

the people wanted, who could get results and lead them to greatness—and put down the communists and any other group that threatened the unity and strength of the nation.

In 1933 Germany came under the control of the fascist Nazi party led by Adolf Hitler. This was a fascism more savage than Italy's. Hitler put all his opponents in concentration camps and planned to purify the German people by getting rid of the Jews. He was determined to have his revenge for the defeat of Germany in World War I.

Before World War I democrats believed that the whole world was moving to democracy. Now democracy was being rejected and new and terrible forms of tyranny were being established in once-civilised countries. This was also the time when democracy came under threat in Australia.

## **Dealing with revolutionaries**

In Australia during World War I, small groups of radical unionists and socialists flew the red flag at their meetings. The red flag was the flag of the workers worldwide; those who flew it showed they were loyal first to all workers rather than to their country. Red was also the colour of revolution, the flag of blood.

The new communist government in Russia adopted the red flag and added to it the hammer and sickle: the hammer for town workers, and the sickle for country workers, the peasants, who used the sickle to harvest the grain.

To fly the red flag in the war was to show that you did not believe in the war. Socialists said that the war was a bosses' affair, fought over markets and territory; the workers should have nothing to do with it. As the war continued to slaughter millions of young men, the socialists became more convinced that they were right, and more people in the unions and the Labor Party listened to their message. The socialists became more radical and some of them became revolutionaries.

Most people, however, continued to support the war. They had sons or husbands or brothers fighting in it or already killed in it. They wanted the British Empire and its allies to beat Germany. They were proud of being British and they saw the Empire as the chief protector of Australia. Because they were committed to seeing this terrible war through to its end, they were enraged by those who

declared that it was a worthless struggle. They hated the people who flew the red flag rather than the British Union Jack, which was then Australia's flag as well. The flying of the red flag was banned by the government, but it still appeared. When anti-war activists flew the red flag at their meetings in public parks, returned soldiers sometimes stormed the platforms, tore the flag down and beat up the speakers and their supporters.

At the end of the war, in 1918, a group of Russian revolutionaries was operating in Brisbane. They were workers who had come to Australia to escape the government of the Tsar. Now that there was a revolution in Russia they were waiting to go home. Meanwhile they teamed up with those who wanted Australia to have a workers' revolution like Russia's. They flew the red flag at their meetings and demonstrations.

The respectable loyal citizens of Brisbane organised a loyalty league to protest about the revolutionaries. They were upset not so much because they were the owners of properties and business which the revolutionaries wanted to take away; they were insulted and angry at the revolutionaries saying their society was worthless and should be destroyed. For them as loyal Australian Britons the Union Jack was the flag of political freedom and decency and equality before the law. Only a madman would tear this down for the red flag that stood for violence and destruction.

In March 1919, when the Russians and their friends paraded with red flags in Brisbane's streets, groups of returned soldiers launched an attack on them that lasted for three days and nights. The police tried to protect the Russians, but the soldiers destroyed their meeting hall and ransacked their homes. The *Courier Mail* praised the soldiers for their magnificent deeds in defending the honour of the flag for which they had fought. The president of the RSL said the local communists must be got rid of, in the same way that Australian troops treated German spies in the trenches.

Something new had happened in Australian politics. There were now people who wanted to overthrow democracy by force, and there were other people who did not mind violence being used against the revolutionaries. As in other countries, the war had led to bitter social divisions and extremism.

Until the military took it down in October 1918, the red flag flew over the Trades Hall in Brisbane, the headquarters of the trade unions. The unions and the Labor Party they supported became much more radical during the war. When they opposed

