increasingly isolated and all too often dogmatic sects." (Yeats 2009: 81). The magazine blamed the new left's weaknesses on the "lack of a viable intellectual tradition or Marxist intelligentsia. … (It was impeded by) … a hasty and attenuated assimilation of various overseas theories, notably Trotskyism and Maoism, and … (an) … uncritical absorption of theoretical influences such as the Marcusean stream in the American New Left." (Cited in Yeats 2009: 81). Like Russell, she was looking back on the history of the movements to disclose the evolution of ideas and argues that new left ideas have been sustained: 'core ideas are continuously restated by thinking sub-cultures today', despite its weaknesses (Yeats 2009: 276).

Trotskyist Tom O'Lincoln traces the CPA's decline from the 1940s to the 1980s in his 1985 book, *Into the Mainstream: The Decline of Australian Communism*, in which he critically analyses it's shift to the left between 1967 and the "Coalition of the Left" strategy, and the 1976 shift to the right (O'Lincoln 1985). He shows that the party gained more influence, although few members, during the period which included the Conference for Left Action; and that the CP leadership thought this outcome to be a major step forward. O'Lincoln argues that the party was incapable of a thorough examination of their past Stalinist ideas and practice in order to become a revolutionary party, and instead adopted liberal critiques which allowed them to attract support among new left radicals for a democratic capitalist alternative. The Trotskyist ideas studied by left members did not reject the USSR model of socialism, rather calling for a limited "political revolution", leaving the socio-economic base intact. O'Lincoln offers a

stronger alternative based on Tony Cliff's analysis that the USSR became state capitalist with the rise of Stalin; this analysis allowed some unorthodox Trotskyists to totally reject the USSR, rather than continue to defend it as the Fourth International supporters in Australia proposed (See John Percy's history and that of the Socialist Labour League (John Percy 1995; WorkersNews and Board 1981)). The CPA followed most western parties to adopt a version of "Eurocommunism" which was really a "peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism".

According to O'Lincoln, the Left Tendency, whose membership overlapped with the editors of *Intervention* magazine, discussed the ideas of Althusser and Gramsci with the aim of rebuilding the party as a Marxist Leninist organisation and put the following topics on the agenda for analysis: materialist analysis of society; a new analysis of the ALP; the nature of the USSR based on Trotskyist Ernest Mandel's work; rank and file organisation in industry, based on Gramsci's Turin experience. Through the 60s and 70s, despite the party's leadership of the workers control and Green Bans movements, the CP's political agenda led to a gradual weakening of links with workers and more likely to recruit ex-students and intellectuals (O'Lincoln 1985). According to Jayson Althofer, writing in *Overland* in 1999, talk about the working class did not lead to meaningful interaction (Althofer 1999). Thus, the intervention by the CPA left leadership resulted in a new breach between theory and practice, largely because their strategy did not situate the working class militants of this period in the leadership of a movement for change.

John Percy published a history of Resistance in 2005, *A History of the Democratic Socialist Party and Resistance Volume 1: 1965-72*, in which he explains the development of Trotskyist politics in Australia (John Percy 2005). The Left Action Conference is discussed as an impressive event which caused some illusions among Resistance members, although Percy is quick to remind us of the temporary nature of the CP's leftward shift at this time. Resistance members attended and participated in the conference. The book is a valuable record of the left at this time, and its history since Australia's beginnings, especially of the radicals in the far left which is covered in much detail. It is clear that Trotskyists in Resistance and other groups were clearer on the nature of the war through their relationship with Marxists in the US and Europe. Further they were not nationalist; and argued that Australia was a small power dominating the Asia-Pacific region in an unequal alliance with the US, but in its own right (John Percy 2005).

While the Resistance leadership (largely Bob Gould, John and Jim Percy) of the mass anti-war demonstrations reflected a successful use of new left mobilisation, their emphasis was not on a specific political challenge to Australian capitalism, rather they attempted to win their young audience to general perspectives of anti-capitalist politics based on the Trotskyist program and saw their main goal as building a leadership, in a vanguard party, for an undefined future revolutionary opportunity; this was central to their split with the *International* group. In his history, he said that from 1966 he understood that: '… the real struggle was a race to build against them [the CPA], in the anti-war movement, among the youth, at the level of a party and eventually in the working class.' (John Percy 2005: 76). Because the key task is building organisation, interventionist political ideas became secondary; his comrade Bob Gould's speech at the conference focused on building a specific youth organisation as a step toward intervening in the labour movement, but did not engage with the debate on political strategies for changing Australia (Gould 1969).

While serious analysis of the Australian left is sparse, some leading activists wrote memoirs, which provide a general impression of the period, although limited mainly to memory and personal experience. In *Map of Days: Life on the Left*, Denis Freney summarises the period after he returned to Australia in early 1968 which found him frenetically active as a teacher and political activist, writing long articles about the nature of the period and the left, and the changes in the CPA; he was particularly dedicated to explaining self-management strategies (Freney 1991). I cite Freney's writings in the *International* magazine extensively in Chapter 2. During 1968/69 he tried to pull together the revolutionary left into the RSA, but unsuccessfully. While he provides limited information on the Left Action Conference, it was part of this period that drew him into the orbit of the left leadership of the CP and eventually membership. In a situation when he had few supporters, the CP probably seemed a natural home, although it is unclear whether they met his expectations.

Leading Melbourne member of the CPA Bernie Taft wrote a critical memoir, *Memoirs of Bernie Taft: Crossing the Party Line*, in which the political fragmentation and decline of the CPA are analysed through his eyes (Taft 1994). Taft has little to say about the conference except that he was impressed and that it opened up opportunities for greater interest in the CP, from the media and others, including: '*The Age* [Melbourne daily newspaper] published several feature articles by … Michelle Grattan, about the new face and the changed attitudes of the Communist party.' (Taft 1994: 224). The book

examines the further differences which emerged between the more left wing Aarons leadership and Melbourne comrades who were less critical of the CPSU and less interested in the revolutionary politics of the new left, in the context of a membership which had halved between 1968 and 1972 (Taft 1994: 243-256).

While the following texts don't mention the conference, they are important works which establish the political context and show how the new left developed. Monash activists wrote their own history, published in 1972: *It Is Right to Rebel*, which was edited by Michael Hyde (Hyde 1972). The book includes reproductions of actual documents prepared by MLC students and detailed discussion of the disputes and occupations on the campus, as well as an account of the origins of the Club (from being a bastion of right wing Labor to revolutionary domination). It is useful to this thesis because it elaborates the development of radicalism of Monash students particularly after 1965, which reinforces the other accounts, but also provides a clearer understanding of the role of radicals' support for the NLF (regarded as the enemy of Australia even though it was the effective administration of the majority of South Vietnam) in consolidating the revolutionary attitudes of students. A summary of how consciousness developed was published by their N.L.F. Aid Committee which organised collections for both medical and direct aid to the NLF: anti-war students felt they were failing and needed to take stronger action not only to oppose the US aggression, but also its victims. Following the decision taken at large LC meetings and consequent furore, the LC's *Print* newssheet (of 31 July 1967) could report: "… a most interesting development has been the general shift to the left of university opinion. Instead of our extreme position causing a reaction to the right as some people expected it has allowed people to remain moderates while adopting a much harder line." (Cited in Hyde 1972: 25)

Thus, the radicals gained confidence from this episode, and radical action reinvigorated what was, in 1967, a declining campaign; they won a much needed public debate about the realities of the war. Thus, this experience had general significance for the Australian student movement. Along with Hyde's recent memoir, *All Along the Watchtower: Memoir of a Sixties Revolutionary* (Hyde 2010), this book provides an understanding of the serious approach of activists to winning their campaigns. However, little is revealed about how they intended to create a new socialist society; ideological debate was not considered as important as the activism. The Left Action Conference is not mentioned in the work, although MLC members attended and the Maoists were extremely critical

of the CP. Political clarity was probably seen as an unaffordable luxury to the activists who spent every waking hour frenetically organising for the immediate struggles, as reported in Hyde's memoir.

Many texts reference a collection of essays, written by 1960s activists, *The Australian New Left: Critical essays and Strategy*, published in 1970, and edited by Richard Gordon. It was the first attempt to sympathetically, although critically, examine Australia's New Left (Gordon 1970). Gordon and Warren Osmond, Melbourne New Left activists (Monash students who left the Labor Club for the New Left Club in 1967), co-wrote the first essay, which critically assesses the politics – theory and practice – of the New Left defined in its broadest sense to include the SDS, SDA and Labor Clubs, and is entitled "An Overview of the Australian New Left". They argue that Australia's student movement had been unable to create a New Left counter-cultural movement that could be defined as "radical". Rather, the student movement was *militant* but unable to attract large numbers of young people, with its politics closer to a continuation of Old Left radicalism. Thus the New Left was radical in its activity – it was militant – but radicalism was not incorporated into ideas and vision for an alternative society.

They criticise the activists for being unable to theorise the political situation in Australia, while recognising that there is no adequate theoretical tradition to build on. Gordon and Osmond identify clear differences for Australian society compared to larger Western countries – Australia was smaller and poorer economically, relied on more foreign investment and immigration, and had not developed the same role for tertiary education; Australia was affected by distance from Europe and proximity to Asia; and the Cold War consensus, which fitted longstanding prejudices about China and Chinese communism, lasted longer. The threat of conscription probably impacted more than war; the authors argue that Australian people: '… were so insecure personally and socially that they were easy objects for the cynical Liberal politicians' cries of "defence of our security", the "threat" from the North and the supposed "Red Menace".' (Gordon and Osmond in 1970: 27).

According to the authors, Australian activists tended to rely on overseas theorists (the CPA relied on Moscow-line Stalinist dogma and militant unionism until the mid-1960s reinforcing an anti-theoretical tradition, and Trotskyists looked to the Fourth International political tradition). Because the new groups did not break from the anti-theoretical tradition, it was difficult to establish an alternative in the eyes of those people they were trying to mobilise, because the propaganda appeared unconnected to

their lives. Osmond, in his essay "Toward Self-Awareness" goes into deeper analysis of the inability of the new left to develop a cultural analysis. The essays do not mention anything about the Left Action Conference, held just the previous year, but the authors recognised a shift in the CPA from anti-theoretical isolation to some attempts to develop new political ideas. The authors argue that the Australian movement was composed of groups isolated from wider society, who competed with each other rather than collaborated, within myriad disconnected activities.

Jon Piccini's recent thesis, *"Building their own scene to do their own thing": Imagining and contesting space/s in Brisbane's youth radicalisation: 1968-76*, uncovers a wealth of experience in the Brisbane left which indicates students at Queensland University were pioneers in mass civil disobedience and building a worker-student alliance, which they achieved as early as 1967 (Piccini 2009). His explanation of their trajectory from SDS-style politics of moral protest to revolutionary Marxism and Gramscian analysis indicates a general pattern; but he uncovers the careful theorization of their tactics, arguing:

> 'New Left activists took the idealistic injunction "let imagination take power" not only as a statement of existential anger against technocratic society and invocation of a utopian future, but as a fundamentally practicable objective in their appropriations of urban space.' (Piccini 2009: 83)

The constructive relationship built between SDA and the Brisbane CP branch is examined and reasons for the demise in 1970, as SDA moves leftwards establishing the RSA, and CP leaders attempted to prevent Brian Laver from speaking at a Moratorium rally. Piccini covers the lengthy discussions at Socialist Humanist Action Centre (SHAC) events, addressed by Denis Freney, Alan Roberts and local Marxists, about self-management in preparation for the conference, indicating the common ideas between the Trotskyist *International* magazine and SDA.

Verity Burgmann provides a longer-term view of the ideas that came out of the new left regarding the social power of the working class (Burgmann 2003). In *Power, Profit and Protest: Australian social movements and globalization* she traces the relationship between the labour movement and the newer social movements of the 1960s through the 1980s (Burgmann 2003: 1-41). Burgmann shows that in Australia these two forces collaborated and could be complementary in the 1960s and 70s period, citing the militancy of the late 1960s struggles and green bans of the early 1970s. However, class analysis was under challenge, particularly among students in the New Left groups like

SDS; '… these [NSM] theorists suggested … that the labour movement was outmoded, left behind not only by the changing circumstances *of* society but by new forces *within* society [emphasis in original].' (Burgmann 2003: 20).

At the same time social movement theorists argued that racism, sexism and homophobia were forms of oppression not based on class; key academics said that new movements took up issues not rooted in the areas of production, rather consumerism and culture (Habermas 1981). Burgmann argues that the support for NSM theories reflected the weakening of union struggle in the 1980s (Burgmann 2003: 16). The involvement of working class organisations in the anti-capitalist movement of the 1990s fractured the confidence of the NSM theorists, and as Burgmann noted, the working class again assumed a central role because of its power in industrial action and ability to link various oppressed groups which were fighting for progressive reform. Both Russell and Burgmann provide a somewhat hidden history of the role of workers as an independent force with a unique economic power to offer the social movements. Both works contribute to an understanding of the serious breach between new left theorists as class analysis was threatened in the universities by academics who had previously supported Marxism. Changes in the working class because of the boom confused political theorists and activists, who often incorrectly placed *all* new intellectual workers and professionals within the middle class, arguing they had different interests from workers in older industries. At the Left Action Conference these debates were not apparent.

A broader view is available in 1960s Marxist Chris Harman's 1988 history, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After*, in which he draws the lesson that revolution in 1968-1970 was not possible because of the weakness of revolutionary leadership which did not seriously attempt to lead working class movements; for example, French workers rose up in 1968, followed by Italians in 1969 but did not and could not challenge for power (Harman 1988). His analysis covers Europe and some parts of Asia and Latin America, but does not include Australia, and argues that radicals tended to substitute other forces for the class, such as students, peasants and a vanguard party. The comparisons are useful because the Australian working class did not develop as a political movement until after 1969. However, his insights about the priorities of the new left radicals, including Marxists, are relevant in that a similar substitutionism was emerging in Australia, as activists focused on student power, Third Worldism and, for Sydney's Resistance, vanguard parties; although Brisbane SDA and Monash LC activists were looking to build a worker-student alliance before 1968. The Italian Communist Party

moved to undermine the radical workers' movement in Italy, creating an electoral success.

Andrew Milner wrote a succinct history and analysis of the Australian left, *The Road to St. Kilda Pier: George Orwell and the Politics of the Australian Left*, in which he cleverly criticises the politics by using George Orwell's opinions as a comparison (Milner 1984). Milner provides us with very clear critiques of the main players over the 20th century until the early 1980s. The sharpness of his critique enables the reader in hindsight to understand the logic of political positions, for example his summary of Third Worldism shows how most left groups were distracted from intervening in their own country, in order to show support for new political leaderships in developing countries; the logic of uncritical support for those political leaderships and the reciprocal influence on the Australian group, meant that: '… any Third World bandit able to acquire a concentration camp and a red flag is somehow immediately deserving of our support and solidarity." (Milner 1984: 29). This is just one example of Milner's opposition to Stalinist compromises; in his insistence on activists intervening concretely in their own situation and country, he criticises the CP and Maoists for nationalist strategies. Whereas many writers denounce the new left Marxists for abstractly relying on overseas strategies, Milner also criticised those who, while arguing for a truly *Australian* theory, misassessed the key problem of Australian Stalinism as anti-theory, arguing that they avoided a thorough critique of Stalinism accommodated themselves to the CPA after 1970, after "de-Stalinisation". He argues Stalinism may be vulgar theoretically, but more importantly it was the 'antithesis of a liberative politics' (Milner 1984: 46).

Summary

While few authors have analysed this event, it was important in the evolution of the CP and the new left Marxists; it contributes to the historiography of Australia's Sixties radicalisation, adding an extra element that can partially correct the impression that the left did not engage in theoretical debate. Most historians privilege the influence and role of the CPA because it was a large party and survived into the late 1970s; however, the younger left activists at the time were also consciously intervening in the movement, no matter how immaturely and left their own legacy of innovative radical tactics which remain important to anti-capitalism today. The limited coverage in the literature of the

conference reflects these strengths and weaknesses of the conference, and the limitations on political practice to create a useful new radical leadership. The left described in all these works is a centred on individuals who made themselves available to provide the work and ideas for building opposition to the establishment; unfortunately failure stalks the results as we look back in hindsight, and politics is unforgiving.

I will attempt to help fill the gap in terms of the role of the new left Marxists and how they were impacted. While Ken Mansell argues that their project of building a revolutionary organisation was disrupted by the role of the Old Left parties, this doesn't address the question of why they could be disrupted. Brisbane SDA revolutionaries and Trotskyists in the *International* group attempted to address theoretical weakness, and these were the key contributors along with CPA left members and various individuals, at the Left Action Conference, while the SDS, Trotskyists and Maoists didn't engage. Piccini's analysis of the Brisbane left provides important material on the relationship between the CP and the new left there, showing the tremendous effort that went into discussions on self-management, at other conferences that included SDS members.

