

The CPA and the Comintern: from loyalty to subservience

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The documentary material presented in this book, some of it previously unavailable, and most of it not widely available, adds a vital dimension to the story of the pre-Second World War CPA. The main lines of this period are well known to scholars who work in this field, but this book is significant because it shows that the Comintern exercised a very important, and at some points a decisive, sway over the CPA. The book's title itself may need some explanation. The Party throughout the period 1920–1940 was 'unswervingly loyal' to the Comintern and the Soviet Union—that was what made it a *communist* party—even if the phrase itself was used first by the CPA leadership only in 1929. At the end of the Ninth Conference in December 1929 at which there had been a major change in leadership supported by the Comintern, the victors telegraphed to the Secretary of the Comintern: 'annual conference greets comintern declares unswerving loyalty new line' (CAML 495–94–53). At the first Plenum of the new Central Committee in June the next year, greetings were sent to the Comintern along with a repeated declaration of 'unswerving loyalty' (495–94–61). Loyalty is a complex matter; it should not be thought that in this context it meant—or always meant—blind obedience. From its origins until the end of 1929, the political line and organizational instructions coming from the Comintern in Moscow were considered and sometimes robustly debated, even if they were rarely challenged directly. After the Ninth Conference, however, there was a major change: the CPA was much more finely attuned to the wishes of the Comintern, and twisted and turned at its behest. The price of dissent was now a humiliating 'self-criticism', or even expulsion. Difficult though it may be for us to appreciate, expulsions were a genuinely feared punishment, even if for the vast majority of those communists outside the Soviet Union the stakes were not life-or-death. After 1929, to be sure, some decisions handed down from above caused consternation and confusion, but there was no sense in which they could any longer be genuinely debated within the Party.

It is not surprising that the CPA's loyalty to communism was at first, and quite readily, expressed as loyalty to the Comintern. But this loyalty turned into a slavish subordination to its decisions: decisions about what communist policy was, and who was and was not a 'communist'. Such decisions were increasingly based on narrow calculations about what was best for the Soviet state, and—since that state was instantly identified with its leadership—what was best for Stalin and whichever group of henchmen was then in his favour. It is a story that

would have been difficult, and perhaps impossible, to predict in 1917. The main elements in that story are outlined in this essay.

The emergence of communism in Australia

Communism as an ideology was not entirely 'foreign' to Australia. To a very large extent Australia was an outpost of Europe on the 'great south land', and was undertaking an experiment with European forms of constitutionalism, conservatism, republicanism, and socialism. While claims to local ideological traditions in all these areas of political thought have been made, they are not strong: it is much more a case of 'liberalism in Australia' than 'Australian liberalism', and *mutatis mutandis* for other political ideas. Australia, for example, had a long tradition of socialist groups, but Albert Métin (another of the Europeans who came to see this great experiment in action) described it as a 'socialism without doctrines'. Like similar groups elsewhere, socialists in Australia were characteristically fractious and divided on a number of issues, though the influence of Marxism was much less pronounced than in Europe, and the existence of a Labor Party (with a 'socialist objective') created additional complications. The Labor Party had held government in the states, and at the national level its leader J.C. Watson became the first Labor Prime Minister of any country in the world—briefly—in 1904. Before and during the First World War, the Industrial Workers of the World gained influence and notoriety as the most militant of the anti-capitalist groups, to such an extent that they were banned in 1916 on trumped up charges. The Russian Revolution, erupting in 1917, excited curiosity (and fear) about Russia and Bolshevism. Some Australian socialists, most prominently R.S. Ross of the Victorian Socialist Party (Farrell 1981), resisted the insurrectionary message, insisting that Australia was not Russia. But the image of an apparently successful socialist revolution—or, at the very least, of the successful capture of state power—led many socialists to try to create a communist party and to be associated with the Soviet state.

Given the Anglo-Irish roots of Australia's European population, and the xenophobia of that population (particularly the working class), as demonstrated by the official 'White Australia' immigration policy, communism was widely seen as a 'foreign' phenomenon, particularly a Russian phenomenon. Communism may have been as 'foreign' as most other complex political ideas then in circulation in Australia, but it was unusual for two reasons: first, it was linked very closely with distinctively Russian ideas of organization, ideas that Lenin had derived directly from the *Zemlia i volia* ('Land and freedom' party) of the 1870s (Lovell 1984, 145), the like of which were uncharacteristic not just of Australia but also of the socialist movement in general; second, it introduced a style of political debate which we would now recognize as 'ideological', but whose circularity, impenetrability, and recourse from rational argument to class insult was at once novel, frustrating, and immensely powerful.

It would be misleading to consider the 'foreignness' of Bolshevism as consisting chiefly in its export from Russia by Russians. Yet Russians in Australia did play a role in its early transmission, and they were amongst its earliest enthusiasts in the Russian diaspora around the world. There had been Russians in Australia in moderately large numbers since 1905, many of them located in Queensland (perhaps their first Australian port of call), who had been exiled by Tsarism. Some were socialists, such as Nikolai Ilin, who arrived in Queensland in 1910 (Govor 2001, 87–8). Few were revolutionaries, and even fewer Bolsheviks. Whatever their views, they seem to have been heartened by the overthrow of Tsarism in March 1917, and impressed by the resolution of the Bolsheviks. Many returned home within the first few years after the Revolution. (A despatch from Australia's Governor-General to the Colonial Office in London in February 1921, for example, asks for advice about a group of 700 Russians who wanted to return to Russia but had not the means (PRO, CO 418/205).) It was a similar story with Russian exiles elsewhere in the world.

Some of those Russians who remained in Australia came to public notice in the 'Red Flag' disturbances of March 1919, when a demonstration of workers in Brisbane was attacked by soldiers (Evans 1988). Some of them used their rapidly acquired knowledge of Bolshevism and of Australia to claim special status. Petr Simonov (or 'Peter Simonoff', as his name was often spelt) was proposed by the Bolsheviks as Soviet consul to Australia, but his accreditation was not accepted by the Australian government. Responding to the heightened interest in Russia, Simonov wrote a book intended for Australians about the history of Russia. Practically none of it was about the Revolution as such. He argued that the 'Russian people are naturally inclined towards communism', and cautioned against the destruction of socialism by 'outside force' (Simonoff 1919), a reference to the Allied blockade. Prosecuted for incendiary speeches extolling the Bolshevik way, Simonov ultimately left Australia in 1921. Aleksandr Zuzenko—who will feature in Section 1 of this book—had also been in Australia for some time (since 1911), and acted as an agent of the Comintern in the early period of the CPA's development. He was present, and may have played a key unifying role, at the conference of 15–16 July 1922 which finally united the warring CPA factions. He was deported from Australia in 1919 after the 'Red Flag' riots, and again in September 1922 after fulfilling at least part of his Comintern mission.

The ideological style of communist argumentation adapted itself quite neatly to political debate in general. At first the Australian socialists, although accustomed to vigorous debates, disliked the centralizing and authoritative tone of the communist style. 'Proof by quotation', from the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and later Stalin, became the order of the day, which is why Stalin rushed to appropriate Lenin in publishing his *Fundamentals of Leninism* shortly after Lenin's death in 1924. There were few issues about which one could freely

debate and learn; rather, there were answers that had to be accepted and applied. The rather too discursive CPA was pulled into line by Herbert Moore in the early 1930s. Sent by Moscow, Moore soon changed the party's 'education' program into a 'training' program. Ideological conformity was encouraged, and dissent met with threats of expulsion. Disputes among the leadership became highly charged, and though seeming to turn on tactical or non-fundamental issues, polarized supporters into what came to be seen as 'class' formations. This was a long way from the mood of the pre- and post-war socialists, and few of them survived in the communist movement through the 1930s. One survivor, Guido Baracchi—an intellectual and thus suspected dilettante and possible class enemy—moved in and out of the party during the 1920s and '30s, until he was finally expelled in 1940.

