

The Pattern of the Australian Labor Party's Foreign Policy Since 1900

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For more than a decade there has been a tendency for social democratic and labour parties in the developed capitalist world to move to the right. A variety of explanations have been offered. These include discussions of loss of political direction, sometimes underpinned by shifts in the class composition of the parties or the impact of a new stage of internationalized capitalism.¹ Far less attention has been paid to two other factors. One is the impact of the period of relative economic stagnation on a global level, which has affected all countries with significant social democratic parties since the mid 1970s. This has, through higher levels of unemployment, contributed to another widespread influence on social democratic politics, lower levels of working-class self-confidence and hence of trade union and other struggles with employers and governments, despite some impressive but short-lived upsurges, notably in France, Italy and Greece, during the 1990s.

1 For example, Stuart Wilks, "Class Compromise and the International Economy: The Rise and Fall of Swedish Social Democracy," *Capital and Class*, 58 (Spring 1996), 89-112 and John Wiseman, "A Kinder Road to Hell? Labor and the Politics of Progressive Competitiveness in Australia," in Leo Panitch, ed., *Are There Alternatives? Socialist Register* (London 1996), 93-117, esp. 97.

The following account does not examine the adequacy of different attempts to explain social democracy's rightward trend. It does not question the undoubted validity of many of the criticisms of the practices of the parliamentary left today. Nor does it take issue with the argument that this trend represents an important adaptation to the realities of late twentieth-century capitalism. My concern is to challenge the conclusion of some effective critics of contemporary social democracy that there has been a fundamental break in national social democratic traditions. Colin Leys, for example, after identifying the "historic mission" of the British Labour Party "to counterpose social need to the selfishness of the market and its socially destructive effects," asserts that "New Labour has, in effect, finally broken with [the] idea of the party as a vehicle for the aspirations and ideas of a social movement, the expression of any kind of collective will."² The French Socialist Party's politics underwent "a cultural revolution," according to George Ross. "Earlier, capitalism was to be rejected and transcended. Henceforth a 'mixed economy' would rebuild France's competitiveness in the capitalist international economy."³ Their position implies or explicitly promotes the possibility of reviving "real" or "genuine" social democracy.

Graham Maddox makes a similar argument about the Australian Labor Party (ALP). The Labor tradition, he argues, was "betrayed" under Bob Hawke's leadership.⁴ It is possible to assess the idea of a fundamental discontinuity in social democratic policy by examining a range of policies and structures.⁵ Here, I take issue with Maddox's general position and hence with those who take parallel

2 Colin Leys, "The British Labour Party's Transition from Socialist to Capitalism" in Leo Panitch, ed., *Are There Alternatives*, 26-7.

3 George Ross, "The Changing Face of Popular Power in France," in Frances Fox Piven, ed., *Labor Parties in Postindustrial Societies* (New York 1992), 90-1.

4 Graham Maddox, *The Hawke Government and Labor Tradition* (Ringwood 1989), 4.

5 See Rick Kuhn, "A Comment on Maddox and Battin, Johnson and Manning," *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 27, 2 (1992), 357-61.

stances on other social democratic parties by examining the history of its foreign policies in particular.

There is no doubt that the foreign policies of the ALP did not cover the Party in glory during its continuous period in office between 1983 and 1996, under Prime Ministers Bob Hawke and, from late 1991, Paul Keating. Labor sought to maintain the established order of access for foreign (especially Australian) capital to the resources of Papua-New Guinea (PNG), until 1975 effectively an Australian colony. The indifference of the PNG Government to the effects of Australian based company CRA's giant copper mine on the island of Bougainville led local people to organize an armed resistance movement. The insurgents closed down the mine in 1989 and then drove PNG forces from Bougainville. Australia provided military assistance to PNG by training personnel, providing ongoing financial aid and key hardware, notably helicopters, to help suppress the movement.⁶ Without these measures the PNG government could not have sustained its war against the people of Bougainville and retaken parts of the island.

The Labor Governments' level of commitment to human rights is amply displayed in their continuing indifference to the right to self-determination of the East Timorese. Keating suggested that the Clinton Administration should tone down its criticism of human rights abuses in both Indonesian and China.⁷ In 1995 he argued that the applications for refugee status of East Timorese who had reached Australia should be denied because they were not only Indonesian but also Portuguese citizens.⁸ This was shortly after the ALP had argued in the International Court of Justice that Portugal had no political or economic status in East Timor. In 1995 the Government signed a military treaty with the generals who ran

6 See D. Oliver, *Black Islanders: A Personal Perspective of Bougainville, 1937-1991* (Melbourne 1991), 230-1 and *Australian Statements on Papua New Guinea*, Vol. 1 (Canberra 1990-October 1993), 84-148.

7 T. Burton, "Keating Cools His Advice on Human Rights in Asia," *Australian Financial Review*, 15 September 1993, 13.

8 Gerard Noonan, "Speaking Softly Makes Us Cowards," *Canberra Times*, 12 October 1995, 13.

Indonesia, the first such arrangement with any country since the 1960s. This general approach facilitated the 1989 Treaty with Indonesia on oil exploration in the seas between Australia and Timor, the Timor Gap, and the efforts of Australian capital to profit from the rapid growth of the Indonesian economy under Suharto's military regime.⁹ In addition, Indochinese refugees, so called "boat people," were interned for years and deprived of legal advice, cultural and educational facilities in remote north-western Australia.

In 1990 the Hawke Government enthusiastically, though with one rather than both hands, grasped the opportunity to help the United States overcome the "Vietnam syndrome" through war in the Persian Gulf. Australia's contribution, a few frigates and some other naval and medical personnel, was cheap and safe compared to that of the USA and other allies. But it showed good faith. What is more, "Australia's decision to become involved in the Gulf does not appear to have emanated from a direct request by the US Government although there is no doubt the US Government welcomed it as part of its efforts in developing an international momentum to enforce the UN sanctions."¹⁰ The logic of this decision paralleled that which took Australia into Vietnam under the conservative Liberal Prime Minister Bob Menzies, that is, a concern to push the United States into playing a more aggressive role in policing the world.

Australia also participated in the US/United Nations adventure in Somalia, justified as an effort to bring food (at a time when the famine was in any case easing) and peace (three years later US marines had to be sent in again so that the last United Nations personnel could withdraw under their cover). Labor's own great

9 See, for example R. Callick, "Australian Makes It Mining Indonesia," *Australian Financial Review*, 29 March 1993, 15.

10 M. Cockburn, "The Politics of Australian Involvement," in M. Goot and R. Tiffin, *Australia's Gulf War* (Melbourne 1992), 44.

international "peace" initiative also took place under the umbrella of the United Nations during the early 1990s. Australia intervened in Cambodia to engineer a settlement which minimized the influence of both the Khmer Rouge, backed by China, and Vietnam. The success of the operation is perhaps better measured by the telecommunications and other contracts Australian corporations (including state-owned Telstra) won in Indochina and its contribution to Australia's economic and political profile in southeast Asia than by the level of peace and well-being it bestowed on the people of Cambodia.

The problem with Maddox's argument about discontinuity in the history of the ALP is not, therefore, a matter of overly negative or uncharitable assessments of recent developments. The problem is his rose-tinted view of the more distant past. The following argument seeks to demonstrate that Labor's foreign policies during the 1980s and 1990s were not an aberration. The pattern of ALP policy has been, and continues to be, shaped by two broad sets of factors: the Party's "material constitution," its relationships with different social classes, and the logic of capital accumulation in Australia, including its relationships with world capitalism. Neither of these have been frozen since the 1890s when the Labor Party was formed. But both have been characterized by fundamental continuities.

The nature of the Labor Party and the significance of its nationalism are considered in the next section. The history of Labor's foreign policy over the long period before the Vietnam War is then explored in an account whose originality lies in the attempt at a Marxist synthesis rather than reliance on primary sources. The ALP's position on the Vietnam War is the focus of the following more detailed discussion. This episode requires attention because the ALP's progressive historical credentials in foreign policy currently rely, to a very large degree, on misconceptions about its attitudes to Australia's involvement in Vietnam. The final substantive section offers a further summary account of the Labor Party's stance in the period after the Vietnam War.

The Australian Labor Party and Nationalism

Even before Federation in 1901, Australian society was overwhelmingly organized on the basis of production for local and international markets. Australian prosperity has depended on the stability of world capitalism to provide outlets for Australian exports; strategic imports, particularly capital and intermediate goods; and inflows of investment. Given the size of the Australian population (less than 3.8 million in 1901, rising to 7.6 million in 1947 and to over 18 million in 1994) governments have never been in a position to exert a major influence on world political relations. But they have maintained or sought powerful allies which had similar interests.

The Labor Party has always been one of the two main political parties at the Commonwealth level and has formed the federal government for 34 of the last 95 years. Two basic continuities have characterized the Party during the twentieth Century. The following sections demonstrate that these have consistently shaped the ALP's foreign policies.

First, the ALP is a social democratic party in the sense that it has a working-class base and has a structure which reflects its parliamentary orientation. It is geared to winning elections and operates within the broad parameters of the existing state. Today the mainstream of the Labor Party openly proclaims its commitment to more rational and humane capitalism. In the past, the same orientation was sometimes justified in terms of the amelioration of capitalism into socialism. But the ALP still retains a base in the working class, which it not only mobilizes electorally but also relates to through trade unions. Union officials play an important role within the Labor Party both formally, if their unions are affiliated and hence are entitled to representation at State Conferences, and informally as activists and Party office holders. The role of Labor Parliamentarians in politics is a partial political analogue to that of union officials in economic affairs. Both mediate between the state and capital and their working-class constituents, though the ability of workers to influence Labor MPs is much more attenuated than their

capacity to exert pressure on their union officials. The ALP has also been characterized by internal cleavages and factions which, at least indirectly, reflect the rival pressures from the Party's working-class base and the requirements of managing Australian capitalism, that is, meeting the needs of the capitalist class whose well-being is an index of national economic stability and prosperity.¹¹ The class characteristics of the Labor Party have decisively shaped important aspects of domestic economic and industrial relations policy. Their impact on foreign policy has been less direct.

Secondly, Labor has consistently, to use its own language, sought to "serve the national interest." This has entailed efforts to appeal electorally to all, or almost all, sections of the population. But a longstanding Marxist analysis of nationalism, recently extended in a substantial literature on the origins and contemporary significance of nationalism, suggests that national and class interests cannot be divorced.¹² Nations are, to use Anderson's term, "imagined communities." Capitalist and middle classes, and intellectuals associated with them, create national identities as ideologies which mobilize broad support behind projects that serve their interests.