My key argument is that the conference was a useful contribution to the development of a revolutionary left in Australia, because it opened up a necessary dialogue on political strategy between all left activists. While important practical steps were taken in 1969 and 1970 to build common anti-war actions and prepare for working class involvement, unfortunately the left were incapable of taking that theoretical dialogue forward. Perhaps it was because the left were too isolated from a workers' movement, and the rise in worker class action came too late to provide a base of common activity; or perhaps ideas were moving away from a focus on the centrality of the working class because of other forces. Unclear throughout this period is an understanding of how workers could become revolutionary. An American Marxist writing in the 1950s and 60s, Hal Draper, argued that Marx's support for the working class was not based on their better nature, but because of their social power and their ability to change in struggle and provide a lead for the entire majority (Draper 1978: 40-48). Revolutionary struggle was necessary, therefore, for the working class to develop as a revolutionary class to lead humanity, and to change themselves in that struggle. In the late 1970s social movements went one way and Marxists another, split over the relevance of a class analysis, I argue that the roots of this divide lie in the experience of activists in the late 60s, which I hope to clarify in the next chapters.

Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured in four main chapters, which follow:

In **Chapter 1**, I introduce background aspects to provide a context for understanding the late 1960s. Firstly I examine the significance of the political struggles of the period which have had a lasting impact on capitalism, followed by an analysis of Australian society being transformed by the events in this period. While the working class was changed by the economic forces of the boom, forming a new social basis for socialist organisation and new demands for social struggle, Marxist ideas remained relevant, but needed to be re-shaped. This chapter introduces the major participants of the Left Action Conference. The ideas of Marcuse assisted young anti-capitalists to understand the nature of capitalism and break through the Cold War consensus, rejecting both the USSR and the West. Gramsci's writings provided a sophisticated analysis of the Western capitalist "state" and "civil society", and suggested a new role for intellectuals and a legitimate alternative to Stalinism in subaltern struggle.

Chapter 2 will examine how hundreds of left activists shifted toward revolutionary ideas from 1967, examining their practice in establishing movements and groups, and the impact of the 1968 events – the Tet Offensive, the uprising in France and Prague. I show how Stalinist strategies lost legitimacy and self-management became the key strategy. The chapter summarises the relevant aspects of Marxist analysis for new left activists – their analysis of capitalism and prospects and strategies for revolution. This discussion will enable me to establish the nature of the political debates in Australia, leading up to the Left Action Conference. Many socialists were interested in whether the CP could be reformed as a new revolutionary party. Attempts were made to unite a disparate far left, including the left of the CP, as part of a process to build the Revolutionary Socialist Alliance (RSA), paralleling the CP's "Coalition of the Left" strategy; the Left Action Conference followed the RSA conference, which met in January 1969.

Chapter 3 will focus on the debates at the Left Action Conference of April. Participants discussed a potential workers' control movement, the anti-war movement and anti-imperialism, among other political issues, and passed radical motions supporting self-management, support for the Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF) and

revolution. This chapter critically assesses the speeches and reveals a lack of attention to working class revolution even though many people argued that workers action would be central to changing the social system. The conference was appreciated by most participants as a first step in cooperation to build stronger anti-capitalist struggles. Left initiatives were successful in its aftermath such as the workers' control conferences and the Moratorium. However, important debates occurred which shattered the cooperation between new left groups and internally within Sydney and Melbourne groups.

Chapter 4 draws conclusions from this brief history, which shows a vibrant political culture in Australia. The anti-war movement flourished and spawned other movements. The radical left grew rapidly and then declined, and the thesis offers some explanation about the strengths and weaknesses of the left in the 1967-69 period. Among the new left Marxists, three key features are shared: an inability to contribute to a Marxist analysis of Australian capitalism; a lack of confidence in the working class and tendency to substitute other forces as the agency of socialism, such as Third World revolutions, student rebellion, orientation to marginal groups or dogmatic adherence to a program and leadership cults; and, an over-centralised party organisation which became ineffective in terms of leading in struggles. SDS avoided the latter, but disintegrated into various important social movements. The overall legacy of the new left Marxists is a positive contribution to the development and enrichment of political practice on the Australian left which revived a moribund Marxism and helped create new movements for change.

Chapter 1 –

Background

Such a large conference of revolutionary socialists is unimaginable in Australia in 2014, at a time of chronic economic and political international crises, so why was it possible in 1969 at a time when Australia was booming? The political movements of the 1960s were unexpected and are little understood today. While many remember the 1960s as a cultural phenomenon of hippies, rock music and drug-taking, less is known about the radical political movements built by young people, although Vietnam was in there, somewhere. Why was the nineteenth century's Karl Marx popular again? Important texts, mainly theses, enable me to draw some conclusions (Yeats 2009, Russell 1999, Mansell 1994, Piccini 2009, John Percy 2005). This chapter examines why some students became radical and were able to modernise Marxism, challenging the established communist movement.

I look at the work of political analysts who studied the significance of the period and suggest an explanation for the spectacular shift in social values coming out of the 1950s. Part of this explanation is economic, with the boom causing enormous change in workers experiences laying the basis for changing consciousness; part of the explanation is political, with the impact of Vietnam and conscription, the Liberal Party government's failing policies and the contradictions of the Australian Labor Party (ALP); and part of the explanation is cultural – the shock of the new clashed with old conservatism, leaving young people gaping. I introduce the "Second New Left" campus groups who played the leadership roles. Alternative ideas were important in this transition; while the Australian left suffered a poor theoretical tradition, international theories, especially Herbert Marcuse and Antonio Gramsci, provided an explanation. The students had begun with strong moral convictions about the hypocrisy of so-called democratic Western civilisation, and a commitment to personal responsibility pervaded their actions.

The Sixties – its significance and why

The Sixties changed the world forever. When the dust settled at the end of the 1970s, a discernible shift in cultural mores had undoubtedly occurred. Celebrated historian Eric

Hobsbawm explains the structural changes within society, arguing that a "social revolution" had occurred in Western societies by the end of the 1960s; significantly by the end of the 1970s the position of women had been transformed: 'For 80 per cent of humanity the Middle Ages ended suddenly in the 1950s; … they were *felt* to end in the 1960s.' (Hobsbawm 1994: 288-99). After World War Two, nationalist movements, in what was known as the "Third World", ousted their Western oppressors in India, Indonesia and Algeria; the 1949 Chinese revolution extended the so-called 'socialist' world, changing the face of Asia. From 1959 a series of revolutionary movements threatened governments – Cuba (1959), France and Czechoslovakia (1968), Chile (1973), Portugal (1974), Iran and Nicaragua (1979), Poland (1980). The uprising in France in 1968 was the most threatening for Western capitalism.

US Marxists Giovanni Arrighi, Terrance K. Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein, in their *Antisystemic Movements*, argue that the events surrounding 1968 represent the second *world* revolution, the other being 1848, and they say: 'Both were historic failures. Both transformed the world.' (Arrighi et al. 1989: 97). They argue: 'In both cases … the political ground-rules of the world-system were profoundly and irrevocably changed …' (Arrighi et al. 1989: 98). Four key progressive reforms ensured there would be no going back to a 1950s political culture: firstly, the defeat of the US in Vietnam caused what came to be known as the "Vietnam Syndrome" preventing future successful US foreign interventions (the next attempt in 2003, an invasion of Iraq, has been regarded as a monumental mistake); secondly, oppressed people increased their rights and status, especially non-whites and women; thirdly, trade unions' status was similarly raised; and, fourthly, the propensity of states for dictatorial power was undermined, as dictators began to fall around the world (Arrighi et al. 1989). Arrighi et al indicate underlying structural changes in capitalism involving significant industrial restructuring accompanied by a changing composition of the working class; they argue, with the rise of the white collar workforce, the nature of politics and the left was fundamentally affected (Arrighi et al. 1989).

In *A people's history of the world*, Chris Harman argues that capitalism was shaken East and West by struggles which had their roots in the changes in the various economies as a result of the post-war boom, creating a new working class less disciplined by social structures and more creatively radical – this element ensured the "Sixties" would be remembered as much more than a student or youth revolt (Harman 1999). This objective element – structural processes affecting material circumstances and

developing deep within capitalism largely because of the boom – provided cracks where the light of new ideas and struggles pushed through. Harman and Arrighi et al also identify the subjective element – the conscious and unconscious responses by human beings – and show how change was shaped by the actions of these people, workers, students, peasants and their overseers. While socialist revolution did not succeed anywhere, a number of revolutions, involving workers centrally, succeeded in overthrowing governments – especially in Portugal (1974) and Iran (1978) – as discussed in Marxist historian Colin Barker's *Revolutionary Rehearsals* (Barker 1987). Internationally, it was a revolutionary movement within capitalism, which stabilised from the late 1970s, but the potential had been exposed and many young people had seen an alternative future. Around the world an Old Left struggled to remain relevant, as the New Left threatened to shove them aside.

Was revolution possible in Australia? Australian new left activist and historian Ken Mansell maintained that 1969 in Australia was superficially similar to France the year before, but that: 'Only some of the more starry-eyed radicals of the sixties expected an imminent revolutionary explosion in Australia …' (Mansell 1994: 93). However, some became revolutionary leaders and many participants of the conference hoped for a change in circumstances as struggles developed, to provide more revolutionary opportunities. Many speeches outlined how a revolutionary movement could develop, with only some arguing to prepare for an imminent shift – nevertheless Brian Laver's speech calling for "action committees" in the workplaces received thunderous applause, according to Bob Gould (Gould 2003 (1970): 33). Leon Trotsky had commented in 1921 that: 'neither impoverishment nor prosperity as such can lead to revolution. But the alternation of prosperity and impoverishment, the crises, the uncertainty, the absence of stability – these are the motor factors of revolution'. (Trotsky 1974 [1921]). Revolution was possible somewhere in the world, and nationalist revolution was happening in developing countries, but a successful *socialist* revolution also requires a political movement of workers led by those rooted in the struggle committed to the overthrow of capitalism. There was no revolutionary movement among Australian workers in 1969 although the struggle did intensify after the defeat of the penal powers in May 1969.

Understanding the shift from Cold War Consensus to Radicalisation

The radicalisation had taken many by surprise. The post-war boom seemed to make anti-capitalist demands redundant. In fact few people thought capitalism was still a problem, the Western left were marginalized or co-opted. Chris Harman's history of the period, *The Fire Last Time*, written in 1988, reminds us that in Britain in the 1950s, 'John Strachey, … responsible for propagandizing Marxist ideas in the Britain of the 1930s … concluded that unemployment and crises were a thing of the past.' (Harman 1988: 3). Western dissidents often only saw one political alternative – support for the other superpower, the USSR, which had carried the major burden of the defeat of German fascism in the Second World War and seemed, to some, to be building a more rationally planned society. Communist Parties were strongly supported among unionised workers. However, communists willingly participated in the Cold War consensus which established a stable, divided world (East and West) which was amenable to the two superpowers, the USSR and the US. The Australian communists were influenced by the Communist Party of Italy (PCI) and China (CCP), as well as the Russians; they were the recognised centre of Australian left wing thought and activity until the late 1950s.

Australian political culture and conversation was dominated by fear and anti-Communism. In a McCarthyite political assault on the left, the Menzies government unsuccessfully attempted to ban the CPA in the early 1950s. It is hard to imagine the constraints on civil society and the extent of self-censorship among the politicians and media. According to John Murphy, the lack of debate on Vietnam, conscription and the ANZUS alliance – and an environment of threats, fear and (blind) loyalty – meant the ruling class drifted into a war in the mid-60s for which they were ill-prepared, even though there were important reservations and genuine political division (Murphy 1993). Australian military advisers were sent to Vietnam in 1962, and the government legislated for conscription determined by the "birthday lottery of death" for 20-year old men, in November 1964. Troops, including conscripts, were sent from April 1965 (Russell 1999: 104). About 60,000 Australians would serve until a phased withdrawal from November 1970 until January 1973. The CPA was in retreat through the 1950s as membership plummeted; however, from 1965, opposition to the war and conscription began to open a new potential audience, although not until 1968 did anti-war activity blossom.

The new generation of student activists was not attracted to communism or to the right. Their first objective was to challenge the leaders of a system which turned them, as new intellectuals, into cogs in a giant machine called capitalism, and which created a wasteful narrow-minded consumer society and brutally dominated poorer developing countries. When Western society shifted after the Tet Offensive in 1968 and the US began to reverse its stance, the Liberal government was unable to keep up, stuck in conservative anti-communist and anti-Chinese rhetoric. By 1969 the government had three key problems: the disarray of their Vietnam policy, a defiant campaign against conscription and the revitalization of the left (Murphy 1993: 218). The fourth problem, the August 1969 opinion polls showing a new mood for withdrawal of troops and an end to conscription, gave an advantage to Labor, and an eight per cent swing in the late 1969 federal election (Murphy 1993). The Communist Party could not be blamed.

The boom was double-edged: on the one hand the new consumerism was conservatising; but it also created greater and different expectations. To young people, the new social opportunities and cultural innovations conflicted with their day-to-day experience of Australian life, as presented in Ray Evans's piece in the book, *The 1960s in Australia: People, Power and Politics* (Evans, in Robinson and Ustinoff (Eds.) 2012: 1-33). More young people had access to education and resources. As industries relied on larger sources of educated labour, the boom was reflected on the campuses, and the number of tertiary students rose to over 100,000 by the 60s and number of universities from nine to 14 between 1956 and 1966 (Russell 1999: 46). The situation in the universities was poorly understood, as was the "youth crisis" which had been developing more widely since the mid-50s. Conservative values of the Establishment were sharply at odds with the new ideas, and demands for free expression and an end to censorship emanated among young people, as governments dictated hair length and music taste as much as road rules (Russell 1999: 40).

The changing working class consciousness

Conference speakers John Playford and Laurie Aarons labeled Australian capitalism "neo-capitalism" because of the growing role of the state in the economy (Playford 1969; Aarons 1969). Many spoke of the scientific revolution occurring leading to the development of new industries and new technically trained workforces. The rise of a white-collar workforce to feed industry and the state bureaucracy attracted many more

women into paid work. Meanwhile the booming construction industry created better opportunities among less-skilled building workers. While the older sections of industry were unionised, penal powers (anti-union laws) worked to limit industrial action; a decade of very low levels of worker combativity gave the impression of a workforce co-opted by capitalism. However, short strikes for higher pay were successful, giving the impression of a working class co-opted by consumerism. Four overlapping arguments emerged: firstly, that blue collar and white collar workers were different, overlapping with the second (and traditional) argument that women workers were more conservative; thirdly, de-industrialisation (the shift to service industries) would reduce the skilled blue collar workforce, overlapping the fourth idea that unskilled workers were not interested in politics, only higher pay. I have drawn out these points from my reading of various works (Russell 1999: 402-443; Kuhn and O'Lincoln 1996; O'Lincoln 2012).

Even though by 1968 larger groups of workers were starting to take action, like the national postal strike, some left commentators argued that the working class had disappeared or declined, making revolution impossible. For example, British communist Eric Hobsbawm argued that the restructuring of key centres of manufacturing industry decimated layers of left wing workers making communist organisation impossible (Hobsbawm 2011). Arrighi et al argued that Western left political parties and movements underwent significant changes between 1945 and 1960, as their base, primarily among blue collar skilled workers, mostly male, was being transformed by the addition of a new mass of unskilled and differently skilled workers, both blue and white collar, men and women (Arrighi et al. 1989: 88). Undoubtedly it is true that changes were happening, but that does not mean that the working class was losing its power or ability to affect society politically. As Callinicos and Harman argue: in actuality, the working class has always changed according to the needs of capital and, as we see today, continues to restructure thereby changing the nature of class struggle (Callinicos and Harman 1987). In Melbourne newspaper *The Age* of 12 February 2014, economist writer Ross Gittins argued that the *quantity* of goods produced in manufacturing had only declined recently (to eight per cent today) – its share of national wealth increased from 15 per cent in 1901 to 25 per cent by the 1950s; meanwhile service industries account for 85 per cent today, taking off in the 1950s from around 50 per cent (Gittens 2014: 41). These figures reflect the increasing productivity through automation of manufacturing; while there are proportionately fewer core manufacturing skilled

workers and a decline in numbers of the traditional bastions of militant unionists, they therefore retained more power per worker.