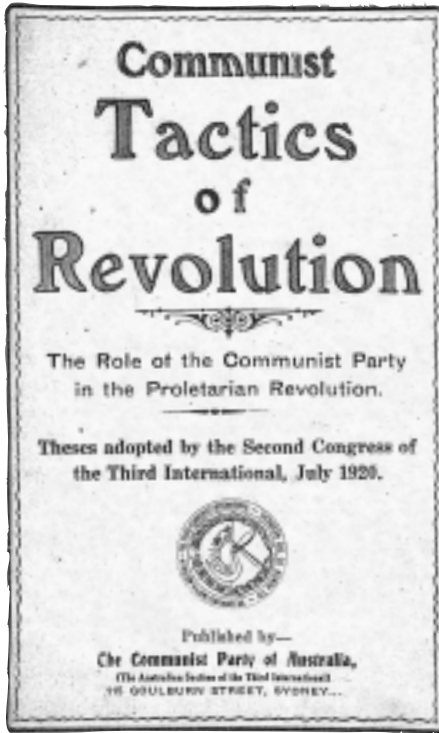
conscription for overseas service in 1916 and 1917 they said they were in favour of the war; they wanted men to volunteer for it rather than being compelled to go. Even then there were many within the movement who were opposed to the war. By 1918 the Labor Party was close to declaring that the war was not worth fighting. This made it easy for the Nationalists, led by the old Labor man Billy Hughes, to denounce them as disloyalists, as betrayers of the Empire and Australia. They were defeated in the elections held during the war in May 1917 and remained out of office in the Commonwealth until 1929, just before the Great Depression.

Before the war the trade unions and the Labor Party were a positive, dynamic force in Australian life. They seemed to be on the verge of taking charge of Australia and making it into a more just society. After the war, unions and the party lived in a hostile environment; they were on the defensive, bitter, stropy and resentful. The Labor Party became more radical and less likely to have the chance to put its program into effect. Unions fought long and bitter strikes in the 1920s and had very few wins. Some of the union leaders wanted strikes just to cause trouble and to bring on revolt against the bosses.

At its 1921 conference the Labor Party adopted socialism as its goal. It wanted banks, factories, large shops and businesses all to be owned by the government. This pleased the socialists in the party but it troubled the parliamentarians, who thought Labor could never get elected with this policy. So an extra sentence was added to say that any private business or property that was not being used to exploit workers could stay in private ownership.

Labor planned to reach socialism by using parliament and sticking to the constitution. Communists said this would never produce socialism. In 1920 in Sydney a small group of communists formed the Communist Party of Australia. Now an Australian organisation was officially linked to the worldwide communist movement that was run from Moscow and wanted to make workers' revolutions everywhere.

The Communist Party attracted more than its share of foreigners and misfits, but also over the years great numbers of talented and idealistic Australians. They cared deeply for those who suffered under capitalism—workers sacked because of an economic downturn, farmers losing their land to the banks, widows having to wash clothes or scrub offices to support their children. Communism came to them as a revelation: it explained why



*Revolution is proclaimed in  
Australia*

peaceful reform had not worked and would not work, and it promised that a society of true equality could be established.

To reach the ideal society they were prepared to accept the discipline of the Communist Party, which was run like a machine: members were to suppress all their human feelings; they were to care only for the cause; and they had to obey the leadership without question. If the leaders decided that members had adopted dangerous views, they had to confess their faults publicly before they could be readmitted to membership. An individual could not be right and the party wrong. The party was a superhuman force carrying mankind to a new future; individuals did not count at all. So even in Australia members accepted the thinking which allowed the Russian government to kill and imprison millions of people to advance the cause of communism. The difference was that in Australia communists who could not stomach the party any longer

*Talented and idealistic  
Australians in the  
Communist Party:  
The communist artist  
Noel Counihan  
paints the communist  
novelist Katherine  
Susannah Pritchard*



Noel Counihan. Australia 1913–1986  
*Katherine Susannah Pritchard. 1953*  
Oil on canvas 76.2 x 63.1 cm  
Gift of Winifred Stone 1977 National Gallery of Australia

could leave it and live, protected by the rights and freedoms which communists denounced as frauds.

The Australian Communist Party, like all others, received funding and instructions from Moscow. Communists around the world had to accept that the top priority was the protection and advancement of the Soviet Union, the first workers' state. Their first loyalty must be to Russia, not their own country.

Communists admired the new order in Russia and refused to believe that the revolution had gone wrong. However, taking orders from Moscow made it harder to be a communist and quite often damaged the local communist cause. Moscow for its own reasons and without warning would suddenly change tack and send out new orders. At one stage communists in Australia had to follow the policy of 'revolutionary defeatism', which meant that they had to tell the workers that they should not resist a foreign invasion because it might give the opportunity for revolution.

The communists were at first a tiny group, but in New South Wales they instantly became very influential. The leaders of several large unions joined the Communist Party and Jock Garden, the secretary of the Trades and Labor Council, became the leader of the party. In 1922 Garden went to Moscow to attend an international communist conference. He told the conference that communists in Australia led unions with 400 000 members and that they would come to power through controlling Labor Councils (as he did Sydney's).