To become adept at the communist style, Australian communists participated in training provided by the Soviets through the International Lenin School, especially during the 1930s, and were annoyed when they believed they were being left out of invitations to the School (Document 52). Aspiring leaders went to such schools. Not everything went smoothly, however, and the expectations of different cultures did not always mesh with Leninist norms. The Anglo-Americans sometimes had problems with what they described as the 'police methods' of the administration, and some were disappointed with Soviet reality (despite their general understanding of the adverse conditions that the Soviets confronted). But it was the Russians' response to criticism that was particularly telling. Skorobogatykh (nd, 9) relates that one of the Soviet leaders of the English speaking students of the Lenin School declared: 'There are traces in the group of the influence of social-democracy, for example the question "Why?"' From the American Comintern archives comes another interesting example, a letter of 27 May 1936, from 'the collective of Sector 'D'', referring to the expulsion of an American, Karl Meredith, from the Lenin School. It appears that Meredith:

did not feel fully at home in the USSR ... By a mechanical, typically bourgeois method of comparison of figures, he repeatedly stressed the erroneous conclusion that the standard of living in USSR is lower than in the USA. (CALC 515-1-3968)

The CPA's relationship with Moscow

It is worth dwelling on a number of aspects of the relationship between the CPA and Moscow. During the 'short twentieth century', it was a commonplace of communist politicians to downplay this relationship, and of conservative politicians to emphasize it. We know that it was a major issue in the United States, where the CPUSA insisted that it was a home-grown phenomenon, responding to local needs, against charges—especially through the 1950s—that it was acting at the behest of the Soviets. It is a matter now put beyond doubt by the opening of the Comintern's archives that in large measure the CPUSA

was acting as a local advocate for the Soviet state. Indeed, it was one of the most slavish of all the Western communist parties to Moscow's 'line'. The CPGB, which faced similar problems to the CPA—internally, with organizational shortcomings and externally, in trying to win workers away from the established Labour Party—also took its directions from Moscow.

What do the Comintern's archives tell us about the Australian party? We already know that in Australia (as elsewhere), the formation of the Communist Party in 1920 and its internal disputes were arbitrated by the Comintern. It is clear that the Australian party, once it had been recognized by the Comintern, was not just an affiliate, but the 'Australian section' of a world party, and the Congress and Executive of the Comintern had, as Macintyre rightly puts it, 'absolute power over every constituent organisation' (Macintyre 1998, 76). Herbert Moore, the Comintern agent who reorganized the Party—introducing especially the technique of 'self-criticism' as a way of stamping out differences—was later expelled from the CPUSA suspected of being an agent for anti-communist organizations (Macintyre 1998, 171). Whether this was because Moore was a police agent, or had developed political differences, is not clear. The CPA faithfully followed the Soviet line through the excruciating twists of the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact in 1939, and then its entry into the Second World War. Macintyre writes of its 'bewildered loyalty', and its relative cohesion, in contrast to the mass resignations from the British Communist Party, for example. Webb (1954, 6) explained that during the first few months of the Second World War, 'the Party's efforts to follow the swift and frequent zig-zags of Russian policy made it comical, ineffectual, and mildly seditious'.

'Moscow gold'

How communist parties were funded became an issue in many countries, sometimes precipitated by the indiscretions or bragging of communists themselves. For whom did these parties actually work: for Moscow, or for their own working class? In England, for example, the Home Secretary was often asked in Parliament in the early 1920s about the activities and funding of 'Bolshevist agents', but kept his public pronouncements circumspect and reiterated his view of what the law allowed. In the House of Commons on 13 July 1921 John Baird, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office, declared: 'I do not know the total amount of money introduced from abroad to subsidise the Communist agitation. In the present state of the law it is not a criminal offence to introduce foreign money for the purpose of such agitation' (Parliamentary Debates, Commons, vol. 144). Indeed, the British authorities insisted that they would prosecute agitators (and deport aliens) only where they incited violence. Baird had earlier that year given some indication that the British government was watching carefully the activities of the communists—or 'Bolshevists', as they were usually called (probably to stress

their 'foreign-ness')—and that the Russian Trade Agreement signed in 1921 was dedicated in part to stopping them. On 20 April 1921, Baird declared:

My attention is constantly directed to the Bolshevist propaganda in this country. It falls under three heads: the payment of salaries to Communist officials, ranging from £5 to £10 per week, subsidies to the extremist Press, and the free distribution of revolutionary literature. An accurate estimate of the amount spent cannot be given, but in December last a Bolshevist agent stated that it exceeded £23,000 a month ... There is evidence that some, at any rate, of the money came direct from the Moscow Government, but that was before the signing of the Trade Agreement [the preamble of which declared that the propaganda would cease]. (Parliamentary Debates, Commons, vol. 140)

There is no doubt that Moscow funded most, if not all, communist parties to some extent. It is difficult to say in every instance what form this support took (whether in cash or in kind), and how significant it was for the particular party. In the early years of the Comintern, the amounts seem to have been considerable, totalling millions of roubles (McDermott and Agnew 1996, 21–22). In the American case, the support seems to have been substantial and long-term, increasing as a proportion of the party's total budget as it lost members and influence in the 1970s and '80s (Klehr, Haynes and Anderson 1998; Draper 2003b, 202–209). The reaction to this funding also seems to differ according to the case. The British government clearly did not like it, and tried to stop it, but for the American government the sore point was that communist agitation was 'foreign' and thus 'un-American'. This position would ultimately be formalized by the investigations, and aspersions, of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in the 1940s and '50s, but it is a theme that pervades American discussions of communism. American communists themselves confirmed the importance of such a critique by insisting—against the truth, as we now know—that American communism was indigenous, self-supporting, and self-directed. That the HUAC was staffed by what the UPI journalist, and later political aide and historian, George Reedy described as 'the worst collection of people that have ever been assembled in the entire history of American politics', does not diminish the fact that American communism was largely a Soviet creature.

CPUSA leader Earl Browder, for example, gave false testimony before the Dies Committee of the US Congress in late 1939. In a confidential letter of 2 October 1939, to the Secretariat of the ECCI, Pat Toohey wrote: 'The Committee sought to prove that the CP is a branch of Moscow, that it is financed by Moscow ... that the CP is an agent of a "foreign principal", i.e. Moscow and the Comintern' (CALC 515–1–4084). The Committee brought in a former CPUSA member, Ben Gitlow—'stool-pigeon and provocateur'—who testified that from 1922–29, the Comintern sent to the CPUSA \$US100,000 to \$US150,000 yearly

and made other claims of subsidies to the *Daily Worker* and other publications. Toohey describes this as 'lies', but though the amounts may be exaggerated, they were not impossible. (In a letter of 10 January 1924, the Executive Secretary of the US party, Ruthenberg, asked Moscow for a subsidy of \$64,000 (CALC 515-1-297).) Indeed, the evidence suggests that the CPUSA would have collapsed, or ceased most of its activities—at various points in its history—without Comintern subsidies.

As for Australia, there is little evidence of direct, annual funding of the CPA by Moscow in the documents in CAAL, and it may be that such funding did not happen. There is certainly evidence that money was requested by those who helped to establish the CPA (Document 4), and at the end of one of the documents in this collection (Document 5) occurs the following paragraph (not included in the collection, but relevant here):

3. Please reconsider the question of financial support to the Communist daily paper in America. The amount of money appropriated for this purpose—twenty-five thousand dollars—is much too small. (495-94-127)

Sums of money—so-called 'Moscow gold'—were given to the Australian communists. Macintyre suggests that this began in about 1923 (Macintyre 1998, 148), but the CAAL documents indicate that Zuzenko and Freeman planned to bring a substantial amount in 1921-22, though how much they delivered in the end is not clear. The requirements of the Australian communists, not to mention the perceived strategic importance of Australia to the world revolution, were markedly less than the Americans'. There was no daily newspaper to support at first, nor a large organization; for example, the Party's main paper, *The Workers' Weekly*, appeared three times a week in the 1930s, but *The Red Star* in Western Australia was weekly for the period we are examining. There were times when no-one seems to have been a full-time, paid employee of the CPA, and when there was the pay was worse than that of an ordinary worker. As Macintyre (1998, 356) relates, the Party president's pay in 1939 was below the level of the basic wage.