Politically, the restructuring of industry in the early 1960s led to new divisions opening up as well as potential for new struggles – equal pay and other women's and gay rights, opposition to racism against Aborigines and migrants, urban and rural environmental concerns – and new global demands for international solidarity, rather than a disappearance of the working class. In hindsight we can see that the same restructuring which seemed to undermine the left workers' movement, would actually assist a politicization of industrial action after 1969. Some issues like equal pay were common to white collar and blue collar – female low-skilled metal workers pioneered the industrial action for equal pay between the 1940s and 1972 (Kaplan 1996). Hal Draper argues that workers' struggle could and did sometimes develop from economic to political demands; and he suggested that wage demands could be interpreted both as consumerist weakness or a potential trigger for political struggle (Draper 1978: 40-48). Thus, it is misleading to argue Australian workers were all "incorporated"; although they were not engaged in political industrial action of a large scale until around 1971. At the conference, speakers positively discussed workers in political action, white collar and blue collar, although in left journals, like *Arena*, some writers argued that white-collar workers raised demands that would not be supported by blue-collar workers and vice versa. The issue of class and "class analysis" would be a defining feature of the arguments of the period afterwards. For now, it is important for my arguments to recognise, as Russell elucidates, that the Australian working class would re-group after 1969 (Russell 1999: 363).

The left response – Labor, students and the second New Left

I will look in detail at the Marxist groups in the next chapter, but here I am providing an understanding of the general situation of the left before 1969, in the ALP and the tiny new groups of the New Left. The Labor leadership was split on the question of war and conscription, with the left behind Arthur Calwell and the right behind Gough Whitlam. However, all sections of the ALP leadership were opposed to a Vietnamese victory in the war and would never condone any policy which put Australian troops in danger. In May 1966, an election year, Labor leader Calwell's policy was for immediate withdrawal of conscripts only (Russell 1999: 220). This meant their position was seen

to be inconsistent in the eyes of young activists. On the other hand, it allowed room for anti-war activists, some of whom were members of the Trotskyist groups in Sydney, to remain active members of the party and for many members of parliament to speak at various anti-war events. Until 1967, the party was a strong opponent of conscription in the eyes of YCAC youth and they gave the ALP electoral support (Russell 1999: 217) .

After the 1966 election defeat, Calwell was replaced by Gough Whitlam as leader, and the party shifted rightwards. In this period Whitlam was attempting to modernise Labor and he moved to undermine the left, particularly the Victorian Socialist Left, and steer the ALP in a direction to accommodate more professional politicians (Russell 1999: 223). Calwell engaged with the anti-war movement in association with Jim Cairns, who was becoming a popular Labor proponent of the anti-war position; Cairns was only narrowly defeated by Whitlam in a leadership ballot in April 1968 (Dyrenfurth and Bongiorno 2011: 124). Left Labor was able to adjourn the Victorian State ALP Conference to Pentridge Prison to support John Zarb, a postal worker and draft resister, when he was jailed in October 1968, indicating their willingness to participate in the politics of "confrontation" or militant direct action (Russell 1999: 230). Particularly in Victoria, the ALP left assisted the radicalisation of young Australians because this mainstream political force legitimated the anti-war struggle, even condoning breaking the law over conscription.

Students and the second New Left

A relatively apolitical student left emerged internationally following the first campus occupations, around civil liberties questions, in 1964 at Berkeley California. As Kristy Yeats explains, higher living standards existed alongside a 'growing anxiety and fear'; the Cold War arms race which threatened to develop into nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1961 led to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) (Yeats 2009: 42). Small student-led campaigns, inspired by the Civil Rights movement in the US, cohered various political students in clubs (Hastings 2003: 12). Eventually such campaigns would challenge the White Australia Policy and the treatment of Aborigines (Russell 1999: 78-97). Education issues and campaigns about curriculum content and self-management of the universities developed (Barcan 2011). Many students were concerned about the role and responsibility of themselves as part of a growing global movement of intellectuals, to change the world.

In agreement with Warren Osmond, Hastings states: '… it would be the Vietnam movement and the fight against conscription that would harden many Australian student activist views from civil rights to revolution', rather than the earlier campaigns against the White Australia Policy and racism, which failed to leave a political intellectual legacy (Hastings 2003: 13-15). Young people were outraged. Mansell argues 'Vietnam … became a metaphor for what was seen as a suffocating and conformist malaise at home'(Mansell 1994: 4). Murphy explains: 'Australian debates were as much about domestic political conflicts as they were about Vietnam, as the war was drawn into the eddies of Australian polity, taking its meaning from their currents.' (Murphy 1993: xx). Student activists worked hard for a Labor Party victory in the 1966 federal election, because Labor had promised to end conscription. When the Liberals won by a large majority, the radicals rejected reformist politics.

Gordon and Osmond examine how students were shocked by the events of 1966/67 which forced them to question what kind of society would act so violently, as police attacked anti-war demonstrators; they identified a clear break from liberalism to radicalism, as student activists argued that, because the war and imperialism were intrinsic to the operations of capitalism, the system could not be reformed but must be thoroughly overhauled (Gordon and Osmond in Gordon 1970). Some rejected the social democratic project totally, although some remained members of the ALP; but almost none joined the CPA because of its links with the USSR and Stalinism. New Left activists responded with civil disobedience against conscription and for democratic rights, and SDS campaigns for a new value-system and "free" universities. Some followed the example of SDA in Brisbane with a multi-issue focus.

Students who supported the existing left parties, the Old Left – ALP, CPA, CPA (ML) and Trotskyist groups – organised together in Labor Clubs and in ALP Clubs at Universities of Sydney, Melbourne and at Monash. There was overlap, and membership was a messy concept. The campus Labor Clubs were dominated, not by ALP members (the ALP clubs were linked to the Labor Party) but by but by radical socialists in Melbourne and Sydney. In Brisbane, Hobart and Adelaide the key group called itself Students (changed to "Society") for Democratic Action in August 1966. SDA and was politically eclectic, until about 1969. The SDS and SDA groups, set up in all major cities except Darwin, focused on a struggle for self-management of the universities, and were heavily influenced by the Marcusean US New Left, Libertarianism and Anarchism (Yeats 2009: 58-68). All, except SDS groups, together became the "far left", a smaller

minority united in their support for various Marxist strategies to overthrow capitalism. SDS groups were considered "non-aligned" (John Percy 2005: 201).

All these revolutionary organisations were regarded as within the new left because of their inventive alternative political methodologies, and their key characteristics included: a re-imagining of a socialist utopia outside of the USSR and the CPA; novel tactics; and a focus on power relations and culture (Yeats 2009). They were as hostile to the USSR and the CPA as to the West. (Yeats 2009). As Mansell explains: 'The "new left" … was not primarily a "generational" phenomenon … but one that was defined by a new practice and style breaking with that of the "old left"'; he cites an *ALR* interview with British socialist Robin Blackburn (who was on tour in Australia) in 1970 who said the "Old Left" had '… failed to touch directly the everyday life of the masses in capitalist society or encourage them to take direct action against the system which oppressed them.' (*ALR* 1970:10; cited in Mansell 1994). While the first anti-war protests were organised by CPA members, the student left established their own campaigns: the Vietnam Action Committee (later Campaign) in Sydney (set up by Trotskyists, Bob Gould, Hall Greenland and Alan Roberts, plus Anne Curthoys who was from a CP family); Labor Clubs in Melbourne (particularly Monash students, Maoist Albert Langer, and Jim Cairns supporter, Dave Nadel); and SDA in Brisbane (Mitch Thompson and Brian Laver) (John Percy 2005). Linked to the ALP were also Save Our Sons (SOS) and YCAC, largely young ALP members who emerged from the CND groups (Yeats 2009).

Alternative ideas – Marcuse and Gramsci

Australian activists felt there was little in the Australian political traditions that could assist their project to change Australian society, let alone the world. Gordon and Osmond state: 'Australian intellectuals have no indigenous body of accumulated social theory, homologous to, say, "the American Dream", or European Marxism, or existentialism, or Central European *Kulturkritik*, that could provide the theoretical drive for an empirical sociology.'(Gordon and Osmond in Gordon 1970). Left intellectuals relied on key international theoreticians whose work had international relevance. Herbert Marcuse and Antonio Gramsci were especially important because they were dissidents within the Marxist movement, and criticised the USSR and the Stalinism of the communist parties. Marcuse, a contemporary European Marxist living in the US,

posed an alternative analysis of alienation, saying it was caused and perpetuated by modern societies; he encouraged intellectuals to challenge capitalism by a "necessary" revolution in the West, and also the East (Feenberg and Leiss 2007). If Marcuse created the moral case that that capitalism **must** be challenged, Italian Antonio Gramsci provided an alternative **socialist strategy** for revolution in the West, and was important for identifying a role for left intellectuals and relating to the working class. A key leader of the factory occupations in Turin in 1919-1920, he died in an Italian fascist prison in 1937 still campaigning for workers' revolution (Davidson 1977), and a selection of his *Prison Notebooks* were popularized in the Left in the 1960s (Cammett 1967; Marks 1957).

In his 1964 book, *One Dimensional Man*, Marcuse argued two main things relevant to young people: firstly, the US-dominated capitalist economic and political system produced a culture which stifled creativity because of a kind of totalitarianism – called "repressive tolerance" – it encouraged a self-imposed domination within the system: 'Under the rule of a repressive whole, liberty can be made into a powerful instrument of domination.' (Marcuse 1964: 7). Secondly, '[In the East] … freedom is the way of life instituted by a communist regime, and all other transcending modes of freedom are either capitalistic, or revisionist, or leftist sectarianism.' (Marcuse 1964: 14). He argued that the traditional agency for change, the working class proletariat, had been neutralized: 'Technical progress, extended to a whole system of domination and coordination, creates forms of life (and power) which appear to reconcile forces opposing the system.' (Marcuse 1964: xliv). To initiate change, he looked to humans existing on the fringe of society: '… the substratum of the outcasts, the exploited, the persecuted of other races and other colours, the unemployed and the unemployable … Their opposition is revolutionary if their consciousness is not.' (Marcuse 1964: 256). Marcuse's ideas dominated the SDS in the US and Australia; and their members attempted to work among the socially marginalised, which proved unsuccessful. Queensland SDA members also supported these ideas. In general, the Marxist left rejected the Marcusean pessimism about workers' incorporation into the capitalist system, and also rejected any useful insights – a case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Antonio Gramsci was an important influence in the Australian left; the CPA was closely aligned to the Communist Party of Italy (PCI), and many in the new left also based their politics on Gramscian insights. Revolutionaries and reformists took different ideas from

Gramsci's work, particularly in Australia. In Queensland SDA members began to thoroughly study Gramsci; current Gramsci scholar Peter D. Thomas was a student of O'Neill's (Thomas 2009: xv). CPA member Davidson wrote a book on Gramsci's contribution, and the *ALR* arranged discussions (Davidson 1977). His major work – the writings of his *Prison Notebooks* – are subject to various interpretations because of their fragmentary state, as a result of his incarceration and attempts to avoid the fascist censors (Hoare and Smith 1971). Gramsci challenged the "determinism" of Marxism Leninism, which stated that socialism was inevitable, not requiring intervention, and opposed the use of Marxism as dogma. He focused on the struggle by ordinary workers in the revolutionary process, as opposed to the bureaucratic socialism of the USSR and Communist parties. He developed the definition of "intellectual" as a functional role; socialist intellectuals' role should be as the organisers of working class struggle, whether or not the individual was a professional, an academic, student or worker. In his analysis of the capitalist society of the 1920s and 30s, he further developed the concept of "hegemony" to understand the relationship between the state and civil society and how rulers dominate hegemonically by a combination of coercion and consent (Hoare and Smith 1971).

Most importantly he argued that workers consciousness was contradictory, comprising the "common sense" of an inherited and uncritical view of the world along with the "good sense" of practical activity in changing the world; this analysis opened a way to understand how workers can become revolutionary through their own experience challenging their inherited ideas, while involved in struggle. The "philosophy of praxis", meaning Marxism and the unity of theory and practice, was of major concern to Gramsci to understand why his party could not lead the Italian workers revolt, which was defeated in 1920 (Spriano 1964 (1975)). A recent work by Peter D. Thomas argues that Gramsci recognised a need for insurrection as an act led by "subaltern classes" and shared a similar politics of revolution as the Russian leaders Lenin and Trotsky, especially what became known as the "United Front" to build unity and hegemony among a majority of anti-capitalist forces (Thomas 2009: 209-212). Thus, Gramsci's strategy was such that the "war of position" was a political war, combining ideas and action, led by the party within a united front to win mass support for revolutionary socialism, and which would aim and prepare for "war of manoeuvre", insurrection, which necessarily is a mass event. This strategy relied on using two forms of organisation: a party – his "Modern Prince" – within a wider movement of non-revolutionary workers and activists, including reformists (Gramsci 1957: 59-67). The

party should not be a machine that violently took power on behalf of the masses but one that campaigned politically throughout society and throughout political institutions, within a dialogue, engagement and practice, at every level of society, he argued. The workers movement would provide power within a broad collective of a social movement for change.

Gramsci was adopted across the board, for different reasons and his writings were published by the PCI selectively, allowing them to use the material as a reinforcement of their 1950s de-Stalinisation process, and consolidating a reformist strategy; eventually Eurocommunism became a common approach of many communist parties, including the Australian CP, misusing Gramsci's work as justification. British Marxist and 1960s student activist Chris Harman developed a creative melding of Gramsci's insights with Trotsky and Lenin in his analysis of party-building, in *Party and Class* (Harman 1968-69(1971): 23-32). However, at this time, Trotskyists in Australia were divided about the role of the party: Resistance supported the model offered by the FI, especially the SWP in the US; the *International* group were moving away from the idea of a separate party. The difficulty in the period after 1966 was the absence of a revolutionary movement of workers: Marcuse suggested a turn to the marginals; Gramsci offered a role to intellectuals.

Summary

A combination of circumstances and alternative ideas would ensure that Australia's young people would persist in their anti-1950s cultural rebellion for a decade and that some would form groups to challenge the government on education reform, civil liberties, war and conscription. When a government that responded with police violence against anti-war protesters in 1966, overwhelmingly won the election later that year, student activists turned against the entire system, knowing they were not alone. Their immediate interests in struggle were freedom from conscription and an unjust war, as well as meaningful education and role in society. Their persistence and their bold new tactics helped keep the war in Vietnam and conscription as the defining public issues, daring the ALP and challenging the CPA.

The movement against war and conscription was much wider than the radicals, and every section was important, but the radicals took the ideas about changing capitalism

farthest. Marcuse and Gramsci were central to the ideological break with both western liberalism and Stalinism because they provided essential tools to understand the need for a thorough change of both capitalism and USSR-style socialism; but they had no magic answer to Australian revolutionaries who asked the question: where is the real proletariat? For that revolutionaries would need their own local analysis.

Chapter 2 –

1967-1969: from revolutionary tactics to revolution?

We have seen how a large minority of student activists were radicalised as they opposed Australia's involvement in Vietnam. Hundreds of activists were developing Marxist ideas about the need for revolution and a revolutionary party, particularly after May 1968. This chapter shows how some sections of this changing Australian left were shifting towards a common analysis and strategy for revolutionary change, although some were resisting this, in the lead-up to the Left Action Conference. The CPA was moving away from Stalinism toward more democratic strategies and using more militant rhetoric. Even though a large minority of the party remained supporters of Moscow, the official party positions shifted further than others in the international communist movement under the leadership of the left faction around general secretary Laurie Aarons. I attempt to answer why this was so in order to explain why the conference took place; and indicate what the CPA leadership hoped to achieve. Thus the first part of the chapter looks at the Old Left: the evolution of Stalinism and how the CPA shifted away from dependence on the USSR, engendering the fragmentation of the communist movement. Trotskyists, a small group with less than 50 members and outside the CP since the 1930s, and Maoists, who formed the CPA (ML) in 1964 with about 200 members, became important competitors (Russell 1999: 294-330).

In the second part I analyse the politics forming in the new left, which indicates further political fragmentation, based partly on geographical divisions, but nevertheless a common commitment to new political methodologies and hostility to the CPA, which started to thaw, for some, after 1968. They were divided over whether to support the conference, reflecting other emerging political differences. The chapter summarises the politics of the key groups who attended the Left Action Conference, as they evolved from 1968 to 1969 – the Monash Labor Club (MLC) and Maoists in Melbourne; the VAC, and Trotskyists in Resistance and the *International* group, also known as Australian Revolutionary Marxists (ARM), in Sydney; and the Brisbane SDA, which began as supporters of American New Left ideas and shifted toward Marxism, setting up a party after the conference (SDAs were also set up in Adelaide and Hobart).

Australia's anti-war movement exploded in 1968, and new people were attracted to the groups leading the direct action in the new left. While some students sought out the Old Left ideas of Trotskyists, who were already active among radical students at Sydney University, and the Melbourne-based Maoists, the CPA were unable to recruit younger people. Recognising the need to change and build a relationship with the new left forces was a compelling incentive to initiate the conference, and the CP was in a key position having 5,000 members and a national organisation including a sizable working class base. The conference represented a coming together of Old and New Left politics; however, the shape of its agenda and outcomes depended on the politics brought along by the various strands. This chapter elaborates those contributions.