The creation of a federated Australian state, as opposed to the separate colonies, is a good example. Federation served the interests of the dominant capitalist class who sought the economies of scale of a larger domestic market created by a state presiding over the whole continent. The greater autonomy from Britain of this new state also provided local capital with more scope to pursue its

11 For a more detailed discussions of the nature of the Labor Party see Rick Kuhn, "What a Labor Government Is," *Politics* 24, 2 (November 1989), 147-53 and "Labor in Power" *Arena*, 88 (Spring 1989), 134-43; Tom Bramble, "Managers of Discontent: Problems of Labour Leadership," in Rick Kuhn and Tom O'Lincoln, eds., *Class and Class Conflict in Australia* (Melbourne 1996), 40-57.

12 For an overview see C. Harman, "The Return of the National Question," *International Socialism*, 56 (Autumn 1992), 3-62; B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London 1983); E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge 1990).

security interests. The newly federated states maintained the conservative structure of bi-cameral colonial legislatures which were extended to the federal Parliament. In its upper house, the Senate, voters from the smallest, least economically developed States — which therefore had the least numerous working classes — were vastly overrepresented. The conservative nature of the new state generated hostility to federation in radical sections of the labour movement, while politicians and the daily press promoted nationalism in the form of commitment to prosperity and to the new national institutions.¹³

This is not to say that the “imagined communities” of nations are simply illusory. Residents and citizens of modern nation states do have important and real common experiences. *Residents* of Australia are subject to the same state. *Citizens* of Australia generally have had the same *formal* rights. But nationalism privileges individuals’ membership in the national community at the expense of other, particularly class, identities. For most of the Australian capitalist class, national and class identity are not in conflict. State action, by virtue of its ongoing commitment to prosperity in the context of a capitalist economy, is geared to capitalist interests in rapid capital accumulation. So the protection of capitalist property and the promotion of profit making to secure investment and growth against domestic and foreign challenges is intrinsic to both capitalists’ and national interests. The Labor Party’s longstanding nationalism (and, until the late 1960s, racism) therefore reveals a preparedness to manage and promote Australian capitalism and hence the interests of its dominant class.

Workers, on the other hand, have an interest in improved wages and conditions which may reduce profitability. They would also benefit from eliminating their status as appendages of capital by abolishing capitalist property, whether they are intent on achieving

13 See R. White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688-1980* (Sydney 1981), for a systematic discussion of the invention of Australian national identity and class influences on it.

this goal at any particular time or not. These contradictory interests of labour and capital are concealed by the illusion that all residents or citizens are “in the same boat” and will all benefit from the pursuit of the national interest.

Nationalism arguments, promoted by politicians, newspapers and leading public figures, addressed real problems faced by the working class and nationalist strategies found working-class adherents, particularly when alternative approaches had little organized or influential support. Competition from less well paid foreign or local Chinese labour did put pressure on the wages of European Australian workers. But the racist and nationalist response of excluding “non-whites” from Australia, which had considerable middle- and ruling-class backing, was not the only logical possibility for local workers. The Chinese Workers Union in the Melbourne furniture industry, for example, made a donation to a fund for striking shearers in 1890. The European Furniture Trade Union immediately demanded, on racist grounds, that the money be returned, offering to pay an equivalent amount. In 1892, the same European union made no effort to support Chinese workers in the industry striking over wage cuts against Chinese employers. In both cases racist divisions served the interests of bosses.¹⁴ In order to overcome domestic and international divisions in the working class, the radical wing of the labour movement often vehemently opposed nationalism and racism. As early as 1887, the Australian Socialist League opposed anti-Chinese agitation. Later organized political expressions of this internationalist current were the Industrial Workers of the World, from 1907, the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) from the early 1920s until 1935, and Trotskyist organizations, whose significance grew from the late 1960s. Since its

14 Andrew Marcus, “Divided We Fall: the Chinese and the Melbourne Furniture Trade Union, 1870-1900,” *Labour History*, 26 (May 1974), 8-10. Also see Ray Markey, “Populist Politics: Racism and Labor in NSW, 1880-1900,” in Ann Curthoys and Andrew Marcus, eds., *Who Are Our Enemies? Racism and the Working Class in Australia* (Sydney 1978), 74, for a discussion of the relationship between racism and nationalism.

formation, the Labor Party has always been the dominant political current in the Australian working class. But it has never been the only one.

Labor Foreign Policy Before Vietnam

To World War I

British imperial authorities had cultivated racism before the invasion of Australia was contemplated. They and local elites in the new colonial settler state continued to use it to justify the expropriation of the Aborigines and to foster cross-class solidarity against mythical Asian threats.¹⁵ The early colonial Labor Parties shared in a racist paranoia which had been the common sense of Australian politics and the mainstream of the labour movement for decades.¹⁶ “By peddling racism more strongly than anyone else, and by integrating it with other policies, the Labor party could hope to appeal to a broad populist base in the electorate, given widespread racial beliefs across all classes.”¹⁷ So the first plank of the Federal Party’s first platform was “The cultivation of an Australian sentiment based upon the maintenance of racial purity.” The Party leader, J. C. Watson, explained his reason for supporting a racist immigration policy: “the objection I have to the mixing of these coloured people with the people of Australia, although I admit it may be tinged with considerations of an industrial nature, lies in the main in the possibility of racial contamination.” The newly

15 For the application of the concept of “colonial settler state” to Australia see Tom O’Lincoln, “An imperialist Colony?” *International Socialist*, 10 (Melbourne August 1980), 39-45.

16 V. Burgmann, “Capital and Labour: Responses to Immigration in the Nineteenth Century,” in A. Curthoys and A. Marcus, *Who Are Our Enemies?* (Sydney 1978), 20-34; Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia* (Ringwood 1978).

17 R. Markey, *The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales, 1880-1900* (Sydney 1988), 296.

federated Commonwealth pursued a policy of "White Australia."¹⁸ A spurious dictation test was used to exclude people the authorities felt were not white. The test was administered to such people in a European language they did not know. At times the "non-white" spouses of Australian citizens were excluded or deported. Some of the pettiest and most vindictive applications of this racist policy were made under the Labor Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell, between 1945 and 1949, at a time of mass migration.¹⁹ He was criticized for this by the conservative opposition. The White Australia policy was slowly liberalized under conservative governments after 1949 and finally abolished after Gough Whitlam became Labor Prime Minister in 1972.

During the first decades of the twentieth century a political consensus emerged across the main political parties, including the ALP, that embraced not only racism but also protectionism and industrial arbitration. The differences inside the ALP over free trade and protection were overcome in 1907. The Party became firmly protectionist, supporting the exclusion of foreign made goods, principally through the imposition of tariffs but also by means of quotas, which competed with local products.

Hand in hand with protectionist policies was an espousing of the benefits of continuing membership in the British Empire, Australia's principal export market and the main source of overseas capital. As the preeminent world power, Britain was also the most desirable military ally for a small country. In tacit acknowledgment of this situation, the mainstream of the ALP accepted Australian involvement in the Empire as the foundation of Australian foreign

18 Quoted in D. Johanson, "History of the White Australia Policy," in K. Rivett, ed., *Immigration: Control or Colour Bar?* (Melbourne 1962), 14.

19 *Ibid.*, 26. Also see L. F. Crisp, *Ben Chifley: A Political Biography* (Sydney 1977), 294; G. C. Bolton, "1939-51," in Frank Crowley, *A New History of Australia* (Melbourne 1976), 482. For Calwell's own explanation of his notorious outburst, "Two Wongs Do Not Make a White," see A. Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not* (Adelaide 1978), 109.

relations. Some members condemned imperialism and the Party was hostile to the idea of Imperial federation (proposals for closer political and economic integration in the British Empire around the turn of the century). But Labor was far from favouring republicanism or withdrawal from the Empire. One of the first sustained expositions of Laborism, published by the Australian Workers' Union, mainstay of the Party in rural areas, was happy about calling on the Imperial Parliament to change legislation to help solve the "financial muddle" in which Australia found itself.²⁰

While accepting membership in the Empire as a framework, Labor's defence policy did lay greater stress on building up local armed forces than did the conservative parties.²¹ The first Federal Labor platform called for "A Citizen Army." But this was a position shared with many conservative figures. Both Watson, the first Labor Prime Minister, and William Morris Hughes, who later led the Party, were members of the Australian Naval Defence League, the main militarist lobby in Australia. Racism was an important element in Australian militarism particularly after Japan's victory over Russia in 1905. Andrew Fisher's 1910 Labor Government, the first with a majority in both Houses of Parliament, established the Australian Navy. To secure the national interest against external threat, it introduced compulsory military training for "men" between 12 and 26 years old, known as "boy conscription." There was systematic resistance to the legislation, based in more militant sections of the labour movement. "By 1915 when 161 000 youths had been trained, there had been 34 000 prosecutions for failing to meet the various demands of the scheme and 7 000 detentions."²²

20 H. I. Jensen, *The Rising Tide* (Sydney 1909), 56.

21 M. Perks, "Foreign and Defence Policies and Policy Making in the Australian Labor Parties, 1916-30," MA thesis, Australian National University (1974), 4.

22 A. Jordens, "Conscription," in *Australians: A Historical Dictionary* (Sydney 1987), 88.

On the outbreak of World War I, Fisher promised “the last man and the last shilling” for the war effort. Labor’s Manifesto in the war-time election campaign of 1914 stated, “our interests and our very existence are bound up with those of the Empire we shall pursue with the utmost rigour and determination every course necessary for the defence of the Commonwealth and the Empire in any and every contingency.”²³ When his successor as Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, tried to extend this to conscription for overseas service in two referenda, he faced massive opposition in the working class and union movement and, as a consequence, inside the ALP. Both referenda were defeated. While there was an internationalist current in the broader labour movement, epitomized by the Industrial Workers of the World, racist arguments were frequently used against conscription and the War in Europe.²⁴ Hughes ratted on the Labor Party, taking other MPs and a minority of the rank and file with him into a fanatically pro-war “National” Government dominated by conservatives. After this split, the Party moved to the left but its basic orientation in foreign policy did not change. The federal party never went further than calling for a negotiated peace in Europe.