The documents in CAAL do not give us a sense of the scale of 'Moscow gold'. Given our current level of knowledge, however, the scale of funds was probably rather small. The documents tell us that the CPA was constantly in need of money, and it could not properly fund the small number of full-time party workers it had on its staff. The state of our knowledge on this score is summarized by Macintyre (1998, 356-57).

If there is no evidence of regular payments, occasional glimpses are nevertheless given of individual requests. On 29 March 1936, for example, Mason (the CPA's representative to the Comintern) wrote to Comrade Marty that he had been instructed by the Political Bureau to ask the ECCI for a grant of £5000:

'My fare took most of the cash.' He explained that if more students and delegates came to Moscow, more cash would be needed (495–14–302). Australian Military Intelligence agents in the 1930s seemed to believe that the Party received £500 per year from Moscow, and that this was only a small proportion of its operating costs (Cain 1983, 253). It may reasonably be assumed that when Australian communists went to the Soviet Union for congresses or study tours, their in-country expenses were paid by the CPSU.

The question of Moscow funding for the CPA arose once again in the 1949 Royal Commission of inquiry into the Party (in the state of Victoria, which empowered the Royal Commission) and its relations with the Comintern. The Royal Commissioner, Sir Charles Lowe, concluded that the CPA had to comply with all decisions of the Comintern; he cited the importance of the Comintern in unifying the original party in the 1920s, and its 1929 intervention on behalf of Moxon and Sharkey against the rest of the Central Executive Committee (Victoria 1950, 33–36). He surveyed the evidence of the Comintern imposing a range of policies on the CPA (including: on the united front with the ALP; on conscription; and on the League of Nations); and also discussed the communists' reaction to the Second World War, with the CPA at first supporting the war, then opposing it at the direction of the Comintern, and then in 1941 supporting it again. Commissioner Lowe talks of the various ways of 'harmonising the CPA's policy with the Comintern' (Victoria 1950, 37). He noted that large amounts of money had passed through Party accounts, many thousands of pounds that were not sufficiently explained in the evidence. Nevertheless his 21st finding states that 'The funds of the Party come from various local sources and there is no evidence of funds coming from overseas.' This may be considered too benign an account of the true situation, but the evidence at the time would allow the Commissioner to venture safely no further.

The fact that we cannot tell precisely how much money was sent by Moscow to Australia does not mean that the Australians did not try to get as much as possible (Skorobogatykh nd, 6–7), or that the Comintern was not organized to respond to such requests. At the broadest level, the Comintern's International Control Commission spent more than three-quarters of a million US dollars per year, more than half of that subsidizing publications by foreign communist parties. In the period 1928–34 the Comintern spent over seven million US dollars by its own figures (Skorobogatykh nd, 7). There is substantial evidence from decrypts of Comintern radio messages that the Comintern was paying a quarterly subsidy of tens of thousands of Swiss francs to many European communist parties (PRO HW/17/1, HW/17/4).

The debate on whether or not Moscow subsidized communist parties abroad should have ended long ago: the documentary evidence is now overwhelming. Klehr, Haynes and Firsov (1995, 22–25) discuss the evidence in the case of the

CPUSA; Thorpe (2000) puts an end to any doubt about the funds given to the CPGB. The genuine debate is over what this subsidization really meant. It cannot be said that financial support equals automatic control of the parties. What can defensibly be said is that communist parties continued to exist where sometimes they might have failed for want of funds; and that they probably had more influence by virtue of their press and presence than they might otherwise have had.

Moscow's frustration

It seems likely that the Comintern expected its recommendations, advice, instructions and 'demands' to be carried out by its sections, in the spirit of working for one cause: not Soviet success, as such, but the historically imminent victory of the world working class. Its expectations were not always met. The CAAL documents reveal Moscow's almost constant sense of frustration at Communist Party activity in Australia.

In this respect, there are some instructive comparisons to be made between Comintern relations with the CPUSA and the CPA. As with the American party, the Comintern sent to Australia many schoolmasterly 'not good enough' report cards from its headquarters. The American communists were well organized, but relatively small and ineffective; the Australian party was poorly organized, as well as relatively small and ineffective.

Both parties had been formed from amalgamations of previous socialist groups who wanted to be allied to the new revolution in Russia. In both cases, these amalgamations were not easily achieved, and for some years there were personal and other disputes between the members—though rarely programmatic differences, as Moscow kept noting, with annoyance—which made building a united and, more importantly, effective communist party difficult. For example, in a resolution of the ECCI on 8 August 1920, both communist parties in America were told to unite, though the date for completion of this task was extended from 20 September 1920 to 1 January 1921 (CALC 515-1-17). Even as late as 1928, a Comintern 'Resolution on the American Question' declared 'categorically that the resumption of factional struggle within the American Party will be a crime against the Party and the International, and will be met by the expulsion of those responsible from the Party' (CALC 515-1-1227).

Furthermore, both parties had great difficulties making practical headway in winning the workers for communism and becoming a mass party. The task in the United States may have been party building, as in Australia, but the situation was in many respects quite different. The American party, like the American labour movement, was divided between an elite of native born, English speaking workers and a large number of foreign-born, poorly-paid workers whose command of English was not good. How to connect the two was a major

challenge. The Americans' first response was to have a type of decentralized and federated party, but this led to problems, and seems never to have been accepted in Moscow. Unity and centralization were the key concepts. Even by the early 1930s these had not been fully achieved. The party had a daily (English) newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, but it also had eight or more foreign-language papers as well as some foreign-language weekly or monthly journals (CALC 515-1-2621).

A major problem for the Comintern was this: how to wean the workers of developed capitalist countries away from existing political allegiances? The general position of the Comintern on existing labour—i.e., social democratic—parties was that their leadership had to be 'exposed' to the working class as unworthy. This was a position designed for Europe, fitted Australia, but did not apply to the United States, since it had no such party. How the American communists could contrive to 'expose' labour leaders was a matter contentious and shifting, and was probably doomed from the start. They even tried to form such a labour party. The problem, in all jurisdictions, was that communists had difficulty in convincing workers they were being betrayed, even when they hysterically denounced social democrats as 'social fascists', and in some ways as worse than the fascists. This position was both dishonest as well as disastrous, especially in Germany, where it divided the working class and helped Adolf Hitler to take power in 1933.

As in many other countries, the radical groups that had merged in Britain to form the CPGB found it difficult to maintain political unity, and to create a Bolshevik style of organization, two issues that were inextricably linked. Syndicalist groups were wary of politics and excoriated the Labour Party; the Socialist Labour Party which had become part of the CPGB opposed its members becoming union officials. In 1922, the Comintern created a Commission of Investigation into the CPGB, which reported in September. It noted that the Party had made no real progress in the two years of its life, and criticized its organization and apparatus. The Report was adopted at the Party's Battersea Congress in October 1922, and organizational centralization and membership growth ensued, but Trotsky—insisting that a revolutionary crisis was rapidly approaching—asked in 1925: 'Will it be possible to organize a Communist Party in England, which shall be strong enough and which shall have sufficiently large masses behind it, to enable it, at the psychological moment, to carry out the necessary practical conclusions of this ever-sharpening crisis?' (Trotsky 1973a, 36).

In the Australian case, the frustration emanating from Moscow was at first about the unity of the Australian party; there seemed no good reason for the continuing disunity. Subsequently the Comintern in general, and various sub-sections of it in particular (such as the Agitprop department) criticized the

party's lack of recruits, its inadequate responses to political opportunities, its unprofessional organization, and even its sloppy publications.

