

Labor & the Fight for Socialism

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Introduction

By Steve Painter

For nearly 100 years the Australian Labor Party has dominated labor movement politics in this country. For all of that time it has been the main obstacle to the advance of the socialist movement.

Though socialists helped to found the ALP and have always been active within it, and though most of the more politically conscious workers have traditionally given it their support, the ALP has never been a working-class party. Today it remains, as it always has been, a liberal bourgeois party.

The ALP is Australia's oldest continually existing party, and has become the Australian capitalist ruling class's second party of government, being entrusted with management of the state machinery in all of Australian capitalism's most serious crises this century.

Labor has governed federally for about 24 of the 87 years since federation in seven terms of government, ranging in length from four months to eight years and three months.

The first two federal Labor governments were not very significant, lasting only four months and eight months respectively. The first long-term Labor government came to office in 1910, at a time when the other capitalist parties were not making a very good fist of forging a single national state out of the six former British colonies that had federated in 1901. In the decade since the creation of the Commonwealth of Australia, these parties had not even been able to create one of the cornerstones of a unified nation-state — a single currency.

Prime Minister Andrew Fisher's ALP government proved its value to the capitalist class as a whole by standing apart from the more short-sighted capitalist factions. It set up the Commonwealth Bank and stopped the private banks issuing their own currencies.

The Fisher government started building the Transcontinental Railway as part of an attempt to quieten separatist agitation in Western Australia. It introduced

compulsory military training for young men over the age of 14. In this, it was pursuing one of the constant ALP concerns of the early years of this century — the establishment of an independent Australian military force — another essential pillar of the capitalist state. Fisher's government also broke the deadlock on the site for the national capital and began planning Canberra. It separated the Northern Territory from South Australia.

Through Fisher's government, the ALP proved itself to be a capitalist party different from those more directly controlled by various competing factions of the capitalist class. Labor demonstrated that it was capable of standing above the squabbling vested interests that dominated the other parties.

The ALP showed that it was capable of serving the interests of the Australian capitalist class as a whole, particularly during times of severe crisis when dissension within the ruling class tended to paralyse the other bourgeois parties. For that reason, it was chosen to govern through most of both world wars, and to inflict the savage wage cuts demanded by the ruling class in the early stages of the 1930s depression.

From Whitlam to Hawke

In the early 1970s, as the Vietnam War and the exhaustion of the long wave of economic expansion that followed World War II again destabilised capitalist politics, the ALP was called on to end Australia's involvement in Vietnam and lay to rest the mass antiwar movement.

It was also called upon to open trade with China in an attempt to balance the loss of Australia's traditional markets due to increasing international competition. Labor was also to carry out other economic reforms necessary to prepare Australian capitalism to weather a new period of long-term downturn in the world capitalist economy.

But panicked by the dramatic slump in profits caused by the first recession in the new, post-boom period, the ruling class quickly lost confidence in Labor's ability to deal with the crisis, and orchestrated the ouster of the Whitlam Labor government through the constitutional coup of November 11, 1975.

The permanent rise in unemployment resulting from the 1974-75 recession and the weak recovery that followed it enabled the Fraser Liberal-National government to use the wage-freeze indexation system established under Whitlam to gradually erode real wages.

For five years, it also slashed spending on health, education and social welfare without serious labor movement resistance. However, ruling class confidence in the coalition was eroded by the collapse of the centralised wage-fixing system at the end of 1981. Adding to this loss of confidence was the rise in wages as a proportion of gross

domestic product in the year that followed, and the Fraser government's inability to arrest the decline in Australian industry's international competitiveness.

During the 1982-83 recession, the ability of the union movement to defend real wages and to win reductions in working hours led decisive sectors of big capital to turn back toward the ALP, which through its wage-freeze prices-incomes accord with the ACTU offered the promise of a mechanism to contain real wage growth during the upturn in the capitalist business cycle that was already under way internationally by mid-1982.

In March 1983 the ALP was recalled to office under the newly installed leadership of former ACTU president Bob Hawke. It immediately set about institutionalising the 12-month "wages pause" imposed by the Fraser government in late 1982.

It also went to work on the task of restoring Australian capitalism's international competitiveness through extensive industry restructuring. When the economic recovery, which began in Australia in the middle of 1983, ran out of steam in 1986 the Hawke government responded with a drive to impose the deepest cuts to working people's living standards since the 1930s.

The ALP and the unions

The trade unions played a central role in the establishment of the ALP, though they weren't the sole force. In the 1890s, the formation of the ALP represented an important political step forward by the trade union movement. It reflected the realisation that working people and trade unionists needed their own political arm. But the ALP never became that.

In his 1923 work, *How Labor governs*, Vere Gordon Childe points to the diversity of the ALP's initial supporters, who included "democrats and Australian nationalists," small farmers, prospectors and mining proprietors, small shopkeepers, the Catholic Church, and "perhaps certain business interests — notably the liquor trade." Childe added:

The heterogeneous elements supporting the Labor Party have naturally led to serious conflicts of interest, The democrats do not necessarily sympathise with the aims of unionism, and may very well be opposed to state interference with private enterprise. Nationalism is diametrically opposed to that internationalist sentiment which is characteristic of the socialist movement. The militarist policy, which the White Australia ideal has forced on the Labor Party, is distasteful to many industrialists [ie unionists].

In *The ALP, A Short History*, published in 1981, Brian McKinlay quotes the words of one of the first ALP members of the NSW parliament:

We were a band of unhappy amateurs ... made up somewhat as follows: Several

miners, three or four printers, a boilermaker, three sailors, a plasterer, a journalist, a draper, a suburban mayor, two engineers, a carrier, a few shearers, a tailor and — with bated breath — a mineowner, a squatter and an MD.

So, from the very beginning, the unions were by no means the only force in the ALP. But even had they been, that was no guarantee of the ALP's commitment to socialist policies.

When the Fisher government fell in 1913, V.I. Lenin, the leader of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, observed:

What sort of peculiar capitalist country is this, in which the workers' representatives predominate in the upper house, and until recently did so in the lower house as well, and yet the capitalist system is in no danger?

The Australian Labor Party does not even call itself a socialist party. Actually it is a liberal bourgeois party, while the so-called Liberals in Australia are really conservatives. Capitalism in Australia is still quite youthful. The country is only just taking shape as an independent state. The workers are for the most part emigrants from Britain. They left when the masses of British workers were Liberals ...

The leaders of the Australian Labor Party are trade union officials, everywhere the most moderate and capital-serving element, and in Australia altogether peaceable, purely liberal.

In Australia the Labor Party has done what in other countries was done by the Liberals, namely, introduced a uniform tariff for the whole country, a uniform land tax and uniform factory legislation. (See Appendix in this booklet.)

Thus, well before the great World War I split in the international socialist movement, Lenin regarded the ALP as a bourgeois party, representing above all the conservative, pro-capitalist layer of officials gathered at the head of the trade union movement.

After the increasingly reformist Social Democratic parties betrayed the Marxist internationalist heritage by each supporting the imperialist government of its own country at the beginning of World War I, Lenin characterised these parties as “bourgeois labor parties”, that is, “organisation[s] of the bourgeoisie”. He later said that the British Labour Party existed only “to systematically dupe the workers”.

Socialists & the ALP

While the ALP is such a bourgeois labor party, many Australian socialists have mistakenly interpreted this to mean that the ALP is fundamentally a working-class party, even if a degenerate one, and that socialists should therefore automatically urge workers to vote for it, and should support continued trade union affiliation to it.

The widely held view that the ALP is the political arm of the labor movement, as

distinct from the industrial arm represented by the unions, carries with it the idea that socialists are *obliged* not only to call for a vote for Labor, but to see it as the fundamental organisational framework for their political activity.

The resolution in this pamphlet, “The ALP and the Fight for Socialism”, was adopted by the Socialist Workers Party at its eleventh national conference, held in Canberra in January 1986. In it, the SWP argues the opposite point of view: That while it may be necessary to vote for the ALP as a lesser evil against the Liberals or Nationals, the only way to really defend working-class interests is to break politically with the ALP in every arena, including the electoral and industrial arenas.

The SWP argues that the trade unions should disaffiliate from the Labor Party and throw their weight behind the construction of a new political party genuinely dedicated to defending working-class interests.

In 1986, this was a new approach for the SWP, which had previously held that the ALP was a party with a dual nature: A party that was pro-capitalist in its program and leadership but working-class in its membership and support. This made it mandatory for socialists to vote for it and to support trade union affiliation to it.

Experience under the Hawke government and its four state counterparts made that view untenable and led the SWP to rethink its approach to the ALP. The conclusions of this process of rethinking are summarised by the second document in this pamphlet — “The ALP, the Nuclear Disarmament Party and the Elections”, which is an abridged version of a report presented by SWP national secretary Jim Percy to the party’s national committee in October 1984.

The Hawke Labor government has proven just as savagely anti-union and anti-working-class as the Liberal-National government before it, and the emergence of the Nuclear Disarmament Party in the second half of 1984 demonstrated that a break from the ALP could be progressive even if it did not involve the ALP’s traditional trade union base.

While limited to activity on the electoral plane, the NDP nevertheless made a very favorable impact on Australian politics, strengthening the left and providing a rallying point for disillusioned activists leaving the ALP. Of course, that impact would have been even greater had even a few unions thrown their weight behind the NDP.

The ALP’s shift to the right has created an electoral vacuum to the left. This was already apparent in the NDP’s strong performance in the 1984 federal elections. In the time since that election, this political vacuum has opened up even more, as the Hawke Labor government has moved politically closer to the conservative parties, adopting more and more of their policies.

In the 1987 elections, an impressive range of progressive alternative candidates

sought to take advantage of the electoral opportunities created by Labor's right-wing course, and a new NDP senator was elected while Jo Vallentine held her seat as an independent senator for nuclear disarmament.

The liberal-capitalist Australian Democrats, squeezed out of much of their traditional territory by Labor's move rightward, also attempted to fill the vacuum on the left.

The third document in this pamphlet — "SWP Policy in the 1987 Federal Election" — is based on a report presented by SWP national executive member Doug Lorimer to a meeting of the party's Sydney branch on June 30, 1987. Lorimer explains why the SWP decided for the first time in its history to call for a vote for the Democrats ahead of the ALP.

For as long as the ALP has existed, some socialists have chosen to work within it, and some without. The SWP believes there are times for both courses of action, and at present the appropriate course is to work from without — to encourage an organisational break with the ALP and the formation of a new party.

That doesn't rule out joint activity with ALP left-wingers who don't accept this course, and who prefer to continue working inside the ALP. But such joint activity should not rule out the need for socialists to explain that working within the ALP is a rather futile activity for leftists at present.

For a good 10 years, the ALP left has known little but defeats, and that has led most of the left forces to leave the ALP. At the very least, that indicates a rather poor immediate future for the ALP left. But more importantly, it points to a more fundamental political weakness. If the ALP left regards its commitment to the ALP more highly than its commitment to progressive social change, and refuses even in the present circumstances to consider a break, it imprisons itself within the capitalist political framework of the ALP, and by doing so automatically concedes the fight to the right wing.

The union movement's great step forward of the 1890s was only ever a partial success. Seeking a political party that would fight for working-class interests, the unions and their allies succeeded only in creating capitalism's party of reform — the one that would step in during times of crisis and carry out measures that could head off social upheaval, so ensuring the maintenance of capitalist rule.

The early years of the party were marked by struggles between those who wanted a genuinely working-class party (however mistaken they may have been in their conceptions of what sort of party that should be) and those who didn't. By the time the Fisher government came to office in 1910, the working-class activists had lost that fight. When the mass anti-conscription struggles broke out during World War I the

main initiative had to come from outside the ALP — largely from the socialist revolutionaries of the Industrial Workers of the World.

Today's socialists must recognise that the great step forward of the 1890s has become the great obstacle of the 1980s, and be prepared to take all the steps — political and organisational — that flow from that recognition.

November 1987

The ALP & the Fight for Socialism

1. The formation of the ALP

The formation of the Australian Labor Party reflected an advance in working-class consciousness — the recognition that existing governments were used by the employers as weapons in the class struggle and that the labor movement needed its own political party to win governmental power in order to advance its interests against those of the capitalists.

The ALP was formed as a result of the defeat of the mass strike wave of the early 1890s. In the wake of that defeat, trade unionists realised that even to win major industrial struggles against the employing class they had to fight on the political as well as the economic level. They realised that parliament, the police, and the army were arrayed against them and they sought to change this through the formation of their own political party.

In the 1890s, the various state trades and labor councils began endorsing parliamentary candidates, and their early successes led rapidly to the formation of the ALP.

2. A party of the trade union bureaucracy

As a party created by the trade unions, the ALP necessarily reflected the unions' strengths and weaknesses. In the 1890s the Australian trade union movement embraced only about one-fifth of the workforce, primarily the more privileged, skilled workers.

The different British settler states that formed the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901 had shared in the British Empire's superprofits from the exploitation of its Asian colonies. These superprofits enabled the emerging independent Australian capitalist class to convert accidental divisions within the working class into more lasting ones —

to foster an aristocracy of labor among the better paid, skilled sections of the working class.

Basing themselves on these workers, a conservative layer of officials consolidated at the head of the unions. Placing defence of their own social privileges, particularly the security of their positions, before the long term (and even in many cases the short term) interests of the mass of workers, this labor bureaucracy shared the ideological outlook of the urban middle classes — shopkeepers, professionals, etc. — particularly their desire for class peace. The union bureaucracy sought to harmonise the interests of labor and capital, which meant in reality supporting the social status quo.

The class-collaborationist outlook of the union bureaucracy has been powerful within the ALP since its inception. While formally a party of the unions, the ALP is directly the party of the union bureaucracy, which controls the selection of delegates to conferences, most of the full-time apparatus, the bulk of the party finances, etc. The union leaders who initiated the formation of the ALP did not see it as an instrument for mobilising workers against capitalism. Rather, they saw the ALP as a vehicle for putting labor representatives into the bourgeois parliaments of each state (and later the Commonwealth).

The union bureaucracy regards political action in the same way as it does industrial action — purely as a means of bargaining for reforms within the capitalist system. It shares with the Labor parliamentarians a fundamental allegiance to so called democratic capitalism, even when its different base forces it to engage in partial struggles against the employers.

3. A liberal bourgeois party

The affiliation of most Australian trade unions to the ALP gives the Labor Party a predominantly working-class membership. This fact has often contributed to the illusion that the ALP is a working-class party. However, a political party is most fundamentally characterised not by the social composition of its membership, but by its real political program and practice.

From this standpoint — the only correct one for Marxists — the ALP is a liberal bourgeois party. It seeks to create a more humane capitalism by reconciling or weakening class conflicts. It represents the working class only within the context of a more fundamental loyalty to Australian capitalism.

This fact dictates that the ALP's attempts to reconcile class conflicts are achieved through the subordination of workers' interests to those of the capitalist ruling class. The pro-capitalist program of the ALP confines the party's actions within the limits set by capitalist property relations, and provides a guarantee against mass pressures

pushing the party onto a revolutionary course.