World War I to World War II

As opinion in the Party changed during the War, sentiments in favour of international arbitration to avoid war emerged and Labor subsequently supported the League of Nations. The world-wide upsurge of class struggle during and immediately after the Great War, which included the Russian revolution, also touched the Australian working class and had an impact on the Labor Party, generating greater suspicions about the imperial relationship. Working-class internationalist arguments were voiced inside the Party as well as pacifist, racist and nationalist sentiments. But in

23 Perks, “Foreign and Defence Policies,” 4.

24 *Ibid.*, also H. McQueen, *A New Britannia* (Ringwood 1970), 79.

1918, “a plank was adopted in favour of complete Australian self-government ‘as a British community.’ It went no further than that.”²⁵ The ALP placed some hope in submarines and aircraft “as a substitute for closer Imperial partnership,”²⁶ though not as an alternative to membership in the Empire. There were also nationalist and internationalist concerns about the detrimental consequences that could follow Australian involvement in Britain’s imperialist adventures, particularly after the Chanak crisis, a military confrontation between Britain and Turkey, of September 1922. Conflicts in the Party led to an ill-defined foreign policy. But as the tide of working-class militancy subsided, the Parliamentarians reasserted their dominance and “a trend towards moderate and electorally acceptable policies was apparent”²⁷ in foreign and domestic policy.

The ALP was only in a position to shape Australian foreign policy directly during the inter-war period when it briefly held office from 1929 to 1931. But the Scullin Labor Government made no effort to change Australia’s foreign policy. Senior Labor Ministers attended the London Conference on Naval Disarmament, supporting the British position, and then the Imperial Conference in 1930: “It was clear from these decisions, made when the full force of the Depression had yet to break upon the Labor government, that the ALP in office was little inclined to diverge to any significant extent from the policy of its opponents.”²⁸ The Scullin Government did end compulsory military training, mainly to save money.²⁹

Other retrenchment measures, at issue in heated public debate over Australia’s domestic and foreign economic policy in the early 1930s, produced a rift between the Federal organization and the

25 A. Calwell, *Labor’s Role in Modern Society* (Melbourne 1963), 163.

26 Perks, “Foreign and Defence Policies,” 279 and F. Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour: The Left in Australia* (Sydney 1981), 172.

27 Farrell, *ibid.*, 169

28 Perks, “Foreign and Defence Policies,” 273

29 Jordens, “Conscription.”

New South Wales Labor Party led by Jack Lang, who offered his own plan for dealing with the Depression. Conservative economists drafted the "Premiers' Plan," which was advocated by the conservative parties and which Scullin eventually adopted. Treasurer Ted Theodore and his dissident economist adviser R. F. Irvine, proposed the "Theodore Plan." It included steps like those advocated by Keynes in Britain, such as lower interest rates, higher taxation of income from interest, deficit spending and devaluation of the currency. Its emphasis on fiscal and monetary policies as means to overcome capitalist crises and of reconciling the interests of capital and labour anticipated the post World War II ideology expressed by social democratic parties around the world. But the hostility of the conservative parties, newspapers and business in general resulted in a campaign against Theodore on the basis of his earlier shady business dealings as a State politician in Queensland, and discredited both him and his proposals.

The tradition of radical "Money Power" populism in the labour movement was evident in Lang's proposals. The Money Power perspective understood society as divided between mainly foreign financial interests and their lackeys on the one hand and the "people" on the other. The Lang Plan was explicitly counterposed to the idea of expropriating capital. It proposed that Australian governments cease paying interest to British bondholders, that interest on domestic debt be reduced to three percent and that Australia abandon the gold standard. Given Australia's dependence on international loan and export markets, such a policy could only have resulted in lower levels of domestic income. These dramatic implications were never seriously explored by advocates of the Lang Plan. But Lang's verbal radicalism attracted massive popular and especially working class support. He was able to tap widespread bitterness towards capitalism and conservative policies. At a time when unemployment and the collapse of unionism in many sectors meant most workers lacked the confidence or the opportunity to express this bitterness through industrial militancy, Lang seemed to be a popular champion who would act on behalf of ordinary people. He reinforced his support by appealing to racist

prejudices. The Government adopted the Premiers' Plan, which involved savage cutbacks in Government spending, including pensions and public service salaries, and the maintenance, as far as possible, of established ties with Britain. In March 1931 the NSW Labor Party and the federal organization split. Scullin was defeated in the December 1931 elections, while Lang was dismissed by the State Governor in May 1932.³⁰

As international tensions increased during the mid 1930s, both Lang's separate NSW Labor Party and the Federal organization were hostile to Australia becoming involved in overseas conflicts. They condemned the imposition of sanctions by the League of Nations on Italy, after its invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1935. An element in this position was Labor's large Catholic membership and the Church's favourable attitude to Mussolini. The left in both Labor Parties supported sanctions, on the basis of a logic most consistently expressed by the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). The Party developed a membership of several thousand for the first time during the Depression. Stalinized during the early 1930s, it loyally followed every turn in Russian foreign policy until the mid 1960s.

Out of a concern not to generate renewed factional tensions and despite his personal inclinations, John Curtin, the leader of a reunited Party, and other senior Party figures did not comment on the Spanish Civil War.³¹ To increase defence self-reliance, recapitulating the preoccupation that led to the creation of the Australian Navy, the ALP was the strongest advocate of building up the Australian airforce. Although the contraction of British influence

30 See P. Love's account of Money Power ideas, including the "Battle of the Plans," *Labour and the Money Power: Australian Labour Populism, 1890-1950* (Melbourne 1984) and R. Kuhn "Paradise on the Instalment Plan: The Economic Thought of the Australian Labour Movement between the Depression and the Long Boom," PhD Thesis, University of Sydney (1985), 22-34.

31 Farrell, *International Socialism*, 217. On "isolation" in the ALP during this period see E. M. Andrews, *Isolationism and Appeasement in Australia* (Canberra 1970).

made it less appealing as a protector and economic partner, flirtation with isolationism did not entail a rejection of participation in the British Empire which was the mainstay of the foreign policy of conservative governments during the 1920s and 1930s. Neither abandonment of the Empire nor an alternative alliance were realistic options at any stage during the interwar period. Labor leader John Curtin argued in 1938 that, "We believe in the British Commonwealth of Nations far more soundly than do the honourable gentlemen opposite, who merely blather about the flag and the Empire."³² By 1939 the Party indicated it would support Britain should war break out.

World War II to Vietnam

After the outbreak of World War II, Labor in opposition quickly shed its qualms about involvement in European wars and adopted a position similar to that at the start of World War I.³³ A Japanese victory in the Pacific and particularly New Guinea would have disrupted the pattern of Australian trade and sources of investment even more radically than German dominance in Europe. After a brief period of opposition, the Party endorsed Prime Minister Menzies' introduction of conscription for service in Australia. Labor took office in October 1941 under Curtin, when two conservative independents decided the ALP would manage the war effort better than the disintegrating United Australia Party. Curtin's December 1941 "call to America," after Japan entered the War, was a rhetorical expression of a profoundly pragmatic policy adjustment recognising that Britain was no longer capable of policing the world in Australia's interests.³⁴ The US Alliance has remained a

32 J. Curtin, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* (House of Representatives), CPD, Vol. 157, 5 October 1938, 395.

33 J. M. McCarthy, "The ALP and the Armed Services: Theory and Practice," *Labour History*, 20 (November 1973), 58-67.

34 The Lyons Government had been prepared in 1938 to turn to America for military aircraft, given the delays in obtaining them from Britain, *ibid.*, 64.

pillar of Australian foreign policy, under Labor and conservative governments, ever since. In order to defend Australia after the fall of Singapore and the annihilation of British influence in southeast Asia, Curtin also withdrew Australian forces from the Middle East and insisted, against Churchill, that they be deployed in Australia rather than Burma.

Unlike Hughes, Curtin, a pacifist during World War I, successfully introduced conscription for service outside Australia in 1943. This was opposed by some Labor MPs, including Eddie Ward, the most left-wing Minister of the time, and Arthur Calwell. But disquiet was limited in the wider labour movement. The racial and military threat to the national interest from Japan appeared much more immediate in 1943 than 1916. And after the German invasion of Russia in June 1941, the Communist Party was fanatically prowar, unlike the IWW and other socialist groups during World War I. Thanks to Labor's ties to the working class (and the Communist Party's recent change in policy) and, in contrast to the efforts of its conservative predecessor, the Curtin Government was able to coopt the leadership of the union movement into the management of the war effort. This facilitated speed-ups, overtime, pegging of wages and reduced living standards. Such measures would have been impossible under the conservatives without dramatic increase in industrial unrest. The Government also broadened the taxation base by increasing income tax and lowering its threshold. It retained the services of administrators such as Essington Lewis, Managing Director of BHP, whom Menzies had appointed Director-General of Munitions. Cost-plus procurement policies guaranteed private industry's profits. As an Allied victory drew nearer the level of industrial action started to rise again in defiance of both Labor and Communist policy, particularly on the coal fields.³⁵

35 Only 378 195 days were "lost" through industrial disputes in 1942, the level already rose to 990 151 in 1943, though this was still a low figure. See Kuhn, "Paradise on the Instalment Plan," 213-7.

During and after the War, the Labor Government promoted the development of multilateral institutions, notably the United Nations, International Monetary Fund and the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, as multipliers of Australia's otherwise limited influence. But the permanent Security Council members' veto powers, whose creation ALP Foreign Minister and the first President of the General Assembly Bert Evatt had resisted in 1945, undermined the effectiveness of the United Nations as such a mechanism. The USA sabotaged the proposed regulatory complement to the GATT, the International Trade Organisation. Alliances with Britain and the USA therefore remained Australia's main means for influencing world events. In order to increase Australia's international weight and to promote capital accumulation the Chifley Government initiated a program of subsidized mass immigration, on the basis of racist selection criteria. The program was continued under the conservative Government of Robert Menzies after 1949. The US alliance was also the mainstay of his foreign policy and that of later conservative governments, though they showed a greater sentimental attachment to Britain, supporting for example, the mother country's position in the 1956 Suez debacle.