The Comintern took a very close interest in the activities of its parties. From the Americans it wanted constantly updated information about the economic and political situation in the USA, and about the state of the party itself. It kept up a stream of critical letters. In a letter of 21 September 1932, for example, 'To the Central Committee of the Communist Party of USA', the Comintern explained that 'in spite of a number of concrete instructions from the ECCI, the question of the line, methods and slogans of the Party in the struggle against war and intervention [against the USSR] has not been presented clearly and concretely by the Party leadership' (CALC 515-1-2604). It directed the Party's attention to 'insufficient activity' with regard to a list of items. This was less the case with Australia, even though the Australians kept insisting that they were important, and that the opportunities for revolution were larger than Moscow assumed. Comintern directives to Australia were less intrusive and less detailed (the Comintern even directed the Americans when to have conferences, though there is no similar evidence in CAAL of such instructions to Australians). There was also less personal contact between Australians and the leaders in Moscow. From the early 1920s, there were always at least a handful of Americans and Britons in the Comintern offices in Moscow, but personal contact with Australians tended to be sporadic until the 1930s and the arrival of Moore and the more regular travel of communists to Moscow. Perhaps all this is merely a reflection of the different views that the Comintern had of the prospects for revolution in different countries, as well as of the difficulties and costs of travel.

In November 1935 an American representative in Moscow gave an insight into how the foreign parties were treated. 'In connection with this [Abyssinian] situation, in a general way, us dignitaries have been called all together and criticised, not naming any specific brethren especially, for our weaknesses at home' (CALC 515-1-3737). The communist parties took their medicine without sugar. Like children of demanding parents, they did not receive much praise. But it was enough for them to be associated with revolutionaries. As the generations moved on, and the Moscow trials 'exposed' the 'rottenness' of even the Old Bolsheviks, more material forms of recognition for foreign communist party leaders became the norm, especially being feted during visits to the Soviet Union.

A CPA 'underground'?

Compared with the United States or the United Kingdom, the very bastions of international capitalism, Australia figured rather low in Moscow's estimation as a likely site for socialist revolution. Some Australians, and some Comintern agents who worked in Australia from 1919 to 1922, heroically attempted to bolster Australia's claims as the Achilles heel of British imperialism. But it was not until

the 1940s, a period beyond the limits of our documentary remit, that Australia became significant for Soviet Russia as the 'soft underbelly' of Allied—and later imperialist—intelligence. Though it is outside the scope of this work, Soviet collection of secret (and not so secret) government documents by Walter Clayton and Ian Milner, exposed in part by the Australian Royal Commission of 1954 into Soviet espionage following the defection of the Petrovs, and more openly discussed in the Venona decrypts which had uncovered this espionage, tended not to rely on publicly recognized CPA members. In the period discussed by this book, however, Australia was of interest to Moscow chiefly as a potential site of socialist revolution. The agents, or operatives, whom Moscow deployed in Australia, including Simonov, Zuzenko and Freeman, were not spies in the usual sense. And the intelligence about Australia that the CPA passed on to the Comintern, through its reports and the minutes of its meetings, was publicly available.

It is not surprising that the suspicion of espionage should have fallen on the communists. One important aspect of communist activity in capitalist states, an aspect that was explicitly addressed by the Comintern (and ultimately managed by the Soviet state), was clandestine activity. Communist parties were directed to establish an 'underground' organization as well as a legal one. This was made clear during the earliest years. The third of the twenty-one conditions for affiliation to the Comintern, promulgated in 1920, directed national sections to establish a 'parallel illegal organization':

In all countries where a state of siege or emergency laws make it impossible for Communists to carry out all their work legally, it is absolutely necessary that legal and illegal activity be combined.

The American Communist Party was continually urged to follow this advice despite its ability to function legally. A document entitled 'Parliamentarism, Soviet Power and the Creation of a Communist Party of America. Thesis of the Executive Committee of the Third International', signed by N. Bukharin and J. Berzin (Winter), for example, included the following: 'We call the attention of the comrades to the necessity of creating illegal underground machinery side by side with the legally functioning apparatus' (CALC 515-1-1). In January 1920, furthermore, in an early letter to the American parties claiming to be communist, Zinoviev as President of the ECCI insisted on the necessity for immediate unification and added that:

The Executive Committee urges the American Comrades immediately to establish an underground organization, even if it is possible for the party to function legally. This underground organization shall be for the purpose of carrying on direct revolutionary propaganda among the masses, and, in case of violent suppression of the legal Party organization, of carrying on the work. It should be composed of trusted comrades, and kept entirely separate from the legal

Party organization. The fewer people who know about it, the better. (CALC 515-1-17)

The background to these urgings is the prevailing sense that the seizure of power was imminent in the early 1920s. It had long been assumed by Marxists that the capitalist state, under threat, would go on the offensive against legal communist organizations, and thus that the communists had to be prepared to turn to underground work. This had some grounding in Marxist theory, but it resonated particularly with the Russian revolutionists' experience under the Tsars. William Z. Forster, an American communist party leader, was tried for treason in 1922. Such actions bolstered the Russians' insistence on the legal fiction of a complete separation between the Comintern and the Soviet state. In 1933, Soviet diplomat Maxim Litvinov made this distinction publicly in the United States. Thanks to recently available archival material, we can see that the US communists developed their secret apparatus, and that this eventually had a major role to play in espionage, including bringing the atomic secrets to the Soviets.

In the Australian case, and despite the wholesale exhortations to develop an underground apparatus, the CAAL documents give no indication that such an apparatus was ever created. Later in the 1930s, as the prospect of another war loomed, Australian communists took much more seriously the idea that they would have to continue their work 'underground'. But the link between such party preparations and Soviet espionage carried out by Australian communists is not proved, and seems unlikely. (Having a secret apparatus may not be a crime, though spying for a foreign power certainly is.)

The use of communist parties to extend the reach of Soviet espionage was acknowledged by Leon Trotsky, only days before he was assassinated by a Soviet agent. Trotsky wrote: 'As organizations, the GPU and the Comintern are not identical but they are indissoluble. They are subordinated to one another, and moreover it is not the Comintern that gives orders to the GPU but on the contrary, it is the GPU that completely dominates the Comintern' (Trotsky 1973, 370).

One important aspect of opening the archives has been a greater understanding of the extensive surveillance and intelligence-gathering activity of communist states, aimed at their own citizens, Western governments, and Western industry. In postcommunist states, the internal archives were opened, revealing for example the vast scale of Stasi internal surveillance in the former German Democratic Republic. About one in 50 of the adult East German population reported in some way to the Stasi on their friends, colleagues, students, and even families and lovers. Apart from any other consideration, this gives an indication of the suspicion and lack of trust in a society supposedly intended to develop the most complete human solidarity. Timothy Garton Ash (1997), the Oxford historian of Eastern Europe, read the files of his own visits

to East Germany partly in order to check their veracity, and to try to understand why people had reported on him. He has observed acutely that—apart from outright errors, which were many and fundamental—even the most innocuous action could seem suspicious to a surveillance officer. Many people in Eastern Europe acted as informants in order to gain privileges, such as travel visas. Markus Wolf was in charge of espionage in the West for East Germany, and claims not to have known about the activities of his internal Stasi colleagues. Koehler (1999) looks at this external role in some depth.

The difficulty with spying is that it creates a self-perpetuating state of mind, which no evidence can dissuade, and this is particularly dangerous for liberal democracies. This may be perfectly illustrated by an Intelligence Branch official's response to Dora Montefiore's apparently uneventful stay in Australia in 1922–23: 'since her arrival she has behaved with decorum ... Outwardly, therefore, she has played her part well just as she has apparently served her Bolshevik Masters well too and she must, therefore, be regarded as dangerous' (cited Cain 1983, 240–41). The more normally people behave, the more suspicious spooks become. The Philby case exemplifies another dilemma of espionage, as Phillip Knightley puts it: the better the information, the less likely is the informant to be believed (Borovik 1994, xiv).

