

8. Communism

The effect of the Russian Revolution of 1917 was startling in its effects on socialist movements worldwide.¹ While Marx and the anarchists had been arguing points of theory during the nineteenth century, the success of the Bolshevik Party in Russia, led by Lenin and assisted by Trotsky and Stalin, galvanised international socialist movements and appeared to show the way to transforming capitalist society into something more humane. In the years following the revolution, Lenin led the party and the country, consolidating the achievements of the revolution within Russia, while through the Communist International, or Comintern as it was more commonly known, he sought to extend the achievements of the revolution internationally. The ruling body of the Comintern, the Executive Council of the Communist International, (E.C.C.I), was led by Zinoviev, though under the guidance of Lenin, and at the 2nd Congress of the Comintern in 1920, the United Front policy was adopted, which aimed at “penetrating and utilising the mass workers organisations of the bourgeois-democratic countries” to further the prospects of world revolution. However during Lenin’s illness of 1922 the administration of the country passed to Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev and from 1922 Stalin was the only member on all four organisations which controlled the country – the Politburo, the Orgburo, the Central Commission and the Secretariat. Stalin’s rise had been the result of the rapid growth of the party bureaucracy after 1920 and he was appointed to the full time position of the General Secretary of the Party in 1922. The ruling triumvirate of Stalin, Zinoviev and Kamenev were united in their distrust of Trotsky, a relative new comer to the party, although he possessed the gifts of mob oratory and intellectual brilliance, with a large personal following in the army and the Communist youth. During 1925 Stalin isolated Trotsky by removing him as the nominal head of the army and then had Zinoviev removed as head of the Leningrad Soviet. During 1926, Trotsky and Zinoviev put aside their past antagonisms and presented a united front against Stalin, but at the 15th Conference in October, Zinoviev was removed from the Comintern, Trotsky from his seat on the Politburo and Kamenev lost his position as a candidate member on the Central Committee. It was at this conference that Stalin’s policy of ‘Socialism in One Country’ was openly adopted and the ‘Third Period’ policy of ‘Class against Class’ was instituted which claimed that Capitalism was entering a period of global crisis and the Social Democratic Labour parties would be called upon by the capitalists to impose cuts in living standards on the workers and thus be exposed as ‘social fascists’ and enemies of the working class. Communist parties around the world were to reject the United Front policy of working with social democratic Labour parties and were now expected to stand candidates at elections to offer the working classes a clear alternative to social democratic policies. In January 1928, Trotsky left Moscow and was finally expelled from Russia in January 1929.

The Communist Party of Australia was formed on the 30th December 1920 at the Australian Socialist Party (A.S.P.) hall in Liverpool St., Sydney.² The party was formed by a combination of the A.S.P. members such as Arthur Reardon, Ray and Marcia Everitt, and Bob Broodney, the Victorian Labour College (V.L.C.) led by Bill Earsman and his companion Christian Jollie Smith with the support of Guido Baracchi, Jock Garden and a delegation from the N.S.W. Trades Hall, Carl Baker from the Victorian Socialist Party, representatives of the Social Democratic League of NSW and the Socialist Labour Party, and assorted individuals such as the recently released Tom Glynn, a member of the International Workers of the World (I.W.W), or Wobbly as they were more commonly known, who had been imprisoned for four years in 1916 for seditious activity because of his campaign for direct action against the war, Tom Walsh from the Seaman’s Union and Adela Pankhurst Walsh from the famous feminist Pankhurst family. Adela had arrived in Sydney in 1914 and was imprisoned for her anti-war activity and only avoided deportation by marrying Tom Walsh while on remand. She had to leave the inaugural meeting when their young child began to cry in the back of the hall.

The A.S.P. owned extensive facilities in Liverpool St., while the V.L.C., with their offices in Sussex St., had a wide range of contacts in the Socialist movement, with the Trades Hall ‘Reds’, led by Jock Garden, content to sit on the sidelines. For a while the A.S.P. and V.L.C. factions co-operated, but they soon split into competing parties, both using the title ‘Communist Party of Australia’. However the A.S.P. gradually became isolated, when the V.L.C. gained control of their facilities after a group of young A.S.P. members led by Bert Moxon removed the printing press and other facilities to the V.L.C. offices in Sussex Street. On May Day 1921, a Sussex St meeting was disrupted by a group of ex-soldiers carrying the Union Jack and the Communists responded by burning their flag. One witness, D.H. Lawrence, then living on the N.S.W. south coast,

described the scene in his novel *Kangaroo*: “The red flag suddenly flashing like blood, and bellowing rage at the sight of it. A Union Jack torn to fragments and stamped upon. A mob with many different centres, some fighting frenziedly around a red flag, some clutching fragments of the Union Jack, as if it were God incarnate.” In December 1922, the party formally adopted the Comintern’s ‘United Front’ policy of working with trade unions and Labor parties as ‘a tool for the acceleration of the revolutionising process of the masses’. The confidence of the young party was no doubt bolstered by Lenin’s view that Australia is “a land of bourgeois political experiments and if a successful revolution were carried out there, that would be the last straw of the Labour bourgeois politicians smashed”.