Stalinism and the CPA

In the late 1960s the CPA was ageing, declining and divided over what to do about Stalinism. While, from 1967, the left of the party publicly rejected the politics of the Moscow-dominated communist movement and attempted to develop an alternative, some in the party cherished the benefits of these international connections. The situation was complicated because political rhetoric often did not match actual political positions; some who supported Moscow spoke more strongly for revolution. The CP leadership championed the struggle in Czechoslovakia in 1968, as a new and more democratic socialism seemed to be in the making, after criticizing the USSR party, the CPSU. In August 1968 the CP condemned the use of Russian tanks to defeat the Czechs, joining with the Italian party (PCI) in becoming more critical than most other communist parties. Key party leaders visited the capital Prague (Taft 1994: 175). Czechoslovakia gave the CP left a current example of an alternative vision of socialism, and with the PCI they developed a new strategy for a socialism relevant for Australia, based on liberal democratic values and a methodology based on Gramscian ideas about "counter-hegemony". A dialogue was being constructed in 1968-69, between the CP and SDA; the two could not be more different superficially, with totally different roots – the monolithic CP meets the spontaneous eclectic libertarian new left, but the ideology of both was evolving.

To understand the significance of this shift, I will briefly sketch the CP's history. Stalinism can be defined as more than dictatorship: originating after Stalin had defeated right and left oppositions in the CPSU, it became an ideology and practice that justified a new ruling elite and sustained the political system of the Soviet Union, dishonestly as

Marxist, for decades. Histories of the CPA agree it was a non-revolutionary tool of USSR foreign policy, but disagree over the causes. Stuart Macintyre's history of the CPA until the Second World War – *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia from origins to illegality* – argues that the entire Marxist Leninist project was flawed, not just Stalin's role and politics (S. Macintyre 1998). After the party was established in 1920, Macintyre shows the extent to which party members, from the late 1920s, succumbed to the machinations of the Comintern to destroy the local traditions; he argues that the process forged a strong disciplined organisation bereft of democratic structures and totally supportive of the USSR. While the organisation undermined democratic debate and was described by many as anti-theoretical, the structures enabled members to withstand pressures from Australian governments to undermine democracy and civil rights for communists, during the early stages of the Second World War when the CP was banned and the attempt to ban it in the 1950s.

The Beris Penrose identifies a crucial period which can be seen as a turning point for the Australian party in terms of relinquishing its independence leading up to the episodes of expulsions of key leaders, Jack Kavanagh in 1930 and Herbert Moxon in 1932. The CPA was based on the CPSU model, establishing 'a bureaucratic apparatus which inhibited free debate inside the party and vilified, ostracised and expelled communist dissidents from its ranks'; and the party abandoned making an '… independent assessment of the Australian political and economic situation … Instead … implemented directives from the Communist International (Comintern) which bore little relevance to Australian conditions.' (Penrose 1996: 92). The party was able to build strong political roots in the working class, although its theoretical capacity was weak; however, monolithism was always tempered with examples of various independent actions of sections of the membership. *Communism: A Love Story*, Jeff Sparrow's biography of CPA founding member Guido Baracchi, traces how dissidence developed in the party as Baracchi shifts from loyal theoretician against the party's Stalinism at the end of the 1930s (Sparrow 2007).

Tom O'Lincoln argues that Stalinism was an outcome, not with the revolution but with the counter-revolutionary politics and process led by Stalin, arguing that a nationalist 'socialism in one country' became the ideology of a brutal dictatorship over the working class and the hierarchical international movement; its popularity was retained until the 1950s because the USSR (in the context of world war, Great Depression and fascism) seemed to present a political alternative to western capitalism (O'Lincoln 1985). The

1930s experience created fertile ground for a new form of Marxism, based on the concept "socialism in one country". The command economy controlled by the state became a model for nationalist revolutionary movements in the Third World, who adopted the name "socialist" to reflect the state-owned property, which was widely considered socialist at this time.

While their adherence to a foreign country *politically* separated the CPA from sections of the Australian working class, their *industrial* practice built very strong union organisation and struggles, for a time. Their union work was dominated by bureaucratism, but CPA members led a politically educated movement of shop stewards. The close links to rank and file workers, including non-aligned or ALP-aligned, provided a strong base for the CPA through the 1950s, when communists built a rich tradition of highly respected political movements with rank and file union membership support, for example the campaigns to defend Aboriginal workers and refugees, as well as support for equal pay and peace (Jordan 2013). Lani Russell documents the development of political trade unionism through the 1960s and 70s, with the CPA playing a major role against the anti-union laws, war and racism (Russell 1999: 403-408).

Fragmentation

The anti-communist Cold War politics of the 1950s created a background for the fragmentation of Stalinism when the CP was pilloried by left and right. In 1956, after the Khrushchev criticisms of Stalin and invasion by Russian troops to crush the Hungarian revolution, dissidents left the party. Bob Gould and Denis Freney were among them, and found their way to the Trotskyists in Balmain (Sydney) around Nick Origlass. Others set up *Outlook* magazine. In 1956 ex-communists like British Marxist Edward Thompson promoted the concept of "Socialist Humanism", seeking '… to re-emphasise human agency at the heart of Marxism …' (Blackledge 2006: 134). To Thompson and his dissident friends, "Stalinism is socialist theory and practice which has lost the ingredient of humanity." (Cited in Blackledge 2006: 135). In Britain the *New Left Review* magazine eventually brought ex-communists together with student radicals, left Labourites and some revolutionaries, in 1960 (Widgery 1976). The magazine was also influential in the Australian left.

Khrushchev's speech criticised Stalin as dictatorial and also encouraged the communist parties around the world to work closely with Labor Parties and reformists rather than

argue for revolution. China disagreed and, according to CPA historian Alastair Davidson, the Australian party was initially more sympathetic to the pro-Stalinist Chinese Communist Party (CCP), with most members preferring to be linked to a leading foreign communist party rather than being independent (Davidson 1969). Davidson's history traced the party's development through the 1950s, showing regular engagement with the Chinese Communist Party. However, the majority sided with the USSR, when China split in the early 60s; this led to more resignations and a rival "communist" party in 1965, the Peking-line CPA (Marxist-Leninist) which combined revolutionary rhetoric and Stalinism and became influential in Melbourne and Adelaide. More unsettling debate about "de-Stalinisation" factionalised the CP between pro-Moscow Stalinists and a growing layer of anti-Stalinist reformers attracted to the electoral policies the Italian PCI (which had been influential since 1953). Fragmentation was accompanied by more debate. Some members and ex-members set up the *Arena* magazine in 1963 to engage in ongoing analysis; the party opened up their theoretical journal re-launching it as *Australian Left Review* (*ALR*) from 1966 and included non-members on the editorial board.

1967 - "Towards a Coalition of the Left"

Laurie Aarons became General Secretary in May 1965 and led the party to adopt, at their 1967 Congress, the "Towards a Coalition of the Left" strategy which intended to position the party as a more democratic socialist party. According to Laurie Aarons: "… cooperation in action for social change (by working class parties) would continue as the centre of different social and political groupings which would [share] the leadership of a new society." (O'Lincoln: 109). Many members identified three key elements in the left proposals as problems: the central role of the working class was removed along with the central role of the working class party (the CPA), and the broadening of the class content of a socialist state (O'Lincoln 1985: 110). Tom O'Lincoln argued that the CPA's shift away from Stalinism in the early 60s was constructed on the basis of anti-Leninist liberalism (O'Lincoln 1985). This analysis was supported by John Percy's 'Towards a history of the Communist Party of Australia' (John Percy 1995).

Aarons' research in the fifties allowed him to produce an important class analysis of Australia in which he identified four key class formations, as analysed by Kuhn:

> "The big bourgeoisie" was equated with the monopolists. The "upper middle
> class" was identified with other capitalists, administrators, executives and some

professionals. The "lower middle class" was made up of small business people and the intermediate strata of white-collar workers, with the "working class" as a final category.' (Rick Kuhn, "Class analysis and the left in Australian history", in Kuhn and O'Lincoln 1996: 156).

The analysis remained nationalist and reformist situating the key class division between the mainly foreign-owned monopolists and "the people" comprising the "lower middle class" and the "working class"; this left the non-monopoly capitalists ambiguously less visible. Laurie and Eric Aarons developed a strategy for a specifically Australian democratic evolution from capitalism to socialism, based on liberal ideas similar to social democracy – they argued for building a party that could represent the interests of workers (both blue and white collar) and the "lower middle class" which could mobilise the social power of the working class to win control of the existing state, via elections. This was a reformist solution similar to that being pioneered in Italy – Eurocommunism – designed to situate the CP left in a position of influence with the ALP left and potentially electoral success in mainstream capitalist society. The change in strategy reflected debates in the communist movement as well. Davidson traces the influence of the PCI in breaking with Moscow, and setting an example in its successful party building locally with approximately 1.5 million members and often the largest share of voters in elections, which was attributed to developing an "Italian" road to socialism (Davidson 1969). The breach with the USSR was not over the nationalist "Socialism in one country" but a symptom of Stalinism – the lack of democracy.

Before the June 1967 conference, Doug White wrote in *Arena* (on behalf of its editorial board): 'The coalition proposed is … one of equal bodies over a long period of transitional, democratic, and partial reforms which will bring about a socialist order… a picture develops of a leadership interested in politics within a bourgeois-democratic framework.' (White 1967: 31-32). From 1967 the CP left developed open criticisms of Moscow, sought to link with the radicals and develop new radical methods among workers (O'Lincoln 1985). The pro-Moscow forces left and established the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA) after splitting in 1971. CPA members called the first demonstrations against the war and conscription in 1964, but they maintained a moderate campaign, demanding negotiations between the NLF and the US, which was criticised by the new left; while more radical CP unionists, usually associated with the maritime unions, threatened industrial action to undermine the war effort. At the same

time, links with radicals were being attempted, albeit selectively, depending on the political group.

Key texts of "Western Marxism" resonated; this group of Marxists mostly outside political parties, and critical of USSR and the orthodox Stalinist Marxism, included Georg Lukács, Herbert Marcuse, Antonio Gramsci, Theodore Adorno and Jean-Paul Sartre; some avoided the party work and focused on philosophy, reviving Hegelian analysis (Blackledge 2006). Of course, it would be nonsense to equate the contributions of the philosophers with those like Marcuse, Lukács and Gramsci who intervened in the left movement; however, the political analysis emerging from this group, in general, would have an impact that legitimized dissidence and provided some alternative ideas from within the Marxist tradition. Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács argued for the concept which Marx called "Praxis" and Leninism (Lukács 1971: 299). According Bernie Taft who interviewed him about the student unrest in 1968, Lukács said: 'I view it with great sympathy as the beginning of the opposition to the manipulated society.' (Taft 1984: 187).

The CPA back-flipped on their analysis of the French revolt – initially they had supported the role of the French communists (PCF) who opposed the radicalism, favouring an electoral strategy, but, according to *Arena*'s Doug White: 'Nine months later Tribune gives unprecedented space to members of the student movements, implies C.P. support and recognition, but scarcely mentions and does not defend … [the PCF analysis] …' (White 1969: 4). This lack of explanation perhaps reflected the internal differences between those of the left who wanted to relate to and recruit radical students, and those moving closer to the Italian strategies and who were more ambivalent about the PCF role, mainly in Melbourne. The 1960s posed a threat and an opportunity to the CP: Maoists and Trotskyists would become key leaders of the Marxist revolutionary tradition in many countries. As Australian journalist Alex Mitchell, recruited to Trotskyism in 1968, writes in his memoir: 'The rise of the Trotskyist movement in the UK in the 1970s was in direct proportion to the decline of the Communist Party of Great Britain.'(Mitchell 2011: 230). The CPA shifted considerably to the left between August 1968 and the mid-1970s in an attempt to relate to the new left forces. They opened up their journal *ALR* to non-party editors like Dan O'Neill, and undertook a 23-page symposium with well-known student leaders in July 1968 (*ALR* 1968: 30-53). In Brisbane the party was working with SDA leaders in 1968.

In general, the left was experiencing the early stage of an upturn in struggle and the CPA tried to relate to those with whom they could find common ground – the SDA in Brisbane and individual intellectuals at various campuses, who were interested in the Gramscian ideas about building a "counter-hegemony" in a "worker-student alliance". The Brisbane branch secretary Charlie Gifford was centrally involved in discussions about self-management and workers' control with SDA and the Trotskyists around *International*. The CPA was a looser group with a range of opinion, but still directed by a centralised leadership. Taft provides an important insight into the methodology of the left leaders showing how they carefully built alliances opportunistically, taking risks to create a party that could benefit from the New Left phenomenon, with little genuine commitment to the radical line of their allies, at the same time balancing their conservative opponents inside the CP, particularly the Melbourne branch (Taft 1994). The conference reflected a party very open to public discussion and debate.

Australia's Trotskyists

Trotskyists were active in the ALP club at Sydney Uni in the early 1960s and split into two groups in 1965. They were well-placed to lead student activism and open to the radical liberalism of New Left critiques of society, education and Vietnam; they also had a general Marxist explanation of capitalism and a critique of the USSR linked to hostility to the CPA. Bob Gould and Denis Freney had been expelled from the CP after 1956, and Nick Origlass had led Trotskyist groups in Australia since the 1930s. Young student John Percy met Gould at a Canberra anti-war protest in 1965 after both were arrested; their discussion convinced Percy of Trotskyism, he says (John Percy 2005: 66). John Percy estimates they had 33 members in Sydney and 12 in Melbourne in the 60s, including Hall Greenland prominent at the university (John Percy 2005: 36). Origlass published the *International* newsletter. Differences emerged over party-building and John and Jim Percy along with Bob Gould, established themselves as leaders of a separate group, based around *Socialist Perspective* magazine (John Percy 2005: 70). Denis Freney was overseas for more than four years, returning in 1968, when *International* was re-launched as a magazine published by Australian Revolutionary Marxists (ARM).

The "orthodox" Trotskyist parties and groups within the Fourth International (so called because they adhered to the FI strategy agreed at the founding conference of 1938) had

outlined an incorrect prediction that capitalism, unable to expand and reform, would enter a severe crisis and would likely suffer enormous working class upheavals after World War 2 (Reisner 1973: 180-220). A second major plank of their raison d'être was defence of the USSR, as a "degenerated workers' state", the defining element of which was the nationalized property secured after the Russian revolution (Reisner 1973: 174-75). They defended the 1917 Russian revolution but were fiercely hostile to the Communist leadership. While these political positions did not have an immediate impact on struggle in Australia, allegiance to one or other of the larger FI parties could affect what kind of party activists tried to build. Thus like the other groups, support for a successful revolution overseas built supporters in Australia, and the groups' politics were distorted by allegiance to an international organisation which was affected by Third Worldist politics.

The Origlass group (about 12 when Freney joined in 1957, (Freney 1991:92)) supported FI leader, Michel Pablo, who was expelled from the majority leadership in 1963. His "Entrism" proposals that the FI re-join the communist or Labor parties was opposed by the largest FI party, the American SWP, led by James Cannon. The Percys and Gould also supported a form of "Entrism" intervening in the ALP, which Percy criticises in his history (John Percy 2005: 39). Freney worked with Pablo in Algeria before 1968 where he experienced local workers attempting to introduce self-management, as part of that revolutionary struggle (Freney 1991). The group around Origlass remained associated with Pablo (and "Entrism") and published his writings on self-management, in this period. Origlass was committed to building a radical current inside Labor; he was heavily involved in the Balmain-Leichhardt branch until expelled. He and his comrade Izzy Wyner were elected to Balmain Council in December 1968 and this work became their focus, with Origlass becoming Mayor 1971-73 (Greenland 1998: 244; John Percy 2005).

Jim and John Percy assisted Bob Gould in establishing the VAC, a huge youth movement against the war along with High School Students Against the War in Vietnam (HSSAW). Gould established the Third World Bookshop, in partnership with VAC, which became a general centre for young people; they took their 'lead from the US movement' (John Percy 2005: 90-92). VAC campaigned around the slogan, "Withdraw all troops", and was politically situated between the CP and the Maoists – they did not support "Victory to the NLF" as a demand for the movement, as the Melbourne Maoists did, because they said it was "ultra-left" and not enjoying mass

support (John Percy 2005: 80-82). They did not campaign against conscription, because they thought the draft resisters campaign was counterposed to getting the troops out and they did not oppose conscription per se, arguing: '… in a situation of wholesale conscription there would be an important role for activists organising *inside* the army.'(John Percy 2005: 84). By publishing a pamphlet, *How NOT to Join the Army*, the Third World Bookshop attracted police raids and concerned discussion in parliament, loads of publicity, but no arrests. In September HSSAW distributed 26,000 *Student Underground* newssheets to 100 schools and more than 1000 demonstrated.