Of course, Garden was big-noting himself. He and his friends controlled unions, but very few of their members were communists; they were supporters of the Labor Party. But it was a great victory for communism to have such persons of influence supporting the cause and promising a revolution in Australia. To opponents of communism (which was nearly everyone), this was very disturbing. Imagine what we would think today if the head of the ACTU announced that she was planning a workers' revolution to overthrow democracy, abolish private businesses and property, and close down the churches!

Some people have argued that the communists were no real threat: their numbers were small and the Australian people were too committed to democracy for communists to have a chance. They claim that there was no reason to fear communism or that fears were greatly exaggerated. However, by its methods of operation communism spread fear of communism, even when the number of communists was small. Lenin was in favour of a small, disciplined party. It should take advantage of chaos and confusion to seize power and impose its control on the country. (Once you abandon democracy you don't have to bother about majority support.) Nor did communists think they had to say openly what they were doing. They were perfectly happy to keep their communist identity secret. They could then infiltrate other organisations and, without their members realising, use them to advance the communist cause.

A small group, working in secret, creating division and conflict, and then hoping to grab power—this was the Communist Party. No wonder it aroused fear. Australian democracy had never had to deal with such an organisation.

In Australia there was no permanent army available to put down an attempted revolution. Full-time foot soldiers could be recruited only when there was a war. To fill this gap, large secret armies were formed by the owners of large businesses and professional men.

Their officers were men who had served as officers in the war and many of the ordinary members were ex-diggers. The armies never came together. They were a network of contacts that could bring men together if there was danger. Men knew who their section leader was, but nothing more about the organisation. These armies first came into existence during the war, when revolutionaries first became active. They did not have a permanent existence; organisation would lapse when things seemed calm. They became most active during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Private armies are a threat to democracy. The only army should be the one controlled by the government, which is responsible to the people. These armies insisted that they were not a danger; they existed only to protect law and order and constitutional rule. Their plans were designed to beat the communists' plans for revolution. They knew the communists were a small group, but that a breakdown in essential services—caused, say, by strikes—might give the communists their chance. The first job of the secret army was to keep essential services going and help the authorities preserve law and order.

In 1923 Jock Garden and the other Red union leaders showed up at the New South Wales Labor Party Conference and asked that the Communist Party be allowed to join the Labor Party. He was acting under instructions from Moscow. Garden and his friends had joined the Communist Party because Labor was not radical enough for them, but Moscow now said that the revolutionary opportunities that had existed just after the war had passed. There was no chance of separate communist action succeeding. Communists should join the Labor Party and work to take it over and make it into a revolutionary party, ready to seize power at the next crisis.

The conference was evenly split on the admission of communists. Only on the casting vote of the chairman were the communists allowed in. At the next year's conference they were voted out 160 to 104. Only for one year did Labor ever give official recognition to the Communist Party. The debate over whether communists should be admitted was one of the most significant in the party's history, even though at the time the delegates gave more attention to whether the leader of the Australian Workers Union should be thrown out for using ballot boxes with sliding panels to rig party elections.

## SHOULD COMMUNISTS BE ALLOWED TO JOIN THE LABOR PARTY?

### Ten reasons against

- The Communists advocate revolution and armed violence. Labor stands for constitutional methods.
- Communists advocate wholesale confiscation of land, cottages, mines, money, factories etc.
- The Communists' iron dictatorship is the complete opposite of majority rule.
- The Communists aim at the destruction of Parliament and Local Governing Bodies.
- Communists cannot be loyal to the Labor Party because they must give undivided allegiance to the Communist Executive.
- The Communists owe allegiance to foreigners in Moscow.
- Communists preach the United Front as a matter of tactics to deceive the Trades Unions and Labor Leagues.
- The Communists aim at destroying the Trades Unions and the Labor Party and converting them into units for a mad revolution.
- The Communists' official attitude to religion is offensive to ninety-five per cent of Laborites and Trade Unionists.
- The admission of the Communist Party with the right to spread its views would destroy the solidarity of the Labor Party.