4. Parliamentarism

Like other liberal bourgeois parties, the ALP regards the institutions of the bourgeois-democratic state, particularly parliament, as the primary arena and instrument for harmonisation of class interests and bringing about changes it considers desirable. It concentrates on convincing workers that their needs can and must be met through parliament and other institutions of the capitalist state, such as the arbitration system, rather than through their own organisation and collective activity.

When the political climate is suitable, the leaders of the ALP sometimes argue openly that workers' interests can be advanced only in alliance with the interests of capital, but the same argument is advanced more consistently and insidiously through the ALP's emphasis on parliament as the highest expression and limit of politics.

5. The ALP in office — a capitalist government

ALP governments work within the framework of the bourgeois power incorporated in the capitalist state — its parliamentary institutions, its courts, army, police, and civil bureaucracy. ALP governments come to office with the consent of the capitalist class and administer the capitalist state machine. They defend capitalist property relations and seek to promote the accumulation of capitalist profits.

ALP governments are *in no sense* workers' governments. On the contrary, they are capitalist governments. This fact is merely a reflection of the bourgeois character of the Labor Party itself.

6. When and why capitalism favours Labor governments

Important sections of the capitalist class usually favour the election of the ALP to office during periods of crisis, such as economic depressions or wars. The reasons for this are twofold:

a. Because the ALP is based upon the trade union bureaucracy rather than directly upon the employing class, the ALP is better able to pursue policies that meet the collective needs of the capitalist class. It is less susceptible than the Liberal or National parties to pressure from sectional interests within the capitalist class.

b. Because of its ties with the trade union bureaucracy, the ALP is able to perform specific services for capital more effectively than could a bourgeois party lacking that base. This attribute becomes particularly useful to the capitalist class when it needs to derail working class resistance to drastic cuts in living standards.

7. Why the ruling class prefers conservative party governments

At the same time, however, the pressure of the party's working class base — refracted through the formal domination of the ALP's structures by the trade union bureaucracy — can come into conflict with the pro-capitalist course of the ALP's parliamentary leadership. This conflict is often reflected in within the ALP about particular aspects of its platform, about control of the parliamentary caucus by the party machine, and even about the control of a Labor cabinet by the parliamentary caucus.

Struggles to include progressive policies in the platform, and to have the ALP's parliamentary representatives bound by party conference decisions, are a reflection of the efforts of the ALP's working-class base to make the party serve their interests. Under this pressure, the party's leaders may be forced to go somewhat further than capital considers necessary in granting reforms or concessions.

Furthermore, to the extent that workers have high expectations of an ALP government, the Labor Party's election to office may encourage them to raise demands that would not be made of a government of the conservative parties. The ruling class's traditional preference for the conservative parties is mainly due to two factors:

- The greater uncertainty and instability often associated with Labor Party governments because of the pressure from the party's base.
- The capitalists' suspicion of, and hostility to, Labor's ties with the unions.

8. Reforms & reformism

To maintain both its mass support and the subordination of workers to capitalist parliamentarism, ALP governments must be seen to legislate at least partially in the interests of workers — at least of sections of the working class, if not of the class as a whole.

Revolutionaries initiate or support struggles for reforms not only to seek immediate improvements in the conditions and level of organisation of the working class and its potential social allies, but also as part of a larger strategy aimed at developing the strength and self confidence of the workers for the struggle to overthrow capitalism.

Through the struggle for immediate reforms, and particularly the struggle for fundamental anti-capitalist structural reforms (transitional demands) such as workers control of production, the working class can gain an understanding of the need and means to replace capitalism with socialism.

But for the ALP, reforms are a means of preventing class conflict from developing into revolutionary struggle. It is therefore a reformist party in two senses:

- a. Reforms are a means by which the ALP subordinates the working class to its

class enemy.

b. Reforms to the existing system of capitalist domination are the most that can be attempted or achieved by an ALP government.

The ALP's reformism institutionalises bourgeois hegemony over the working class, which Australian imperialism has maintained thanks to its membership in the exclusive club of the most favoured capitalist states. Workers' struggles, including the struggle to create their own political party, are prevented from developing to their full potential by the timely granting of partial concessions. This is made possible by the ruling class's ability to dole out some of its imperialist superprofits when necessary. When a bourgeois ALP government is able to pose as the instrument for obtaining such concessions, the result is a reinforcement of parliamentarist illusions and the diversion of workers from the path of consistent class struggle.

Because the revolutionary approach to winning reforms is based on class struggle mobilisations of the workers and their allies, and does not subordinate the struggle for reforms to what the capitalists or their state regard as compatible with bourgeois power and profitability, this approach is far more likely to succeed than the ALP's method of appealing to the goodwill of the capitalist rulers.

9. The further co-option of the labour movement during the postwar capitalist boom

Changes within the ALP in recent decades have undermined the potential dangers of a Labor government even to short-term capitalist interests.

From the late 1940s until the early 1970s, a long period of accelerated growth in the world capitalist economy enabled the capitalist class to provide a steady increase in working-class living standards, and thus created a climate favourable to the generalisation of class-collaborationist attitudes, including increasing union reliance on the good will of the capitalist state, and particularly the arbitration system.

In these conditions, the majority of workers did not resist the conservative officials' consolidation of their hold on the unions. Nor did they resist the increased subordination of the unions to the state-controlled industrial relations system, itself a creation of ALP governments.

The strengthening of the union bureaucracy inevitably had its parallel in the strengthened hold of the most pro-capitalist elements within the ALP leadership. Parallel with these developments there was a shift in the composition of the party's local branches with a decline in the relative numbers of workers and an increase in the relative weight of middle class elements.

This shift in the social composition of the branches is reflected in the changed

social composition of the ALP's parliamentary leadership. Formerly, the typical Labor parliamentarian was a worker who had become part of the trade union bureaucracy and used his union base to secure preselection. But today, the typical Labor parliamentarian is likely to be a former arbitration commission lawyer or an academic. Present day Labor politicians are more often people who feel a closer affinity with big business and less embarrassment about openly serving its interests.

The ALP's left wing, which is largely influenced by academic and middle-class leftism in the absence of a recent tradition of militant working class struggle, has increasingly taken on the role of apologist for the ALP's subservience to capital.

10. Recent changes in the ALP

Since the mid 1970s, the ALP has moved sharply rightward. This shift corresponds to the changed needs of Australian capital resulting from the onset of the world capitalist economy's fourth long term depression caused by a decline in the long-term rate of profit.

The slower rate of capital accumulation since the mid-1970s has reduced the capitalist rulers' ability to contain social unrest by granting concessions to working people. In fact, capitalism has embarked on a drive to take back many of the social and economic gains won in earlier periods of greater prosperity, and to substantially reduce working class living standards to offset the decline in the rate of profit.

From 1972-75, The Whitlam Labor government attempted to accommodate the changed needs of capital, particularly through the Hayden budget of August 1975. But the dominant sections of the capitalist class did not consider that the Whitlam government could impose the austerity measures they wanted rapidly enough or decisively enough.

The Whitlam government's failure to defend workers' living standards and jobs during the 1974-75 recession caused widespread disillusionment with the ALP. This led important sections of the ruling class to believe that the ALP could be defeated by the Liberal-National coalition if it could force Whitlam to the polls. The Kerr-Fraser coup of November 1975 was the result.

However, the coup provoked spontaneous outbreaks of working-class protest. The Labor reformists, more fearful of the consequences of a sustained working-class mobilisation against the coup than of losing office in a parliamentary election, campaigned to demobilise the ALP's supporters and to channel any protest back into the parliamentary arena.

In this framework, the conservative parties were able to capitalise on widespread working-class disillusionment and anger with the Whitlam government's pro-capitalist

policies, and to win a landslide victory in the December 1975 federal election. This experience demonstrated once again that the ALP's subordination to capitalist parliamentarism is a dead end for the working class.

Since the defeat of the Whitlam government, Australian capitalism has encouraged the ALP leaders to reduce working-class expectations of a Labor government and to deepen the unions' integration with, and subordination to, the capitalist state. This has necessarily involved an erosion of the democratic rights of the membership in order to prevent opposition to the leadership's right-wing course.

Even in regard to electoral campaigns, this has entailed a deliberate demobilisation of the party ranks and the working class generally, and an increased reliance on the bourgeois media.

In its own way, the official Labor left assists in this process of demobilisation, seeking to convert actions by the ALP ranks or actions outside the party into mere instruments of pressure in internal factional struggles.

The right-wing course of the ALP in recent years (most clearly symbolised by the Hawke government's wage-freeze Accord with the ACTU and its attacks on militant sections of the union movement such as the Builders Labourers Federation), combined with the total failure of the Labor left to challenge this right wing course, will make it increasingly difficult for the ALP to make even tactical, demagogic left turns when it is out of office.

11. The Labor left

Traditional left-wing formations and individuals in the ALP have usually failed to gain dominance within the party because they have succumbed to the pressures created by the ALP's political domination of the organised working class.

Above all, the traditional ALP left fears isolation from the ALP, which it tends to identify with the working class. It has no perspective of going beyond the ALP. Its attempts to give the party more progressive policies therefore take place in the overall framework of the ALP's parliamentarist, pro-capitalist role, and are inevitably subordinated to that role. What appears realistic to the ALP left is circumscribed by what the right can be forced to accept without splitting away or expelling the left.

Since the leadership is seen as an objective limitation on what may be fought for, the traditional ALP left is always under strong pressure to see the key to changing the ALP in the replacement of the existing right wing leadership by more progressive leaders. This shifts the focus of ALP left politics still further towards the ground of the right, giving priority to unprincipled factionalism and opportunist deals.

In general, Labor leftism is a reflection of the nervousness of a wing of the union

bureaucracy about relations with the masses. The traditional ALP left remains weak and is defined by a lack of ideological cohesion. In the end, it acts as a cover for the more consistently and openly pro-capitalist elements that dominate the ALP.

Because the Labor left values its allegiance to the ALP more highly than its support to progressive policies and movements, and refuses under any circumstances to break with Laborism, it is unable to combat the pro-capitalist course of the ALP right and is forced to capitulate to it at every decisive turn.

The refusal of the traditional ALP left to countenance a break with the ALP in the end means that the Labor left disenfranchises itself. As the Nuclear Disarmament Party showed during the 1984 federal elections, even a relatively small left-wing party outside the ALP can be more effective than the traditional Labor left in forcing the ALP right to make concessions to progressive movements.

Rather than being a force within the ALP that champions the demands and interests of the labor and other progressive social movements against the pro-capitalist right wing, the traditional Labor left is (particularly when Labor is in government) an objective tool of the ALP right within these movements. It seeks to moderate the movements' demands and struggles so as not to embarrass the Labor government and weaken its support within the ruling class.

Moreover, in the context of the present long-term capitalist depression, the Labor left's traditional perspective of creating a more humane capitalism has become even more clearly utopian than it was during the previous period of relative capitalist prosperity. In order to appear realistic and to avoid jeopardising the ALP's ruling class support, the Labor left has by and large accepted the capitalists' austerity drive.

12. The false perspective of reforming the ALP

Socialists who understand the central role of the working class in the struggle for social change have sometimes drawn the erroneous conclusion that the ALP, regardless of its actual political role, is inherently progressive merely because of its links with the trade unions.

Even socialists who acknowledge the ALP's pro-capitalist role often hold that the party is the "political arm of the labour movement". They often claim, falsely, that the ALP's pro-capitalist program is simply a reflection of the existing level of political understanding within the organised working class.

Such a view assumes that the ALP is an empty vessel that can be filled with any political content — pro-capitalist or pro-socialist — depending on the level of political consciousness among the workers organised in the trade unions. From this standpoint, the task of socialists is to transform the ALP into a revolutionary party — to preserve

the *formal* unity of the working class through the ALP's political hegemony over it while giving this hegemony a new, socialist content.

But form and content cannot be isolated and dealt with separately in that fashion. Working-class unity — a far higher degree of unity than exists in the ALP — is a precondition for socialist revolution. But unity can be either progressive or reactionary, depending on its basis and the uses to which it is put. The existing working-class unity within the ALP is founded on the perspective of maintaining capitalism, and therefore must be broken down before a progressive, pro-socialist unity can be built.

A socialist strategy cannot be based on the utopian perspective of transforming the liberal bourgeois ALP into a proletarian socialist party. The parliamentarist, reformist perspective that has dominated the ALP from its inception makes it an obstacle to further steps towards the development of working-class political consciousness and action.

The ALP is an obstacle that must be removed if the working class is to achieve the level of political consciousness and action that can enable it to seriously challenge capitalist rule in this country. Accomplishing this task involves transforming the political outlook of the working class by breaking its allegiance to reformist ideology embodied in the Labor Party, and building a credible anti-capitalist alternative.

13. Preparing defeats

In the absence of any credible alternative to the left of the ALP, disillusionment or anger with Labor's betrayals tends to drive many workers to support the conservative parties or to adopt a posture of political apathy. This was the experience under the Whitlam Labor government, and the same outcome is being prepared today by the Hawke government and its state counterparts.

The refusal of the Labor left to break with the pro-capitalist ALP program and leadership and to help build a credible anti-capitalist alternative not only does nothing to save ALP governments from inevitable electoral defeat, but also helps to prepare defeats for the working class at the hands of ALP governments.

These defeats, which are invariably a product of the deliberate demobilisation of the working class by the Labor reformists, are the worst sort: Defeats that usually occur without a fight and therefore produce nothing but demoralisation and confusion. Such defeats are inflicted with the assistance of the Labor left as well as the right, in the name of retaining ruling class support for Labor governments.

14. An anti-capitalist political alternative

Only the creation of a serious anti capitalist alternative, necessarily founded on a

complete break with Labor reformism, can minimise such defeats and open the way to working-class victories in the struggle against the bosses' attempts to make working people pay for the capitalist crisis.

Revolutionaries therefore place a high priority on helping to develop such a political alternative — a broadly based party that consistently counterposes defence of the interests of workers and their allies to the illusions of class peace fostered by the ALP and the trade union bureaucracy.

The road to building such a political alternative lies along the line of seeking unity among all who are willing to break with Labor reformism and to encourage the most broadly based action in defence of the interests of workers and their allies.

15. The working class & progressive movements of labour's allies

No other class or social group can substitute for the working class in overthrowing capitalism. But it is also true that to achieve the overthrow of capitalism and to build socialism the working class must win the support of non-proletarian sections of the population whose objective interests would be served by the elimination of various aspects of capitalist exploitation and oppression.

Over the past two decades, movements such as the Aboriginal, peace, feminist, and environmental movements, have had an increasing impact on the consciousness of broad layers of the working class, and have generated struggles with objectively anti-capitalist aims and dynamic.

As the class struggle deepens, and increasing numbers of workers radicalise, these movements can expect to find growing support within the organised labor movement. This, in turn, will enable these movements to enlist the social power of the working class in aid of their struggles, and help to further develop the anti-capitalist political consciousness of the working class.