As Percy wrote: 'We weren't the mass movement, but hundreds of young people were attracted to the cultural, social and political centre we had set up.' (John Percy 2005: 93). The approach was to build new *socialist* groups – a socialist youth group and a disciplined party. Resistance was established by the end of 1967 (John Percy 2005: 89). As John Percy wrote: 'Our course was for continuing to build political actions … that would mobilise the largest numbers of new people and build a political organisation that could develop a Marxist analysis of the world' (John Percy 2005: 85). The Percy brothers were keen to implement party-building strategies of the SWPUS leader, James Cannon, whose portrait was on their office walls (John Percy 2005: 168-70). They first attempted to form a small nucleus of a party in 1967, attracting 25 activists. The group didn't meet again until the establishment of International Marxist League (IML) in May 1969; however, 100 marched behind the Resistance banner on May Day 1968. John Percy writes: '… our development was a story of organisational competition and political clarification and contention with the CPA.'(John Percy 2005: 30).

According to the MRM, Resistance dominated the Sydney off-campus left, their unity made possible '… by an eclecticism and softness that enabled the Resistance leaders to accommodate the political ideas of potential rivals both within and without the movement. It is worth noting that no "New Left" of socialist inspiration got off the ground in Sydney.' (MRM 1975: 10). Orthodox Trotskyists argued that revolutionary parties could build socialism *for* the masses, giving support to a range of regimes, especially Cuba, Vietnam and China. The Percys agreed: 'We were anti-Stalinist. We rejected Maoism. That was clear from the start. On the other hand, we liked Cuba. We liked Guevara. We liked Castro.' (Jim Percy 2008: 14).

Attempts were made to re-unite the two Trotskyist formations (*International* and Resistance) from May 1968. In the June-July 1968 edition of *International*, ARM argued for '… the formation of a unitary revolutionary Marxist organisation in Australia

with full freedom of tendency and on the basis of a commonly agreed list of transitional socialist demands.' (Freney 1968a: 6). Militants would be drawn together from, mainly, the ALP, as well as the CPA and workplaces to operate as a vanguard party. In the second half of 1968, Freney was leading the RSA project. Members of both groups were involved in discussions in November about a potential new RSA (Freney 1991) (John Percy 2005: 107-09).

The 1960s revolts provided an opportunity for Trotskyism to break out of isolation. However, the two groups differed on strategy – the Resistance leaders opposed the ARM focus on self-management – and their vision for the party, and were split within: the Percys favoured a tight group of specially self-selected "cadre" who would be trained as a future leadership for a future revolution, with no right of tendency (Percy 2005). They were at odds with Gould who favoured a looser formation. Origlass also favoured a less disciplined current. Freney's ideas were shifting through 1969, from supporting the RSA as an alliance working toward a disciplined (but not a hard vanguard) party. Thus, on the eve of the Left Action Conference there were four different perspectives offered by organised Australian Trotskyists, in two formal groups.

Australia's Maoists

The CPA (ML) formed in 1964 after being expelled from the CPA; they were totally hostile to the Left Action Conference, but attended, and had a strong influence on the Melbourne and Adelaide lefts afterwards. Initially, they were dismissive of the student left until May 1968, when they began to relate to the younger activists at Monash University; China and Maoists were building enormous influence internationally, largely based on support for the Cultural Revolution (ostensibly against bureaucracy) (Russell 296-7). Supporting the colourful new left tactics and offering an alternative to capitalism in the example of successful Third World revolutions, they presented themselves as a radical challenge, far to the left of the CPA.

Their strategy was based on armed struggle by guerrilla bands to capture or destroy the existing state and build a "socialist" state in the image of the USSR/China. American ex-Maoist Max Elbaum outlines how Maoists emphasised having "correct ideas" as the prescription for success in changing the world, relieving activists of making their own analysis of the world and relying on dogma (Elbaum 2002). The leaders of socialist

change could then be those who carried these correct ideas – organised Maoist activists substituted for Marx's working class "proletariat"; Maoist Paul Healy defines "proletariat" as politicised activists, or Marxists (Healy 2008). Elbaum said Maoist parties were based on an undemocratic disciplined military-style party, which was nationalist and sectarian (Elbaum 2002: 159). The Maoists declined after Mao's invitation for Richard Nixon to visit China in 1971, and Mao Tse Tung's "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" was exposed as neither against bureaucracy nor proletarian, rather it was a violent faction fight (Elbaum 2002: 157-58).

Maoist ideas of voluntaristic revolutionary acts by a minority on behalf of the masses struck a chord with Australian activists who wanted change immediately. They had a party and resources, with key left union leaders, including tramways union leader Clarrie O'Shea and Norm Gallagher (building union leader). In Australia they based their tactics on exposing the violence of the capitalist state, especially police violence, hoping to incite wider rebellion. Young students were also attracted to the Maoists because of talented leaders like Albert Langer, and Humphrey McQueen who was active in the early 1960s Brisbane New Left, and Darce Cassidy an important journalist from Sydney Uni. In the late 60s, they published weekly political newssheets *Print* (and sometimes daily) with creative political analysis, advertising local militant actions, and theorised their tactics. Writing in *Arena*, Humphrey McQueen argued: "confrontation" was a tactic designed to challenge what was known as "consensus" in society, it involved action that could not be co-opted by the media or government, for example, the collection of funds for the NLF forced the government to take countervailing action. (McQueen 1968). McQueen also developed a radical Gramscian social analysis of the ALP, accusing it of racist and middle class origins in his *A New Britannia*, published in 1970.

Nick Knight's paper is a short critique of the CPA (ML), arguing that it was not capable of a strategy appropriate to Australia, despite some clever pro-Australian nationalism in the anti-US rhetoric (Knight 1998). Australian Maoist politics developed into more and more militant but divisive sectarian practice, as Hastings reports: particularly at Adelaide's Flinders University, the Maoists tactics to split anti-war activities during the Moratorium march in 1971 left them isolated from political activists (Hastings 2003: 65). They engaged in violent attacks on the rest of the left in 1972 (John Percy: 200). However, as a party, the Maoists split and declined after 1972. Despite their Stalinist "Old Marxism", they became a large force on the left in Melbourne (Monash and

Latrobe Universities) and Adelaide (Flinders and Adelaide Universities) after 1969 until the early 70s, briefly establishing a successful "Worker-Student Alliance" with hundreds of members and thousands of supporters (Russell 1999: 300).

The Labor Club

The Monash Labor Club did not begin as a Maoist group; rather, right wing Labor politics dominated until after 1966, and then they began to lead radical occupations and struggles for student democracy (Hyde 1972). The MLC became the most militant student force in Australia, leading occupations and militant tactics at anti-war demonstrations, particularly outside the US embassy. In 1967 the club collected funds, including military support, for the NLF and drew national attention to radical politics. They led a militant mass campaign for democracy on campus, their occupations building a reputation as the best example of "Student Power" in Australia, winning student control of the student union. During 1968, as some members were graduating, the MLC established "The Bakery" off-campus in Prahran, organising a range of activities including political educationals for hundreds of young radicals.

In April 1968, the group held a major discussion on "Which Party for Socialists?"; Darce Cassidy and Humphrey McQueen were '… dedicated to building a new revolutionary organisation, to the "left" of the ALP and distinct from both Communist Parties.' (Mansell 1994: 43) The "Rev Socs" (Revolutionary Socialists), "open to all those who believe that revolution is an essential pre-condition for socialism", was established by early 1969 linking loosely to the nationally-based RSA, but it fizzled out. The Maoist attitude to the Left Action Conference was particularly hostile and unengaging, although other MLC activists were supportive, and Dave Nadel became a contact person for future conferences (Conference Documentation 1969).

SDA Brisbane

Three SDA leaders spoke at the conference, reflecting their contribution to the new left and relationship with the CPA. Jon Piccini describes the SDA as creating a '… truly transnational, yet consciously metropolitan, "new type of politics" in the supposedly staid and boring Brisbane of the 1960s and 1970s …' (Piccini 2011b: 76). The SDA set up in 1966 before the electoral defeat and was not formed from within the left politics of various Labor Clubs (Piccini 2011b: 77-78). SDA leader Dan O'Neill said that in

1966, radical students had begun to recognise their concerns as very similar to those of the US groups, especially the literature of SDS and to think more broadly than the war in Vietnam (Piccini 2011b: 78). The 1966 manifesto of the SDA, 'a critique of the Australian social system in terms of "participatory democracy", appeared "remarkably similar in flavour to the Port Huron [US SDS] text', according to O'Neill (Piccini 2011b: 78). The name, Students (later "Society") for Democratic Action was consciously created as an amalgam of Vietnam Action Committee (the campus off-shoot of the CPA-dominated Queensland Peace Council) and SDS (Piccini 2011b: 79).

Between 1966 and 1969, these activists would display a very creative confrontational politics, attempting to include other less radical elements and, crucially, unions and workers. By September 1967 SDA was able to provide key leadership, as part of the Civil Liberties Coordinating Committee (CLCC), of a 4,000-strong rally (representing half the campus population) which attempted to march from the University of Queensland, which was illegal. Six days later the Trades and Labour Council (TLC) held a 3,000-strong four-hour stopwork rally in King George Square (in the city centre) in solidarity with the students' demands, indicating the growing collaboration between left-wing union leaders, including CPA members, and SDA student leaders. The CLCC had been formed by students and staff, led by Dan O'Neill, Ralph Summy and Brian laver, to unite as broad a group as possible behind the demands to repeal certain clauses of the *Traffic Act*', according to Piccini (Piccini 2011a: 22). In January 1968, two Queensland youths were arrested handing out leaflets supporting the national postal strike; SDA and CLCC actively supported the strikers.

On 3 March 1968 FOCO began as a "one-stop" venue, Sundays on the 3rd Floor of Trades Hall, for all new left cultural and political wares, from music and theatre to political organising, debates and the SDA book stand. SDA, with a membership of around 500, collaborated with the TLC and CPA leaders and young members. By July 68 they had to close the books because they reached 2,500 members, and again in August when they reached 3,200. Regular weekly attendance was around 500. According to Piccini, FOCO aimed 'to provide a cultural and political environment and to politicise people; SDA leaders hoped the combination of union venue, CPA support and student activism would facilitate the desired worker-student links' (Piccini 2011a: 23). There was some success in this venture – in September FOCO assisted the TLC to organise a daytime concert in the Botanic Gardens as part of Trade Union Week. However, not all unions supported FOCO. Decline set in as membership dropped, from

early 1969: while it seemed the CPA youth were shifting towards new left politics, others were shifting away from politics, and relations between the CP and TLC leaders with the SDA was being tested as SDA shifted toward building "a revolutionary movement" with the Revolutionary Socialist Alliance (RSA) project (Piccini 2011a: 26-27).

Brian Laver stated that SDA collaborated with the CPA in a new project, Socialist Humanist Action Centre (SHAC), 'especially because of their developing stand against Stalinism'; it was formed to discuss workers' control and self-management (Cited by Piccini 2011a: 28). Some in the Brisbane new left would also see SHAC as a potential new revolutionary formation and 'the possible transformation of the CPA into that organisation', according to Laver (Cited in Piccini 2011a: 28). SHAC held a conference on these issues in late 1968, addressed by CPA, SDA and interstate revolutionaries, including Denis Freney (Freney 1991: 234). Rowan Cahill reported that by the beginning of 1969 SDA were focused on three areas of work: support of social revolution in the Third World; student-staff control of the universities and workers' control of all centres of production; and structural involvement with the underprivileged (Cahill 1969: 32). From this list it is clear that the SDA political theory was a mix of Third Worldism, student-worker alliance in self-management, and Marcusean focus on marginal groups.

The new left and theory

The SDA, Maoist and Trotskyist successes compared with the CPA's failings, between 1967 and 1970, indicate that ideological clarification played an insignificant role in building mass radicalism. What mattered was clear opposition to established Liberal, Labor and Communist politics and lively militant tactics of defiance. Initially, the new left were united in rejecting the politics of the Old Left; they rejected the Stalinist dogma that socialism was inevitable due to "iron laws of history", and were attacked as unrealistic by the older left (Gordon 1970: 56-7). As Yeats argues, while the new left understood what they were against they did not articulate clear alternative plans for change; but by the mid-60s supporters of new left ideas had grown to a significant activist minority on the Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne campuses (Yeats 2009: 50).

Australia's new left was influenced by both the UK and the US. Rex Mortimer explained that whereas the new left in Britain emerged within the labour movement in

dialogue with the dissident "old" New Left, the US radicals were isolated from the labour movement (Mortimer 1967: 27). While there was overlap, the Australians, after 1967, were divided along two streams of socialist political dialogue in Sydney and Melbourne – the supporters of various New Left theoreticians (particularly Herbert Marcuse, Theodore Roszak and Alain Touraine) in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS, a name borrowed from the US), and in the campus Labour/Labor Clubs, although Mansell argues there was also overlap between these streams (Mansell 1994: 92). This is one reason that, in Australia, two streams of new left political dialogue continued, reflecting different but parallel political organisations: some ex-CPA dissidents from 1956 debates continued to connect with the CPA – the journal *Arena* reflects this group – while campus-based radicals remained separate, usually working in the SDS, and some working in the ALP (Yeats 2009: 58-68). The younger leaders of the Maoists and Trotskyists originated in the new left but adopted much of the "Old Left" Marxist theory and remained active in radical clubs.

The radical left also divided between those who favoured a class analysis, and those who started to challenge the primacy of class, largely associated with SDS. According to Yeats, the followers of Marcuse in the SDS argued that the working class had been integrated into capitalism and that the new revolutionary proletariat was the student left (Yeats 2009: 58-60). At the centre of SDS politics was the opposition to consumerism rather than a critique of capitalist production, typical of older Marxist analysis (Yeats 2009: 264-76); they developed a moral social critique and argued for an immediate values revolution to create an alternative from within the old society without insurrection. However, the new left Marxists (those who would join Trotskyists and Maoists; and some in the SDA) looked to the working class as the agency of change; against Marcuse, they did not blame workers for the weaknesses of the movements, rather the CPA failure to lead, arguing the party lacked theoretical sophistication. In his essay, "Labourism and Socialism", Humphrey McQueen suggested the 'CPA was little more than the culmination of militant unionism and its relationship to Marxism as a philosophy, as distinct from a political program, was slight.' (McQueen in Gordon 1970: 62).

The differences over class analysis stemmed from new developments in capitalism and in understanding the change in working class experience and consciousness, as I commented in Chapter 1. *Arena* magazine (1971) explained in hindsight: 'The left revival has come about in the main outside of socialist humanism and certainly outside

of the Australian left. Marxism has been re-established because of its analytical powers, and because of the growth of a new social basis for the socialist movement.' (G.S. and D.W. 1971). They were referring to the changes in the nature of the working class, as the white-collar workforce boomed, raising political concerns of new layers of intellectual workers; while some argued that these new professionals and white-collar employees were fundamentally different from the working class, other Marxists included them in the broad working class movement. The year 1968 strengthened the need for greater ideological content in their politics and an orientation to the working class, shifting closer to the Old Left Marxists in the CPA, CPA (ML) and the Trotskyists.

Political Theory - State and revolution

Analysis of the nature of the state informs strategy: while reformists argue to reform capitalism, via the election of a Labor or Social Democratic Party to gradually create socialism "from above" and seize control of the forces of domination in the state, revolutionaries, following Lenin, argued for insurrection, but in terms of mass struggle rather than action by a minority (Lenin 1921: 22). Classically, revolutionaries argued to challenge and destroy the state before socialism could be built; and they argued for a new democratic workers' state (the soviets or workers' councils) built out of the struggle of the working class "from below". The Australian revolutionaries agreed on the need to replace capitalism with non-Stalinist socialism, but the nature of that revolution was not agreed – does the party come to power representing the "proletariat" (revolutionary class) or does the working class become the new ruling class in workers' councils with multiple parties representing the class? Despite the serious concerns about the USSR, democracy and political power, the left continued to adhere to the "Russian model" for a socialist economy, whether in the USSR or China or Cuba or Vietnam. Few on the left would accuse the USSR of establishing a non-socialist society, with the CP labeling it "socialist-based", rather than "socialist", after their 1970 conference. This was to describe a society based on a socialist economy but with a non-socialist political system, similar to Trotsky's analysis. However, if the working class did not control the state, in what way was it socialist? Russian workers were exploited to create wealth for an elite, including a huge military apparatus. Even the FI defined the USSR as "a degenerated workers' state", and defended it against the West, although they called for political revolution by the working class to overthrow the dictators.