Just as the Comintern archives have revealed the connections between the CPUSA and Soviet espionage in the United States (Klehr, Haynes and Firsov 1995), so the archives brought to England in 1992 by a KGB librarian, Vasili Mitrokhin, and published as *The Mitrokhin Archive* (Andrew and Mitrokhin 1999) have revealed a great deal about Soviet espionage in the West. A number of people—now elderly—have been identified as long-term Soviet spies and agents of influence, adding to the spies already uncovered during the 1950s and '60s: Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, Kim Philby, Anthony Blunt and John Cairncross. What is perhaps most surprising is the public reaction, which sees this as something of a joke. The 'Bolshevik from Bexleyheath', for example—Melita Norwood, aged at the time of exposure in her late eighties, and unrepentant about passing British nuclear secrets to the Soviets from 1937—was not prosecuted. A newspaper report notes that 'Neighbours describe her as kind and jolly, and say she makes a particularly fine chutney' (Walker 1999, 28). It is her sincerity that is presented, without challenge: 'I thought it was an experiment what they were doing out there—a good experiment and I agreed with it ... I did what I did because I expected them to be attacked again once the war was over ... I thought they should somehow be adequately defended because everyone was against them' (cited Walker 1999, 28).

There was a time when caution was an appropriate response to the charges against Australians of spying for the Soviet Union. As late as 1994, for example, David McKnight declared: 'For many, including the writer, the idea that a

left-wing Australian may well have been under the control of Soviet intelligence is a conclusion to be resisted' (McKnight 1994, 92). This was said chiefly in defence of Walter Clayton, but also indirectly in defence of Ian Milner. But the evidence of the archives now seems indisputable. With the release in 1995 of the Venona decrypts of Soviet intelligence traffic from Canberra to Moscow in the 1940s, the role of Clayton—or 'Klod'—is clear. Ball and Horner, on the basis of this evidence, have concluded that 'From 1943–49, a group of about 10 people, all of whom were members of the Communist Party of Australia or close acquaintances of communists, provided information and documentary material to the Soviet State Security Service, commonly known as the KGB' (Ball and Horner 1998, xiv). The Venona decrypts make it clear that there was a significant Soviet espionage effort in Australia during the 1940s and early 1950s. How useful, and how secret, was the material gathered are questions that remain open, as is the issue of Clayton's professionalism as an agent (see Macintyre 1998, 400–401).

The Petrov Royal Commission named both Clayton and Milner as spies, but the evidence for doing so could not be made public at the time, and no-one was charged with espionage. Venona has now definitively exposed Clayton, and the opening of secret Czech archives clears up the case of Ian Milner, about whom there was previously dispute. Milner was a New Zealander who became an Australian academic, secretly joining the Melbourne University branch of the CPA in March 1940; he later joined Australia's Department of External Affairs, then the UN, and in 1950 went to Czechoslovakia and refused to return. Until his death, Milner himself (and his wives, both of whom seem also to have been agents) continued to insist that he was not a spy—much as did Julius Rosenberg and Alger Hiss. But in a major turning point, Phillip Deery in 1997 conceded Milner's espionage. As Deery noted at the time, 'Historians study the past not for comfort but for truths: disclosures about the past usually provide pain more than solace' (Deery 1997, 12).

As long as there was a lack of definitive evidence about communist spying in Australia, much of the discussion in this area centred on espionage as a baseless political charge designed to discredit communists. The political advantage that the Menzies government clearly gained from the Petrov Royal Commission (whether through the electoral victories in 1954 and 1955, the psychological decline of Opposition Leader 'Doc' Evatt, or the split in the Labor Party), and the lack of prosecutions arising from it, have led many including Evatt to conclude—wrongly, as it turns out—that it was a Menzies' plot to defeat Labor at the 1954 election. The authoritative study of Menzies concludes that these notions of conspiracy are indefensible (Martin 1999, 276–85). And Western security organizations—whatever their competence, about which there is legitimate disagreement—were created or bolstered in response to a sustained Soviet effort at espionage against the West.

The Comintern was undoubtedly connected with collecting information for the Soviet intelligence services (Brown and MacDonald 1981). Indeed, the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 created some difficulties for their intelligence gathering, as the following message from 'Viktor' (Lt Gen P.M. Fitin) in Moscow to his agent in Canberra on 12 September 1943 reveals:

A change in circumstances—and in particular the dissolution of the BIGHOUSE [i.e., Comintern]—necessitates a change in the method used by the workers of our residencies to keep in touch with the leaders of the local FELLOWCOUNTRYMAN [i.e., Communist] organizations on intelligence matters. (PRO, HW/15/21)

But this is not to say that all communists were spies. There is an important distinction to be made between communists who were loyal to policies (and who joined, and left, communist parties as policies changed—and there were many in that category) and those who were loyal to the party and through it ultimately to the Soviet Union. It was the latter who would respond to the 1930 reminder by the ECCI to Western communist parties that 'legal forms of activity must be combined with systematic illegal work' (cited Klehr, Haynes, Firsov 1995, 71). Walter Clayton, for example, headed the CPA's underground organization in the 1940s. The Venona decrypts reveal his KGB handler describing Clayton's embarrassment at being paid for some information in 1945, Clayton explaining that he passed information for 'duty' (PRO, HW 15/1).

Loyalty to communism and a better future for humanity transferred easily to loyalty to Moscow. Australian (and other) communists believed that in helping Moscow they were not being traitorous: they were doing the best for their country, even as they opposed its present government and social system. In their eyes, perhaps, they were the real loyalists, while the capitalists were loyal only to their own greed and class interests. Moscow took these sentiments and, especially with the domination of the 'socialism in one country' mentality in the Soviet Union, turned communists into a second-tier (and highly expendable) aspect of its foreign relations. The decent motives that turned many people into communists, the wish to improve their own society and confront greed, racism and injustice, were used by Moscow for baser purposes. If communists saw this, they did not recognize it, at least until a major shock threatened their view of the world, a shock such as the Soviet-German Nonaggression Pact, or Khrushchev's 1956 Secret Speech about Stalin's crimes.

Australian, and Australian government, reactions

If an international political movement, with the blessing and apparently under the influence (if not control) of a foreign power, set up business in your country in order to overthrow the political system, it would not be surprising if the existing government was either wary or hostile and kept that movement under

surveillance. Communists, as the *Communist Manifesto* proclaimed, disdain to conceal their views; but Bolshevik experience of persecution, imprisonment and exile under the Tsarist secret police, the Okhrana, had recommended a rather different set of rules, all of them designed to take and maintain power. Communists were therefore part of public politics in countries where that was possible, including Australia, and they were always preparing for illegal or 'underground' activity in the event that the state turned on them, as they were convinced it ultimately would.

Surveillance and intelligence agencies were just coming into their own in the first decades of the twentieth century. Surveillance of 'aliens' and 'enemies' began in earnest in the period of the First World War. In Britain, the Special Intelligence Bureau was established in 1909, and in Australia the Commonwealth Investigation Branch was established in 1916. Their chief task was to track enemy agents, and their targets were Germans, Sinn Fein, and soon, socialist agitators. The extensive surveillance organization and activity generated by the war was ready to be turned against internal dissent after it, and the state archives of both Australia and the United Kingdom reveal that informers were part of the communist movement, that mail was intercepted and opened, that headquarters of communist organizations were occasionally raided by police, and that public meetings held by communists were often monitored (eg, PRO, HO 45/25574).