16. Support for all progressive breaks with Labor reformism

There is no reason to suppose that the Australian working class will follow any particular pattern or model in developing revolutionary consciousness. Socialists must therefore be alert to new or unexpected events that can assist such development. A case in point was the rapid rise of the Nuclear Disarmament Party during the 1984 federal election campaign.

Because of the highly bureaucratised character of the Australian union movement and the success of the ALP ACTU prices and incomes Accord in holding down industrial

struggles, a movement with the potential to produce a significant break to the left of Labor reformism began not in the unions but in the ALP branches and in the leftist middle-class milieu usually sympathetic to Labor. While its activities were limited to the electoral arena, the NDP was a positive development.

The spectacular development of the NDP was the reflection and outcome of several years of mass mobilisation around the anti-nuclear issue. This example demonstrates that it is political action by broad masses of people that creates the basis for political breaks with Labor reformism.

17. The role of Marxist organisation

In the process of developing a consistent anti-capitalist alternative to the ALP, even a small Marxist organisation can play a decisive role.

Such a revolutionary organisation can bring to the process of creating a new anti capitalist party the accumulated lessons of more than 130 years of anti capitalist struggle, summarised in Marxist theory. It can provide a network, based on a politically coherent outlook, for the collective thinking necessary to weld the diverse elements breaking with Labor reformism into a mass, anti capitalist alternative — a mass revolutionary party. These qualities are also the ones necessary to chart the way forward for the working class and its allies in the complex and difficult struggle to overthrow capitalism and construct a new, socialist society.

An independent revolutionary organisation is needed not only to win and train cadres who reach revolutionary views outside the context of the ALP, but also to assist the process of political clarification and formation of a revolutionary current within the Labor Party.

At most, socialists within the ALP can propagandise for revolutionary policies. But even the possibilities for such propaganda are increasingly circumscribed by the right-wing, anti-democratic course of the ALP leadership. Within the ALP, it is impossible to explain openly the need for a break with Laborism and the need for a new and revolutionary party.

Even though small in size, an independent revolutionary organisation like the Socialist Workers Party can tell the whole truth to ALP members dissatisfied with the course of the ALP leadership. Even more importantly, it can *demonstrate* the revolutionary Marxist alternative through its practical activity and initiatives in the class struggle.

For these reasons, we reject the view, shared to one degree or another by most socialists in the ALP, that the construction of a revolutionary party organisationally

and politically independent of the Labor Party must be postponed into the indefinite future.

18. A revolutionary transitional approach to the problem of the ALP

It is undeniable that many members and leaders of the future mass revolutionary party will come from the ALP. But that mass revolutionary party cannot be the product of an exclusive focus on a single tactic, whether that tactic is work within the ALP or any other.

At the present level of development of the Australian labor movement, revolutionaries are a tiny minority. There is no *a priori* justification for the assumption that the necessary accumulation of revolutionary cadres at any particular time can proceed most rapidly within the ALP. Today, the main political motion to the left of Labor reformism is to be found outside the ALP.

ALP hegemony is an objective fact that cannot be overcome or bypassed by wishful thinking or simply by counterposing a small socialist organisation as an alternative leadership. It will require a patient, consistent, long term political approach and activity to convince masses of workers that their political needs can be met only by a revolutionary party and program.

Regardless of whether it works within or outside ALP structures, the political activity of a revolutionary organisation must be directed towards undermining the hold of Labor reformism over the working class.

Undermining and eventually defeating ALP hegemony will require the ability to deal with this hegemony in its real and specific forms — that is, the ability to relate to working-class consciousness at its present level and to help it develop by posing the need for realistic actions in the interest of working people.

To the extent that the revolutionary party is able to become directly involved in the struggles of the working class and its allies, the propaganda and agitation of a revolutionary party will be more closely attuned to the real level of working-class consciousness, and therefore more capable of modifying that consciousness.

A strategy for defeating Labor reformism must therefore be based on an activist orientation to struggles by the workers and their potential allies, at whatever level they begin and wherever they occur. Only through active participation in the struggles of the working class and its allies can a revolutionary party demonstrate the relevance of its program and win a mass base.

19. The need for tactical flexibility

The extent to which revolutionaries can effect a break with Labor reformism by sections

of the working class and its allies depends on the overall level of struggle, for it is only through their own experience in struggle that broad masses of working people will see the need for such a break. Sound tactics, applied appropriately by revolutionaries, can facilitate such a break when mass struggles have prepared the conditions for it, but they cannot substitute for the role of such struggles.

Struggles by forces outside the organised labor movement will play an important role in politicising the working class, and can act as a catalyst for a working class break with Labor reformism.

Socialists must champion the progressive demands of all sectors of the exploited and oppressed, and must orient their political tactics towards forces that are in motion at any particular time. The struggle to overcome the ALP's hegemony within the organised working class thus requires great tactical flexibility of socialists.

20. Building a revolutionary current in the ALP

Work within the ALP is at times a possible and legitimate tactic for socialists in their fight against Labor reformism. The aim of such work must be to build an anti capitalist, anti-reformist current. Whether socialists employ such a tactic will depend on whether there are forces in the Labor Party that could develop in a progressive direction.

Also important in deciding whether or not socialists should join the Labor Party is the possibility at any given time for socialists to retain their full freedom to criticise the bourgeois leaders of the Labor Party *and* their freedom to carry on the work of propaganda, agitation and organisation in support of their own revolutionary workers' party.

It is not possible for socialists to join the ALP under these conditions today. This fact places serious limitations on work to encourage the formation of a revolutionary socialist current within the ALP, though these obstacles should not become an absolute barrier to such work.

21. United front campaigns

The bosses' offensive against working class living standards has encouraged a spontaneous striving for unity within the labor movement. United action by the working class is desperately needed to defeat the bosses' attacks.

However, the reformist leaders of the ALP and the trade unions cynically seek to manipulate this desire for working class unity in order to stifle any opposition to their class-collaborationist perspectives. The Labor reformists and the trade union bureaucracy preach unity in words, but vigorously oppose it in action. The unity they want is a unity of passivity in the face of the capitalist offensive.

To the fake calls of the Labor reformists and union bureaucrats for working-class unity, socialist counterpose the need for a united front of anti capitalist struggle.

Such unity can best be built through the broadest mobilisation in campaigns around specific issues or reforms. United front campaigns are a mechanism for advancing the interests of the working class and its allies, and for helping those who look to the ALP to recognise the need for anti-capitalist policies and class struggle methods in order to defend their interests.

Through such united front campaigns, socialists can turn workers' illusions in their present leadership against the ruling class by calling on the ALP to participate in united campaigns for specific progressive goals. The potential of such campaigns is demonstrated by the growth of support for the anti-uranium movement within the Labor Party, and the widespread anger, leading to the formation of the Nuclear Disarmament Party, when the 1984 ALP national conference dumped Labor's opposition to exporting uranium.

22. Critical support

Parliamentarism is an important means by which the ALP subordinates the interests of the working class to those of capital. Electoral activity is therefore central to relations between the ALP and the working class, and is the main content of politics as understood by working people who are under the ALP's influence.

For these reasons, electoral campaigns present socialists with an opportunity to address workers at a time of heightened interest in political issues, and a challenge to do so in a manner that undermines parliamentarist illusions, rather than reinforcing them.

The tactic of critical support for Labor against the conservative parties can be useful in advancing this goal. The aim of this tactic is to gain a hearing from workers so as to explain the need to break with Labor's parliamentarism and its reformist politics.

It is also a specific electoral application of the united front tactic. That is, while not giving up our right to criticise the pro-capitalist politics of the Labor Party and to advocate our own anti-capitalist program, we offer to make an alliance against the conservative parties with those workers who have illusions in the ALP.

Critical support for ALP candidates does not mean political solidarity with Labor reformism. On the contrary, it is a weapon of struggle against it. We support the election of a Labor government in order to more effectively explain why the ALP and a government formed by it will not solve the fundamental problems of the working class and its allies, and why a revolutionary alternative is needed.

That is, we favour the election of an ALP government so workers, through their

own experience, will learn the correctness of our criticisms of the ALP.

23. Lesser evilism

A Labor government may introduce reforms that would not be granted by a government of the conservative parties, or it may be less willing to attack the working class in the way a conservative government might. Usually, the conservative parties openly advocate savage attacks on working people's rights and living standards while Labor conceals its anti-worker program behind a platform of demagogic promises. Often, the defeat of the conservatives may cause the ruling class to proceed more cautiously with such attacks.

In such circumstances the election of an ALP government may constitute a lesser evil. But it would be a mistake for socialists to favour the election of a Labor government exclusively on such grounds. Such an approach would limit socialist electoral tactics to explaining which bourgeois government — Labor or Liberal-National — is the lesser evil.

While it is often necessary for workers to choose the lesser of two evils, it is also necessary to understand that *both* are evils and that the real need is for a struggle to create a genuine alternative.

Particularly in periods of capitalist crisis, a Labor government can often be a *greater evil* in terms of the immediate interests of the working class. In such periods, the reforms of a Labor government are usually outweighed by the role of the government in demobilising the working class and carrying out attacks in other, more important, areas.

Often Labor can carry out measures that would provoke serious resistance if they were attempted by conservative governments.

Moreover, no reforms introduced by an ALP government will solve the fundamental problems facing the working class. A revolutionary government is necessary to tackle these problems at their roots. To achieve such a government it is necessary to break workers' illusions in Labor reformism and to win them to a revolutionary, anti-capitalist perspective.

Only within this framework can the election of a Labor government always be considered a lesser evil than the election of a conservative government. When the ALP is in office, its bourgeois character is more evident to wide layers of working people than when it is out of office and its leaders can make demagogic promises of reforms in the interests of working people.

Such considerations do not apply to by-elections and other elections that do not affect the question of which of the bourgeois parties will form the government. In such

elections, socialists weigh the question of calling for a vote for ALP candidates differently. In such circumstances, the most important question is whether calling for a vote for Labor will help or hinder the process of convincing workers of the need for a political break with Laborism. Will calling for a vote for the ALP candidate enable us to gain a wider hearing for our criticisms of Labor, or will it simply reinforce illusions that Labor is fundamentally better than the other bourgeois parties?

Moreover, even when we call for the election of a Labor government, this tactic should not be counterposed to the tactic of calling for a preference vote to candidates standing on a platform to the left of Labor's. In fact, use of the latter tactic often offers the most effective means of highlighting the fact that we call for the election of a Labor government only as a lesser evil than the election of a conservative government.

24. Our attitude to ALP governments

Socialists, of course, support any measures of ALP governments that improve the conditions of the workers and their allies. Indeed, we also support genuinely progressive measures by governments of the conservative parties. But in no circumstances do we support bourgeois governments, whether Labor or Liberal-National, even when they carry out such measures. Similarly, socialists defend ALP governments against attacks from the right without expressing any political confidence in such governments.

To the degree that an ALP government bends to the pressure of the working class, the ruling class may conclude that a new government is needed. It may try to unseat the ALP government in order to install a government it considers better able to defend its interests. This is what happened to the Whitlam government in 1975. In that situation, we united in action with the ranks and supporters of the ALP to defend Whitlam from the attack headed by Kerr and Fraser.

This did not mean that we gave up our goal of replacing the bourgeois Labor government with a revolutionary government. Rather, it meant a change in the *form* of our opposition to the ALP government. Our opposition took the form of demands that the Labor reformists conduct a serious fight against the Kerr-Fraser coup by extending the mobilisations of workers into a general strike.

The return of the Whitlam government to office as a result of such a mobilisation would have created better conditions for the workers to fight against the pro capitalist policies of that government. It would have created better conditions for increased numbers of workers to understand the need to replace this government with a genuine workers' government.

25. Governmental alternative

To satisfy their fundamental (and often even their immediate) class interests, workers need to break with parliamentary reformism and, jointly with the exploited sections of the middle class — particularly working farmers — establish their own government.

Such a government could only arise out of a period of deep social crisis and mass mobilisation, in which the masses of working people were drawn into direct political action challenging the economic and political power of the capitalist class.

In the context of such a mobilisation, working people would inevitably find it necessary to coordinate their struggles by creating a network of democratically elected committees in the factories, offices and neighbourhoods. The centralisation of such a network of committees would create a popular power counterposed to the power of the capitalist state — a potential revolutionary government.

Experience in other countries — particularly Russia in 1917 — has demonstrated that in such a situation of deep popular mobilisation and self-organisation, agitation around the call for the reformist misleaders of the working class to form a government based on the mass bodies of popular power can play a tremendous role in breaking working people's illusions in these misleaders.

In non revolutionary periods, the usefulness of such an approach is far more limited. Nevertheless, one of the central aims of all our political propaganda (and agitation where appropriate) is to convince working people that their interests cannot be served by a capitalist government, and that they need to organise and struggle for political power.

26. Socialist electoral campaigns

Standing socialist candidates in parliamentary elections and calling for our preferences to flow to the ALP is one way of popularising our class struggle program. Calling for the election of an ALP government makes it possible to counterpose key elements of the revolutionary program to the pro capitalist policies of the ALP without alienating ALP supporters. At the same time, this approach enables us to appeal to militants who are prepared to break with Laborism.

Apologists for the ALP, both left and right, often raise the objection that standing socialist candidates in opposition to the ALP splits the working class or left vote. Such objections are in reality pleas to allow ALP candidates to monopolise the working class vote.

Such false unity does nothing to advance or defend the interests of the working class, and in the end amounts to an appeal to socialists to boycott themselves in favour of the bourgeois Labor Party.

27. United front electoral campaigns

In some circumstances, electoral campaigns that unite left forces broader than our own may provide a more effective example of the direction in which the labor movement should go. Our active involvement in, and support for, the NDP in the 1984 federal election was a variation on the tactic of standing our own candidates, and was completely complementary to it.

Our backing for such a campaign is not contingent on such groups presenting a full program for government. To impose such a condition would be to acquiesce in the illusion that Australia is ruled by parliament rather than the bourgeoisie through its banks, corporations and the top echelons of the capitalist state apparatus.

By bringing together forces breaking with Labor reformism, such united front electoral campaigns can help to lay the basis for the experiences and discussions necessary to create a new, broadly based anti-capitalist party. We should therefore be alert to the possibilities for such campaigns, and whenever possible take the initiative to encourage their formation.

28. Trade unions are the decisive arena

The Labor Party's overwhelmingly dominant political position within the Australian labour movement makes it an inescapable and fundamental problem for socialists in this country. Failure to solve this problem will eventually undermine all the other successes of a revolutionary organisation. The deepening of the class struggle in the years ahead will make this question even more important.

Whatever the exact course of events, because the ALP is the political instrument of the trade union bureaucracy, the decisive arena of struggle against Labor reformism will be the trade union arena.

In the long run, revolutionaries will not be able to defeat the influence of Labor reformism over decisive sections of the working class without defeating the class-collaborationism of the trade union bureaucracy through consistent struggle to transform the unions into class struggle instruments. On the other hand, the fight to transform the unions will not be successful so long as the majority of the organised working class remains politically imprisoned by Labor reformism.

Because the ALP is the political instrument of the union bureaucracy, the liberation of the unions from this bureaucracy's control will confront militant unionists with the need to break with the ALP and build a new political instrument.