The importance of the US Alliance to Australia was reinforced by the postwar consolidation of the United States' superpower status. At the same time economic ties between Australia and the USA deepened, in terms of trade and investment, including the activities of US based multinational corporations. While the ALP and the conservative parties agreed on a primary foreign policy orientation to the United States, they differed on the specifics of the relationship and secondary issues. The Labor Party was often more bellicose than the conservatives. Labor, for example, favoured a more punitive peace agreement with Japan than the one which the USA promoted and the Menzies Government signed. The ALP then endorsed the 1951 ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand and United States) agreement which it regarded as a *quid pro quo* for the unsatisfactory Japanese peace treaty. But Labor's aggressive nationalism soon led to criticisms that the South East Asia Treaty

Organisation, unlike NATO, lacked teeth and calls for more effective defence spending and the encouragement of strategic industry.

Foreign policy disputes enlivened the factional polarizations inside the ALP during the early 1950s. The supporters of the Industrial Groups, behind which stood the covert Catholic Social Studies Movement led by Bob Santamaria, were virulently anti-communist. Between 1954 and 1956 the “Groupers” in different States split to form the Democratic Labor Party, which by delivering its preferences to the Liberals helped keep the ALP out of office for another decade and a half. After the split Labor policy moved somewhat to the left. The Party opposed, for example, the 1955 dispatch of Australian troops to fight communists in Malaya, though this position was abandoned in 1963. Labor demonstrated its continuing commitment to the relationship with Britain when it accepted a 1955 announcement that British atomic bombs would be tested in Australia.³⁶

The ALP and Vietnam

The development of Labor’s position on the Vietnam war provides a particularly useful case study of the Party’s foreign policy tradition, its material and intellectual basis and points of similarity and difference from the policies of the conservative parties. Labor was mainly out of office during the Vietnam period, but Gough Whitlam became the first Labor Prime Minister for 23 years, in late 1972, in time to complete the withdrawal of Australian forces which the conservatives had begun. Australia’s experience of the Vietnam war has also been mythologized into a triumph for the Labor tradition. In fact the Menzies Government, its conservative successors and the Labor opposition shared fundamental assumptions about the national interest and the US Alliance. While conceived of in a somewhat

36 See B. Carter, “The Peace Movement in the 1950s,” in A. Curthoys and J. Merritt, eds., *Better Dead than Red* (Sydney 1986), 72.

different way, the national interest was also the linchpin of the positions of the left both inside the Party, and, in the main, outside it. In order to understand the development of the Party's policies on Vietnam it is necessary to examine the Australian interests at stake in the war. Both the material advantages which derived from participation in the war and the ideology behind Government policy therefore need to be examined. The evolution of official Labor policy and that of the Party's left can then be explored.

Why was Australia there?

The Menzies Government lied about the events leading up to the May 1962 and April 1965 decisions to send "instructors" and then a battalion of troops to Vietnam. In order to encourage a greater US presence in southeast Asia in general, and to promote the escalation of the War in Vietnam, the Government suggested to US officials that it could send a battalion to Vietnam. No request was received from the US or South Vietnamese Governments. US officials accepted the offer. Subsequently, the Australian Ambassador approached the South Vietnamese Prime Minister for a formal request for Australian forces. This "request" was then used to justify the operation publicly.³⁷

Apart from superficial rhetoric about defending democracy, some conservatives made frank statements that it was in Australia's national interest to involve the United States in southeast Asia and that Australian participation in the Vietnam conflict would encour-

37 The original demonstration that the Menzies Government had lied about how the 1965 deployment of Australian troops in Vietnam came about, is M. Sexton, *War for the Asking: Australia's Vietnam Secrets* (Ringwood 1981), 41, 136-56. Additional details are available in the conservative official history, P. Edwards and G. Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments: The Politics and Diplomacy of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts, 1948-1965* (Sydney 1992), 358-75.

age this. A senior academic apologist for Government policy made the argument very plain: "The commitment of Australian forces to Vietnam does more than anything else we can do to ensure a continued American presence in an area which is vital to our security."³⁸ There is an important element of truth in this, once we understand what the national interest was. But the most popular conservative justification for Australia's involvement in Vietnam derived from the domestic political and economic advantages of propagating racism (the "Yellow Peril") and anti-communism (the "Red Hordes") neatly combined in a fear of Chinese expansionism, toppling dominoes down to Darwin. So Menzies claimed that

The takeover of South Vietnam would be a direct military threat to Australia and all the countries of South and South-East Asia. It must be seen as part of a thrust by Communist China between the Indian and Pacific Oceans.³⁹

The US Alliance was allegedly an insurance policy against the Asian/communist threat to Australia. Supporting the US in Vietnam was a way of renewing it. There was little serious evidence to support this argument and it was quickly debunked by the anti-war movement.⁴⁰ It was, nevertheless, effective for some years.

Like racism, anti-communism served to bind all Australian classes together against a common imagined foe. An element in conservative ideology since 1917 at the latest, paranoia about an international communist conspiracy grew with the Cold War from the mid 1940s. It identified an external foe with internal enemies out to destroy the Australian way of life. Anti-communism helped

38 S. Cowen, "Australia's Policy Towards Asia," in Australian Institute of Political Science, *Communism in Asia: A Threat to Australia?* (Sydney 1967), 168.

39 *CPD* (H of R) Vol. 45, 29 April 1965, 1061. Also *CPD* (H of R) Vol. 44, 10 November 1964, 2715-18 which provides a rationale for forward defence, the SEATO and ANZUS treaties and the introduction of conscription.

40 For example, see the widely reproduced arguments of H. Levien, *Vietnam: Myth and Reality* (Sydney 1967) also see University Study Group on Vietnam, *Vietnam and Australia* (Sydney 1966).

to undermine support for local “communists,” understood as socialists, union militants and anyone else deemed to sympathize with them.⁴¹ The construction of a racially unified Australia and the marginalization of working-class militants and dissidents, in other words, benefited Australia’s capitalist class and also justified a particular foreign policy course. But that course cannot be understood simply in the framework of dominant ideas, it also has to be examined in material terms.⁴²

The Minister for External Affairs, Paul Hasluck, explained some of the real interests the USA and Australia had in raising the stakes in Vietnam:

The United States could not withdraw [from South Vietnam] without necessarily considering the world-wide impact of such a withdrawal on the broader strategies of world politics.⁴³

This paralleled the more confidential explanation of US calculations by “Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton who in late March [1965] assigned relative weights to various American objectives in Vietnam”: “To avoid humiliating US defeat (to our reputation as a guarantor),” 70 per cent, “to keep SVN (and then adjacent) territory from Chinese hands,” 20 per cent and “to permit the people of SVN enjoy a better, freer way of life,” 10 per cent.⁴⁴

Australian capitalists needed a growing and profitable global private capitalist economy, capable of absorbing Australian exports, and providing both commodities not produced here, and capital flows, to cover the typical current account deficit. This

41 R. Kuhn, “Whose Cold War?: Capitalism, Class and Economic Crisis,” in R. Summy and M. Salla, eds., *Why the Cold War Ended: A Range of Interpretations* (Boulder 1995), 153-69.

42 See Jan Pettman’s critique of “national identity,” which does not, however, draw attention to its important class content, “National Identity and Security,” in G. Smith and S. Kettle, eds., *Threats Without Enemies: Rethinking Australia’s Security* (Sydney 1992), 53-68.

43 CPD (H of R) Vol. 45, 23 March 1965, 233. Sexton, 117, misinterprets this as an effort to exert pressure on the USA.

44 *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking in Vietnam*, Vol. IV (Boston 1971), 22.

entailed both endorsement of the western side of the contest with the Soviet Bloc and a rejection of efforts by underdeveloped countries to radically alter their form of integration into the private capitalist world. No doubt Hasluck and McNaughton regarded these as identical. It is true that successful national liberation movements against the United States and its allies might give succour to the Soviet Bloc. But, more importantly and realistically they could limit the scope for private capitalist profit-making by imposing restrictions on trade and investment, while providing encouragement for other similar movements.

Australia's modest economic and military capacity meant that its governments alone could not hope to significantly shape the international order, as opposed to that closer to home in the south-west Pacific. The United Nations was ineffective and British power continued to decline, particularly east of Suez, which left the USA as the only "superpower" rival to the Soviet Union and powerful ally for Australia. At the same time, US-Australian bilateral economic relations grew at the expense of Anglo-Australian relations.

Keeping in mind the fundamental qualification that the national interest is at the same time a class interest, it is possible to agree with the current Liberal Party leader, John Howard's comment "that Menzies and his colleagues (and often large sections of the Labor Party) believed it to be in Australia's interests to act in concert with those powerful friends — and that in most cases, that judgement was right."⁴⁵

In its foreign policy, as in Australia's, "The United States was acting not out of a desire to defend the nation against some tangible threat to its physical welfare but because it sought to create a controllable, responsive order elsewhere, one that would permit the political destinies of distant places to evolve in a manner beneficial

45 J. Howard, "Menzies Minus the Myths," *Weekend Australian*, 12-13 November 1994, Books Section, 5.

to American goals and interests far surpassing the immediate needs of its domestic society.”⁴⁶ As the world's largest economic and military power, the USA was in a better position than any other state to secure a global private capitalist order. And this preeminence encouraged an (ultimately unjustified) optimism in the viability of this project. As Australian capital had an interest in creating and sustaining a broadly similar world order to that sought by the United States, it was a logical policy option to encourage the USA to police the world. In this way, Australia achieved a free ride in terms of the proportion of output devoted to arms expenditure. Australian military expenditure was around half that of the USA, as a proportion of GNP, during the Vietnam War.⁴⁷

Central Europe, where the two blocs directly confronted each other in strength, was the site at which most was at stake in the Cold War. The United States' own back yard in Latin America was its main preoccupation as far as the underdeveloped world was concerned, especially after “communism” gained its hemispherical “toehold” in Cuba. In terms of overseas investment and trade, shipping routes and military strategy,⁴⁸ the western Pacific and

46 G. Kolko, *Vietnam: Anatomy of War, 1940-1975* (London 1987), 73; *The Roots of American Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Power and Purpose* (Boston 1969), xv, 78. Michael Hammel-Green expressed a similar view in Australia, “although American economic interests are not directly present in Vietnam, the war is a test of whether American military security for her economic hegemony over the rest of the Third World can be successfully challenged by popular revolutionary guerilla movements. Hence American leaders” talk of the necessity of showing that “wars of national liberation are bound to fail.” “Vietnam: Beyond Pity,” *Dissent* (Winter 1970), 33.

47 J. Richardson, “Australian Strategic and Defence Policies,” in G. Greenwood and N. Harper, *Australia in World Affairs* (1974), 239. Also see M. Teichmann, ed., “Introduction,” *New Directions in Australian Foreign Policy* (Ringwood 1969), 11.