Classical Marxist strategy was further contested in the 1960s. Firstly, the Trotskyists compromised: after the spread of Stalinist political systems to Eastern Europe following the Second World War, the FI were ambivalent on the role of the working class and other classes in seizing state power, as illustrated in the debates about whether it was necessary for the working class to control a state in order for it to be defined a "workers' state" – in Eastern Europe the Red Army was the effective force creating these states, not local workers (Callinicos 1984: 118-9). Secondly, Third Worldism created confusions: from the late 40s, nationalist movements would emulate the USSR, build parties and take power in various Third World nations, either through armed struggle or relatively peaceful "decolonization", with the support of Western activists. This was given a powerful boost by China. Thus, thirdly the Maoists championed smashing the capitalist state by a revolutionary armed force of guerillas, an alternative party of the proletariat. The French uprising was quickly defeated and gave rise to a fourth substitute for the working class, giving weight to Marcuse's notions that the new proletariat could be marginals, students and intellectuals.

Fifthly, many sections of the left developed various interpretations of Gramsci. An anonymous paper produced by Melbourne Revolutionary Marxists (MRM) in 1975 argues: '… the "New Left", had begun to develop its ideas in opposition to the crude theories of the Maoists as far back as 1967. It counterposed the Gramscian notion of "counter-hegemony" to the Maoists' explanation for the basis of capitalist power in modern societies: the naked violence of the state apparatus.'(MRM 1975: 13). In the early 20th century Gramsci argued that through the state and civil society institutions, the capitalist ruling class could rule by a combination of consent and coercion – creating "hegemony" (Hoare and Smith 1971). Ideological apparatuses are a powerful adjunct supporting the military power, and located in both the state and civil society – church, media and educational institutions, as well as the family. SDA members were developing a practical strategy for building a counter-hegemony and urging activists to situate themselves alongside marginal elements and intellectuals, relying on anti-capitalist arguments. Those who argued for self-management explained it as the workers taking power in the productive centres and other institutions, and the party as the future self-managed society. However, these activists had no strategy to directly confront the capitalist state. On this point they were vulnerable from Maoist and Trotskyist arguments, which relied on classical Marxist arguments about the need for insurrection.

Political Theory - The Party

Lenin argued that within the working class movement revolutionaries needed to organise to clarify and consolidate their ideas in distinction from reformists; this became known as the "vanguard party" – a minority, until the revolution, which would provide leadership. For some, the barriers between revolutionaries and reformists would be stricter than for others. Stalinism included an emphasis on a strict vanguard or disciplined minority elite as party, and undemocratic practices, which they called "democratic centralism", to build a party whose role was to take state power on behalf of the masses. Some also supported what was widely regarded as Lenin's 1902 ideas, of the pamphlet *What is to Be Done* (Lenin 1902), about the need to bring revolutionary consciousness to workers from the outside, although, according to a recent work by Marxist Lars Lih, Lenin himself regarded that as anomalous to his general ideas of workers party organization (Lih 2006). The Resistance leaders argued for a centralised vanguard party, built up from a small group of dedicated cadre; in practice, still too small to be a party, they focused, *outside* workplaces, on recruiting students and other young people in the anti-war movement. As Jim Percy explains in a letter to comrades: 'organisational principles derived from the tasks we have ahead of us in creating "an organisation able to lead the working class struggles and overthrow the capitalist state" as against [the] idea of creating "in our organisation … the very image of the society we wish to create".' (Emphasis in original) (John Percy 2005: 227). In contradistinction, for self-management supporters, the role for the party is in projecting itself as the future society – carrying through the actions to win control of campuses and workplaces.

Self-management

There were important attempts to provide an analysis for self-management. Nick Origlass wrote an article for *ALR* (February-March 1967) on "Socialism: A Transitional Policy" where he argued: '[Self-management] … means direct participation of the producers and citizens in the management of the economy and state.'(Origlass 1967: 43). Freney wrote about the situation in France: 'I sensed that if the revolt was to become a revolution, then the majority of the working people who supported the general strike and uprising in the first few days had to organise self-management bodies to take control of their workplaces and neighbourhoods. These did evolve spontaneously in quite a few places, but none of the various radical groups put their development anywhere near the top of their agendas and the upsurge soon ebbed.'(Freney 1991: 226)

At a second "Radicals" conference in Brisbane at the end of 1968, a number of speakers were also supporting various similar ideas – CPA member Charlie Gifford spoke about workers' control referring to Australian struggles; Freney, jointly with fellow Trotskyist from Monash Alan Roberts, spoke about their interpretation of May events in Paris; and Brian Laver argued for self-management as a model for socialism. Freney commented on differences with Laver: 'He was reading much anarchist and libertarian material at the time ... For me, self-management was not only a model for the future society, but provided a strategy and tactics in everyday disputes, where it could be tested and introduced into workers' awareness. To do that, you had to get involved in struggles at the level people were at, not just preach from above.' (Freney 1991: 234-35). In the June-July 1968 issue of *International*, Freney argued that, while students have no social power, they could use occupations, supported by staff and students, to show self-management in practice and perhaps inspire workers' power. Students '… could be the detonator … and with the youth acting as the vanguard of the working class'; it was the leadership of young workers that kept factories on strike in 1968 in France (Freney 1968: 4-5). To succeed, he argued, there would need to be actual links between workers and students in struggle (Freney 1968: 17). The self-management aim for the working class was, for Freney: '… a workers council in each enterprise taking the major decisions on all questions relating to production.'(Freney 1968: 16). Again, there was little agreement or clarity among the left. However, their campaigns were succeeding, causing little reason to question their practice.

New lefts in practice

In his thesis, *Australian Student Radicals - The Nature and Origins of Dissent*, Christopher Rootes identified common issues among Western student movements, largely: US imperialism (especially Vietnam) and Student Power, which included the position of the university in society; the content of study; university discipline; and the right to organise politically (Rootes 1969: 4-5). The war was the catalyst for the politicisation, encouraging activism beyond the campus. While the issues were similar, their strategies diverged depending on experience; geographical factors played a major role because the activists would focus on tactics relevant in response to their state-based government and society, selecting appropriate ideological tools as needed. As the ALP and CPA shifted rightwards on the question of war after 1966, the mainstream peace movement suffered a lull. Direct action against conscription was organised by Youth

Campaign Against Conscription (YCAC) (Russell 1999: 106) and was largely led by SDS and SDA radical students and workers, pacifists and young communists (Rootes 1969: 48).

There was loose coordination nationally; a broad anti-war conference in Sydney in January 1967 attracted 300 participants representing 50 organisations from across Australia (John Percy 2005). Radicals broke with the left tradition of single-issue campaigns, connecting the issues, including anti-war, imperialism, democracy, education, conscription, and so on. The Australian Student Labor Federation (ASLF) conference, bringing together ALP, CPA and other left students, met annually during the May vacation; however, at the 1967 conference, decisions indicated that a majority of the delegates no longer supported the ALP or CPA (John Percy 2005). In June 1968 a Socialist Students Alliance (SSA) was established to cohere *revolutionary* student and semi-student groups nationally. In these national meetings, the SDA allied with the Monash Labor Club, and both were regarded as more militant than the Sydney left students; the Sydney the Percys and SDS were allies. In Brisbane a collective of activists were attempting a national newspaper, *The Brisbane Line*, edited by Monash Marxist activist Dave Nadel (Piccini 2009; John Percy 2005).

In 1968, polarisation between the different student delegations indicated a diversification of political positions geographically, about which Jim Percy said: "They are not greatly influenced by each other. A political movement usually sees its goals in terms of its central city – it is a very big step to become nationally influential." (John Percy 2005: 111). As Denis Freney stated after attending a "Radicals" conference in Sydney in May 1968: 'The radical student movement in each city was developing its own characteristics and there was almost no coordination. Indeed, there was a great deal of competition, particularly as each centre began to crystallise its own political orientation and ideology.' (Freney 1991: 227). The groups experimented with different organisational models. According to Rootes, from 1967, SDA (Qld) and SDS groups were important in building up a '"movement" designed to accommodate all tendencies' (Rootes 1969: 65). He argued that the organised left formed the core of the campus clubs and that: 'Around the committed core is a somewhat larger body of non-joining fellow travelers, and beyond that is the much larger section of the student body which is either sympathetic in principle but in disagreement over tactics, or which can be drawn into "united front" action on particular issues.'(Rootes 1969: 65-66). However, in

Sydney the Resistance leaders ran VAC parallel to and in competition with the CPA's anti-war campaign; rather than a united front, they sought to build a youth movement labeled "socialist". Thus, differences evolved. VAC and some Labor Clubs did not campaign around conscription.

By the end of 1968, Freney and others in the *International* group collaborated with SDA activists and developed a revolutionary self-management strategy. A Gramsci-inspired approach to building a counter-hegemony within society was elaborated. While the ideas of the CPA and SDA overlapped, at the core were two different goals – those advocating self-management sought a revolutionary change from below which would have the power to overthrow capitalism, while the CP left sought a democratic change to reform capitalism. In 1968, according to Mansell, the Maoists rejected this "leit motif of the New Left" – the "self-managed" university – arguing that staff-student control of the university is impossible until after the revolution (Mansell 1994: 84). This was also the case for Resistance leaders and the CPA Stalinist faction. From 29 December until 10 January 1969, a Brisbane conference brought together the CPA left and Trotskyist Denis Freney with the SDA, attracting activists from most states.

Leading revolutionary activists met to form the Revolutionary Socialist Alliance (RSA), in late January 1969, as 120 people came together to plan ongoing united activity (Freney 1969a). John Percy reports 80 attended (John Percy 2005). Writing in *International* in late 1968, Freney hoped the RSA would be a microcosm of an alternative society, stressing democracy and power to members (including right of tendency), with a high political level and centralised leadership, but *not* like an army led by generals; RSA would link up all groups, transitional to a revolutionary party (Freney 1968: 2-7). Reporting on the conference, Freney says there was general agreement to build RSA as an alliance; however, a minority wanted members to be required to join the ALP (Freney 1969a). Minutes of the RSA conference are not available.

Also in January 1969, the CPA held a National Committee meeting which decided on sweeping reforms to the party, including questioning the relevance of their Stalinist past. Freney commented enthusiastically in the same issue of *International*: 'Marxists outside the CPA must now seriously consider entering the CPA with the aim of participating in the decisive struggle to reorientate the CPA …'(Freney 1969a: 11). At this stage he thought the CPA was not capable of becoming a revolutionary party. Thus, a lot of discussion was taking place in the months leading up to the left Action

Conference, and old foes were making new allegiances, as old friends disagreed, over self-management. SDA leaders hoped to either collaborate more closely with the CPA, perhaps join, or create a new independent party through the process of forming the RSA. Freney shared their ambitions; the Melbourne "Rev Socs" seemed to be on board. Resistance was supportive of the RSA as an alliance, but already had their own party plans. The Left Action Conference would play a role in re-establishing the radical left on a new basis.

Chapter 3 –

The conference

The CPA and its supporters started building the Conference for Left Action from late 1968. It was organised and promoted by a range of left activists, centrally the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), led by Laurie Aarons, along with various supporters and other left groups, including the Brisbane-based Society for Democratic Action – SDA, and Trotskyists based in Balmain, Sydney. The conference occurred over the Easter weekend 4-7 April, from Friday to Monday. According to reports, every major trend of the Australian left was represented, from the Labor Party (ALP) left to Anarchists; industrial militants (both blue and white collar workers), student radicals, and other activists, as well as many writers from dissident journals, participated. Conference records (provided by Ken Mansell's personal archive and the National Library) show that 17 political organisations, 30 trade unions and 7 workplace Shop/Job Committees were represented officially; individuals included 34 high school students, 159 industrial workers, 111 white collar and professional workers, 188 tertiary students, 42 housewives and 52 trade union employees (CLA Documentation 1969). At least 14 'New Left' groupings participated …', (Briedis 2010a). Others joined in at the last minute.

The *Australian Left Review* (*ALR*) commented afterwards that, while there had been 30 initiating sponsors: 'Later more than 100 others endorsed their proposals, added to them, changed some. By the time conference assembled no significant trend was absent although some were more substantially represented than others.' (Comment 1969). Briedis reports that, on 25 November 1968, the sponsors endorsed a statement announcing: "A Conference of Left and Anti-Establishment Forces" which '… would be " a forum for an exchange between all the different views opposed to the existing social system… [r] ather than serving as a summit for policy-making … [and] could facilitate "both dialogue and preparation for more effective counter-action". While Sydney activists were the most prominent, a number of organising meetings involving interstate leftists were held.' (Briedis 2010a: 11). In Alastair Davidson's press release announcing the event … its initial rationale was that "New and Old Left enter into a dialogue" (Briedis 2010a).

In attracting all these forces the conference was considered widely as a major success, after many discussions and hard work. It seems that at first the conference organisers had not invited the hard left groups. However, Denis Freney (writing as Denis Francis) publicly encouraged the CPA to invite a wider group of the radical left; in a letter, published in *International*, the CPA was advised to invite all the young Marxist groups – particularly the *Socialist Perspective* group (and Resistance), Queensland SDA and the Monash Labor Club (Francis 1968: 19). This exchange illustrates the tentative relations between the CPA and the smaller groups, as well as the closer relationship developing between Freney and the Aarons leadership. At this stage SDA saw their closest ally as the Monash Labor Club, although they were working with the local CPA youth and trade unionists. Refusing to participate, the vitriolic response of the Maoists to their invitation from "the Aarons traitors" was recorded in their newspaper *Vanguard*, accusing the CP of handpicking and stage-managing it, and encouraging "class collaboration" (Cited in Briedis 2010a: 2). While neither Resistance nor the CPA (ML) officially registered (although the Monash Labor Club did), members from these groups attended some formal and informal discussions (CLA Documentation 1969).

From his reading of the various comments and assessments of the conference, Briedis' analysis is that the CPA were engaging in a 'process of renewal … primarily concerned with opening the party up to the new possibility for action generated by the radicalism of the time.'(Briedis 2010a). While he recognised their need to overcome the serious decline in membership, Briedis credits the leadership with achieving a 'genuine transformation … in this period, arguing: 'They moved towards greater internal democracy, militancy and shifted away from vanguardism.' (Briedis 2010a: 3). The Aarons leadership spoke publicly about an opportunity to '… rupture the conservative hegemony marked by years of Coalition rule.' (Aarons 1969b: 3).

The 1967 congress decisions were already creating new risks of further factionalism and loss of more older dissident members and this was exacerbated by those committed to Moscow-line Stalinism after the 1969 National Committee discussion. The party leadership had already made their decisions more transparent and internal party debates were reflected in *Tribune*. The alternative of remaining static, was untenable if the party was to survive. Taking an opportunity to influence the political climate was basic good politics in their own interests and in terms of the wider left. In hindsight, we can assess the analysis of a range of activists, from cynical members of the left who did not trust the party and who witnessed a reversal of policy by 1976, to those who welcomed the

shift. I make some assessment at the end of this chapter. For now, it is important to understand that the party were openly courting sections of the Marxist new left to assist their process of renewal, which could benefit the left as well, and the conference gave the wider left a free platform to present their ideas and arguments.

The agenda was designed around open discussion of strategies for left activity and socialist ideas; and the aim was to build cooperation and popularise concepts of workers' control and self-management. Speakers (eight) and discussion on "Strategies for Action" took up all of Sunday and into Monday. Key speakers included Laurie Aarons (Secretary of the CPA), Laurie Carmichael (leading CP member and Victorian Secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), the metalworkers' union), J E Heffernan (General Secretary of the Sheet Metal Workers' Union (SMWU and ALP Left), Bob Gould (Resistance), Denis Freney (*International*), and SDA members Dan O'Neill, Brian Laver and Peter Wertheim. Two other speeches were given in a session entitled 'Whatever Happened to Democracy' - Pat Clancy (leading pro-Moscow CP trade union official in the building industry) and academic John Playford. The *ALR* editorial comment indicates the nature of the priorities for most participants:

> 'Although the sponsors had sought to discuss two questions, a critique of Australian capitalism and its position vis a vis world imperialism and then to consider various strategies, it was really the latter which engaged attention. Many participants rejected the need to make a substantial critique, claiming that "we know the problem." Unfortunately this is less than the truth … If the Left Conference showed anything, it showed that most of the homework remains to be done and must be done if an alternative to capitalist myth-making is to ever become the province of more than a few… Yet there is already sufficient grasp of basics to ensure genuine attempts at socialist renewal.' (*ALR* 1969: 2).