Only through simultaneous struggle against the class-collaborationism of the trade union and ALP leaders can revolutionaries increase their influence among the working class and its allies, and eventually win political leadership of these forces.

29. New opportunities

For nearly a century, the ALP has successfully harnessed the working class to the chariots of bourgeois nationalism and parliamentarism. This success is due above all to objective factors — particularly the ability of the Australian imperialist bourgeoisie to grant small but real reforms when this seemed necessary to diffuse developing proletarian struggles.

With the exhaustion of the long postwar capitalist economic boom and the successes of anti-imperialist struggles in Latin America, Asia and Africa, the objective situation of the world imperialism system, and of Australian capitalism within that system, has evolved unfavourably for capitalism.

This evolution, which can be expected to continue until major class battles bring decisive victory to one side or the other in at least several major advanced countries, does not dictate any automatic weakening of the trade union bureaucracy, or of the ALP's hegemony over the working class. It does, however, reduce the capitalist class's ability to grant concessions and it thus reduces the Labor reformists' room for manoeuvre.

This changing objective situation has already created new opportunities for the revolutionary movement in Australia, and it will create even more in coming years. As a small revolutionary party seeking to help the working class to develop beyond the limits of Laborism, the Socialist Workers Party requires the utmost tactical flexibility and the closest attention to developments within and around the unions and the ALP.

It is particularly important to be on guard against arbitrary schemas about how the class struggle will or should develop, for these prevent revolutionaries from recognising new or unexpected opportunities to contribute to the class struggle. The task of Marxists is not to make speculative predictions about the future, but to help create it by building a revolutionary party in the daily struggles of the working class and its allies. This will undoubtedly require frequent shifts of emphasis and direction as the struggles themselves arise or subside.

With a combination of flexible tactics and inflexible adherence to the historical interests of the proletariat and its allies, revolutionaries can make real gains in the struggle to destroy the influence of bourgeois liberalism within the working class, and to build the mass revolutionary party necessary to lead the Australian socialist revolution. ■

The ALP, the Nuclear Disarmament Party & the 1984 Elections

By Jim Percy

When our national executive began thinking about preparing a Labor Party resolution early in 1984, we thought that we'd probably take what we had from our 1981 conference resolution (*The World Capitalist Crisis and the Coming Australian Socialist Revolution*), restructure it, tidy it up, change some formulations, expand it. Basically we thought we'd be involved in a polishing process. But a couple of events changed our thinking on this.

Firstly, the new situation in the labour movement impinged more and more on our consciousness. In particular, the party began to discuss the effects of the July 1984 national conference of the Labor Party. The discussion about that event intersected with the more flexible tactical approach we've developed in recent years.

It intersected with other aspects of the rethinking we've been doing as a party over the past five years. That was a very fortunate intersection. Like the adjustment of our line on the trade union question, we got to this question in the nick of time.

If we hadn't done so, we could be going very far off the rails right at this moment.

This report, then, will concentrate on some proposed changes in our line, and on some of the mistakes we think we've made in the past. It will briefly take up our work in relation to the Labor Party today, and will then look at the federal elections and what we should be, or already are, doing in regard to them.

The dual nature thesis

There are many mistakes in what we've said about the Labor Party in the past. Some of them are just questions of emphasis, but I want to go over them in some detail

because they illustrate dangers we could fall into, or were already falling into.

To begin with, looking at our general analysis of the Labor Party, there is what I'll refer to, for the sake of shorthand, as the dual nature thesis.

Let me read from the 1981 resolution so that comrades can refresh their memories a little, though I think it's like a catechism for a lot of us who have read this thing too many times:

So from the beginning the Labor Party had a dual character: It was based on the main proletarian mass organisations, the trade unions — but it had an opportunist leadership with a bourgeois program.

Later on in the resolution we said:

So the ALP as a Social Democratic party is a bourgeois *workers party*. That is, it has a dual class nature. Because it is based on the unions, it is a working-class party, but its program is bourgeois and its leadership is petty-bourgeois.

We said there were two sides to the question, and that the tension between these two sides was reflected in ongoing fights within the Labor Party. But we implied that these two sides were balanced internally. There was a tendency for us either to give equal weight to the two sides or to jump from one side to another, depending on what we wanted to do.

This approach was rather mechanical. It led us to put the wrong stress on each aspect, and to try to divide one from the other. When we wanted to talk about *tactics*, we talked about the ALP's *working-class base*, and when we wanted to discuss *the need for a revolutionary alternative*, we talked about the *program*. Our approach became rather artificial and one-sided. Marxist dialectics doesn't consist of simply posing two sides of a question. We must try to develop a synthesis.

To give the 1981 resolution its due, it did attempt to do this. It did try to analyse the fundamentals of the Labor Party question by insisting that program was the key question. Because the ALP has a bourgeois program, in the final analysis it is not our party. In the final analysis, we must replace it. Fundamentally, we're opposed to it.

But while saying that, we nevertheless tried to maintain a Chinese Wall between that and the other view in the resolution — the view that the creation of the Labor Party was a historic step forward.

The ALP was founded by the trade unions and remains based on them today. In the 1981 resolution, that aspect still conditioned our tactics towards the ALP, and that made our tactics somewhat rigid. Because tactics relate to immediate action and practice, this aspect tended to become the dominant theme of our overall approach.

Let's look at the different aspects in more detail. Is the program of the Labor Party key? There's a bit of a problem in ranking the different aspects of the Labor Party

question. I think the reason we've always stressed the program, apart from the obvious fact that what people put in their program has a real importance in the class struggle, is that the movement founded by Leon Trotsky, and from which our party originated, has always considered formal programmatic questions far more important than what a party *does* — its function, its history, its role today, how people react to it.

Of course, we should make all the necessary points about the bourgeois program of the ALP, but perhaps what needs more stress is the inevitable role the ALP will play in the class struggle today. The question of program can be a little abstract when far more apparent are the open attacks that the Hawke government and the state Labor governments are leading against the working class today.

As well, there was a bit of a contradiction in what we said about the question of program. We said program was key, and therefore we were in fundamental opposition to the ALP. But then we said we must call for a vote for the Labor Party, in spite of its program.

We permitted ourselves to call for a vote for it, in spite of its program, and then we jumped to the other side of the formula for a justification. We said it was okay to vote Labor because the historic step forward embodied in the composition of the Labor Party allowed us to cast a pro-working class vote.

We said that the ALP is a working-class party, based on the trade unions. We quoted something Trotsky wrote in 1926 about the British Labour Party: The Labour Party "is a priceless historical achievement which even now can never be nullified". Therefore, despite its bourgeois program and our fundamental opposition to the ALP, we've always managed to justify a vote for it as a pro-working-class vote.

We've never felt completely comfortable with this approach. We talked about the historic step forward, but then we also said, as we did in our 1976 resolution:

Today, however, the ALP is an obstacle to the further progress of the working class ... the social-democratic program and leadership of the party are an obstacle to the development of revolutionary consciousness in the Australian proletariat ... It is a barrier across the road which prevents further progress.

So we've never been quite comfortable with the historic-step-forward view of the Labor Party. This is clear in our attempts to reconcile this view with the obvious fact that the ALP represents the main obstacle to working-class political action today.

Perhaps the biggest problem with our 1981 approach is its timelessness. In 1895 or 1900 or 1905, the emergence and development of the Labor Party really did represent a big step forward for the working class. The problem is, things have moved on.

The power and the weight of the labor bureaucracy, and its relative separation from the ranks of the trade unions, is far greater today than it was in the 1920s or

1930s. This change is due to the long post World War II capitalist boom, which enabled the imperialist bourgeoisie in this country and other advanced capitalist countries to dole out larger crumbs from their superprofits and thus to recruit steadily more reliable agents in the labor movement.

While this factor has declined since the end of the long boom in the mid-'70s, its effects are still with us. We see this reflected in the growing support of the bourgeoisie in the imperialist countries for the labour and social-democratic parties. This has been a particularly marked trend since the 1960s and '70s. The capitalist class is more comfortable with those parties today, and there are good reasons for that.

There are apologists for social-democracy who regard this as a growing strength of the labor movement. They say the labor movement is getting stronger because there are more social-democratic governments. But the record of these governments says that's not the case.

How much of the supposedly dual nature of the Labor Party remains today? Let's look at what we mean when we say, "based on the trade unions". Lots of comrades have pointed out how indirect this foundation is today. Firstly, very few union representatives in the Labor Party are democratically elected by the ranks. Most are chosen by union leaderships.

The ALP's relationship to the ranks of the union movement is very indirect. If you don't recognise that and if you overemphasise the question of the trade union base of the Labor Party, you can miss the fact that the ALP represents the trade union bureaucracy, not the working class. That's a step towards the view that the Labor Party is some sort of genuine workers' party, albeit a flawed one. That, in turn, can lead to a slide away from the view that the fundamental attitude of revolutionaries towards the ALP is one of opposition.

All this is not to say that everything we've previously said about the Labor Party has been wrong. One thing we've always said remains true: That any radicalisation in the labor movement as a whole — in the trade unions, in the other mass movements — will be reflected in the Labor Party, because of its trade union base and because it is seen by many as a vehicle for social change.

Take the example of the Labour Party in Britain. The political upheaval surrounding the miners' strike has been reflected in the Labour Party. That's also true of other types of parties, such as the Democratic Party in the United States. Any radicalisation in the United States is always reflected in the Democratic Party, because the US ruling class presents the Democratic Party as the party of reform.

That illusion is one of the means the US ruling class uses to absorb some of the discontent among workers or Blacks or women, to channel it back into the capitalist

political system and therefore to contain and diffuse it. The ALP plays essentially the same role here.

In general, instead of our rather timeless, mechanical counterposition of the two aspects of the ALP, we need an analysis of the actual role of the Labor Party today, and of how it's perceived by the masses. A mechanical view of the supposedly dual nature of the ALP abstracted from the real development of the class struggle and the ALP's role in it can lead to a lot of errors about the Labor Party.

Permissible tactics?

A one-sided stress on the composition of the Labor Party can lead to schemas and tactical errors. Perhaps this general problem relates to a more general problem of tactics that we're beginning to grapple with: That is the attempt to found our tactics on rigid class definitions in an attempt to guarantee ourselves mechanically against the perils of opportunism.

This is a big preoccupation of Trotskyists in general, and as we've moved away from Trotskyism we've had to come to terms with it. There are plenty of worse examples than ourselves. Some people and organisations were even more rigorous than us, and found many more evil things that could be done and therefore found many more ways of abstaining from the class struggle.

Even Trotskyists who we regarded as free of the worst of this schematism were in fact affected by it. This is something we quoted from James P. Cannon, the founding leader of the United States Socialist Workers Party, in our 1981 resolution:

But the composition of such parties gives them a certain distinctive character which enables, and even requires, us to make a different tactical approach to them.

Enables, even requires, he says.

We then went on to paraphrase the idea again, after going through our argumentation. We said:

So it is quite principled for revolutionists to call for a vote for a reformist labor party, providing we make it crystal clear that we are calling for a vote not on the basis of the program of the labor party but *in spite* of this program.

What's the purpose of such a tactic? Or, to take things back a step further, what's permissible and not permissible when considering tactics? I think any tactic is permissible if it helps to develop class consciousness, if it helps to win workers to the revolutionary party, to the idea of socialism. That's a very general statement, but do we really want to go further than that? Certainly, we can learn a lot from studying history, but the past is only a guide to the present.

What will help workers to develop class consciousness? We have to figure it out.

There's no rigid set of rules that can tell us what's permissible and not permissible, what will work and what won't work. On this we must be very pragmatic.

In the past, we've said that it's permissible to orient to the Labor Party in the way we did because of its union base. Because the ALP had that working-class composition, we said we could do just about what we wanted, within certain limits. We could get our feet wet. We could get into the class struggle.

But often when you say a particular tactic or set of tactics is permissible, what you really mean is that *only* this tactic or set of tactics is permissible. All other tactics are impermissible.

The ALP's base

To get the trade union base of the Labor Party in perspective, it modifies what happens in the Labor Party. It's a factor but it's not the only factor, It's something we take account of, but it doesn't determine whether we can or can't pursue a particular tactic.

We created a lot of problems for ourselves by ramming together the two contradictory aspects of the Labor Party in a synthesis that didn't quite work. That led to a good deal of confusion in what we said about the Labor Party. Here's one paragraph, for example:

So we put our criticism of the program and leadership of the Labor Party in the context of support to the party as a party of the working class opposed to all the bosses' parties.

This is not a contradictory position since it is precisely its bourgeois program that prevents the ALP from really defending the class interests of the proletariat against the bosses.

I think in some ways that's probably one of our most confused paragraphs. There's nothing very profound about the view that when there's something wrong with a formation you try to expose it.

For example, the Reagan administration claims it's for democracy in El Salvador. How do we reply? We try to expose this claim as fraudulent: "You say you're for democracy and justice, but your actions in supporting the military dictatorship show the opposite. If you were really for democracy you would stop intervening there and let the people decide their own affairs. That's what real support for democracy would mean." That's the normal method of politics.

Ronald Reagan says he's for peace, we say: "You're putting the missiles in Europe, you're not for peace." The ALP leaders say they're for a nuclear-free Pacific, so we reply: "Good, but if you were serious about it you'd ban visits by US nuclear-armed warships. The fact that you don't do that shows that you're not really for a nuclear-free Pacific."

More generally, with regard to the Labor Party we use this approach to demonstrate the contradiction between the ALP's pro-capitalist program and practice and the real interests of its working-class supporters.

The problem is, our "context of support" formulation implies political support to the Labor Party. It implies that we're making criticisms of something we genuinely support, rather than something we implacably oppose.

If we do support the ALP, what sort of support are we talking about, and what aspect of the ALP do we support? Do we support the base, perhaps? Does the ALP's union base make it in some way superior to other bourgeois political formations? What does that mean? In the end it only creates illusions in the Labor Party.

Having got into this mess, we try to wriggle out of it by quoting Cannon, who always tacked to a fairly left line on this question:

But critical support of a reformist labor party must be correctly understood. It does not mean reconciliation with reformism. Critical support means opposition. It does not mean support with criticism in quotation marks, but rather criticism with support in quotation marks.

That's a good journalistic phrase, but it doesn't clarify things totally. The problem is that support is an ambiguous word. How should we say it? Lenin said communists should support the Labour Party like the rope supports the hanged man. That's the tradition Cannon was trying to stick to. We should too. But we have to formulate it a little differently. We can't just quote Lenin's phrase. That helps us to understand what our stance should be, but it's not very transitional. It doesn't relate very well to the existing consciousness of broad masses of workers today.

So we have a problem in saying just what we want to say about the Labor Party at election times. How we do it will depend on the extent of working class illusions in the Labor Party. This approach is not just relevant to the Labor Party. It is relevant in dealing with any bourgeois institution about which large numbers of workers hold illusions.

Because there are illusions in parliament, we don't say, as some British ultralefts did in 1970, "Piss in the polling booths." We don't adopt the anarchists' slogan: "Vote Guy Fawkes, the only man to enter parliament with honest intentions."