48 Objectively the levels of threat to Australian territory were very low: none of the countries in the region had an interest in armed conflict with Australia and, even if they had, their military capacity was small. The Minister for the Army noted in his diary in mid 1965 that “The threat to the Australian mainland remains remote till at least 1970,” quoted in Pemberton, *All the Way*, 313. Other factors involved in the Government's decision to send a battalion to Vietnam in 1965 were its concerns about the credibility of SEATO and bolstering ANZUS, as well as Indonesia's “Confrontation” with

southeast Asia were of much greater concern for Australian Governments. Given this disparity, there was a clear logic behind efforts to maintain US interest in the region. A conservative academic put his finger on this in 1963:

Attempting to pursue an independent policy, Australia has found that the global strength of the United States has set limits within which diplomatic manoeuvring is possible, and consequently that one of the major tasks of Australian diplomacy has been to collaborate with the United States and to influence, perhaps attempt to orient, American policy in our own area that is often of peripheral interest to Washington.⁴⁹

And the best study of the origins of Australia's involvement in Vietnam observes that "Australia's strategic and economic interests demanded that Western hegemony be maintained in" southeast Asia.⁵⁰ Australian policy makers embraced an ideology of national defence most of whose racist and anti-communist premises had little in common with reality. But that ideology justified a very broad international economic and strategic policy which could accord with the interests of the Australian capitalist class. Far from being a puppet of the USA, the Australian Government's position "was to the Right of the US over Vietnam, seeking skilfully to use its troop commitment to force an even larger commitment by the US."⁵¹ What Richard Leaver has called "the counter-cyclical

Malaysia in northern Borneo, essentially as a diversion from domestic tensions. It seems that calculations about Indonesian policy were very important in the decision to introduce conscription in 1964.

49 N. Harper, "Australia and the United States, with Special Reference to South-East Asia," in G. Greenwood and N. Harper, 169.

50 G. Pemberton, *All the Way: Australia's Road to Vietnam* (Sydney 1987), 333.

51 G. Clark, "The Vietnam Debate Revisited," *Quadrant*, 33, 10 (October 1989), 10. Also see Pemberton, *All the Way*, 267-8. After 1966 when "the primary objective [of embroiling the USA in the region] had been achieved ... America did not find much enthusiasm from their [Australian] ally after 1966 to increase its contribution to the common effort in Vietnam." *Ibid.*, 319.

pattern in relations between the ANZUS allies,⁵² not only demonstrates the poverty of approaches which emphasize Australian dependence on the USA but also the existence of distinct Australian interests which Australian governments have pursued.

The Labor Party and the War

Analyses of why Australia was in Vietnam varied within a narrow range, though there were more diverse proposals for what to do about it. There was a broad consensus that included not only the conservative parties and the ALP but also the CPA and the pro-Beijing Communist Party of Australia-Marxist Leninist (CPA-ML) that Australian involvement in Vietnam should be judged on the basis of the national interest. The Government and the right and centre of the Labor Party agreed that maintaining the US Alliance was important for Australia. They differed over whether conducting the war in Vietnam actually benefited Australia (and the USA). Jim Cairns, a member of the ALP's shadow cabinet and the most prominent left Labor opponent of the War, agreed with much of the Labor right that participation in the War was not in Australia's interest. But, he advocated a foreign policy less reliant on relations with the USA. The main forces further left regarded both the War and the Alliance as a betrayal of Australia and the Government as essentially a puppet of the United States.

The ALP's contradictory location between labour and capital (on the one hand its commitment to the management of Australian capitalism and parliamentarism, on the other its connections with the working class) was an important factor that, along with the domestic and international political situations, shaped the Party's understanding of developments in Vietnam and stance on the war.

52 R. Leaver, "Patterns of Dependence in Post-war Australian Foreign Policy," Australian Political Studies Association Conference, University of NSW, 24-7 September 1989.

The ALP, as much as the conservative parties, recognized the logic of capitalist Australia's position in the world. Thus the Parliamentary Labor Party did not oppose decisions to send Australian "instructors" to Vietnam in 1962 and 1964, or troops to North Borneo, to support Malaysia against Indonesia, in 1963. The Federal Executive and Party Conference in 1963 approved (though with strong opposition from the left) the establishment of a US base at Northwest Cape.⁵³

Except on the left of the Party, the Labor conception of Australia's place in the world rested on the same foundations as that of the conservatives: Australia was an independent member of the community of states, capable, without radical social changes, of pursuing its people's interests. The idea of "imperialism" was inimical to such a perspective. Mainstream Labor tended, therefore, to regard the Vietnam War as essentially a civil war into which Australia and the USA had foolishly strayed.⁵⁴ Members of the Party's left also saw the conflict simply as a civil war.⁵⁵

The precise balance between using military force and other means in securing common US/Australian international goals and the extent of the USA's capacity to act as a global cop were contentious matters in US administrations and in local debate over Australia's involvement in Vietnam.⁵⁶ The initial difference be-

53 K. Beazley, "Federal Labor and the Vietnam Commitment," in P. King, ed., *Australia's Vietnam* (Sydney 1983), 41-2; Edwards, *Crises and Commitment*, 348, 278.

54 A. Calwell, *CPD* (H of R) Vol. 46, 4 May 1965, 1102-7. Also see T. Uren, a prominent member of the left from NSW, *CPD* (H of R) Vol. 45, 25 March 1965, 347, *CPD* (H of R) Vol. 50, 22 March 1966, 432, 435; and even as late as 1968, *CPD* (H of R) Vol. 58, 28 March 1968, 621.

55 See T. Uren, *CPD* (H of R) Vol. 45, 25 March 1965, 347; Vol. 47, 19 August 1965, 249-50; Vol. 50, 22 March 1966, 432; Vol. 58, 28 March 1968, 621.

56 In 1964 there was some scepticism about the capacity of the United States to win the war at high levels of the Australian Department of External Affairs, D. Jenkins, "1964: We Plan Bomb Attack on Indonesia," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 January 1995, 1, drawing on recently released Cabinet documents. The conservative French Government did not believe that the communists could be defeated in South Vietnam, Pemberton, *Crises and Commitments*, 195.

tween the Government and Opposition was on how to secure the US alliance and US willingness to intervene in the region. They agreed that these were desirable goals. Both thought US intervention in Vietnam was legitimate. The Menzies Government thought a more substantial US involvement was desirable and could be secured by sending Australian troops. Conscription was necessary for this. The ALP mainstream was more inclined to believe that verbal encouragement and cheaper practical steps than sending Australian troops to Vietnam would be enough to promote US commitment to the region. These steps, cheaper than maintaining troops in the field, included endorsement for the bombing of North Vietnam in early 1965, the establishment of US bases in Australia and a supportive but not uncritical attitude to US foreign policy.

Arthur Calwell was ALP leader from 1960 until early 1967. While not of the Labor left, he was not associated with the right either. He opposed conscription, announced in November 1964. Calwell's opposition to conscription dated back to World War I and reflected the widespread hostility in the labour movement then and subsequently to compulsory service, as threatening not only workers' physical safety but also undermining their position on the labour market.⁵⁷ But these attitudes were tempered by Labor's commitment to managing capitalism. The Curtin Government, for example, had introduced conscription for overseas service in 1943 with the support of the extra-parliamentary Party (though Calwell, not yet a Minister, had opposed this).

Calwell criticized the dispatch of troops to Vietnam in 1965, arguing that Menzies and the US Government had overestimated

57 On Calwell's opposition to conscription see G. Langley, *A Decade of Dissent* (Melbourne 1992), 69; A. Calwell, *Calwell: Be Just and Fear Not* (Melbourne 1978), 35, 54 and A. Calwell, *Labor's Role in Modern Society* (Melbourne 1963), 164.

the possibility of a military solution to the Vietnam “problem.”⁵⁸ He maintained that it would be more effective to combat communism by improving the lives of the South Vietnamese people and advocated United Nations involvement to resolve the dispute. As a Labor stalwart with a knowledge of the union movement, he also had some feel for the capacity of ordinary people, if organized, to resist authority. This and his early sympathy for the Irish independence struggle were a basis for grasping the problems the USA would face in Vietnam: it was not in the interests of the USA or Australia for the US to remain involved in an unwinnable war. Similarly, he recognized that militancy and Communism were not the same thing, though he can hardly be regarded as being soft on Communism (he was made a Papal Knight in 1963!). Calwell was predisposed to his position on Vietnam, with its emphasis on compromise and the UN as arbiter, by a social democratic preference for pursuing domestic political and economic stability through collaboration amongst the state, bosses and unions. This had been a dominant feature of the successful management of industrial relations on terms favourable for capital by the Curtin and Chifley Governments. While Labor’s position on the Vietnam War had deep roots, there were other advocates of a negotiated settlement in Vietnam: amongst Australian employers, the conservative French President de Gaulle and even sections of the US bureaucracy.

During the May 1965 parliamentary debate on the commitment of Australian troops to Vietnam, Calwell highlighted the basis of his positions on the war, “All our words, all our policies, all our actions must be judged ultimately by this one crucial test: What best

58 Kolko identifies the hubris of imperial states in their overconfidence in their own power. In Vietnam, “America, locked into its mission to control the broad contours of the world’s political and socioeconomic development, had set for itself inherently unobtainable political objectives.” “Despite America’s many real successes in imposing its hegemony elsewhere, Vietnam exposed the ultimate constraints on its power in the modern era: its internal tensions, the contradictions between overinvolvement in one nation and its interests and ambitions elsewhere, and its material limits.” Kolko, *Vietnam*, 545, 547.

promotes our national security, what best guarantees our national survival?"⁵⁹ And he regarded the US Alliance as being in the national interest. The problem was that the conservatives were too supine in their attitude to the United States and the Johnson Administration was mistaken in its Vietnam policies. The Labor leader was capable of expressing this in populist rhetoric when it suited him, denouncing the Government's failure "to define and implement a clear defence and foreign policy that has now placed it in the relation of a client, rather than the ally of our great and powerful friends."⁶⁰ But one of his concerns was to prevent Washington from being embarrassed in Vietnam,⁶¹ because he regarded Australia as an independent power whose interests included close relations with the USA. Unfortunately, he believed, Menzies was not doing a good job in realising this basic and common goal.