In Australia, the Commonwealth Police force—formed only in late 1917 under the War Precautions Regulations—was tasked with keeping an eye on political subversives. Prior to the First World War, socialists had been imprisoned, and during the war members of the Industrial Workers of the World were tried, imprisoned, and even deported (Turner 1967). There was considerable suspicion of socialists and worker radicals, compounded by the events in Russia in 1917, and deepened by Russian withdrawal from the war. The communists were not going to have an easy time. Nor did they. Those Russians and other foreigners who tried to help them were deported (Evans 1989); their mail was intercepted. The government put other frustrations in the way of the communists, including prohibiting the importation of communist periodical literature, under its censorship powers, and disallowing the mailing of communist newspapers within Australia via the government monopoly mail system. The Bruce-Page government also banned printed material arriving from the USSR.

Political surveillance in Australia was conducted by both Military Intelligence and the Investigation Bureau of the Attorney-General's Department. The government tried to frustrate as well as intimidate the communists. The frustration came from using the office of Censor to identify a number of communist publications that could not be brought into the country: this began in 1921, and by 1927 'a list of 129 papers and journals had been declared to be "prohibited importations"' (Cain 1983, 243) and Australian publications that

could not be put through the post. In February 1932 the Post Office declared that six communist papers would not be allowed transmission through the post under Section 30E of the Crimes Act (Cain 1983, 247). One of these papers was the communists' main journal, the *Workers' Weekly*, with a claimed circulation of over 13,000 copies per week in 1931. Subscriptions were understandably affected (and the Western Australian communists as a consequence established their own newspaper). There was, however, an element of bluff involved in this move. The Crimes Act prohibited the transmission of publications of an 'unlawful association', but the CPA had not been found unlawful in any legal proceeding. The CPA, according to Cain, accepted the ban 'rather than challenge it in court and run the risk of being suppressed altogether' (Cain 1983, 248). As it was, the government of Joseph Lyons, under Attorney-General John Latham, pressed the issue. It prosecuted the editor of the *Workers' Weekly* for soliciting funds for an unlawful association, but after being found guilty in a lower court, the conviction was ultimately quashed in the High Court (Macintyre 1998, 214). The High Court's decision was based on a point of law, not on the protection of civil liberties, and the CPA remained nervous about its legality until its situation was definitively clarified on 15 June 1940, when the Party was banned.

With the benefit of hindsight, and given the failure of the CPA to establish any real bases except in leading certain sectors of the industrial trade union movement, we may say that the reaction against the communists was excessive. The Party numbered officially 128 at the end of 1922, 296 in mid-1927, 486 in 1930, 2093 at the end of 1931, 2,873 in 1935, and 4,421 members by the middle of 1939; the vast bulk of its members were unemployed males (Macintyre 1998, 179, 180, 351, 428; Document 49). In the United States, by comparison, there were 10,266 dues-paying members in October 1931, and by March 1932 there were 14,374. In early 1935, a meeting of Central Committee of the CPUSA was told that membership at December 1934 was 31,000, but that the turnover of members was very high (CALC 515-1-3742).

Given the spectre of communism, governments' reactions may be easily understood, but what is less easy for defenders of liberal democracy to justify was the inroads into rights of the freedom to organize and speak, inroads represented by the use of government power to intercept mail and harass communists. It is not enough to say that these were rights that the communists themselves did not respect (though western communists nevertheless expressed outrage when their rights were violated). The British House of Commons was a forum in the early 1920s where these issues were regularly aired, covering matters such as the deportation of aliens, the privacy of the mail, and whether or not advocating communism was illegal. The prohibition of communist organizations in Britain was under active consideration. In December 1925, the Labour Opposition in the Commons moved to censure the government for initiating the prosecution of some members of the CPGB as 'a violation of the

traditional British rights of freedom of speech and publication of opinion' (Ramsay MacDonald, Parliamentary Debates, Commons, vol. 188, 1 December 1925). That prosecution had sent 12 men to jail, and followed a police raid of communist headquarters. The Home Secretary, Joynson-Hicks, replied that these men were found guilty of advocating the violent overthrow of the government, and there was additional discussion about the extent to which the Comintern exercised control over the CPGB. Joynson-Hicks invoked 'a conspiracy, with foreign money, with foreign instructions'.

Police and other surveillance of communists may have fed into the latter's sense of their own importance, but it put an emphasis on the secrecy of communications. The CAAL documents do not provide any evidence of ciphered messages in the Australian documents, but it is clear from Australian government files that a cipher was found on Zuzenko when he was arrested in Melbourne in August 1922 (Windle 2004a). Ciphers were extensively used by the American communists. In 1922, for example, there are a number of reports to Moscow from the US party that break into cipher (CALC 515-1-93). Report 8, dated 16 January 1922 includes this: 'Please change the figure system in the heavy code that Gorny is using from the I432I432 combination to the simple system of 2I2I2I2I ...'. And it finishes with the sentence 'Expect to report in person when the violets bloom in the spring': a code devised, perhaps, by a devotee of Gilbert and Sullivan. The message was signed 'Carr'. Carr later reported to the Secretariat on 25 January: 'Rush ten thousand [dollars] to be used solely for Damon, Caxton and others release through special arrangements'. This request was sent via cable from America. G. Lewis, in a letter of 2 February, includes ciphered material, but also: 'By the time this letter reaches you our salesman will have reached your territory for the stock holders conference you mentioned' (and so on, in this vein).

Considering that the communist movement was dedicated to the overthrow of the government, the latter's reactions may even be seen as relatively restrained. Australian citizens were uninterested, or mildly hostile to communism, linking it with a foreign power. Membership of the CPA remained small throughout this period, and was mostly concentrated in metropolitan areas, except for a lively base in northern Queensland during the 1930s and 40s (McIlroy 2001). This is not to say that the influence of the CPA was negligible, for it agitated among trade unionized workers (and Australian workers were the most heavily trade unionized in the world, largely on account of the centralized wage fixing system). Communists attempted to gain positions of responsibility in some trade unions, so that they could exert more influence.

The official response of governments within the liberal tradition to the challenge of communism was put by the British Home Secretary a number of times in the House of Commons, but its characteristic theme was as follows: 'I

have no power to stop mere propaganda of opinions, however false or harmful, even when the propagandists are in receipt of pay from foreign sources' (Parliamentary Debates, Commons, vol. 151, 7 March 1922). What would be stopped, he made clear, was incitement to violence. But there was nevertheless a great deal of activity to gain information about and to frustrate the communists. The fundamental question was how far one could tolerate those who would show you no tolerance.

The CPA: autonomous or subordinate?

The relationship between the Comintern and its constituent parties is often misunderstood as a simple case of foreign control of a local organization, or as a branch structure. It is certainly true that the amount of local autonomy was limited, that policies and leaders ultimately required the authorization of Moscow. But the idea that Moscow acted as a grand puppeteer should not be too readily accepted. Apart from anything else—and in Australia's case in particular—the difficulties of regular and rapid communication between the Comintern and the CPA made such detailed control impossible. Some of the more jarring conflicts in the relationship may be put down to time lapses. In the notorious case of Moscow's surprise rapprochement with Nazism in 1939 (after years of pillorying Nazism), the local communists were taken unawares, and insisted on calling for the defeat of the Nazis in the war that broke out only a week later. They were soon brought into line by Moscow explaining that the war was an inter-imperialist one in which Nazi Germany and liberal democracies were equally evil. In the relationship between the Comintern and its parties, Moscow ultimately had its way.

CPA leaders and members did not see themselves as puppets of Moscow, but rather as part of, or partners in, the same struggle against capitalism. Communists were citizens of the world. The opposition of capitalist governments to the Soviet Union was seen as an attack on all communists, and opposition to one's government was not difficult to justify or sustain. Where nationalism intruded, as it did in those countries which fought against the Soviet Union, communists were sometimes torn, but at least until the 1950s tended to regard Soviet victory not as Russian domination, but as socialist unity. These illusions would collapse completely by the 1980s, but that was a long time away from the period with which we are concerned.