We've never allowed ourselves the luxury and indulgence of that approach. We say it's good that there are democratic rights, but we also explain in a more detailed way what's wrong with bourgeois-democratic institutions such as parliament.

How we address the Labor Party question is important tactically. None of us thinks that we should put out a leaflet with Lenin's phrase in it today, even though that phrase expresses a general approach with which we agree.

Even proceeding on the basis of Lenin's approach, we've managed to create a lot of difficulties for ourselves in regard to the Labor Party. By focusing on an attempt to draw out the difference between the base of the party and its program, we've created a good deal of confusion.

Political wing of the labor movement?

When we made a special tactical orientation to the Labor Party because of its base, we ended up with confusion about what the Labor Party is. We overemphasised the supposedly working-class side of the ALP to the exclusion of the fact that it is fundamentally a bourgeois party.

This can lead to the view that it's fundamentally a working-class party, and that it's the political wing of the labor movement, or the political expression of the trade unions. Lenin himself had to deal with such erroneous ideas.

In 1920, at the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin took up the view of one of the British affiliates of the Comintern, the British Socialist Party, which claimed that the British Labour Party was "the political expression of the workers organised in the trade unions." Lenin replied:

Of course, most of the Labour Party's members are workingmen. However, whether or not a party is really a political party of the workers does not depend solely upon a membership of workers but also upon the men that lead it, and the content of its actions and its political tactics. Only this latter determines whether we really have before us a political party of the proletariat. Regarded from this, the only correct point of view, the Labour Party is a thoroughly bourgeois party, because, although made up of workers, it is led by reactionaries, and the worst kind of reactionaries at that, who act in the spirit of the bourgeoisie. It is an organisation of the bourgeoisie, which exists to systematically dupe the workers ...

If we take the approach against which Lenin was polemicising, we can make all sorts of errors. We can begin to regard a Labor Party government as some sort of workers' government rather than a bourgeois government. Some Canadian Trotskyists around Ross Dowson made that error in the early 1970s.

Dowson elevated the union base aspect of the Canadian labor party — the New Democratic Party — above the party's fundamentally bourgeois nature. This led him to think that the union base of parties like the ALP, the New Democratic Party, or the British Labour Party, made them somehow more working class than the European social-democratic parties. He even floated the idea that because of this union base, governments headed by parties like the ALP were not fully bourgeois governments, but workers' governments of some kind. In the end he and his supporters liquidated

themselves into the Canadian social-democracy.

Another error is to think that the strategic goal of socialists is to reform the Labor Party, not to remove it. That leads to a slide away from the view that an independent, revolutionary socialist party is necessary. This can take the form of advocacy of the tactic of deep entry into the Labor Party.

This tactic involves revolutionaries abandoning any perspective of building an independent revolutionary organisation outside the Labor Party, and functioning completely within the framework of the Labor Party for a long period of time.

Such a tactic can cut revolutionaries off from radicalising forces, including radicalising workers, outside the Labor Party. It can lead to political adaptation to the Labor Party milieu. If treated as the only long-term approach, entrism can become a strategy that undermines understanding of the need for an independent revolutionary party.

But not only those who openly advocate deep entry into the ALP are plagued by this outlook. In fact, most of those who regard themselves as socialists in this country have this position in one form or another.

They think they can act through the ALP to win socialism — if only they could get rid of the right wing. In this view, anyone who advocates building an independent socialist party is sectarian. In reality, this is nothing more than adaptation to the framework of bourgeois politics in this country.

Other, subsidiary errors have flowed from our overemphasis on the union base of the ALP. When the Sydney branch discussed the ALP question recently, one comrade raised the affiliation of the four NCC-influenced unions in Victoria. He argued that we should support these affiliations as a matter of principle — the supposed principle of strengthening the ALP's union base. No one else supported that view, but it was a product of the schematic view of what the Labor Party is and must be.

Whether unions should affiliate or disaffiliate is a tactical question, not a principled question. It's a tactical blunder of the first order to make it a principle. You can't define what you should do about such a question on the basis of some belief in the sanctity of the ALP's union base. You have to decide what will help to move the political situation forward, what will help workers to develop class consciousness, what will help to defeat the right wing. These are the only real considerations.

We also fell into another error: A schematic view of how opposition to the Labor Party will develop. Because we stressed the union base so much, we assumed that any major new radicalisation would first be reflected in the unions and that would then affect the Labor Party. If you like, that's our preferred model. That's how we'd like things to happen.

We would be in our element if there had been a fightback in the unions, and if

there was a class struggle left wing developing in the unions and spreading into the Labor Party as well. That would mean that opposition to uranium mining would still be ALP policy, and there would be no NDP.

It would be much better to have a revolution according to the classical model rather than all the inferior models that we have to live with. But that's not the way things are happening.

Our schema about how the radicalisation would develop came from a mistaken view of what the ALP's base represents today. We were fortunate that the emphasis on that didn't lead us to drag our feet when something began to happen that didn't fit our preconceived notions.

Governmental slogan

Before dealing with our electoral tactics I want to discuss the question of our governmental slogan. It is necessary to understand the errors we made on this question, and how they relate to our errors on election tactics.

We've been rethinking the question of our governmental slogan as a result of the impinging reality I mentioned before — the events surrounding the Labor Party national conference and the emergence of the NDP.

These events made us rather uncomfortable with our governmental slogan. I think most comrades have been discontented with our governmental slogan. Not many really liked it. But we've persisted with our governmental slogan for so long because none of the people who don't like it have ever found a better one. We've made plenty of attempts to do so, and we've had numerous discussions about it.

The last time the discussion came up on the national executive, our dilemma went something like this: How do we pose a governmental slogan today? Should we call for *A Labor government with socialist policies*? People would think we're crazy. Here's the Hawke government, and we're going to say "Labor with socialist policies". There was one proposal, made in a fairly lighthearted manner: *For a Labor government with Labor policies*. But in the end we thought the most we could do with that would be to put it on a badge or a car sticker.

As the discussion proceeded, we realised what we'd been doing wrong with the idea of a governmental slogan. We needed to look at our basic criteria.

First of all, our slogan must be accurate. It must express the fact that our aim is a workers' and farmers' government — a government based on the independent organisation and mobilisation of the workers and their allies, and not on the institutions of the bourgeois parliamentary state. Our aim is a government that defends and advances the interests of the workers and their allies, not those of big business.

Our governmental slogan must say that. It must have that sort of accuracy. That's why we now reject past slogans, such as *Vote Labor and prepare to fight*, or *Vote Labor and fight for socialist policies*, etc. Those slogans didn't sum up the sort of government we advocate.

As well as being accurate, our governmental slogan must be transitional. It must relate to the existing political consciousness of the broad masses of workers. That's why we tried to relate our governmental slogan to the Labor Party question. Rather than a Socialist Workers Party government, we called for *A Labor government with socialist policies*. We tried to relate the workers' and farmers' government concept to the existing consciousness of the broad masses of working people who vote Labor.

A third conclusion we drew is that any slogan we put forward must be realistic. Is a call for a *Labor government with socialist policies* realistic? I think it hasn't been realistic for quite a long time, but in the 1984 elections it would be so out of touch it would sound a little crazy.

In the past, comrades worried that our governmental slogan didn't differentiate us from the Labor Party. A lot of people thought the Labor Party was a socialist party, and therefore our slogan didn't differentiate us. That's certainly not the problem this year.

The fact that our slogan wasn't fully in touch didn't make it completely non-transitional. The main problem was that it only addressed one aspect of the question. It addressed the question of the Labor Party, but it did so in such a way that people thought, "Well, that's not really very likely".

Propaganda & agitation

It's very difficult to come up with a governmental slogan that meets all of the criteria we want it to meet. It's easy enough to propagandise for a workers' and farmers' government in the small print by explaining what sort of policies we need, and what our sort of government would do. We will continue to do that. We're not proposing to drop the idea of explaining what sort of government we need. But we are proposing that we drop the search for an agitational slogan that meets all of our criteria today.

That's because we're not even close to the stage of revolutionary crisis that would require us to concretise such a governmental concept and express it in a popular slogan. There's not that mass consciousness today, and we don't have sufficient political weight to use a governmental slogan as an agitational tool.

The essential problem is that there's not sufficient crisis, mobilisation, development of the class struggle. That's why we never felt comfortable with our slogan, even though it did reach some people.

We reached some people just because we talked about the Labor government and how we wanted a Labor government, but we never really set the world on fire. It will be some time before we find some slogan that relates our workers' and farmers' government concept to a concrete revolutionary institution or struggle the way the Bolsheviks were able to do in 1917.*

We could try to invent a name for what we mean by a workers' and farmers' government. That's what the Socialist Party of Australia attempts to do. Leave aside the debate about whether their slogan encapsulates the concept of a workers' and farmers' government. It's very similar. With their new democratic economic program, they're trying to find a way of popularising the idea of a different sort of government. They call for a *government of people's unity*.

We could try for something like that, but in the present circumstances such slogans can sound esoteric or totally abstract. For the moment, we can't find a concrete agitational slogan that meets our needs. There are good reasons for that: The class

* In 1917 the Russian Bolsheviks raised two agitational slogans: *All power to the soviets!* and *Down with the capitalist ministers!* while carrying out propaganda for a workers' and peasants' government. These two agitational slogans related their propaganda slogan to the concrete situation, in which the masses had formed institutions — the soviets (or councils) of workers', soldiers' and peasants' delegates. These had the potential to create a workers' and peasants' government. But the Russian social-democratic reformists — the Mensheviks — and their allies in the peasant-based Socialist Revolutionary Party had political hegemony in the soviets and used their position to support and participate in the capitalist landlord Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks sought to expose the Menshevik SR refusal to break with the capitalists and advance the masses' interests. They did this by calling on them to use their leadership of the soviets to take power from the provisional government and to create a workers' and peasants' government by expelling the members of the capitalist Constitutional Democratic Party from the Provisional Government and constituting a government consisting only of representatives of the soviets, subordinate to, and based on the latter.

This approach proved very effective in breaking the Russian workers' illusions in the reformists and winning support away from them to the Bolsheviks.

The Bolsheviks' pre-1917 slogan of a workers' and peasants' government or "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" — could not be used in an agitational way. It was, as Lenin said in April 1917, only a description of "a *relation of classes*, and not a *concrete political institution implementing this relation*" ("Letters on Tactics", *Collected Works*, Vol. 24, p. 441).

It was an abstract, or algebraic, formula. It didn't describe a concrete institution that could form such a government. The soviets were just such an institution. The formation of the soviets enabled the Bolsheviks to concretise their governmental formula, to move from propaganda for a workers and peasants' government to the plane of agitation, and in November 1917, to action for such a government.

struggle in this country hasn't reached the point where workers are creating independent, revolutionary organs of struggle that we can use to concretise what we mean by a workers' and farmers' government.

So our governmental formula remains a propaganda slogan, and there's no need to concretise our general concept with a name any more popular than workers' and farmers' government until the name emerges from the class struggle itself.

We're going to continue propagandising for the idea of a workers' and farmers' government, and we're also going to support the election of a Labor government. The trouble is, in the English language the word "support" is fairly ambiguous. It can be misunderstood to mean political support, or, in the case of the Labor Party, political confidence in it. Nevertheless, to simply say, "We're for the election of a Labor government", is a good way of indicating what we want to do at the moment.

That means we're calling for the election of a *bourgeois* government. And we've always said this in the past. We've understood this is one of the things this slogan meant. But we're also saying that we have no overall political confidence in the ALP, we give no political support to a Labor government.

At the same time, we also say that a Labor government will be better in immediate terms than a Liberal government. We say to workers that we'll be better off with a Labor government.

We can say that providing we don't put a full stop there. If we put a full stop there, we've got an opportunist position that implies political confidence in Labor — that implies that we think Labor can really solve workers' problems.

We have to go on and say much more, because our electoral tactics must not only relate to what's happening now, but also should prepare us for the future. Failure to understand that can be the source of a lot of errors in the socialist movement, not just in this country, but all around the world.

Electoral tactics

In considering our electoral tactics, we firstly must be clear as to what elections represent. The first steps are easy. We know what a bourgeois parliament is. We know that the bourgeoisie does not rule through parliament. We know that elections are a fake and a fraud, and that bourgeois democracy is a sham.

There's nothing new about all this. We put most of it in our 1981 resolution, and that section still reads pretty well, tacked on there at the end. To give us our due, our 1981 formulation is better than some others we've used in the past, and better than most you'll encounter around the left. It's still not uncommon to hear formulations like, "during election campaigns the question of which class will rule is posed". That's

still the most common Trotskyist explanation of why it's necessary to cast a "class vote" by voting Labor.

Our formulation is a little better. We say the question of government is foremost in workers' minds during election campaigns.

The problem is that once you start to get into a discussion about what's happening that's different during elections, you're down the road of designing your tactics to be different during election campaigns. That is, some things are permissible most of the time, but not during election campaigns. In elections, you can't do things that you can do at other times.

You can start to argue that during elections the need for "independent working class political action" must be posed in some way. And if you say that, you're implying that the question of which class rules is posed, even if you continue to hold formally that parliament doesn't rule.

Putting things that way assumes that our electoral tactics must relate directly to the question of what sort of government is to be formed. So, in spite of any good statements against parliamentarism, about how the bourgeoisie really rules, you end up in the trap of parliamentarism.

In reality, the bourgeois parliament is just another forum in which we can present our ideas. That's all parliament is. We try to have advanced contingents in it, that's all. That was Lenin's viewpoint. And it's the right viewpoint.

This question is different from the question of what sort of government we want to see, and what sort of government we would support politically. We mixed the two by trying to make our governmental slogan meet the context of particular parliamentary elections — the needs of the parliamentary struggle in this country.

We certainly know what sort of government we really want, and it's not a bourgeois Labor government, or any sort of bourgeois government. It's a workers' and farmers' government, a revolutionary government. But by trying to make our electoral tactics relate to that we confused the issue in our minds.

Trying to make our governmental slogan realistic in the context of bourgeois elections, we distorted our very approach to elections themselves, implying that the question had importance far beyond the real weight Marxists have given it in the past and that it required a special set of tactics.

This led us to draw a sharp distinction between alliances during elections and alliances at other times. Outside elections, we said it was permissible to be involved in multi class alliances, but during elections we said this was impermissible.

Multi-class alliances

We've often been involved in multi-class alliances in the past, as we are today. What was the Vietnam Moratorium Movement if not a multi-class alliance? Isn't People for Nuclear Disarmament a multi-class alliance? It includes forces from outside the labor movement, and individuals who are middle class in their social position and their political outlook. Even Don Chipp's Democrats are involved in PND.

We support multi-class alliances like PND because they have an objectively anti-capitalist dynamic. They mobilise people around objectively anti-capitalist demands like stopping uranium mining, removing the US bases, and breaking the Australia-US alliance.