The debate between Labor and the conservatives over Australia's defence capacity was linked to that over the management of the US Alliance. Both accepted the need for strong armed forces. Until the mid 1960s, Labor insisted that current levels of defence spending were inadequate. In practice, conservative governments offset military outlays against greater emphasis on the Alliance.

59 CPD (H of R) Vol. 46, 4 May 1965, 1102. For a very clear expression of his support for the US Alliance, which did not alter after Australian troops were committed, and preparedness to condone the dispatch of additional Australian "instructors" to Vietnam in June 1964 see A. Calwell, *The Challenge Before Us: Australian Labor Party* (Canberra 1964), 9, 11.

60 CPD (H of R) Vol. 38, 2 April 1963, 266.

61 "We want the American presence, strong and powerful, in Asia and the Pacific. It is precisely because we do not want America to be humiliated, because we want America to be in a position to negotiate from strength, that we are concerned about the danger of her present course" CPD (H of R) Vol. 45, 23 March 1965, 241; CPD (H of R) 46, 29 April 1965, 1107. Also Allan Fraser CPD (H of R) Vol. 47, 18 August 1965, 206. For similar views outside Parliament see, for example, University Study Group, *Vietnam and Australia*, whose proposals for resolving the Indochinese problem were very similar to Labor's in 1966, 134. "It is not a question of the US imperialists telling Whitlam *et al* to be a counterrevolutionary; rather it is a question of Whitlam *et al* telling the imperialists how to be more effective at it. There is no disagreement over ends, only over means," H. McQueen, "Living Off Asia," *Arena*, 26 (1971), 15.

Menzies' fifteen years in office, Calwell argued in early 1965, "have left Australia weak and virtually defenceless."⁶² Labor consistently argued that improved wages in the army, instead of conscription, were a better means to maintain Australia's defence capacity.⁶³

The conflict between the Government and Opposition over Vietnam amounted to a coded (even to the participants) debate over the most effective means of maintaining a stable world capitalist order dominated by the USA, in the face of revolutionary nationalist movements in underdeveloped countries. But, as Calwell stated,

on three great issues, there [was] agreement between the two parties. These issues [were]: The American alliance, opposition to Communism, and the common determination to keep Australia safe and inviolable.⁶⁴

The Government favoured confrontation and military means of achieving foreign policy objectives. The ALP advocated cooptation. As a later Labor Foreign Minister put it,

The Australian desire to see the United States actively engaged in the security of South-East Asia was more understandable. Here the problem lay not in the objective but in a failure to appreciate that the US strategy in Vietnam would not succeed.⁶⁵

This was a position advanced by the External Affairs Department in 1964.⁶⁶ Subsequent events demonstrated that overwhelm-

62 CPD H of R Vol. 45, 23 March 1965. Also see A. Calwell, *Labor's Policy: Blue Print for a Government* (Melbourne 1961), 21, where he promises stronger armed forces and a maintenance of the level of military expenditure established by the Liberals.

63 Richardson, "Australian Strategic and Defence Policies," 262. A. Calwell, CPD (H of R) Vol. 44, November 1964, 2923-4, makes this point and calls for the development of "defence" industries.

64 A. Calwell, CPD (H of R) Vol. 45, 23 March 1965, 242.

65 G. Evans and B. Grant, *Australia's Foreign Relations* (Melbourne 1991), 204. The Communist Party drew attention to the common assumptions of Government and Opposition at the time, L. Aarons, "Menzies' Undeclared War," *Communist Review* (June 1965), 130-1.

66 Jenkins, "1964."

ing superiority in weaponry is not a guarantee against defeat. But Calwell's alternative strategy for defeating or neutralising Communism in South Vietnam which the peak union body, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), and, initially, his more conservative deputy Whitlam shared⁶⁷ was utopian. The prospects of the USA, let alone Australia, embarking on a massive aid program to improve Vietnamese living standards while the Communists had control of the North and significant support in the South were minimal. With both the USA and USSR able to veto decisions, the UN was a nullity when the superpowers were in conflict. A "neutral" government with NLF participation could have been only temporary or superficial.

Although he was not systematically on the left of the Party, Calwell's opposition to conscription and preparedness to support extraparliamentary activity against Australian involvement in Vietnam received backing from the Labor left.⁶⁸ The issue of Vietnam was a factor in a deepening polarization inside the ALP as Whitlam pursued his leadership ambitions. The Party's treatment of the question cannot be separated from factional and electoral concerns. Unlike Calwell, Whitlam had a middle-class background, no experience of the union movement and was firmly on the right wing of the Party. Whitlam was sceptical of mass involvement in politics, arguing in 1969 that "I am convinced that no demonstration helps to end conscription or to end the war. I am convinced they are counter-productive."⁶⁹ The Party had not earlier called for unilateral Australian withdrawal from Vietnam, but in May 1966 the Parliamentary Labor Party endorsed Calwell's commitment that a Labor Government would pull conscripts

67 See E. G. Whitlam, *Australia-Base or Bridge? Evatt Memorial Lecture* (Sydney 1966), 7-9

68 See, for example *Socialist and Industrial Labor* (March 1966), 1; (June 1966), 1; (February 1967), 3. Calwell was particularly enthusiastic about demonstrations against South Vietnamese Prime Minister Ky during his visit to Australia in January 1967.

69 *CPD* (H of R) Vol. 63, 27 May 1969, 2247. Also see Murphy, *Harvest of Fear*, 252.

out “without delay” and regular forces “as soon as possible.”⁷⁰ Shortly before the November 1966 Federal elections, the divisions in the Party deepened. A very sympathetic study concluded that Whitlam “was not convinced that the Americans would lose the war; he believed that at least a compromise settlement could be achieved, and worried that insufficient pressure was being placed on the Americans for a negotiated settlement.”⁷¹ Calwell advocated the immediate withdrawal of conscripts, while there would be consultation about the process of bringing regular troops home. The rivals agreed, nevertheless, on the importance of the US Alliance and Calwell did not support unilateral American withdrawal.

After a severe defeat in the elections, Whitlam took over as leader of the ALP and pulled the Party to the right on foreign policy. Vietnam was now clearly a test case for US global power and both the election and opinion polls indicated Australian involvement in the war was popular. Whitlam affirmed that “It is not the American Alliance itself which has reduced Australia to a status of diplomatic and defence dependence. It is the Government’s interpretation of the Alliance.”⁷² His right wing supporter Kim Beazley (senior) defended the purity of US motives in Vietnam against accusations of imperialist behaviour.⁷³ The 1967 Federal Conference watered down the Party’s position. The resolution on Vietnam expressed general opposition to the continuation of the war and Australian involvement in it, but there was no call for the immediate withdrawal of Australian conscripts. Australian participation, it stated, should end only after an ALP Government had failed to persuade “our allies” to stop bombing North Vietnam, negotiate with the National Liberation Front and to “transform operations in South

70 M. Saunders, “The ALP’s Response to the Anti-Vietnam War Movement: 1965-73,” *Labour History*, 44 (May 1983), 79.

71 Beazley, “Federal Labor and the Vietnam Commitment,” 51.

72 E. G. Whitlam, *Beyond Vietnam: Australia’s Regional Responsibility* (Melbourne 1968), 22.

73 *CPD* (H of R) Vol. 50, 29 March 1966, 717.

Vietnam into holding operations.”⁷⁴ Much of the Party's left was complicit in this position.⁷⁵

Labor's policy on the war only began to become more forthright again when this became electorally expedient. The Tet Offensive in February 1968 demonstrated the fragility of the situation in South Vietnam and the mood in Australia and the United States began to shift. But it was over a year before ALP policy changed. In June 1969 the first withdrawal of US forces was announced. In July Nixon enunciated his “Guam Doctrine,” a rationale for pursuing US foreign policy goals by means other than the deployment of troops. The Federal Labor Conference in July formally hardened ALP policy, against Whitlam's position that withdrawal of Australian forces should occur after a united Vietnam had taken responsibility for affairs in Phuoc Tuy Province which they were attempting to occupy.⁷⁶ In August an opinion poll indicated that for the first time a majority of Australians was opposed to involvement in the War. In October Whitlam promised the troops would be brought home by June 1970 if Labor won the 1969 elections.

The scale and militancy of the anti-war movement also increased in response to a shift in the political climate and the rising level of working class self-confidence. In 1969 these produced a general strike to free Tramways Union Secretary Clarrie O'Shea and destroyed the ability of the Arbitration Court to impose fines on unions. When seamen had earlier taken action over staffing the military supply ships *Boonaroo* and *Jeparit* there had been little support in the wider union movement. The November 1969 ban by rank and file members of the Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) on the *Jeparit*, in defiance of WWF and ACTU policy had a much wider, positive impact. And 300 union officials from 32 unions called on National Servicemen to lay down their arms in

74 Whitlam, *Beyond Vietnam*, 19.

75 So, for example, Bob Gould was expelled from the NSW left Steering Committee faction for moving for a return to the policy under Calwell at the 1967 State ALP Conference, Langley, *A Decade of Dissent*, 39.

76 *Socialist and Industrial Labor* (August 1969), 1.

Vietnam in Fitzroy Town Hall in mid-December 1969, a much more radical position than any advocated by the Communist Party. It was only in 1971 that the Labor Party decided it would repeal the National Service Act, the legislation for conscription, and “annul its penal consequences” once it took office.

The ALP was better placed than the conservatives to adjust to the new situation in which US administrations recognized that a new approach to Vietnam was necessary to maintain the United States’ international influence. But by the end of 1971, the conservative McMahon Government had cut its losses and pulled the bulk of Australian troops out of Vietnam. At this stage, “The political aims and sympathies of ALP leader Whitlam, so far as South-East Asia was concerned, were indistinguishable from those of the government, though this was not true of the party’s left wing.”⁷⁷ Ultimately, Whitlam’s critique of Australian policy in Vietnam, like Calwell’s, was an internal one, accepting the same conceptual framework as the Government: that Australia was capable of pursuing its national interests in foreign policy and that close Australian-United States relations were consonant with those interests.

The Labor left

Jim Cairns, a Member of the House of Representatives (MHR), was the preeminent opponent of Australia’s involvement in Vietnam. His views are therefore worth examining at some length as the most visible alternative to Whitlam’s position in the ALP from 1967. Cairns made it clear that the conservative parties, Liberal, Country and Democratic Labor, used anti-communism as a weapon against Labor. The United States and its allies were not resisting Chinese expansionism and Communist aspirations for world domination in Vietnam.