### Ten reasons for

- The Communist Party is a working-class organisation.
- The Ultimate Objectives of the Two Parties are the same—the Socialisation of Industry. The real difference lies in the means adopted: the Communist Party does not believe that the capitalist class will allow the workers to socialise industry by parliamentary action.
- The unity of the Working Class is essential to the Victory of Labor over Capitalism.
- The Affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labor Party will strengthen the Labor Party.
- Affiliation has been demanded by all Trade Union Conferences.
- The Communist Party is a fighting organisation in the trade unions and trade union support is the only power that the Labor Party can rely upon.
- The criticism of the Communist Party against the reactionary elements in the Labor Party will make for the advancement of Labor.
- The Labor Party at present is not a class party and therefore does not alone represent the working class.
- The Labor Party in its final fight for the complete overthrow of capitalism must have the support of all workers.
- The Communist Party, if rejected now, will continue its fight for affiliation and will in the end win.

P.F. Loughlin  
(Deputy  
Leader of  
State  
Parliamentary  
Labor Party)  
*Ten Reasons  
Why Labor  
should  
continue to  
Exclude the  
Communist  
Party and  
Members of  
that Party  
from the ALP,  
Sydney, 1925*

*The  
Communist  
Party and the  
Labor Party  
Central  
Executive,  
Communist  
Party of  
Australia,  
Sydney, 1924*



the same thing as the Labor Party—socialism. They might differ in methods, but the workers would get nowhere unless they were united, and the communists were real stirrers who would help to keep the politicians on track. These were the views of the militant trade unionists.

The case against was that the difference in method was everything. Labor was and had to remain a constitutional party that would bring in its program only if the majority of the people supported it. Communism frightened and offended people by its attack on all property and on religion. These were the views of moderate union leaders, the delegates from the country, the Catholics—a large element in the party—and the politicians. The politicians most of all knew that an alliance with the communists would be electoral suicide. The Labor Party had taken a terrible hammering from the Nationalists and in the press for having allowed the communists in.

The second vote in favour of exclusion did not settle matters between Labor and communism. Communists who hid their identity could still be members of the Labor Party, as could communists who were not members of the Communist Party, and sympathisers with communism. Communists who gained control of unions would exercise an influence in the party whether or not they were allowed to be members of it. This was a real problem for the Labor Party. The unions were the most important part of the party, but the party could not control who joined or led the unions.

Communism became the central issue in federal politics in the 1920s. The Nationalist government led by Stanley Bruce won two elections by campaigning against communism.

Bruce had replaced Hughes as Nationalist leader in 1923. The son of a Melbourne businessman, he went to Cambridge University in England and then looked after the London office of the family firm. He returned to Australia after fighting in the war in the British army. He is the only businessman to have been prime minister. However, he did not see himself as governing for business; he was a Nationalist, the leader of a party that had brought together Liberal and Labor politicians to fight the war. He talked constantly of the need for national unity if Australia was to solve its problems and progress.

He talked about unity because in the workplace there was constant strife. Militant unions opposed to capitalism ran strikes against hard-headed bosses who wanted to keep costs down. Bruce



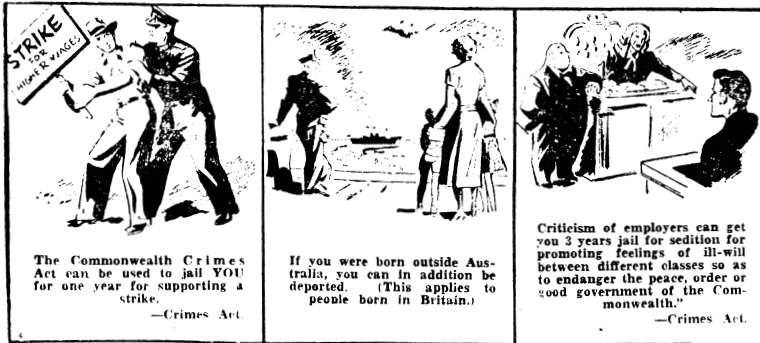
*Prime Minister Stanley Melbourne Bruce with Rolls Royce*

thought there should be no strikes. Australia had created an arbitration system to make strikes unnecessary, and workers should accept the rulings of the Arbitration Court. He considered—rightly—that communists were making industrial strife worse. His solution was to increase the penalties on unions for striking and defying the court and to deport foreign-born union leaders who gave trouble.

The most militant union leaders were often born outside Australia. Bruce was targeting in particular Tom Walsh and Jacob Johnson, the leaders of the Seamen's Union. Both were socialist revolutionaries. Johnson was born in the Netherlands. Walsh was born in Ireland and was thus a British subject. Bruce was himself a loyal Britisher and his party criticised Labor for not being loyal enough to Britain, but he was going to treat a union leader with British citizenship as a foreigner.