But when it came to elections, we said we couldn't support multi-class alliances, even if they were based on some part of our program. When the Tasmanian Wilderness Society ran candidates on the single demand of stopping the construction of the Franklin River dam, we took the view that we couldn't support that campaign because the TWS was a multi-class formation, or a middle-class formation. We supported the ALP because, even though it supported building the dam, it had a "working-class base," and a vote for Labor was therefore a "pro-working class vote."

Of course, this schematic tactical approach actually contradicts our overall strategy for revolution in this country: *The strategic class alliance* we advocate for the formation of a revolutionary government in this country.

We know that a workers and farmers' government in a semicolonial country can involve a tactical alliance with bourgeois forces, including at the governmental level. That's the form that the workers' and farmers' government took in Nicaragua after the Sandinista victory in July 1979.*

Because the immediate objective tasks of the Nicaraguan revolution were bourgeois democratic tasks, there was an objective basis for the FSLN's tactical alliance with sections of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie. These sections of the bourgeoisie paid lip service to agrarian reform, winning genuine national sovereignty, etc.

* When constructing the Junta of the Government of National Reconstruction, the Sandinista National Liberation Front included representatives of the bourgeois opposition to Somoza. It did this because these forces had a certain amount of credibility due to their active opposition to Somoza.

Including them in the revolutionary government, a government that acted to advance the interests of the workers and peasants, was a useful tactic to expose the contradiction between these figures' democratic rhetoric and their defence of capitalist privilege.

There was no immediate contradiction in doing this because the first tasks that confronted the Sandinista revolution were those that objectively promoted the development of indigenous

But in this country there are no sections of the bourgeoisie that would be part of a revolutionary government — some small farmers, family farmers, yes, but no sections of the bourgeoisie. That's because the tasks of the revolution are different here. There are no big bourgeois-democratic tasks like eradicating feudal survivals in the countryside, or winning genuine national sovereignty.

These tasks were completed a century or more ago, though not through a revolution. That's why we still have some minor feudal refuse like the monarchy. But there won't be a national-democratic stage in the Australian revolution. The tasks confronting a revolutionary government in this country will be directly socialist tasks, such as expropriating big capital and organising a planned economy, even if it does take a little time to carry through these tasks.

The revolutionary government necessary to create such a socialist state in this country will require a multi-class alliance.

It will be a government resting on the support, mobilisation and participation not only of the working class, but also of the rural and urban middle classes. That's the strategic alliance necessary to carry through a revolution here. Of course, this alliance must be around a program that is anti-capitalist in its basic thrust.

That, in general, should be our approach to all alliances we seek to form, whether they're electoral alliances or alliances for extraparliamentary action. The NDP is a multi-class alliance, with many middle-class elements in it.

Even some individuals from the big bourgeoisie support it. But like the Moratorium campaign and PND, the NDP has an objectively anti-capitalist program, or to put it more precisely, the NDP's political program is one we fully support. The NDP represents a leftward break with the policies of the Australian ruling class and its parties — including the ALP.

This is a key difference between the NDP and the Democrats. The Democrats are a middle-class party in social composition, but we couldn't form an electoral alliance with them today because they do not help to promote such a political break. The

capitalism in Nicaragua — destruction of landlordism through a radical land reform, elimination of imperialist exploitation of the country through a state monopoly of foreign trade, elimination of the monopolistic economic position of the Somoza family through the nationalisation of its holdings, raising the level of labor productivity through measures like the mass literacy campaign and the improvement of the social infrastructure of the country (e.g., measures like a free national health system).

These steps were also of benefit to the masses, and combined with the promotion of mass organisation and mobilisation, helped to consolidate the masses' power, a power they are now using to eliminate capitalism in Nicaragua.

framework of their policies is the same as Labor's, even if they make some left noises about nuclear disarmament.

Like the Labor Party, they support anti-union laws. Like Labor, they support a stronger Australian imperialist "defence" force. This affects even the anti-nuclear policies on which they try to differentiate themselves from Labor. Rather than call for removal of the US bases, they call for them to be placed under the control of the Australian ruling class. In the end, like Labor, they support the Australia-US alliance, and are therefore just as pro-war as Labor.

Class vote?

We were taken down a slippery slope by the mistake of mixing up our election tactics with the question of what sort of government we want. We thought we had to use elections to post the question of a revolutionary, working-class government.

We kept asking how we could call for a vote that was at least symbolic of this goal, or that would at least be indicative of a step towards it, We said it could be done either by calling for a vote for a revolutionary program — i.e., for our own candidates — or a vote for the ALP on the basis of its working-class composition.

Today, though, it's very difficult to use elections to present the need for a revolutionary government, even symbolically. That's partly because of our size and partly because of the nature of the Labor Party. Those are the two main problems we face.

How can we advocate a pro-working class vote on the basis of program? We really had a good shot at it in the 1983 elections. We went all out and ran 48 candidates. We did what we could. We campaigned vigorously for a working-class program. We know that not many workers voted for us. Overwhelmingly, they voted for the ALP. Was this a class vote? According to our 1981 resolution it was. Here's one of the most contorted paragraphs in the whole document:

So it is quite principled for revolutionists to call for a vote for a reformist labor party providing we make it crystal clear that we are calling for a vote not on the basis of the program of the Labor Party but in spite of this program. What a vote for the Labor Party represents for us is a vote for the working-class base of the Labor Party, for that aspect of the Labor Party that represents a step forward for the working class on the road of political action independent of the bourgeoisie and its parties. So we can call for a vote for Labor even where the question of government is not posed ...

We say what a vote for the Labor Party represents for us. That's a wonderful way of looking at the world: Millions of workers vote for the Labor Party, and we say what their vote means. No matter why they did it, for us it represents another part of our

schema. It helps it to fit together, so that's what it must be.

There's no doubt that when workers began to vote for the Labor Party 80 or 90 years ago, it represented more of a class vote than it does today. But what does it represent today? Ask workers why they vote Labor and what answers do you get? "Well, it's better than the bloody Liberals." "Oh well, my family has always voted Labor." "Well, I voted Liberal last time." How often do they say: "Well comrade, I'm glad you asked me this. Our class took a historic step forward with the formation of the Labor Party. It's a priceless historic acquisition even today. So I voted Labor, despite its capitalist program, because it has a working-class base, and this enabled me to cast a vote for independent working-class political action."

Today there are fewer illusions about what a vote for the Labor Party represents. Not many workers think: "That's our party; it's going to do this and do that." It's more and more: "They've betrayed us." That process has been developing for a long time. The most we can say is that it's very unclear what a vote for Labor represents. But our schema allowed us to pretend to pose the question of a class vote in the framework of the elections.

Was this a good electoral tactic? Was it what we should have been doing in elections? Was our key task in elections to call for a vote for the Labor Party because 95 years ago it was a historic step forward from which nothing can ever detract?

That's the most important thing we can do? Isn't it more important to encourage motion in a progressive direction, to get the biggest number of workers to break to the left, towards progressive politics, rather than simply swinging back and forth between the Liberals and Labor, from one form of disillusionment to another?

If there's a chance to do that, isn't that a better road? Isn't it better that some workers get rid of one or two illusions? Isn't that vital? Isn't that the best thing we could encourage at the moment?

This is just a political judgment to some extent. We look at politics and we see the Hawke Labor government totally dominant in the labor movement. Then it goes a little too far. It offends many of its supporters — artists, peace marchers, workers. It creates a furore and the beginning of a political break. We have to make a political judgment: Is this good or bad? Does it help or hinder?

The answer of this report is that it helps, and therefore we want to encourage that break. That doesn't mean we give a blank cheque to the NDP. But we do stress the direction and the motion: It's healthy, it's something we want to encourage. Our criterion is politics today, not politics at the time of the shearers' strike in 1891.

What is happening in the class struggle today? That's the question we ask when we want to formulate our tactics. And our answer to that question is based on a number

of elements, on an understanding of the impact of this on the whole of the labor movement, the whole milieu in which we operate. That's how we should develop our politics and our tactics, not from the timeless criteria we've been trying to use.

Why vote for Labor?

That still leaves the problem of the Labor Party. If we're not going to call for a vote for it because of its base or because of its program, on what basis do we call for a Labor Party government?

Let's go back to Lenin and to Trotsky, and to our 1981 resolution. In fact, the resolution is quite good on this.

Let's begin with Lenin's view. This is from *'Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder*:

At present British communists very often find it hard even to approach the masses and even to get a hearing. If I come out as a communist and call upon them to vote for Henderson against Lloyd George, they will certainly give me a hearing. And I shall be able to explain in a popular manner, not only why the soviets are better than a parliament and why the dictatorship of the proletariat is better than the dictatorship of Churchill (disguised with the signboard of bourgeois "democracy"), but also that, with my vote, I want to support Henderson in the same way as a rope supports a hanged man — that the impending establishment of a government of the Hendersons will prove that I am right, will bring the masses over to my side, and will hasten the political death of the Hendersons and Snowdens just as was the case with their kindred spirits in Russia and Germany.

Very direct. Whether that's a dialogue you could have with an Australian worker — the part about the hanged man and so on — is something we could argue about, but the point is simple. Why did Lenin call for a vote for Henderson, the British Labour Party leader, in 1920? To get a hearing, simply that.

Because of the continuing illusions, we continue to call for a vote for the Labor Party. We continue to go through this experience. It's very simple. Lenin didn't raise anything at all relating to our old position: Well, it's a question of the Labor Party's working class base and so on.

Lenin's approach is very simple and very practical. His tactic is one that can be applied to any formation in which masses of workers have illusions.

I think it's the extent of the illusions that dictates the tactics and the language we should use. But the key thing is to get a hearing. In no case do we identify with Labor's program. While we call for a vote for Labor to get a hearing, we do nothing to increase the illusions. We do it because there *are* illusions. We try to cut across the illusions.

Then there's Trotsky's view. This was quoted in the 1981 resolution: Revolutionists never give critical support to reformism on the assumption that reformism, in power, could satisfy the fundamental needs of the workers. It is possible, of course, that a Labour government could introduce a few mild temporary reforms. It is also possible that the League [of Nations] could postpone a military conflict about secondary issues — just as a cartel can eliminate secondary economic crises only to reproduce them on a large scale. So the League can eliminate small episodic conflicts only to generalise them into world war.

Thus, both economic and military crises will only return with an added explosive force so long as capitalism remains. And we know that Social Democracy cannot abolish capitalism.

No, in war as in peace, the ILP must say to the workers: "The Labour Party will deceive you and betray you, but you do not believe us. Very well, we will go through your experiences with you but in no case do we identify ourselves with the Labour Party program."

We think that's the same approach as Lenin's, We think that's the correct approach. That's all we need to say about why we're going to support the Labor Party: Because there are illusions. Because we want to get a hearing. Because we want to explain what's wrong with the Labor Party, and why the Accord's no good.

Lesser evilism

There's another thing in what Trotsky says. He admits "it is possible of course that the Labour government could introduce a few mild temporary reforms". This is an important factor to take into account because it brings up the terrible question of lesser evilism.

How do we approach the problem of lesser evilism in bourgeois elections? Can we say there is a lesser evil? I think what Trotsky said indicates what we can do. We can say "Yes, there will be a few mild, temporary reforms." Yes, sometimes. But the problem is that the working class will still be weakened unless it makes a move to the left, unless it begins to reject the whole program of the Labor Party. If we only say it doesn't matter whether Labor or the Liberals are elected, millions of workers won't listen, because workers obviously sense the difference. It can be a real difference in life.

Earlier this year, I was talking to a Black comrade in the United States, a former member of the US SWP. He described an SWP campaign in Atlanta, in which there was also a Black Democratic candidate for mayor. He said:

Well, you know, we said, "A Black Democrat, won't do any good, he'll introduce capitalist austerity, won't make any difference." But I was a bit uncomfortable with

that, because once this Black mayor was elected, what happened was what we said was going to happen — they introduced all the capitalist austerity measures and so on and so on. But you know, in Atlanta there used to be some 30 Blacks killed by the cops every year. That stopped, and Black workers knew that. And then there was a lot of money spent in government projects, and the city government passed a law that said that every second worker hired would have to be Black. That wouldn't have happened under the previous administration. So there was a real difference in life.

We have to relate to that. If we don't find a way of explaining it, we're in trouble. We won't get a hearing. Workers will think we're crazy. There are illusions because there is a lesser evil. We can argue the point about the details, but that's why there are illusions. We mustn't identify with those illusions and increase those illusions, but the illusions must be the starting point of our dialogue.

So, our dialogue must go: "Sure, Labor is better than the Libs, but in the end they're going to betray you. They're going to carry out the same basic policies as the Libs — war, austerity and so on. We think our program is the only thing that's really useful, but you don't support it yet. You think Labor will make a real difference. Okay, we'll go through the experience of another Labor government. We'll help Labor to get elected. But the problem is to break with this whole method of politics. The program of the Labor Party is against your interests. Here's the record." With a dialogue along those lines we'd be getting closer to explaining what we need to explain.

So while it's correct to point to the basic similarity between Labor and the Liberals, it would be a mistake for us to say there's no difference. That would be the wrong tactical approach. It would prevent us getting a hearing for our opposition to the Labor Party.

But it would also be a mistake to limit our electoral tactic to figuring out which is the lesser evil — to fail to call for a development of politics beyond that. That's the approach of the Labor lefts.

They refuse to make any break with the perspective of Laborism. According to them, The fight is only within the Labor Party. Or at best: We can use the mass movement to put pressure on the right wing in the Labor Party." Then there's another side to this left reformist approach: "Oh, don't stand against us. We're on the left. It's not our fault. You can't be in a revolutionary party. That's just a sect." Or today: "You can't support the NDP, it's only a single issue party."

Our line is totally different. The Labor Party is an obstacle. Leave aside the tactical tone of what we say about it, our aim is to remove it, not to strengthen it.

Sometimes, when we take that approach, we might be accused of conceding an advantage to the right. That is a problem. It's something the Labor lefts harp on. But

I think it's a general rule that there's always a risk that any new political motion can temporarily help the right.

When we attack the Accord, some workers may think we're attacking the Labor government from the right. That's a risk. If we attack the government on uranium mining and call for a vote for the Nuclear Disarmament Party, that could threaten the Labor government. There is always that risk. In any new motion there's the risk of dividing the left forces.

What if this leads to the downfall or overthrow of the Hawke government? Well, that abstracts from the question of how this happens. Suppose there was massive political motion that really did hinder the Hawke government's project, and there were big developments outside the Labor Party, and the Labor government fell. That would be positive if it strengthened the left and helped to restructure the labor movement.

The worst outcome of a period of Labor government is the fall of the government because it has demoralised masses of workers and driven them back to the right. That's what we have to point out to the Labor lefts. Until they understand that, and are prepared to fight the right wing, even at the risk of Labor losing office, they'll remain politically hostage to the right. They'll continue to cave in every time the right argues that fighting for left policies will cost Labor votes.

Labor will lose votes anyway as workers become disillusioned with the effects of pro capitalist policies.

The Labor left

What's needed is a new type of left wing, one that knows how to stick to its principles. The existing Labor and trade union left has helped to prepare the way for the present right-wing domination of politics. It has done so by supporting the class-collaborationist prices incomes Accord.