Briedis' report of the conference, from his listening to official tape recordings, includes non-speech material. However, he has not analysed the speeches. While I am relying on his audio selections, the quotes he provides help flesh out more of the flavour, in particular, as well as the content. The opening address '… argued that, by the "divergence of forces" present, "already Australian labour history has been made", [and] … stressed that rather than aiming to "emerge with a single line" it was up to those present "to act upon … their convictions", as whether to implement resolutions.' (Briedis 2010a: 13). Maoist leader Albert Langer '… immediately proposed that discussion be around clear policy statements. The Monash activists were a small

minority and were noisily voted down. However, they did win an amendment to make the "business session", intended for discussion of resolutions, incorporate the entire Monday of the conference. 'On the Saturday afternoon … [Langer stated] … "something is wrong when you get 600 of some of the most militant people in Australia and you can't discuss what to do about it and where to go". Langer proposed that instead they solely discuss these points, which was again rejected.' (Briedis 2010a).

The speeches

I accessed the papers of these ten speeches from Ken Mansell's archive and from the National Library. An additional paper is also available, possibly in response to the accusation about the lack of female speakers – Alice Lee on "Environmental Protection as a Concern for the Left" (Lee 1969). The two speeches by trade union leaders Carmichael and Heffernan – different in tone but not in substance – illustrated a very left wing and very political trade unionism, both arguing for unity of the left, "confrontation" against the penal powers, and for political transformation; but there was no entertaining the idea of independent action by workers in revolution or establishing workers' councils. (Carmichael 1969; Heffernan 1969). Clancy, who spoke in the session "Whatever Happened to Democracy" also argued for a militant confrontation of the penal powers and he promoted the USSR as a positive model for workers (Clancy 1969). All were engaged in militant leadership of wage struggles and political campaigns, for example anti-war campaigns. All speeches from the trade union leaders spoke of the new activism among white-collar workers. Supporters of Stalinism were in a small minority, but a number of Stalinist CPA members were very important trade union leaders with a base in their own industry and beyond.

Aarons gave a 25-minute speech outlining a comprehensive revolutionary strategy for Australian socialism. He gave a Marxist analysis of the specific contradictions within Australian capitalism which would cause workers and other layers to challenge the society and its ruling class. In particular, he emphasised the role of the "scientific and technological revolution" to generate hope for a wealthy society and anger that capitalism would not creatively utilise the opportunities offered with improvements in technology for the benefit of human development; rather it would squander resources on wars (including nuclear weapons) and undermine human potential with bureaucratic and undemocratic structures. Echoing Gramsci's analysis he described a society based on

rule by a combination of coercion and consent in Australia, and military conflict imposed on developing countries. While he optimistically predicted a growing radicalising movement, based centrally on the social power of working class action, and demanding control over workplaces and social life, supporting "self-management", he also recognised the need for 'meeting conservative violence with radical violence'. He argued:

> 'The aim of socialist revolution without civil war can only be realised through creating an over-whelming balance of mass opinion backed up by a mighty mass movement of strikes, demonstrations, occupation of decisive factories and institutions by so dividing the men who make up the coercive power of the State as to intimidate the controllers and rulers of the system.' (Aarons 1969: 19).

He did not use the terms "insurrection" and "workers' councils", and did not promote a democratic movement of workers leading a struggle which would replace the capitalist state with a workers' state, arguing for: '… intimidating and paralysing those who would prefer civil war rather than a revolutionary social change that destroys their power and privilege.' (Aarons 1969: 19). The strategy was for a revolutionary campaign to support a left wing social democratic government – a 'democratic state, which aims from the very beginning to wither away'. (Aarons 1969: 4).

Denis Freney's speech was limited to 15 minutes and focused on self-management and "workers' control", which he analysed as central to transforming capitalism, starting in the "here and now"; he also omits reference to "insurrection". However, Freney puts the state at the centre of his speech; it [the bureaucracy, the state] is 'the instrument and servant of the capitalist class.' (Freney 1969b: 2). He implies that self-management strategies – workers' direct control of the factory floor as a basis, and 'then control of the other institutions upwards' – would be sufficient to establish socialism. In his speech he says: '… these workers and students' committees are at the very basis of the power structure – that is where <u>power is</u> in the final analysis – that is where it must be defended against the capitalist counter-revolution and the encroachments of the bureaucracy.' (Emphasis in original) (Freney 1969b: 3).

He said the party was to be '… as much as possible, a microcosm of the self-managed society we are seeking to build. It itself must serve as a model to be held up to the workers as a whole.' (Freney 1969b: 8). His strategy, following what happened in France and Czechoslovakia, was to begin a movement for self-management which

challenges capitalist power in general through capturing the power base across society, in workplaces and other institutions. However, by this time it was known that the European movements were overcome directly by the actions of the state – in France by police (and indirectly via social institutions like the Catholic Church), in Prague by tanks. He spoke of the need to defend the movement against the state, but not to directly remove or neutralise the armed forces of the state. His summary of the three main party tasks are: self-management as a slogan and form of action, revolutionary confrontation with the capitalist State and lastly, the formulation of a counter-hegemony.' (Freney 1969b: 8). The speech doesn't show how these three elements relate.

The "formulation of a counter-hegemony" was largely left up to Dan O'Neill to explain and promote. His analysis was based on the Gramscian idea of the state and civil society: '… the state is simply one agency among several agencies, several great institutional orders of society, through whose reciprocal relations the final status quo of power is maintained.' (O'Neill 1969: 8). For this reason, he argued that there was no point in "smashing the state", as argued by the Maoists, or "capturing" the state, as advocated by reformists, because the movement faced a range of hostile institutions through which capitalism ruled; he said that power cannot be captured by capturing only the state. That's why O'Neill argues that it is: '… vitally important … to work in the institutions of civil society … because of the completely integrated nature of the society …' (O'Neill 1969: 8). His idealist strategy is based on the idea that the real power of the left is 'open theoretical discussion' (O'Neill 1969: 13). His practical suggestion is to urge activists to: '… actually integrate themselves structurally with under-privilege in our society' (he likened the disadvantaged groups as "internal colonies") (O'Neill 1969: 5), as well as in the education system among intellectuals (O'Neill 1969: 7). He saw the "student-worker alliance as the 'nucleus of the new society' within his plan for an alternative society. The strength of O'Neill's social analysis is in his analysis of modern Australia; like Marcuse he reveals the way society hides its true nature, saying that we live in a society: '… of extremely bland repression which manages the repression mainly by consolidating huge pressure groups who believe that they live in a very good society.' (O'Neill 1969: 2).

Brian Laver made two proposals for strategies to be implemented as soon as possible: firstly, he argued that the left, and the conference formally, should agree to focus in the anti-war movement on activities to support the National Liberation Front of Vietnam by 'printing its documents so that Australians may read a revolutionary manifesto.' (Laver

1969: 3); secondly, he argued for a strategy in workplaces and campuses for self-management; he said: 'the important thing is to get the workers to realize out of their apathy that they are able to control the decisions which affect their lives both physically and psychologically because until we defeat the apathetic mentality we will be on the defensive for ever.' (Laver 1969: 3). Both these were presented as 'a direct attack to smash the present power system in the world'. (Laver 1969: 2). He drew lessons from the recent successful campus occupations by students to show how workers could also implement self-management strategies, and he argued that workers would have far more effect because of their location in society's productive units.

Laver urged his audience to build a revolutionary party rooted in these centres of power; the role of students was to "set the tone" for wider self-management across society, but the party needed to establish itself and its propaganda through factory-based action committees, not in geographic branches. Laver held out the possibility that the CPA could transform itself. 'The Communist Party appears to be fighting on issues… it is now time to fight against the system … I believe that the peace movement is now irrelevant …' (Laver 1969: 5). He argued that the communist publications should be directed to developing cadre to lead a struggle for socialism based on an analysis of power and that trade union leaders should attempt '…to raise the political consciousness of the working class towards socialism and not fighting battles for … [basic demands for higher wages and better conditions]' (Laver 1969: 7). For Laver, the main concern for Australian revolutionaries was '… who will control power.' (Emphasis in original) (Laver 1969: 8). He differentiated between the struggle for "economic liberation" in the "under-developed world" and the struggle for self-management and power in "advanced western society" (because of higher living standards in the West) (Laver 1969: 8).

Bob Gould spoke about building revolutionary socialist youth groups based on his experience in Sydney. He presented an analysis of the cultural differences between the growing movement of radicalising young people and the older elements of the labour movement, and argued for a separate youth organisation within which education about labour movement traditions would be encouraged. He argued for a strategy '… in which we battle to organise the revolutionary Left, the students and the youth, around a revolutionary socialist strategy, and carry this strategy into all the mass organisations …' (Gould 1969: 5). He accused Laver and other student leaders of infantile ultra-leftism, arguing that there did not seem to be '… many factories due to be occupied tomorrow …'; however, he didn't actually propose a political strategy for the youth

group or the labour movement; his focus was on building organisations of young people around their concerns and intervening in the ALP and the unions. Gould's contribution raised an important consideration about building organisations in the context of many contradictory political positions even among revolutionaries.

John Playford spoke about Australian capitalism, arguing that the state played more of a role in directing the economy, and defined it as "neo-capitalism". He would later write a book about the nature of Australian capitalism. Playford quoted Gramsci as the anti-fatalistic revolutionary leader of workers, arguing: '… a socialist revolution is dependent on consciousness rather than on economics'; and looked to the 'workers, intellectuals, technicians [including state employees and managers] and farmers [to] become conscious of their own collective force and determine to be masters of their own destiny.' (Playford 1969: 11). Playford here refers to a longish list of "masters of their own destiny" and it is unclear if he is broadening out the definition of "proletariat" to include more than workers.

Assessment

The conference was the largest of its type held in Australia to date and provides an important window on the left debates. New ideas abounded and fragmentation was the order of the day. And yet there was a striving for unity. The post-conference assessment was generally sympathetic – at Sydney Uni an article entitled "Major Landmark in Left Action" generally supported the conference (1969: 3); while an article in *Lot's Wife* the student paper at Monash Uni also praised the "attendance and enthusiasm" (Kirsner 1969: 6). Denis Freney, in *International*, immediately started campaigning for the forthcoming workers' control conference to be held in August 1969 (Freney 1969c).

However, Geoff Sharp and Doug White remained critical and suspicious of the CPA leadership's methods and motivations, generating a debate in Arena; in response John Playford and Doug Kirsner reported how the agenda had changed during the course of the conference and that the organising meetings were open, but White and Sharp saw this as just part of the tactics, indicating the CPA was still attempting to dominate in the left (White 1969). Writing in the August-September issue of *Australian Left Review*, Ann Curthoys criticises Aarons' speech for incoherence, citing mere "hopes" for the state to wither away and relying on the scientific and technological revolution to

"determine the world wide struggle for social change"; in classical Marxism and Leninism, it is the workers' state which withers. Curthoys' critique included: 'The moral ideal doubtful, the social analysis unclear', and [one] can find the only immediate strategic step to support the ALP in forthcoming federal elections (Curthoys 1969: 30). She accurately hit on the contradictory position of the CP at the time – neither for workers-led revolution nor ALP-style reformism.

In the immediate aftermath of the conference, the leadership majority were pleased with their success at creating a new authority for the party among the radical left, recognizing the conference as a major contributor to that. Angus Macintyre presented in the his PhD thesis, in an interview with Eric Aarons, reports on the discussion at a National Committee (NC) meeting where Mavis Robertson says in her report: "There was a shift to the CP – not a shift to the CP as such, but to a wider acceptance that the CP is sincere." (A. P. Macintyre 1976: 71). Macintyre writes:

> 'Thus, generally speaking, the character of the Conference attendance reassured Party members that the Coalition of the Left strategy had correctly identified the moment of modern capitalist society and those … most likely to bring it tumbling down.' (A. P. Macintyre 1976: 71).

Laurie Aarons said at the NC that "... such a shift would soon lead to a rise in Party recruitment." (Cited in A. P. Macintyre 1976: 71). Edgar Ross, a key pro-Moscow supporter, disagreed saying that they should have tried "… to win support for the ideas of Marxism-Leninism against reformism, anarchism, Trotskyism and the like… " (Cited in A. P. Macintyre 1976: 40).

Publicly, the post-conference *Tribune* included a major spread carrying selected speeches and, in *ALR*, editors said: 'It may be that this conference represents first steps for the revolutionary coalition needed for the '70's.' They continued:

> 'What was new was the coming together, the prevailing spirit that no one (one or two excepted) had all the answers, that the lessons of France had been taken in, if not fully admitted, and expressed in the conviction that the key to social change lies with the working class. By and large then all present were seeking common ground for the Left – students, academics, workers, union officials, professionals – to break capitalism's hold on the working people, if the means varied the end was the same.' (*ALR* 1969: 3).

International did not formally discuss the conference in its aftermath, but was heavily involved in building for the August Self-management and Workers' Control Conference. John Percy describes a situation in his group of confusion about the CP's shift to the left. He was impressed with the size and tenor of the conference reporting that the CPA had: '… been hoping to attract 500 people and nearly 800 registered.' (John Percy 2005: 120). He analysed it in terms of his group's competition for left influence, saying that it '… allowed the CPA to make a turn with the Left Action Conference, to try to catch up, and in the early '70's, they were able to recover somewhat.' (John Percy 2005: 121). He accuses his comrade Ian Macdougall of having illusions in the Aarons' leadership. Macdougall had written an article for the FI's international publication, *International Press* (*IP*), which was not published because of disagreement with Macdougall's analysis. Percy states: '… Ian's reply indicated he did have illusions … taking its [CPA leadership] left turn as a genuine revolutionary transformation – [Macdougall wrote in a letter to *IP*]: "I think we recognise as a group that genuine changes have occurred in the Aarons' wing of the CP which point to a genuine end to CP betrayals."' (John Percy 2005: 121). This incident indicates that the CP's tactics had an impact wider than their supporters, and that Percy's approach was to dismiss the turn.

Bob Gould was certainly impressed with: '… the extraordinary lengths to which the Aarons faction of the Communist Party was prepared to go to curry favour with the student radicals. In particular they were enraptured over silver-tongued, charismatic Brian Laver … whose rousing speeches for "occupation of the factories" "action committees as instruments of dual power", and the like, were greeted with thunderous applause' (Gould 2003 (1970)). Gould also argued: 'Communist Party hostility was reserved for groups like Resistance and the Monash Labor Club … who set themselves, from different points of the political spectrum, in deliberate opposition [to] the CPA, and are guilty of … having built independent political structures separate from, and even in opposition to, the CPA. Towards all the other radical student groups … the CPA … maintained an attitude of total sweetness and light in the interests of trying to co-opt them into the CPA.' (Gould 2003 (1970)). Russell reports that prominent left radicals were offered half the positions on the CP Central Executive and half control of party newspaper *Tribune* as an inducement to join (Russell 1999: 273-74).

Outcomes

The conference led to greater co-operation in a number of areas. As Briedis comments: 'Rather than being recruited to the Communist Party, activists generally returned to their own distinct efforts at organising.'(Briedis 2010a: 23). However, in key areas, people were drawn into new collective organising, for example the workers' control conference in August in Sydney and Melbourne, and ongoing activity supporting workplaces. There was an immediate response: When police attacked student demonstrators in Sydney soon after the conference on 11 April, trade unionists came to their aid with a statement of support from more than 20 unions. According to Briedis, a 2,000-strong demonstration was organised jointly by students and unionists on 23 April (Briedis 2010a). The left combined to support the strike against the penal powers in May 1969, building greater confidence for workers to organise around wages, conditions, and issues like equal pay for women and Aboriginal workers, and anti-Apartheid. The movement against the war in Vietnam was fragmented before 1969 and, taken together, the fragments could not have achieved the results of the Moratorium of 1970. One conference could not achieve this, but the Left Action Conference was able to build a unity and a new respect for the left as a whole. The anti-war left took the opportunity of a growing confidence to build a series of meetings at the end of 1969, after the federal election, to build for major rallies in 1970, which became the Moratorium (Murphy 1993). The CPA was able to lead this momentum in Melbourne. In Sydney leadership was shared with VAC and Resistance and others, and in Brisbane with RSA (John Percy 2005). Hundreds of people attended planning meetings and the first rallies in May 1970 drew about 100,000 in Melbourne, with smaller numbers in other cities. The movement supported draft resisters and defended people arrested over civil liberties issues.

The conference reflected the eclectic flavour of a volatile left responding to new situations and new ideas about revolution, but many were unifying around concepts: "worker-student alliance", "self-management", "workers' control" and "confrontation". Dissent had been given a boost and the CPA attempted to maintain and build on this as part of building a "counter-hegemony". The CP left leadership was keen to facilitate further discussions and practical support and resources. *Tribune* was opened up further, as was *ALR*. A number of left publications appeared in 1970. Some of the initiatives lasted into the early 1970s, for example Jack Mundey, leader of unskilled building workers in the Builders Labourers Federation was heavily involved, and in the early

1970s developed the struggle for the Green Bans in Sydney, within which was also serious experiments for workers' control of certain building sites (Russell 1999: 404).