77 Richardson, “Australian Strategic and Defence Policies,” 262.

Cairns recognized that there were concrete reasons why ordinary people might support Communists. While expressing his distaste for Communist dogmatism and commitment to revolution, he recognized that they gained support in Australian trade unions because "most Communist union officials have proved efficient ... for ideological reasons, they are often keen to promote strikes and other militant action, but it is also true that there is often a strong practical case for militant action, a case that is understood and supported by many other union members." Similarly, support for Communism in Vietnam grew out of the role of the Viet Minh and National Liberation Front in resisting foreign domination and corrupt regimes, that is, in leading an essentially nationalist movement. There was no military solution to the Vietnam War. Australia, it was argued, should be offering aid and support for economic progress. And, "If aid is to be effective in preventing capture of the revolutionary forces by extremists, then we will have to recognize that men who will be described as 'nationalists,' 'socialists,' or even by some people as 'Communists,' will have to come to the top."⁷⁸ Cairns' political activity was directed against US policy in Vietnam. An "alternative" policy should "accept, in general the national revolutionary changes as they occur" and "support and encourage the most liberal and democratic of those involved much more than oppose those called communists or leftists."⁷⁹

His starting point in explaining why Australia was involved in Vietnam was Australian nationalism. His argument revolved around the mistaken ideas and outdated attitudes on the conservative side of politics:

Our failure to achieve a distinctive Australian outlook is preventing us from solving our Australian problems. The basic assumption of our "defence policy," for instance, is that we cannot solve our military problems: that we must depend on "powerful friends" Granted the assumption, it follows that we should never

78 J. Cairns, *Living with Asia* (Melbourne 1965), 174, 41, 97.

79 J. Cairns, *Economics and Foreign Policy* (January 1966), 28.

displease our “powerful friends” or they will never come to our aid.

This analysis amounted to the identification of a “cultural cringe” at the level of foreign policy, because “we are ruled by classes of people whose connections with England and the United States are tenuous enough, but whose value-judgements are conventionally subservient to England and the United States.” Cairns did not link this account to his discussion of Australia’s economic problems in terms of “the concentration of power in the hands of fewer and fewer large ‘monopolistic’ companies,” while “much of this power is being rapidly transferred *outside* Australia.”⁸⁰ In other words his critique of Australian (and US) foreign policy was moral and cultural. It did not identify a relationship between domestic class structure, economic interests and imperialism.⁸¹ This dissociation facilitated an ambiguous attitude to the US Alliance, critical of

80 *Ibid.*, 111, 127, 115. Also see J. Cairns, *The Eagle and the Lotus: Western Intervention in Vietnam, 1847-1971* (Melbourne 1971), ix, xi. The “cultural cringe” refers to the assumption that things British (or European and American) are superior to their home grown Australian equivalents.

81 See *The Eagle and the Lotus*, 75, 77, 230. Cairns can envisage Australia and the United States co-operating to play a positive role after the War through “a reduction in the military aspects of that co-operation and an increase in all the elements that go to make up progress in South East Asia.” When Cairns very briefly related imperialism to economics in this book, it was to a transient “banana republic phase of American capitalism,” xii, 239. In the earlier *Economics and Foreign Policy* a similar down playing of economic interests was apparent. Such factors were less important than the “overall power struggle,” while US foreign policy “can best be understood if we think of it as being psychologically determined,” 12, 23. For a critique of Cairns’s position, see K. Rowley “Bob Hawke: Capital for Labor?” *Arena*, 25 (1971), 14; McQueen “Living Off Asia” 19-20. In her defence of Cairns against McQueen, G. Summy confirms the weakness of Cairns’s conception of imperialism. She also identifies the problem with his idealist approach to socialist strategy (which reflects the weight he gives to mistaken ideas in explaining the world), “Cairns Reassessed: A Critique of McQueen” *Arena*, 26 (1971), 53, 61.

overdependence on the US, but assuming common interests.⁸² It also reflected his labourist belief that it was possible and desirable to reconcile class conflicts in the national interest.⁸³

Cairns' far from radical analysis of the Australia's place in the world and involvement in Vietnam was matched by his political stance. Not only did he comply with Labor's official policies on the War, he also drafted the amendment which watered down the Party's position on Vietnam at the 1967 Federal Party Conference.⁸⁴ At a left wing Conference in 1968 he argued that "Australian influence should primarily be used to end the war, and it could be significant in ending the war Withdrawal of forces should come if it appears that Australian efforts to end the war were no longer likely to be effective."⁸⁵

The Moratorium Campaign in 1970 and 1971 was an expression of more widespread opposition to the war. Cairns became the campaign's most prominent figure and demanded that Australian forces be brought home immediately. This did not distinguish his position from Whitlam's. His encouragement of mass political activity did.⁸⁶ Only in Victoria, where the Labor left's influence was greatest, was the ALP to whole-heartedly support the Moratorium Campaign, even after Whitlam had decided that rapid with-

82 J. Cairns *CPD* (H of R) Vol. 44, 17 November 1964 3097-8; *Living with Asia*, 99-100; "Foreign Policy after Vietnam" in Association for International Co-operation and Disarmament, *The Asian Revolution and Australia* (Sydney 1969), 182-183. Cairns was not alone on the Labor left in this regard, I. Lasry, President of the Brighton (Victoria) ALP Branch maintained in *Socialist and Industrial Labor* (July 1967), 6 "that many of those who oppose the Vietnam war are utterly convinced that they are the most sincerely pro-American of all Australian citizens."

83 See K. Rowley, "Dr Cairns on Tariffs: Planning, Imperialism and Socialism," *Farrago*, 29 (July 1971), 4.

84 T. Uren, *Straight Left* (Sydney 1994), 189. Also P. Ormonde, *A Foolish Passionate Man* (Ringwood 1981), 86, 90. He did not, however, favour the dilution of the Party's opposition to conscription.

85 Cairns, "Foreign Policy after Vietnam," 183.

86 Ormonde, *A Foolish Passionate Man*, 126.

drawal was an electoral winner.⁸⁷ As a consequence, the movement was largest in that State.

Only to the left of Cairns were there explanations of Australia's involvement in Vietnam which were really distinct, in their basic assumptions, from those of the conservatives (and the mainstream of the Labor Party). Most of these left wing accounts of Australia's place in the world were influenced by the Stalinist heritage of Australian communism, with its populist analysis of Australian capitalism. They did not regard Australia as an independent, though small, state pursuing its own interests. Sections of the ALP left influenced by the Communist Party's analysis, the CPA itself, CPA (ML) and other currents especially in the student left, saw Government policy as a betrayal of the national interest. This policy was seen as a result of direct pressure from the US Government and/or the influence of US corporations and Australian monopolies allied with US economic interests. Because its touchstone in foreign policy was the "national interest" and it regarded local monopolies as subservient to the USA, this populist radicalism could not identify an independent imperialism on behalf of Australian interests. Cairns's idealism had allowed him to regard Australian governments as capable of pursuing their own policies (even if these, under the Liberals, expressed a cultural deference). The dominant left approach did link foreign policy to material interests but had the implausible corollary of regarding conservative Australian governments as mere pawns of the United States.

The more systematic nature of Communist theory and considerable support for the CPA in the union movement gave it an intellectual influence in the broader labour movement including the ALP. In order to secure Australia's independence, the CPA sought an alliance with the Labor Party, or at least its left wing. This was part of a strategy for winning broad support from workers, farmers, small and even middle-sized business interests against the monop-

87 M. Saunders, "The Vietnam Moratorium Movement in Australia: 1969-73," PhD Thesis, Flinders University (1977).

olists, “the sixty families who owned Australia” and their government. So, while critical of Whitlam and the right of the Labor Party, Communists tended not to offer an analysis of the problems with the ALP as a whole. The CPA’s positions were tailored to accommodate allies in the ALP and, in the tradition of the peace movement of the 1950s, amongst “progressive” intellectuals and ministers of religion. There was a significant element inside the Labor left (including a few secret Communist Party members)⁸⁸ that took its lead from the Communist Party and they worked together in the largest peace organizations in Sydney and Melbourne, the Association for International Co-operation and Disarmament (AICD) and the Congress for International Co-operation and Disarmament (CICD). So there was an element of feedback braking the emergence of more radical positions in the Labor left. The CPA accommodated its position to the Labor left while influential sections of the Labor left took their cue from the CPA. Rather than organising around the demands to end conscription and bring Australian troops home immediately, particularly after Labor’s electoral defeat in 1966, the CPA called for an end to US bombing of North Vietnam and negotiations, summed up in the slogan “Stop the Bombing, Negotiate!”; that was until the political climate shifted dramatically to the left in 1968. And while the CPA rejected the US Alliance, for the sake of unity it tended to play this down as an issue for the antiwar movement.

Expressing ideas dominant on the left inside and outside the ALP, Tom Uren, a federal Labor politician, stressed (in rather

88 There is, as one would expect, little written evidence of this, but for CPA members in the Labor Party in the late 1930s and 1940s see R. Milliss, *Serpent's Tooth* (Ringwood 1984), 114-5, 120 and for the 1950s see D. Freney, *A Map of Days: Life on the Left* (Melbourne 1991) 72, 82, 92. In the union movement Communists and sections of the Labor left worked very closely together in some unions, while Communist led unions sent delegates to State Labor Party Conferences. Labor Clubs at a number of Australian universities and the Australian Student Labor Federation provided a bridge between left Labor and Communist students during the 1950s and into the 1960s, see Ann Curthoys, in Langley, *A Decade of Dissent*, 13, 30.

vague terms) the alleged link between foreign ownership and control of Australian industry and involvement in Vietnam.⁸⁹ At the third Moratorium rally in 1971, Labor Senate leader Murphy said “We are involved because the US Government decided we should be involved.”⁹⁰ Uren did not, however, stray far from official Party policy on the Vietnam conflict. In 1966 he said “we do not support the proposal that American forces and installations should be withdrawn from South Vietnam before peace talks commence.”⁹¹ He also played a pivotal role in tempering the militancy of the Sydney demonstration against South Vietnamese Prime Minister Ky in early 1967.⁹² After the Tet Offensive Uren still did not go beyond advocating the moderate official position. The slogans he recommended were

Stop the bombing now. Recognize the National Liberation Front.
Achieve a holding position so we can have a negotiated peace in
Vietnam. It may be a long drawn out war, but this would be a
de-escalation of the war.⁹³

From 1969 when Whitlam changed the ALP’s position, the anti-war movement and its Labor left component grew more radical, demanding the immediate withdrawal of troops. But Communists and their Labor left allies continued to restrain the movement’s slogans and tactics. In Brisbane they physically prevented a prominent militant from speaking at a rally. The Communist Party opposed US imperialism, but the CPA and Labor left were still not keen on the Moratorium adopting “anti-imperialist” slogans. Even the more radical aims of the third Moratorium mobilization of 30 June 1971 did not raise the issue of imperialism by making links between the structure of Australian (or US) society and foreign policy or the US Alliance. This approach was justified in

89 CPD (H of R) Vol. 50, 22 March 1966, 432, 435.

90 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 July 1971, 2.