It has opened the road through its own move to the right.

The betrayal on uranium mining at the 1982 ALP conference cleared the way for Hawke's complete victory in 1984. Some of the Labor lefts see such shifts as clever tactics, and a way to increase the influence of their faction. The 1984 conference showed how wrong they are.

One clear lesson, for Labor Party activists as well as those outside the ALP, is that you can't beat the Labor Party unless you're prepared to split from it. There's always a danger that will help the right, but it's the only way to prepare for the future. That's the lesson we have to drive home again and again. If you're caught in the Labor Party bind, you have nowhere to go, and your only appeal is to a different action and to the

same old numbers game.

Today we're seeing the beginnings of a split in the Labor Party. In its effect, this is a split even if it only takes the form of a bleeding process — a process of large numbers of people dropping out of the Labor Party.

We welcome the fact that many people have drawn the conclusion that the ALP is a dead end, and that the NDP offers the beginnings of a way forward. We welcome the fact that so many people are trying to find their way around the obstacle of Labor Party reformism.

At the same time, we're trying to build a bridge to other genuine left-wingers, both inside and outside the Labor Party. Many Labor left-wingers have nowhere to go except in our direction. We must encourage alliances with such people.

There's often a problem with the attitude of socialists to the Labor Party. They try to put all their eggs in one basket. But our approach should be concrete. What's happening? What are the other options? What are the other opportunities today?

The British Trotskyist movement is probably the one from which we can learn most about how not to proceed. For instance, the Militant group had one tactic — deep entry in the Labour Party. It stayed in through 20 years. As a result, it missed the whole youth radicalisation, it missed the movement against the Vietnam War.

On the other hand, the British International Socialists took a sectarian stance towards the Labour Party throughout the '70s and as a result they've been unable to have much influence on the development of the Labour Party left wing.

We're trying to see what is moving, to be flexible, to respond at any moment. We don't have a long-term historical view that we must do it only this way or only that way.

At present, the real conservative push in this country is the Hawke project. Hawke and the other right-wing ALP and trade union leaders are attempting with some success to transform the labor movement into a tool of the ruling class. They've already persuaded most of the union officialdom to act as wage cops against their members. They're also pushing to make the ALP even more independent of its legendary working class base. They're out to ensure that the right wing is totally dominant inside the ALP. They're removing any constitutional avenues for the expression of left-wing criticism inside the Labor Party, and they're driving the left out.

In some ways, they're transforming the ALP into a larger version of the defunct Democratic Labor Party. It's perhaps not coincidental that Hawke's base is the NSW ALP machine, which is dominated by NCC-influenced union officials who stayed in the ALP after the 1955 split. Now the Hawke faction has brought the NCC-influenced

union bureaucrats into the Victorian branch. These are officials who supported the DLP in the 1950s and '60s.

We must be sharply critical of the Labor Party at a time like this, and that's what we've been doing since Hawke came to power. But we still haven't done enough to develop our *counter-arguments* to what the Hawkes and Haydens say.

The problem is this: The fake left cannot develop arguments against the right wing leadership. That was crystal clear at the ALP national conference. They have no way of doing it because they accept most of the right wing's premises.

To see the right wing's arguments you don't have to read the *Radical*, the official magazine of the NSW ALP machine. That's not the paper they use any more. They use the bourgeois media entirely. An article by Alan Ramsey in the September 21-27, 1984, *National Times* illustrated this.

It was about Peter Barron, an ALP numbers hack on Hawke's staff. Anyway, Barron is supposed to be a hotshot, and this is his line:

Look, the NSW branch gives the Labor Party a lot of stability and a lot of professionalism. They're much harder than most of the other state ALP branches. And they're about winning. I mean, they don't have a bad track record at it, do they? And I think that for the ordinary Joe, NSW is a better place to live because of it.

No, obviously I don't think they're too pragmatic but I do think they're overburdened with the tag. I mean, if you believe that something is silly because it would be electorally suicidal then you'd be off your head if you didn't say so and you didn't fight it. But because NSW is somewhat of the slower, steady school rather than accepting that a few policy decisions at an ALP conference can change the world, because they tend to face realities, then they're always being branded as pragmatic.

How do the Labor lefts counter that? They don't! There is no counter to that line within the framework of Labor reformism. The only way to counter that is to say: All that means is that you will only do what the bourgeoisie will allow you to do. You're about winning parliamentary elections. But what's the real meaning of parliamentary elections? Simply that the bourgeoisie is deciding who they'll have run the government for them. Fundamentally, that all that's involved.

What Labor does in government is decided not by the ALP, nor is it decided by the unions, nor even the voters. It's decided by big business. We have to stress that. The Labor right-wingers admit it in their everyday practice. That's how parliamentary politics works today.

This is all conditioned by the ruling class, by the big business media, not by the objective needs of the working class. That's left out of Peter Barron's picture about the lot of the "ordinary Joe". For the Hawkes and Barrons of this world, what the "ordinary

Joe” wants, and more importantly, what they’re prepared to do for the “ordinary Joe”, is what the ruling class will let them do. And today that isn’t much.

In fact, what the bosses want the Labor leaders to do (and they’re more than willing to oblige in exchange for the plush seats on the treasury side of parliament) is to kick the “ordinary Joe” in the teeth — to cut wages, to do away with jobs, to slash social services etc., so that profits can increase.

Labor’s strategy for winning government is based not on mobilising the working class but on getting the backing of the bosses. They want to reform capitalism, not abolish it. So they have to prove to the real power brokers — the “captains of industry” — that they’ll manage the system better than the Liberals. That’s the pitch in their election campaigns.

If ever the ALP left is to be worth anything, it will have to break decisively with that view. It will have to break with the view that in order to win government, it is first necessary to get favourable coverage in the media — because favourable coverage in the media comes only when you’ve proved to the bosses that you’re on their side, and that you’ll do whatever is needed to keep the capitalists’ profits coming in. The only kind of left that plays by those rules is a thoroughly housebroken one — one that is really only a cover for the right wing.

Nuclear Disarmament Party

That’s the context that makes the formation and growth of the Nuclear Disarmament Party so refreshing. The break with the Labor Party represented by the NDP reflects a deep anger with Labor’s betrayals.

We risked not understanding this fully because of our dogmatism about the base of the Labor Party. We would have missed the importance of these developments had we not been prepared to shift on this question.

What are we going to do about all this?

Firstly, we need to know more about what’s happening around the country. We’ve heard a number of reports indicating that it’s very uneven. But one thing is clear: The Wilderness Society commissioned a poll, and apparently it revealed that 18% of people will vote for an anti-nuclear candidate or will consider doing so. Whether that actually happens on election day still remains to be seen, but even so it shows that something very big is happening.

In some places the NDP meetings have been relatively modest. But nevertheless, 50 or 100 people turn up, trying to figure out how to put something together. This represents an opportunity for us to work with other people. It allows us to make contact with people who we can talk politics with.

The NDP's three demands are a very good starting point: Stop uranium mining, repudiate the contracts; US bases out; no nuclear armed ships or planes. We can unite with others in struggle around these issues. There is absolutely no contradiction between us loyally building the NDP and continuing to build the SWP.

So, the proposal is that we give our number one vote to the NDP in the Senate and our second preference to the Labor Party.

SWP election campaign

As well as calling for a vote for the NDP, we also want to run our own SWP candidates. We can expect that during these elections a lot of people will draw the conclusion that we need socialism, and will go looking for a socialist party to join.

Building a party is not, and cannot be, a plunge all on one tactic, although we may have to change course if the NDP or some similar development opens up big possibilities we hadn't foreseen. But nothing we see today says that. The NDP is a very important development, but there's still a lot of confusion in it and no one, including the founders and candidates of the NDP, knows what they have started or where it is going.

There's no contradiction between us running in some seats and the NDP running in the Senate. In the seats in which we're standing, we should distribute NDP literature along with our own. So there's no technical contradiction.

But there's more to it than that. We're going to be work in the NDP campaign. We're going to approach the activists and say, "We'll take some NDP leaflets, we'll help get the word out." Some NDP members and anti-nuclear activists may also get interested in our campaign through this process.

We always try to run our own candidates because it opens up chances to talk about the need for socialism and the need to build a revolutionary party. A lot of people are interested in having those conversations with us.

Our campaign won't be primarily about winning votes, though it will be interesting to see if we can increase our vote in this political climate. But that's one of our less important concerns. Our main concern is the use we make of the elections to get our ideas around. We don't want to drop our own campaign unless it really gets in the way of united action with other forces. At the moment it doesn't. It complements everything we're doing.

What we're proposing is quite a new electoral approach for our party. As yet, we don't quite know the scope of these new developments. That will be tested in life.

We're a coherent force, even if not a big force. In comparison to what other left forces came through the '70s with, we've come a long way. Nevertheless, we're still at the stage of looking for a way to break through the ceiling that small socialist parties

sooner or later run up against.

We're looking for new tactics that will enable us to link up with broader forces. We don't think these new tactics will cause us many problems. Whenever we make a new move, there will always be some confusion and debate, some false starts and errors, but we're rather keen to find an opening. I think that's the spirit in which we approach the present situation.

We know that consciousness always lags behind reality. That's also true of ourselves. Nevertheless, I think we've done pretty well. We got on to the change in the political situation right after the ALP national conference, though we haven't necessarily followed it up as vigorously as possible everywhere. It always takes a while to reorient our cadres to a new situation and the outlook necessary to deal with it.

But the key thing is that we are able to find a way to work with other forces. The new situation offers a better opportunity to work with new forces than any we've had for quite a while. We want to put the party through this experience.

We hope these new developments will offer our party a way from a period of steady but rather slow growth to a period of more rapid growth. The new situation offers us more opportunities than we can possibly tackle, but that's the way out of a relatively isolated situation on the left. It can open up the next stage of building a strong socialist movement in this country.

Flexible, non-sectarian party building approach

We've never had a propagandist approach to party building. An ability to respond to new situations has been a vital part of the party building approach that has enabled us to grow to our present size from an initial nucleus of 30 or 40 people. Our flexible tactical approach has been vital.

It hasn't been easy, but no other approach would have got anywhere at all. There was no great wave of radicalisation we could ride through the 13 years since our party was formed. Only our flexible party building approach, which involves running our own candidates, which involves maintaining our own press, which involves having a correct orientation to the Labor Party, which requires an immersion in the mass movement, has enabled us to get where we are today. We are part of the real forces that have something to say and do about the situation facing the left.

Whatever mistakes we may have made, we have doggedly persevered in building a party that's genuine about its ideas. The importance of this isn't always understood by socialists or leftists who insist on sticking with the ALP no matter what.

The logic of that position is acceptance of the our-day-will-come view — the comfortable view that because the political situation isn't ripe for socialism we should

immerse ourselves in the labor movement for a long historical period, and one day just because we're there, the workers will turn to us for leadership. In this view, all that's necessary is an insistence on the correctness of our program and the betrayals of everyone else.

But such an approach involves abandoning the perspective of building a revolutionary party. Building a party requires immersion in the class struggle as it unfolds today. It requires orientation to the forces in motion today, rather than those we expect to be in motion some time in the indefinite future.

The leftists who refuse to go beyond the ALP even when the chance presents itself have a very different perspective. Rather than orienting to the NDP and the forces it is politicising and mobilising and helping to break leftward from Laborism, they argue that all socialists should simply remain in, or join, the ALP and focus their political work on the ALP.

They counterpose this to orienting to the NDP and the forces it is bringing into political action. But that approach involves abandoning any perspective of building an independent revolutionary party.

Others, while saying there is a need to build a socialist party (either a new one or an existing one), also fetishise the ALP. But this only reveals that they ultimately don't agree with the Leninist position that the Labor Party is fundamentally a bourgeois party. In the final analysis, this is a sectarian position. It involves a refusal to unite with the real forces that are in motion.

Anyone can talk about unity of the left or unity of the working class, and lots of people do. Even sects talk about unity. Sectarianism is not a matter of how many members you have or what you say about unity.

Sectarianism is seizing on some schema and letting it lock you into a prescribed set of tactics, a list of rules about what you have to do — prescriptions and schemas that blind you to the opportunities and the tactics necessary to build a genuine and effective socialist party.

Saying that all socialists must be members of the ALP is just as sectarian as trying to pretend that the ALP can be ignored or refusing to support forces that break with Laborism unless they immediately adopt a full socialist program.

To build a real socialist party, one that is not a sect, we must be willing to work with anyone moving in the same direction, even if they may be going only a small part of the way. We have to actively seek whatever agreement is possible. That means seeking agreement with forces that are breaking in a progressive direction from Laborism, breaking with the politics of the ruling class. These are the forces that have the potential to renew the left and help it to overcome its isolation.

The 1984 election campaign, and our non-sectarian approach to the forces emerging in it, will provide us with a rich experience. It will enable us to take some steps forward and will put us in a far better position to understand the challenges and opportunities posed by the class struggle in the years ahead. ■

SWP Policy in the 1987 Federal Elections

By Doug Lorimer

In a June 24, 1987, discussion of the July 11 federal House of Representatives elections, the Socialist Workers Party National Executive decided to support a first-preference protest vote for left alternative candidates wherever possible, and a vote for the Australian Democrats where no left alternative candidate was available.

The national executive also decided to urge the allocation of second preferences to the ALP to ensure re-election of the Hawke government. In the Senate, the SWP urged support for left alternative tickets in all states, with preferences flowing first to the Australian Democrats and then to the ALP.

This policy, and particularly the decision to support a vote for the Democrats ahead of the ALP, represented a change from the party's previous approach.

Before looking at the reasons why the national executive made this change, it is useful to review the general political framework in which the SWP decides its voting policy in any parliamentary election.

As Marxists, we know that parliament is an institution of the bourgeois state. Modern parliamentarism was born some 150 years ago in England as an expression of the right of the capitalist class to control government expenditure, which was financed by taxes they paid. It was an attempt to levy taxation without consulting the English bankers and merchants that had led to the English revolution in the 1640s. The rebels had executed King Charles I and subordinated the monarchy to parliament.

It was the same fundamental issue — taxation without representation — that had led the emerging bourgeoisie in the North American colonies to wage the War of Independence from England in the late 18th century, and to establish a parliamentary

democracy in what became the United States. The Australian parliamentary system is fundamentally modelled on those of Britain and the USA.

Evolution of the parliamentary system

Until the end of the nineteenth century, these parliaments were real centres of power. Eligibility to vote was subject to ownership of a certain amount of property. This effectively restricted the right to vote to the bourgeoisie itself. Parliament was a forum in which representatives of the capitalist class decided how their taxes would be spent.

In the second half of the 19th century, however, the labor movement in Britain and in the Australian colonial-settler states forced a widening of the electoral franchise to include all adult males, and later all adult females. This qualified workers — the great majority of the adult population — to vote. (At the same time the workers were also bestowed with the right to pay the major part of taxation, but that's another story).

With the introduction of universal adult suffrage, the illusion spread that bourgeois parliaments had ceased to be instruments for the defence of capitalist class rule. The ideologists of the ruling class promoted the view that parliament was a non-class institution representing the will of the majority of voters.