However, as Mansell reported, the far left fragmented. Mansell identifies 1969-70 as the highest point for the student radicals, but the radicals' unity (a 'left coalition') against the CPA – was disrupted. The far left had shown a unity of purpose in their militant tactics, especially in opposition to Stalinism, but as the world changed and they were forced to clarify ideologically, they were exposed politically. The issue of self-management linked old foes and caused division among former friends, the SDA and MLC. The Resistance Trotskyists, the Stalinist wing of the CP and the Maoists remained relatively inured to the volatile debates, because they held firm programmatic beliefs, and all moved to tighten their distinct party organisations, and recruit supporters, after April 1969. The CPA had moved considerably to win over sections of the new left, which seemed to be working even though the party had, as Nick Origlass argued, avoided: '… the examination and repudiation of its past …' and a total break with Stalinism (Origlass 1970: 2).

The debate after the conference was acrimonious and damaging, leaving the RSA project in tatters and various sections of the left hardened in their opposition to all "rivals"; this meant further fragmentation on the geographic basis. Freney attempted to build the RSA throughout the rest of 1969. It is unclear what the arguments were against the RSA, but it petered out. Freney and Gould, who seemed to have a fractious relationship, had a row over real estate (they couldn't agree on renting a venue) (Freney and Gould debate in *The Old Mole* 2013, in *Ozleft* website). The Trotskyists developed differences as to the RSA role. In early 1970, Freney joined the CP and Origlass argued forcefully against Freney's actions in *International* (Origlass 1970); Australian Revolutionary Marxists collapsed, as Origlass deepened his involvement in local issues.

The Sydney Trotskyists split four ways in the aftermath of the conference and partly because of the impact of the conference on the left. While Freney was moving closer to the CP and the idea of a new Marxist party, Origlass was committed to building a radical current inside Labor and heavily involved in the Balmain-Leichhardt branch. Alan Roberts built on the self-management ideas of the *International* group and Pablo in his book not published until 1979, called *The Self-Managing Environment* (Roberts 1979). He and Origlass both broke with the idea of building a vanguard party, situating their revolutionary practice in assisting struggles, pioneering Marxist analyses of environmental degradation, caused by capitalism, and self-management as an alternative

to what they both would call "substitutionist" practices of the party-building activists who advised from outside of particular struggles. Roberts' work does not oppose leadership but argues for a more organic relationship among rank and file activists among whom would develop leaders to assist in raising consciousness, developing theory and building conscious anti-capitalist struggles (Roberts 1979: 140-46; Greenland 1998).

After the conference, thirty people attended the founding conference to set up IML and publish *Socialist Perspective.* The IML grew closer to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International led by the American SWP in 1969; it was plagued by factionalism until mid-1970. John Percy attended a conference of the SWP in the US, which impressed him and convinced him of 'the necessity of a clearly defined political program, understood and defended by all the members of the organization. This is the basis for any education process and any effective action.'(John Percy 2005: 138). Bob Gould left the group, remaining committed to entrism and a loose student grouping and then joining a different Trotskyist organisation, the SLL. Percy wrote: 'In 1970, the definitive fight with Gould and the split in Resistance, and the setting up of the SRG, marked the real birth of our party organisation.' (John Percy 2005: 170).

Thus, schisms *within* each city also developed from 1969, as activists clarified their politics. Mansell argues that from 1969, with 300 members, the MLC changed: action became more militant and theory 'retreated to the refuge, certainties, and orthodoxies of the past' as the Maoists strengthened their influence (Mansell 1994: 31-38). By the end of the year, most key Monash activists had joined the CPA (ML); a small number around Dave Nadel were won to Trotskyism, setting up the Independent Communist Caucus (ICC) and later the Marxist Workers' Group (MWG) (eventually Nadel helped set up the International Socialists) (Ilton 1984). Activists would be won to Trotskyism in the UQ group (1970) as well as within SDAs in Hobart and Adelaide (Percy 2005). The core of the CPA, its left leadership, remained stable but the party was factionalised until the 1971 split. A number of activists attempted to change the CPA after the Left Action conference in 1969 (John Percy 2005: 123). Apart from SDA who continued to work with the CP, within Queensland's SHAC until May 1970, the CP was also building common ground with various New Left activists around Australia, particularly in Adelaide and Melbourne, on the basis of Gramscian "counter-hegemony" strategies. By 1972 some of these activists joined the CP, participating in the Left Tendency.

The 80/120 revolutionaries at the founding conference of RSA represented a leadership with substantial influence drawn from all states and capable of achieving links with workers based on universalizing the demand of self-management, according to MRM, but immaturity and the role of the CP undermined the possibilities; the CP '… staved off a threat to replace it as the main radical force and reasserted its claim to be the party with whom all radicals had first to come to terms.' (MRM 1975: 11-12). This outcome also benefited the Resistance leadership in Sydney and in 1969 they grew by drawing in hundreds of high school students and radical youth. The MRM paper argues that there was too much division on the far left and too little political maturity; the revolutionary left had learnt their politics from experience, given the paucity of political ideas and lack of reliable Marxist tradition (MRM 1975). This was particularly true of the Brisbane SDA and Monash LC who adopted only those Marxist ideas which seemed to explain their experiences: 'Their ideology, therefore, was nothing more than a patchwork of simple Leninist truths.' (MRM 1975: 8). The argument over self-management was confused, but effectively divided the revolutionaries. In general, arguments took place in an overly polarized atmosphere which obscured the potential for ongoing common work with those who had fallen out. This was not the first time: according to MRM, when the radicals broke with Labor after the 1966 election the Sydney and Melbourne anti-war campaigns magnified the differences despite similar social bases and goals, isolating their own supporters.

The late 1960s provided a crucible for intellectual activity among the new left to rethink Marxism, and ideas that can link the fight for reforms with working class revolution and parties. The war was effectively won by the Vietnamese by 1968, assisted by international solidarity in places like Australia. From early 1969 in Australia, at the time of the Conference, the tide was turning and confidence among the left was growing: by May the one million-strong strike against the penal powers; by August polls showed a majority both against war and conscription; Labor shifted left and at the October 1969 federal election ran on a platform of withdrawing troops and ending conscription. The radical left had made Vietnam the defining issue of the decade, drawing in the Whitlam Labor leadership. The CPA was forced to remodel itself to become relevant; anti-war activity continued and the movement grew into the mass rallies of the 1970 Moratorium. The struggle could now strongly influence the nature of capitalism post-war in Australia, and some hoped for turning the struggle into mass revolution.

John Percy summed up the situation for revolutionary groups at the end of 1968:

> 'A struggle developed in the next two years over which political currents would
> be able to establish strong national organisations. Some, like the SDSs, which
> seemed the shining stars in the 1960s, didn't last into the 1970s. The Maoists had
> a very dramatic rise and a just as rapid fall. The CPA was able to scramble back
> on the board in the '70s, partly by scooping up some of the new left types
> radicalised in the '60s in Adelaide, Melbourne and Brisbane, to prolong its
> existence for another 20 years before calling it quits in 1991. We were able to
> expand the start we had in Sydney among radicalising students and youth into a
> national organisation over the next few years.' (John Percy 2005: 112).

While Resistance members did build a national organisation connected to their party
organisation, the Socialist Workers Party, it was small and did not replace the CPA's
influence nor create a similar base among workers, although it did become a defender of
the USSR "degenerated workers' state" controlling nuclear weapons, in the peace
movement, according to Andrew Milner (Milner 1984: 42). Only the Australian Greens
have built a sizable force, but they are not a Marxist party even though many members
are Marxists. While many radicals developed as talented Marxist ideologues, they did
not build a movement around the revolutionary idea of changing capitalism through
working class-led revolution, the core idea of classical Marxism.

The CP rhetoric was a testament to the pressure from the new left and an indication of
the willingness of sections of the CP to change in the direction of radical youth in
Australia. However, the CPA was divided; the left were dominant and held the
leadership but even within the left, key leaders were in transition to Eurocommunism.
Laurie's brother Eric Aarons was clearly moving away from support for forms of
Stalinism to democratic liberalism which would be published in 1972 in his *Philosophy
for an Exploding World*, as cited in O'Lincoln, but this also revealed a clear shift away
from the centrality of the working class (O'Lincoln 1985: 127). Angus Macintyre's
study of Eric Aarons reveals more fundamental shift away from Marxist concepts:

> 'In 1967 and 1970 Congress documents and in *Class and Ruling Class* Eric
> explained the political militancy of the sixties in terms of the relations of
> production lagging behind the technologically-streamlined forces of production.
> Scientists and other tertiary-educated people, standing in the same relationship to
> the means of production as industrial workers, and therefore to be regarded as

members of the proletariat, enjoyed insufficient freedom to exercise their creative skills, he argued. In *Philosophy for an Exploding World* (page 427), Eric rejected this analysis out of hand. It fails, he wrote, because it keeps within the framework of the primacy of ownership over all other social relations, and the determination of consciousness by these ownership relations.' (A. P. Macintyre 1976: 83).

The CPA was not capable of a root and branch deconstruction of Stalinism and limited itself to democratisation, thereby continuing to provide a barrier to the creation of revolutionary leadership which was more powerful than the collection of revolutionary individuals attempting something Marxist. The CPA understood need to build a political counter-hegemonic force, which helped create a new political environment beneficial for the left as a whole. But it was not a revolutionary force. Rather than Gramsci's revolutionary strategy being the source of a useful Marxist perspective for rebuilding the left, a Eurocommunist Gramsci-style of politics dominated. So, by 1969 the CPA moved toward a Eurocommunist version of reformism rather than a vanguard party. The New Left was split in three Marxist groups with vanguard parties and the SDS which soon collapsed into the social movements; and they all went different political ways. By 1972, a range of social movements flourished, the ALP won the election, the CPA recruited some young people, and the Maoists declined. The Trotskyist Resistance and SWP grew as an Old Left vanguard party and also fragmented, while *International* collapsed.

Chapter 4 –

Conclusions

The Conference for Left Action has been a focus of this thesis in order to understand the political origins of the radical left and to situate their contribution in the wider history of the Australian Left. The origins of the New Left lie in the student movement of the early 1960s; it developed in response to Australian society from a moral critique of the racism against Aborigines and other social ills, to become a political movement in opposition to the American war in Vietnam and conscription from 1965. By the time of the conference in April 1969, the broader new left had divided into supporters of four elements (although they collaborated on their activity): three kinds of Marxists – Maoist, Trotskyist and "self-management" politics – and the non-Marxist SDS. At the same time the CPA was dividing again as its left wing ditched formal Stalinism, breaking with the USSR. After the conference, all organisations collaborated to build the mass rallies of the Moratorium in 1970, and the CPA built a new respect within the left. Social movements would thrive, based on women's and gay rights, Aboriginal rights and more; workers gained a new confidence and industrial militancy flourished. In 1972 Gough Whitlam's Labor Party won the federal election and change continued, along with various struggles.

The thesis looks at the period between 1967 and 1969, including the conference, to draw out the nature of new left Marxist politics, examining why it emerged and what the activists did to build the movement. Opposition to the war was the catalyst for radicalisation. By 1967 some radicals were collecting money for the Vietnamese NLF, developing Marxist critiques of capitalism, supporting Third World revolution in China, Cuba and Vietnam, and encouraging draft resisters. However, initially they also opposed the USSR and the CPA. Such a political position broke through the widely accepted Cold War consensus; their actions encouraged a re-think among intellectuals about the war. After the Vietnamese Tet Offensive and then the uprising by students and workers in France, society shifted left. Each new left group was based on tactical prowess before 1968: SDA and MLC learnt from experience to cultivate innovative militancy that challenged the governments to grant concessions but this practice was not linked to a strategy to change capitalism. Resistance pioneered a method of building eclectic socialist organisation, capable of attracting numbers and built an alternative youth centre. These contributions were all important for building social movements.

By situating this short period within a longer view (1960 – 1972), it becomes clear that the radical period after 1969 would not have happened had there not been the period of radicalisation and political clarification beforehand. Radical practice was necessary to break through the logjam of Stalinist domination of the left to win support for an alternative vision for humanity's liberation. SDA, along with SDS, began life arguing for a "values" revolution – they were interested in issues of human alienation and control and they pioneered the notion that the "personal is political". The ideas of Marcuse connected with them and informed their opposition to the war, conscription and education policies. The political breakthrough that was essential in building their movement before 1968 was a thoroughgoing commitment to anti-Stalinism, anti-domination, anti-manipulation, and fighting for power and control.

However, to achieve the liberation they sought, the left needed to take another step – go on to challenge the society and its state. Unfortunately, Marcuse had removed the central ingredient from his political theory: a working class movement. The new left would take some time overcoming his weakness. Those activists who continued to support Marcuse, especially in arguments in *Arena*, did not develop practical revolutionary politics. In what Russell labels 'overhurried abandonment', most New Left intellectuals joined an international phenomenon of dumping the working class, just before that class moved into action (Russell 1999: 364). Marcusean Marxism could provide the ideas and confidence for a new generation of young intellectuals to take to the streets, and challenge everything about the status quo, but for the final victory social power would be essential.

A journey through Marxism

Yet by 1969 some activists had sought out working class politics in the Old Left and were either creating new organisations or assessing whether to join the CPA; the conference discussion was a window on a radical movement gaining influence in the mainstream left and wider society. However, even though they adopted a Marxist analysis based on workers' power, the link with the Australian Old Left drew them to champion the party rather than the class and to shape the proletariat in their own image. Their journey from radical liberalism took them *via* Marxism but not *to* the basic ideas of classical Marxism.

My analysis of the new left Marxism indicates the tremendous reservoir of Stalinist practice in the Australian left, as radicals flipped from opposition to manipulative

parties to taking up the elitist party-building task themselves; in their competition with the CPA, were they mirroring their opponent? Without their own independent Marxist analysis of Australian capitalism they were more likely to make concessions to the nationalism of the ALP and CPA; their analysis of the state and politics would also be confused, illustrated in the lack of unity around this at the conference; concomitantly, their party was more likely to mirror the accepted model in the broader left. In saying the Marxist left were hampered by a low level of theory does not equate with criticising them for not accepting the fashionable ideas of the new left, as Milner points out rather it suggests that Marxists must concretely analyse their own environment (Milner 1984) and shape their practice to intervene to change that world, while at the same time intervening in all arguments of international capitalism.

Impatient for revolution after 1968, the new left Marxists put themselves in the vanguard, but way ahead of even their campus base and instead of developing politically with the working class. From 1969 the focus was on creating the vehicle for revolution, their parties. However, would these parties aid the workers' struggle or retard it? From the conference speeches it can be understood that Freney, Laver and O'Neill were attempting to bridge the existing circumstances and the socialist goal via workers' revolution as self-management in the capitalist workplaces, with an organisation that aided that process, but it is unclear whether the workers were to be represented or to lead themselves, nor how this would happen. Gould was arguing for, and building, an organisation outside the workplace, which presumably would link up with, and provide leadership for, the generalized social struggle in the future. Aarons' strategy was to provide a party to lead the struggle and a party that could *represent* the workers in parliament. Theory remained disconnected from practice, as theory was used to justify tactics; rather than practice to test theory.

What was left unclear was the nature of control both in the struggle and the socialist goal – was the party to control, or the rank and file workers? The political activists were ahead of the working class and the workers' movement would not radicalise sufficiently until after 1969. While the New Left had a grasp of what was wrong with society, they couldn't turn that analysis into a concrete message for other Australians. Most importantly their attempt was hampered at this time by the distortions of Marxist ideas from decades of the dominant left organisation's practice of building a Stalinist party and the ideas of radical nationalism; few confronted this problem sufficiently. The comparative freedom of student politics was skewed by individualism – politics

originating in radical liberalism and clever tactics to win reforms shaped individual leaders and undermined a collective politics, which was difficult to overcome without a relationship to a revolutionary workers' movement. The radical left groups were unable to prepare for the upturn in struggle which took place from 1970, from which the ALP and Gough Whitlam benefited most with their election victory in 1972. While the Left Action Conference provided a step toward a new dialogue to develop on political theory, the step was not taken. This thesis is able to provide some answers to the question of why the left failed to use this period to build lasting useful socialist organisation.

Among the new left Marxists, three key features are shared: an inability to contribute to a Marxist analysis of Australian capitalism; a lack of confidence in the working class and tendency to substitute other forces as the agency of socialism, such as Third World revolutions, student rebellion, orientation to marginal groups or dogmatic adherence to a program and leadership cults; and, an over-centralised party organisation which became ineffective in terms of leading in struggles. SDS avoided the latter, but disintegrated into various social movements which grew until the 1980s. In the long view, we can see that the New Left phenomenon began this left-moving process, and they partly achieved their aspirations for a more democratic, less restrictive society.

Were they part of the failed revolution that changed the world? The year 1969 and the conference provide a window on a radical experience which made a significant contribution to the overhaul of the old conservative and repressive ways of 1950s Australia.

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