Communists believed that Russia was not a foreign power but a glimpse of the future, where 'foreignness' would be irrelevant. Perhaps the closest parallel that can be drawn with the communist quest is the Roman Catholic Church, which has a type of self-rule in the various countries in which it operates, but whose head is—in a celebrated phrase from the seventeenth century—a 'foreign prince', and whose emissaries and leaders are appointed in and by the Vatican

in Rome. Catholics do not think of themselves as agents of the Vatican, but rather as engaged in a universal struggle for human redemption and against evil.

The parallel between Moscow and the Vatican is not fanciful. In Australia there was until the 1960s a sectarian edge to mainstream parliamentary politics, with the conservatives distrustful of the role of the (in the early period largely Irish) Church. As a result of Cardinal Moran's part in opposing and helping defeat the proposal for conscription put at two referendums during the First World War (October 1916 and December 1917), the Australian government was unhappy about the use of ciphered messages in communications between the Vatican and the Australian outpost of the Church, and complained in 1920 to the Colonial Office (PRO, CO 418/186). The Church saw itself as the implacable foe of communism, in a struggle it waged by means ordinary and extraordinary. Stalin may have underestimated its resources—'how many divisions has the Pope?', he is reputed to have asked in the Second World War—but the Church mobilized in various ways to defeat what it saw as its mortal enemy. In Australia, the Catholic Social Studies Movement (the 'Movement') adopted communist methods to defeat the communists in the trade unions and in the Australian Labor Party, and precipitated the split within that party in 1955. (More recently, Pope John Paul II seems to have played a key role in the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (Bernstein and Politi 1997).) In the absence of communism, Catholicism can perhaps now refocus its opposition to materialistic and individualistic capitalism, begun in the Papal encyclical of *Rerum Novarum* (which opposed socialism, but also stressed the responsibilities of property).

CPA members knew that their party was closely connected with Moscow. One of the conditions of affiliation with the Comintern was that the Soviet Union had to be defended. That was done in official party resolutions, in their newspapers and theoretical journals, and in their discussions and arguments with ordinary workers. The exact nature of the relationship was probably less well known by ordinary members, though it was certainly a fact of life for all CPA leaders. In particular, conference resolutions and general strategic directions had to be approved by Moscow, and many were initiated in Moscow. Nevertheless, CPA members would probably not have baulked at this level of contact, or 'interference', with their party, because of Moscow's enormous reserves of authority.

Defending the Soviet Union became more and more difficult, not just because of the greater amount of critical information being published in the 'bourgeois' press, but because of the sometimes erratic political line emanating from Moscow. It is difficult to know to what extent communists discounted this negative information, but they probably dismissed much of it as lies and propaganda. Dismissal became much more difficult after 1956, when for the first time a Soviet

leader admitted that communists had made mistakes. That was a striking change that disturbed many communists around the world.

Khrushchev's testimony given in a secret speech to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU was damning. Nevertheless Ted Hill, one of the CPA's leaders, at first lied about the authenticity of Khrushchev's speech when it was published in the West, even though he had seen a copy of the original. By the end of 1956, the Party would concede only that Stalin had made 'mistakes' (rather than 'crimes'), public discussion of the matter in its newspaper, *Tribune*, was prohibited, and portraits of Stalin were still displayed prominently in Party offices. The CPA made some grudging criticisms of Stalin during its 1958 conference, but turned them into an attack on the 'revisionists' in the Party—those who wanted a fuller discussion of Khrushchev's report—as enemies of socialism (Blake 1984, 96).

Of all the shocks to have affected the communist movement—dramatic changes of political direction, communist invasions of neighbours, splits between communist states, and even the collapse of communism—1956 was perhaps the greatest. Khrushchev's speech, recalls Georgi Arbatov, 'came like a bolt out of the blue, shaking the Party and our whole society to its roots' (cited Gaddis 1997, 208). Above all, the aura of infallibility surrounding the leadership had been destroyed. That claim had virtually paralysed independent thought in the communist movement. But the logic of admitting fallibility could be devastating. The British communist playwright, Arnold Wesker, reflected on this point in 1956 when explaining his mother's dilemma: 'If she admits that the party has been wrong, that Stalin committed grave offences, then she admits that she has been wrong. All the people she so mistrusted and hated she must now have second thoughts about, and this she cannot do ... You can admit the error of an idea but not the conduct of a whole life' (cited Beckett 1995, 140).

In the wake of 1956, however, other arguments emerged to balance the equation. In defending the increasingly evident brutality of communist regimes, many communists began to argue that the First World War and its senseless carnage had changed the whole moral equation of modern life. Humphrey McQueen, for example, took this approach when he insisted that 'the Great War had altered the rules of every game' (McQueen 1997, 174). Any means necessary to stop this slaughter, and end this system of slaughter, were justified. If it was not stopped, it would happen again. The First World War, in other words, had exposed the true nature and tendency of capitalist society, which was murderous. A system bent on murder cannot be argued away; it requires force and even deception. But if this can be used as a justification for the Bolshevik Revolution—and it relies upon a questionable assumption about the systemic causes of the war—it cannot be used as justification for all its consequences.

This outlook is brought to a sharp focus in the widely differing treatment accorded by many analysts to Hitler and Stalin, which forgives Stalin's crimes (but not Hitler's) on the grounds that he led a 'progressive' state. Historian Alan Bullock argues that, leaving aside the Second World War, Stalinist repression killed perhaps double those killed by Nazis, but the difference lay in the Holocaust being a *planned* extermination (Bullock 1992, 1073). Bullock concedes, however, that jointly Hitler and Stalin are responsible for a level of human suffering hitherto unparalleled. Doris Lessing, by contrast, argues that the 'decent, kind people' who joined the Soviet-supporting communist parties of the West in the 1950s and afterwards:

supported the worst, the most brutal tyranny of our time—with the exception of communist China. Hitler's Germany, which lasted thirteen years, was an infant in terror compared to Stalin's regime ... The first and main fact, the 'mind-set' of those times, was that it was taken for granted capitalism was doomed, was on its way out. Capitalism was responsible for every social ill, war included. Communism was the future for all mankind (Lessing 1997, 52).

Whether communists actually believed the argument from moral equivalence, or used it simply as a political tactic, it points to a choice in outlook between an ethic of responsibility and an ethic of absolute principles, discussed by Max Weber in 1919 (Weber 1994). It is a choice which, in the memoirs of most communists, comes down on the side of absolute principles. In supporting and justifying their activities, communists have looked not to consequences but to intentions. They find succour in their commitment and idealism. This point has been aptly put in a novel which traces the career of the well-connected (and once knighted) British spy, Anthony Blunt. In John Banville's *The Untouchable*, the Blunt character complains: 'What have I done to be so reviled in a nation of traitors who daily betray friends, wives, children, tax inspectors? I think that what they find so shocking is that someone—one of their own, that is—should actually have held to an ideal'. Robert Manne describes McQueen and many other members of the former communist Left as having 'their own moral blind spot concerning their support for totalitarian regimes and what this failure of understanding might mean' (Manne 1997).

The Comintern represented an obvious link between the CPA and Soviet Russia, but that link was not broken when the Comintern was dissolved. Indeed, it was the characteristic of the CPA's politics (and of communists more generally) that defence of the Soviet Union and its political twists and turns was an article of faith. As Otto Braun declared, 'all my life I have considered the touchstone of every Communist, regardless of nationality or situation, to be his posture towards the Soviet Union' (Braun 1982, 264). The CPA was thus hostage to the fortunes of the Soviet Union. When times were good—and they were really good for the CPA only after the Nazis had invaded the Soviet Union in June

1941, and the war had thus also become a defence of the Soviet motherland—then the Party's fortunes were good and membership was high. (Lance Sharkey claimed near the end of the war that membership was 20,000 (Sharkey 1944, 70).) When times were bad, as they were especially during the 1950s and in the Cold War more generally, membership declined. Many committed communists could not reconcile their Party membership with Khrushchev's revelations in 1956, and many moved away (some to form the 'New Left', others to shun politics or become conservatives).