Acceptance of this view became widespread within the labor movement. The reformist leaders of the Australian Labor Party actively fostered the idea that putting a majority of their own representatives into parliament would enable workers to legislate reforms to their advantage — and even achieve socialism.

Developments since then have confirmed that it is impossible to use parliament against the capitalists in any significant way. Parliament is not the real centre of power in capitalist society. In fact, it has little real power at all.

Real power rests with the owners of the banks and the big, monopoly corporations. It is in the corporate boardrooms that the really important decisions are taken. Since the late 19th century, and the emergence of monopoly corporations with interlocking boards of directors, it has been unnecessary for the decisive sectors of the capitalist class to have a representative institution such as parliament to regulate their common affairs.

It had been necessary for parliament to play that role only when the bourgeoisie consisted of tens of thousands of medium and small company owners. In a capitalist society dominated by a hundred or fewer large companies owned by a tiny minority of super-rich families, the most influential capitalists can use corporate boardrooms, associations such as the Business Council of Australia, and bodies such as the Melbourne Club as forums in which to work out joint policies that suit their common interests.

Within the capitalist state itself, most of the real decision-making power has shifted from parliament to the permanent state apparatus — to the permanent secretaries of the government bureaucracy, to the heads of the armed forces and the police. These people continue to run the state regardless of which parliamentary party sits on the treasury benches. Ministers come and go, but the bureaucracy and police remain.

The outlook and interests of this permanent apparatus harmonise closely with those of the big capitalists because of the way it is recruited (largely from bourgeois families), its selectivity and career structure, and the enormous incomes paid to the top officials. John Stone's quick transition from Treasury secretary to Peko Wallsend board member illustrates the symbiosis between the state bureaucracy and the owners of capital.

While parliament has no real power, it does perform some useful functions for the corporate rulers. Above all, it helps to maintain the illusion that the great majority have a say in how the country is run. It reinforces the idea that working people should remain passive and rely on a handful of parliamentarians to defend their interests. And it helps the ruling class to gauge "public opinion", i.e., the success of their propaganda in convincing the majority to accept ruling class policies.

Choice of two evils

In 1871, Karl Marx summed up the real nature of parliamentary elections, describing them as an exercise in which the people are allowed once every three years to decide which representatives of the ruling class were going to preside over their oppression. A look at the real governmental choices in the July 11 elections confirms the accuracy of this view.

Both the major parliamentary parties — the ALP and the Liberals — are committed to cutting our wages, to slashing government spending on health, education and social welfare, to using the courts — both industrial and civil — to repress unions that take industrial action in defence of their members' living standards. Both are committed to serving the interests of the corporate rich. The only real difference is over how, and at what pace, to reduce working people's real incomes and thus increase the amount of socially produced wealth that the capitalists will appropriate.

Faced with this limited electoral choice, the SWP urges workers to choose the lesser evil. While Labor would continue to attack working people's living standards and democratic rights, a Liberal-National government would undoubtedly carry out such attacks more rapidly and to a greater extent. In July 1987, the return of the Hawke government was thus a lesser evil than the election of a Howard government.

But simply advocating the return of capitalist's soft cop doesn't really get us very

far. Socialists must exploit the opportunities that elections present to help workers understand that neither Labor nor the conservative parties represent their interests. The whole parliamentary system is rigged against them, and the real need is for a party that challenges the entire capitalist framework of parliamentary politics.

Such a party would actively encourage and build extraparliamentary struggles of workers and the oppressed, and would use the electoral arena to win a wider hearing and to promote support for grassroots struggles for progressive change.

Alternative candidates

In the 1987 federal elections, the most effective way to assist the process of building such a party was to maximise support for, and encourage links between, a range of progressive alternative candidates. These candidates reflected the progressive demands of the peace, environmental, student, feminist, Aboriginal and labor movements. Moreover, most were activists in one or another of these movements and were seeking to use their campaigns to promote support for extraparliamentary movements.

As well as presenting one SWP candidate — Jamie Doughney for the Victorian seat of Gellibrand — the SWP called for a vote for a number of alternative candidates, including:

- The student anti-fees Senate campaign of Kevin O'Connell and Lisa King in Victoria, and the independent campaign of Georgina Motion for the seat of Swan in Western Australia.
- The campaign for re-election of Senator George Georges in Queensland.
- The Nuclear Disarmament Party campaigns in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory.
- The Peace, Environment and Social Justice campaign of John McGlynn for the NSW seat of Eden Monaro, and the progressive independent campaign of Jack Munday for the seat of Sydney.
- The independent environmentalist Senate ticket of Lyn Allen and Catherine Paul in the Northern Territory.
- The independent welfare and social justice campaigns of Lyn Teather and Danielle Dixon in Victoria.
- The independent Aboriginal campaigns of Michael Mansell in Tasmania and Alan Brown and Thomas Walsh in Victoria.
- The Greens Senate teams of Ian Cohen and Daphne Gollan in NSW, and Ally Fricker and Jules Davison in South Australia.
- The Vallentine Peace Group campaign of Senator Jo Vallentine and Louise Duxbury in Western Australia.

- The Independent Labor Party and Socialist Party of Australia candidates in several states, and the Communist Party of Australia candidates in South Australia.

Voting for these candidates offered an opportunity to record opposition to the business dominated parliamentary parties. A strong performance in the elections by these candidates could encourage the process of building a political alternative to the capitalist parties.

Political vacuum

The fact that there was such a range of alternative candidates in 1987 reflects the persistence of a phenomenon that began to emerge in the 1984 elections with the appearance of the NDP. The rightward shift of the ALP has dramatically increased the political space to the left of Labor, opening up new opportunities to win the support of former Labor supporters for the construction of a new left party. It has also left a political vacuum within the existing parliamentary framework.

Labor has vacated its traditional political role as the reforming, liberal capitalist alternative to the conservatives. This is a result of important changes in the fortunes of the capitalist system since the mid-1970s.

Capitalism in Australia and internationally has entered a long-term economic depression, which has reduced its ability to buy social peace with the coinage of steadily improving wages and conditions. Capitalists are driven to seek to reduce workers' wages in order to boost declining rates of profit.

In this new economic climate, the ruling class will not tolerate governments that fail to meet their demands for savage reductions in working people's living standards. In this context, there is simply no role for liberal, reforming capitalist governments (or even for liberal reformers within governments). This is convincingly demonstrated by the complete capitulation of the ALP's federal parliamentary left to the Labor right.

Nevertheless, there is electoral space for a liberal capitalist party, even if it can have no role in government.

The deepening crisis of capitalism is radicalising growing numbers of people, who have not yet concluded that a decent standard of living, social justice, peace and a livable environment cannot be had under the present economic and political system. These people, particularly former Labor supporters, will inevitably look for an alternative within the existing parliamentary framework.

Desperate to hold onto their parliamentary representation, the Australian Democrats have recognised this and have moved into some of the space abandoned by Labor.

In the June 16 *Australian Financial Review*, Jenni Hewett commented on this shift

in the parliamentary spectrum. The Democrats, “who originally had the image of a middle-of-the-road party, are now far more radical and left-wing in many policies than the ALP left”, she wrote. “This is less because the Democrats have changed than that the Labor Party in office adopted foreign and economic policies it considered much too conservative in opposition.”

Democrat leader Senator Janine Haines presented a similar analysis: “We have stayed in the same place but the road has moved.”

While Haines’s explanation is substantially true, there is also an element of deliberate calculation in the Democrats’ move into traditional Labor territory. This is particularly so since the departure of Sidchrome boss John Siddons, with his supporters, to form the Unite Australia Party.

“The Democrats’ stance is far more clearly delineated from the conservative direction of all major parties, and their focus on these issues has been emphasised accordingly,” notes Hewett.

The Democrats have sought to broaden their previous support, based largely on environmental and peace questions, by emphasising social welfare issues and softening their industrial policy.

This shift was also reflected in Democrat decisions, at least in Tasmania and Victoria, to call for preferences to Labor ahead of the Liberals. The Democrats sought to present themselves as the only progressive parliamentary party, branding all the others conservative.

Haines, for example, argued that “people and organisations concerned about social justice, civil liberties, peace and environmental issues are beginning to realise that the Democrats are the only effective lever they have, whichever conservative government is in power.”

In the past, the Democrats stood to the right of Labor on industrial issues, particularly on union rights. For example, they opposed the repeal of Sections 45D and 45E of the Trade Practices Act and supported extending the ALP’s legislative assault on the Builders Labourers Federation.

Today, however, their industrial policies are either the same as Labor’s (e.g., support for its Industrial Relations Bill) or even to the left of Labor’s (support for restoration of wage indexation), and (according to Victorian Senate ticket leader Janet Powell) opposition to the use of sections 45D and 45E in disputes on environmental questions.

The Democrats’ positions are to the left of Labor’s on social welfare, health and education spending. They oppose the Hawke government’s spending cutbacks and the even more draconian cuts proposed by the Liberals.

In the federal elections, the Democrats actively went after the votes of those

disenchanted with the big business policies of the two major parties. They described Labor and the Liberals as parties of big business opposed to the interests of small businesspeople, farmers, workers, pensioners and students. They even raised the slogan “people before big business”.

Capitalist party

Of course, these positions don't make the Democrats a genuine alternative to Labor. Like the ALP, they are committed to supporting the private profit system, albeit tempered by a desire for liberal reform to make capitalism more tolerable to those it exploits and oppresses.

The Democrats advocate a thoroughly utopian program the creation of a “humane, caring” capitalism. This liberal capitalist fantasy is summed up in their electoral platform, which declares support for “measures to develop entrepreneurial opportunities within a conserving, non-exploitative and ecologically balanced society.

Moreover, like the ALP leaders, the Democrats also reflect the disdain of all bourgeois politicians for extraparliamentary struggles. Regarding their electoral platform, for example, Janine Haines argues that “people and organisations concerned about social justice, civil liberties, peace and environmental issues are beginning to realise that the Democrats are the only effective lever they have, whichever conservative government is in power.”

The Democrats believe that extraparliamentary struggle is ineffective. They relate to progressive social movements only in order to capture parliamentary votes. They believe that those seeking progressive social change should rely on parliamentarians to act for them, rather than acting for themselves. Their contempt for mass struggle is summed up in their slogan: “You can depend on us.”

Nevertheless, because the Democrats were less reactionary than Labor on a range of questions, a protest vote for them was a legitimate tactic.

The big business media is certainly conscious of the fact that a sizable vote for the Democrats would represent an expression of opposition to their austerity drive. Where they haven't ignored the Democrats, the media have sought to paint them as part of the “loony left”.

“Compared with the gulf that once divided them”, noted an editorial in the June 30 *Australian*, “the major parties now agree in essence on what is wrong with the economy ... Both government and opposition accept the need for reduced public spending and encouragement of business, although they disagree on the means whereby these policies should be put into effect.”

The editorial then went on to attack the Democrats for making “a deliberate

appeal to those voters who do not accept the general consensus that, one way or another, public spending should be cut”.

The *Australian's* editors clearly recognised that the return of the Democrats' senators on the platform they advocated would be an expression of popular protest against the Liberal-Labor austerity “consensus”. That was clearly a lesser evil than a vote that didn't register a protest and thus helped to preserve the illusion of consensus.

Prior to the 1987 elections, the Democrats used their balance of power in the Senate to block some of the Hawke government's most anti-democratic measures — particularly the Australia Card. For that reason, it was important to support the re election of the Democrat senators. We shouldn't throw away any lever, even if it is only as marginally effective as the Democrats.

The SWP called for a vote to the Democrats for the same basic reason that it called for the return of the Hawke government. When faced with a choice of a number of bourgeois parties, we advocate voting for the least reactionary.

Of course, in the 1987 election that option formed only one part of a more comprehensive policy. Voting for the range of progressive alternative candidates offered a far more effective method of protesting against the consensus among all the capitalist parties, including the Democrats, that the main need is for “entrepreneurial opportunities”.

More importantly, efforts to forge links between the various alternative campaigns helped to lay the basis for a united left party that can pose a genuine challenge to capitalist politics as a whole. ■

Appendix

In Australia

By V.I. Lenin

A general election recently took place in Australia. The Labor Party, which had a majority in the lower house — 44 seats out of 75 — was defeated. It now has only 36 seats out of 75. The majority has passed to the Liberals, but this majority is a very unstable one, because 30 of the 36 seats in the upper house are held by Labor.

What sort of peculiar capitalist country is this, in which the workers' representatives predominate in the *upper* house and, till recently, did so in the lower house as well, and yet the capitalist system is in no danger?

An English correspondent of the German labour press recently explained the situation, which is very often misrepresented by bourgeois writers.

The Australian Labor Party does not even call itself a socialist party. Actually it is a liberal-bourgeois party, while the so-called Liberals in Australia are really Conservatives.

This strange and incorrect use of terms in naming parties is not unique, In America, for example, the slaveowners of yesterday are called Democrats, and in France, enemies of socialism, petty bourgeois, are called Radical Socialists! In order to understand the real significance of parties, one must examine not their signboards but their class character and the historical, conditions of each individual country.

Australia is a young British colony.

Capitalism, in Australia is still quite youthful. The country is only just taking shape as an independent state. The workers are for the most part emigrants from Britain. They left the country at the time when the liberal-labour policy held almost undivided sway there, when the masses of the British workers were *Liberals*, Even now the majority of the skilled factory workers in Britain are Liberals or semi-Liberals. This is the result of the exceptionally favourable, monopolist position enjoyed by Britain in

the second half of the last century. Only now are the masses of the workers in Britain turning (but turning slowly) towards socialism.

And while in Britain the so called Labour Party is an *alliance* between the nonsocialist trade unions and the extremely opportunist Independent Labour Party, in Australia the Labor Party is the *unalloyed* representative of the nonsocialist workers' trade unions.

The leaders of the Australian Labor Party are trade union officials, everywhere the most moderate and "capital-serving" element, and in Australia, altogether peaceable, purely liberal.

The ties binding the separate states into a united Australia are still very weak. The Labor Party has had to concern itself with developing and strengthening these ties, and with establishing central government.

In Australia the Labor Party has done what in other countries was done by the Liberals, namely, introduced a uniform tariff for the whole country, a uniform educational law, a uniform land tax and uniform factory legislation.

Naturally, when Australia is finally developed and consolidated as an independent capitalist state, the condition of the workers will change, as also will the *liberal* Labor Party, which will make way for a *socialist* workers' party. Australia is an illustration of the conditions under which *exceptions* to the rule are possible. The rule is, a socialist workers' party in a capitalist country. The exception is: a liberal Labor Party which arises only for a short time by virtue of specific conditions that are abnormal for capitalism in general.

Those Liberals in Europe and in Russia who try to "teach" the people that class struggle is unnecessary by citing the example of Australia, only deceive themselves and others. It is ridiculous to think of transplanting Australian conditions (an undeveloped, young colony, populated by liberal British workers) to countries where the state is long established and capitalism well developed. ■

Resistance books