91 T. Uren, CPD (H of R) Vol. 50, 22 March 1966, 435.

92 Uren, *Straight Left*, 188.

93 CPD (H of R) Vol. 58, 28 March 1968, 623.

terms of the dangers of “excluding” people by going beyond the questions of foreign troops in Vietnam and conscription.⁹⁴ There was very widespread hostility to the War. So it seems that the Communist and Labor left feared that the movement would have been weakened if it formally called for an end to the US Alliance, and thus drawn attention to the imperialist nature of the war, were exaggerated.⁹⁵

Labor's foreign policy on Vietnam is not an illustration of the triumph of principles, but of a profound pragmatism rooted in the Party's material constitution. There were dramatic shifts in the ALP's position on the Vietnam war between 1965 and 1972. These were due to factional, local political and international developments, in the context of the overall framework of the ALP's ongoing commitment to the “Australian national interest” and hence the US Alliance.

After Vietnam

On taking office in December 1972, Whitlam ended conscription. But his Government increased the size of the regular army.⁹⁶ Australian foreign policy under Labor did not undergo a radical change of direction. The shift from “forward” to “continental” conceptions of defence policy began before Labor took office and, like the reduced emphasis on the US Alliance, was a consequence

94 Aarons, CPA National Secretary, “Anti-war Perspectives: A Communist View,” *Australian Left Review* (March 1971), 25-6.

95 This was the Maoist position at the 19 July 1970 Vietnam Moratorium Campaign sponsors' meeting. See Saunders, “The Vietnam Moratorium Movement in Australia,” 169. The tone of “anti-imperialist” material could be just as reasoned as that presenting more moderate explanations and demands, see “What's So Special About Vietnam,” a leaflet produced by “an alliance of radical student and worker groups,” [April 1970], Riley Collection, National Library of Australia, “Vietnam Moratorium South Australia.”

96 R. O'Neill, “Defence Policy,” in W. J. Hudson, ed., *Australia in World Affairs, 1971-1975* (Sydney 1980), 12.

of the USA's defeat in Vietnam and subsequent reluctance to become directly involved in military conflicts — the “Vietnam Syndrome.” Whitlam formally recognized China, to which Australia had been selling wheat, steel and other commodities for decades (despite US disapproval). This policy, together with a greater emphasis on relations with southeast Asian countries, was part of a wider effort to renovate Australian capitalism both internally and in its articulations with the world economy.⁹⁷

While the conservatives had started to dismantle the White Australia policy during the 1960s, Labor consummated this process. Papua-New Guinea became independent but Australian aid and business activity continued to be crucial for the new state's political viability. There may have been paranoia in the CIA about the Whitlam Government, but this reflected neither an inclination on Whitlam's part to abandon the US Alliance in general nor a desire to make any significant changes in military and intelligence cooperation.⁹⁸ The Whitlam Government presided over the transition from Australian colonialism to neo-colonialism in New Guinea, which has remained dependent on Australian financial aid since its independence. Whitlam also established the framework for Australia's policy on East Timor. As one researcher puts it, “In meetings with then Prime Minister Whitlam in 1974 and 1975, the Indonesian government gained the impression that the Australian government understood Indonesia's position and would not oppose East Timor's integration into Indonesia, notwithstanding Australia's concerns that the rights of the Timorese should be respected.”⁹⁹ This “impression” proved correct. The conservative Fraser Government formally recognized the annexation of East

97 On the program of “technocratic laborism” see Rowley, “Dr Cairns on Tariffs,” and R. Catley and B. McFarlane, *From Tweedledum to Tweedledee*, (Sydney 1974).

98 S. Albinski, *Australian External Policy Under Labor* (Brisbane 1977), 249-51, 257-68.

99 S. Sherlock, “‘A pebble in Indonesia's Shoe’: recent developments in East Timor.” Department of the Parliamentary Library Research Paper No. 8 (Canberra 1995), 21.

Timor by Indonesia in 1978, a position continued by the Hawke and Keating Labor Governments.

The Fraser Government reacted to the start of the "Second Cold War," prompted by the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and increased arms expenditure under US Presidents Carter and Reagan, by increasing Australian "defence" spending, offering increased support facilities to the USA and increasing military ties with Malaysia and Singapore. None of these steps was reversed by the Hawke Government. But as Cheeseman and McKinley point out, the Fraser Government "refused an American invitation to participate in a Rapid Deployment Force which the US was raising to counter further Soviet moves."¹⁰⁰

As the decay of Russian military power became increasingly apparent during the second half of the 1980s, the Hawke Government and its Defence Minister Kim Beazley (junior), formulated and implemented defence policies that complemented the greater outward orientation of economic management. Where Fraser talked about reducing protectionism while raising levels of support for the least competitive industries, the Hawke Government presided over a period of rapid restructuring of Australian industry. Lower tariff and quota protection was accompanied by measures to promote increased international competitiveness, mainly by improving labour productivity but also by encouraging strategic new investment. Domestic rationalization provided the basis for more corporations to internationalize their operations, notably in finance, transport and some areas of manufacturing. Labor's external policies were designed to allow Australia to play a more aggressive role in the western Pacific and southeast Asia and further afield, a "new Austra-

100 G. Cheeseman and M. McKinley, "Australia's Regional Security Policies, 1970-1990: Some Critical Reflections," Working Paper No. 101, Australian National University Research, School of Pacific Studies, Peace Research Centre, 14. This section draws heavily on the outline of developments provided in Cheeseman and McKinley's paper.

lian militarism.”¹⁰¹ This involved the acquisition of appropriate hardware and deployment of aircraft to Malaysia and Singapore. The Hawke Government also pursued longstanding Labor policies of promoting strategic industries. It encouraged arms exports and required overseas suppliers of military hardware to undertake or contract out work in Australia. There was also increased emphasis on using aid projects to encourage trade, particularly with Asia.¹⁰²

After the collapse of the eastern European communist regimes in 1989, Australian Labor governments sought to influence the shape of the changed world order. This not only involved encouraging the USA to resume a more aggressive role as a global policeman, prepared to intervene wherever governments or movements seemed likely to challenge aspects of the existing order from Somalia to the Balkans. Labor also encouraged Japan to take on more international military “responsibilities.” In foreign economic policy the Labor Governments initiated the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Process (APEC) as a multinational multiplier of Australian influence, made systematic efforts to boost trade with southeast and Northeast Asia and to increase Australia’s own direct influence in southeast Asia and with the island states of the Pacific.

The overall orientation of Australian foreign policy changed little after the conservatives, under Liberal Prime Minister John Howard, returned to office in March 1996. There were efforts to make the US Alliance seem still tighter. But the resulting additional joint exercises did not change the relationship. The incompetent

101 See G. Cheeseman and St. J. Kettle, *The New Australian Militarism* (Sydney 1990); T. O’Lincoln, “The New Australian Militarism,” *Socialist Review*, 4 (1991), 27-47.

102 “An innovative trade-oriented aid deal by Australia with Manila has helped BHP Co Ltd break back into the Philippine steel market with a \$A5.3 million export contract ... The deal gives weight to the push within the Australian Government and industry for official aid to be angled towards the generation of growth of Australian trade, especially with Asia.” *Australian Financial Review*, 5 July 1987.

antics of “the boy on work experience”¹⁰³ who was Minister for Foreign Affairs was the most notable development in Australian foreign policy in the first months of the new Government. There have been no major departures from Labor's approach.

Conclusion

Since its formation, the Labor Party has undergone important changes¹⁰⁴ and pursued various policies. The pace of change during the long period of Labor government during the 1980s and 1990s was particularly rapid. This was particularly the case for policies on Australia's external relations. The ALP Governments responded to changes in world capitalism by reducing protectionism, encouraging international competitiveness and the diversification of exports. This was accompanied by a more aggressive “defence” policy. Between the end of the Cold War and Labor's defeat in 1996, Australia was directly engaged in military operations in the Persian Gulf, Somalia and Cambodia, and indirectly in the war in Bougainville. Labor encouraged the United States to maintain its military presence in the western Pacific¹⁰⁵ and Japan to play a large role in the maintenance of world order.

But these policies and measures did not differ fundamentally from Labor's earlier approach to foreign policy. Hence the Party's role in establishing the foundations of Australia's armed forces before 1914, and its enthusiasm for the slaughter of two World Wars. Labor juggled bilateral relationships with powerful allies, involvement in multilateral organizations and building up the country's own defence capacity during and after World War II. In the recent

103 Television satirist John Clark's description of Alexander Downer.

104 For recent developments see Tom Bramble, “Managers of Discontent.”

105 For example, “Evans Presses Philippines to Keep US Bases,” *Australian Financial Review*, 26 January 1989: “The Australian position was that while the future of the bases was a bilateral issue, it believed they should remain in the Philippines for regional security reasons.”

past it similarly kept Australia's options open in terms of relationships with the United States, Japan and APEC and Australia's capacity to intervene militarily in the southwest Pacific and further afield, alone or with allies. Nor can the shifts in the attitude of the Labor Party's leadership to the Vietnam War be accounted for by nobler principles than those which inform its policies today.¹⁰⁶

It is far more fruitful to seek explanations for the behaviour of social democratic parties in their material circumstances than their professed principles. We have seen that while changes in Australia's position in world capitalism have influenced Australian Labor Party's foreign policy, the Party's overall approach has not shifted. The pursuit of the "national interests" of capitalist Australia has consistently underpinned the policies of the Labor party. Support for repressive regimes and other imperialist powers, preparedness to send Australian workers overseas to kill and be killed are nothing new. They are integral to the social democratic tradition.

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106 Maddox, *The Hawke Government and Labor Tradition*, 200-1.