Many Labor politicians regarded the militant unionists as a menace, but the Labor Party in parliament opposed Bruce's plans as a general attack on unionism and on civil liberties. They criticised the method that was to be used to order deportation—a board of enquiry, not a court—and the inclusion of British subjects as foreigners.

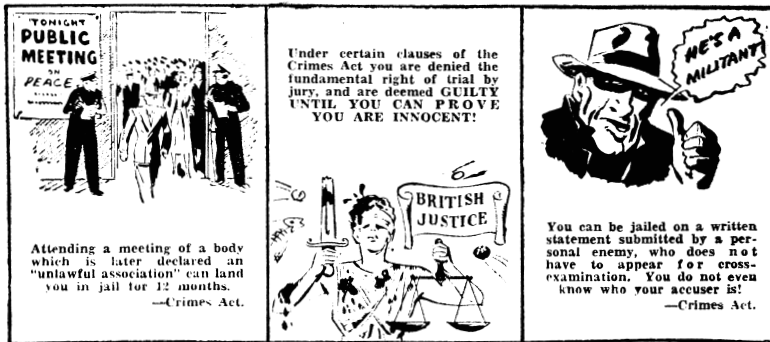
**"THIS LEGISLATION DRIVES US BACK TO THE DARK AGES OF CENTURIES AGO."**—Labor member J. H. Scullin on the political clauses of the Crimes Act.



**"A MEASURE WHICH IS A MENACE TO THE PEACE, ORDER AND GOOD GOVERNMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH."**—Labor member N. Makin on the Crimes Act.

The Communist Senate team — Sharkey, Thornton, Ross and Ogston—is pledged to fight for the repeal of this menace to freedom.

**"I BELIEVE THE BILL HAS BEEN FRAMED WITH THE SOLE INTENTION OF SUPPRESSING TRADE UNIONISM."**—Labor member W. H. Lambert on the Crimes Act.



**"THIS BILL WILL REMAIN A BLOT ON THE FAIR ESCUTCHEON OF AUSTRALIA UNTIL A FUTURE PARLIAMENT WIPES IT OUT."**—Labor member J. E. Fenton on the Commonwealth Crimes Act.

*The communist criticism of Bruce's legislation directed against militant unionists*

Bruce was confident that the people would support him. In September 1925 he called an election as the deportation board was examining the activities of Walsh and Johnson. Bruce declared that Australian democracy was in danger from the communists and that tough measures had to be taken against them. Labor could

Please refer to the book for this image

not be trusted to deal with the menace; it was altogether too friendly with communists. The Labor Party said that Bruce was exaggerating the danger just to win an election. It attacked the Nationalists for taking away the ancient rights and liberties of British subjects. The Nationalists replied that the threat to liberty came from the communists.

The government had a great victory, increasing its majority. However, the High Court stopped its plan to deport Walsh and Johnson. The Commonwealth government has only limited powers. The government had based its law on deportation on its power over immigration. The Court ruled that Walsh and Johnson had been in the country so long that they could not be regarded as immigrants.

The government continued its anticommunist campaign. In the new parliament it added a section to the Crimes Act that declared revolutionary associations and their publications unlawful. Labor supported it. The law did not directly outlaw the Communist Party: the government would have to prove in court that the party was revolutionary; then its members could be jailed for up to a year and its property seized. The communists expected this and prepared to go underground. However, the government did no more than seize communist papers and literature coming from overseas and step up its spying on the communists.

Communism was an issue at the next election in 1928, which the government also won. It lost office at a special election in 1929 when the issue was the Arbitration Court. Bruce was a tidy-minded, efficient man. One of the difficulties of industrial relations was that both the states and the Commonwealth had power over them. In 1926 Bruce tried to change the constitution to get full power for the Commonwealth. He lost the referendum. Then he decided to abandon the Commonwealth Arbitration Court and leave industrial relations to the states. Some of his own party deserted him on this and he was forced to call an early election. This move against the Commonwealth Court that set the basic wage was very unpopular. The government was defeated and Bruce lost his own seat. A Labor government under James Scullin took office.

## **Economic collapse**

The economic Depression of the 1930s was just the sort of crisis that communists hoped for. Capitalism around the world seemed