The CPA after the Comintern

Though it is outside the scope of the documents presented in this book, it is worth outlining the story of the Communist Party of Australia after the end of the Comintern in 1943. The CPA survived its declaration of illegality in 1940, was reinstated to legality at the end of 1942, and achieved its highest-ever membership just after the Second World War. Ironically, its success at this time was soon to be its failure, and was linked to the fact that dogged most of its existence: its real and imagined links with the Soviet Union. In 1946, the Soviet Union—as one of the victorious allies, having sustained terrible losses during the war and been a decisive factor in the defeat of Hitler, and with an (apparently) avuncular Stalin at the helm—looked as if it would join the world in an era of post-war stability and peace. But as the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe remained, with the blockade of Berlin in 1948 and rigged communist elections elsewhere over the next couple of years, the mood soured and the Soviet Union became an inscrutable enemy behind Winston Churchill's evocative image of the Iron Curtain, 'from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic'. Membership of the CPA dropped, trade union headquarters (with the notable exception of the Federated Ironworkers Association) became communist redoubts, the Australian Security Intelligence Organization was formed by the Chifley Labor government in 1949, and the succeeding Menzies government attempted to outlaw the CPA.

What is particularly relevant for our story, however, is that—of those who were still alive—the generation who joined the CPA in the 1930s were the most dedicated, or stubborn, depending on one's view. That is because of their experience of one of capitalism's greatest human disasters: the Great Depression. It was an experience that none of them forgot (Lovell 2001). Their opposition to capitalism and their 'outsider' status threw them increasingly on their own resources to find not just political colleagues but also a social life and even marital partners. The party was a family, and Herbert Moore used the language of 'family' in his correspondence of the early 1930s (see Document 65). It comes as little surprise, therefore, that in ciphered Comintern and Soviet espionage messages, the Comintern is denoted by the term 'Bighouse'. As a family, however, they could become isolated and inward looking. Arthur Koestler described

joining a communist party as akin to a spiritual conversion (Crossman 2001). In the memoirs of Eric Aarons and Bernie Taft—both of whom devoted most of their adult lives to communism and held leadership positions in the CPA—this view is reinforced (Aarons 1993, Taft 1994). Aarons likened the CPA to a church, with its distinctive world outlook; Taft talks of the emotional attachments he had made to the Party. Intellectual conviction is only one part of the communist experience and, if it is primary in the decision to join a communist party, it is soon matched by emotional commitments that are developed to and within the Party. Joining a communist party in the West was a momentous decision. There was no confluence of ideology and self-interest, as in the communist states. As John Murphy explained, ‘Once having crossed the threshold and declared party allegiance, communists found it all the harder to step back’ (Murphy 1994, 115). Loyalty to, and support of, each other and discipline in cleaving to the party line, therefore, were types of self-defence.

In the face of widespread popular suspicion and government hostility to communists in the West, communists were sustained in their pro-Sovietism not just by their debating strategies, but also by the solidarity of the communist movement itself, as an international family. These genuine and often deeply-felt emotional bonds were an important reason why some remained communists, despite their doubts, for the threat of these bonds ending upon their renouncing pro-Sovietism was a credible deterrent. The charge of ‘traitor’ was perhaps the most devastating that could be made within the communist movement.

The relationship after the Second World War between the CPA and Moscow—no longer the Comintern, but the CPSU without intermediaries—was much more complex and convoluted. The loyalty that had been at the base of this relationship was sorely challenged. We have less detailed documentary evidence about the relationship for the period after 1943. The subservience certainly continued, but 1956—the year of Khrushchev’s ‘Secret Speech’ and the Soviet invasion of Hungary—represents a major shift. It was the time when in international anti-capitalist circles the ‘New Left’ began to form, finding its inspiration in Marx’s early, ‘humanist’ writings. The Soviet interpretation of Marxism—‘orthodoxy’—came under sustained theoretical challenge from within the Marxist tradition itself.

Prime Minister Menzies’ attempts to ban the CPA by legislation and then by Constitutional amendment were unsuccessful, but the fear of communism—in contrast to communism itself—was a factor in Australian political life for many years afterwards. This fear affected the Australian Labor Party, leading in 1955 to a split with hard-line anti-communists who formed the Democratic Labour Party and helped to keep the ALP out of federal government for a further 17 years, and influenced a popular perception of the ALP as akin to, or soft on, communists. That perception was brought to a fitting end by ridicule in the

1983 election campaign, when Labor leader (and soon-to-be Prime Minister) Bob Hawke made a successful joke out of the longstanding 'Reds-under-the-beds' scare. The CPA, having split in 1963 between those who supported Moscow and Peking, and having split again in 1971 between those who supported an independent communist line against Moscow, had a brief resurgence around the Vietnam Moratorium movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but ultimately dissolved itself at a conference in March 1991. Following its opposition to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the CPA became one of the most independent of the world's communist parties, and no longer enjoyed the support (political or financial) of Moscow. For many communists, it was not communism that had failed in the changes of 1989–91, as Eastern Europe rejected communism and then the USSR imploded; rather, it was a flawed version of communism, corrupted at various stages, depending on the commentator, by Stalin in the 1920s, Khrushchev in 1956, or Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985.

Though the CPA gained new vitality and members from the student and anti-Vietnam War movements in the late 1960s and early '70s, it keenly sensed its isolation from its preferred audience, the working class. Programmatic documents of the time reveal a sense of crisis and lack of direction. In 1987 the main resolution of the National Congress was 'Socialist Renewal: Where to Now?'. In 1984, the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) ceased its surveillance of the CPA. In 1991 the Party dissolved itself. It had finally met the classic conditions of irrelevance: its friends no longer understood what it was trying to say, and its enemies no longer cared.

Conclusion

As the Comintern aged, its relationship with its parties became more demanding. The key turning point came in Australia in 1929, with the change of CPA leadership. The importance of this change is not the merits of the respective positions, but the intervention of Moscow, the Party's compliance, and the subsequent subservience to Moscow. This led ultimately to the zig-zag of policy in late 1939 over the Second World War, and a 'defeatism' that justified the Australian government's decision to declare the Party unlawful in 1940. The CPA paid a heavy price for its slavish obedience to Moscow. The story was similar elsewhere. In the United States, Theodore Draper argued, the communist movement 'was transformed from a new expression of American radicalism to the American appendage of a Russian revolutionary power' (Draper 2003a, xi).

In the formation and early years of the Party, the CAAL documents suggest that the Comintern played a larger role than previously believed. That the Comintern was crucial for the unity of the CPA goes almost without saying: Australian communists would have split into many warring groups, and lost direction, were it not for their desire to be the Australian section of the Comintern. Their relationship was shaped by the deference and respect in which

the Comintern was held. The Australians, in general, did not question the authority (or the arguments) of whoever won the inner-party struggles in the RCP. Was it thinkable that a party that had won a revolution and was running a state could be wrong? If Communist Party members (and especially leaders) stood to gain by the relationship with Moscow, it was very little—an occasional trip to Moscow, as well as recognition. Otherwise, it was a matter of hard work, being constantly criticized for not coming up to scratch, and putting yourself in the line of government surveillance. If the ultimate prize was envisaged as taking power and enjoying its fruits, the real reward was simply a life of continuing hardship.

The main lines of the relationship between the Comintern and the CPA have been known for a long time. This collection of documents adds substance to the notion that the loyalty that the CPA paid to the Comintern was transformed into subservience. The CPA drew on a native radical tradition and on working class discontent, but its Bolshevik elements probably did more to alienate it from its Australian audience than to help its cause. Ironically, in Moscow's own calculations, the Comintern itself seems to have become far less important. After Lenin and Trotsky, the Comintern became an instrument of Soviet diplomacy, and an expendable one.