At the federal election of December 1922, the recently formed Country Party led by Earle Page won fourteen seats, giving it the balance of power in a hung parliament of Billy Hughes’ Nationalist Party and the A.L.P.³ Hughes, the Labor Prime Minister during the war, had come out strongly in support of compulsory conscription, but the Labor Party was split of the issue and after the defeat of the conscription referendum of 1917, Hughes left the A.L.P. and joined the conservative Nationalist Party, thus becoming one of the great Labor ‘rats’. However after the success of the Country Party at the elections, the dislike and distrust of Hughes enabled Page to have him ousted from the Prime Ministership and replaced with Stanley Bruce, a Melbourne lawyer and the Bruce-Page coalition set the pattern of co-operation between the two main anti-Labor parties which has lasted ever since. The A.L.P., still weakened by the wartime conscription issue, was further disabled by growing tension between the parliamentary and industrial wings over the growing militancy of the unions under the influence of the International Workers of the World (I.W.W), or ‘Wobblies’.

At the 1925 federal election, the Bruce Government successfully exploited a photo of Jock Garden and other Australian Communist’s standing shoulder to shoulder with Communist’s from China, Japan, India and from Vietnam, Ho Chi Min, to win the federal election. Prior to the election Tom Walsh and Jacob Johnson were to be deported by the government for their involvement in the seaman’s strike of 1925 - a story strikingly told in Christina Stead’s ‘Seven Poor Men of Sydney’ - but after the success of their election victory, the government was rebuffed by the High Court which ruled that the deportations were unconstitutional. In response, Bruce appointed Latham as attorney general with the brief to re-draft the Crimes Act with a broader definition of ‘unlawful activity and association’ and imposed new penal sanctions on strikers. During the twenties the Bruce-Page government pursued a policy of ‘Men, Money and Markets’ which aimed at developing natural resources, primarily by tariff protection which was also extended to a wide range of primary products to appease the Country Party politicians. The government enjoyed strong support for its defence of the ‘White Australia Policy’, although the government and the unions were in constant conflict, with the government introducing legislation to restrict the unions, employers locking workers out of factories and the unions responding with strikes across a range of industries. Bruce was systematic in his attacks on the working class, attempting to increase the weekly working hours from 44 to 48, tried to make strikes illegal and extended the censorship on literary and political writings first instituted by Hughes during the war.

The first main electoral test for the local Communist party was the 1925 N.S.W. state election, but they failed to gain any significant votes as the electors supported Jack Lang in his quest to become premier and the effect of this electoral failure was to drive many of the ‘Trades Hall Reds’ into the ranks of the N.S.W. Labor Party. Jack Kavanagh joined the party in May of 1925, was co-opted to the executive in August and then chaired the end of year conference, which was also attended by the novelist Katherine Susannah Pritchard. By this time Guido Barrachi, an original party member and past editor of *Inpreccor*, the paper of the Comintern, having been on the fringe of the local party for some time, finally resigned, regarding the party as ‘such a tragic farce that I cannot bear to be associated with it a moment longer’. He eventually left Sydney to the strains of the old Wobbly anthem: “Hallelujah! I’m a bum, Hallelujah! I’m a bum, Hallelujah! Give us a handout, to relieve us from pain.” Throughout 1926, there was continuing tension between the A.L.P. and the C.P.A. with the Trades Hall Reds caught in the middle, until December, when Garden, the last of the original membership of the C.P.A., abandoned the ideals of the Communists for the pragmatic reality of party politics siding with Jack Lang’s Labor Party, eventually becoming Lang’s lieutenant. Stalin’s policy of ‘Socialism in one country’ attempted to insulate Russia from foreign interference by the capitalist democracies by subordinating the aims of international Socialism to his own nationalist policy. However within the C.P.A. acceptance of this policy was not universal and when the leadership of the Party transferred to Jack Kavanagh at the end of 1926, he pursued a policy of ‘exceptionalism’ which sought to allow the local party to operate independently of

Comintern directives. Despite Kavanagh's attempt to pursue an independent line, at the December conference the local party meekly accepted the Comintern view in its 'Resolution of the Australian Question' that there were no revolutionary conditions in Australia, thus deferring to the authority of the Comintern for the first time in its history and henceforth increasingly came under the direction of Moscow.

With the arrival of John Anderson in February 1927, the C.P.A. soon gained an important intellectual ally, for within four months Anderson had contributed his first letter to The Workers Weekly. Anderson had formed many of his political views in Scotland during the 1920's, but access to information on Russian Communism in Australia was limited by the government's censorship and hence there was a wide gulf in understanding between Anderson and the leadership of the local party, whether from the left or right wings.⁴ In several letters and articles to The Workers Weekly, Anderson outlined his general social and political position. In his first brief letter 'Art and the Workers', he defended a view which was to characterise his perception of Communism for the rest of his life.⁵ In response to an earlier writer who had criticised the 'corrupt' nature of anything which originates in the bourgeoisie, Anderson argued that to regard bourgeois culture as corrupt simply because it originates in the bourgeoisie, overlooks the fact that Marxist and Communist theory itself arose from the bourgeoisie and therefore must also be corrupt. Anderson concluded that if the proletariat can learn nothing from the bourgeoisie, then it can only be reactionary and opportunistic, with the class struggle being the only thing which can keep the proletariat from becoming corrupted. Anderson's belief in the consistency of Communism with determinism was evident in an article for The Workers Weekly, 'Evolution and Revolution', where he argued that there is no 'accident' in evolution, that everything, including social and political activity, is governed by causal, determined laws.⁶ Hence the 'struggle for existence' in human history is, in modern times, the struggle between capitalist and proletarian forms of organisation, with the proletarian form becoming the next dominant form of organisation. Anderson also contributed a short piece to The Workers Weekly on the issue of censorship where he argued that the restriction of political propaganda was illogical, for if the spreading of propaganda is not a crime, then the importation of propaganda could not be a crime.⁷

Towards the end of 1927, the C.P.A. resurrected its theoretical journal, The Communist, and in his article for the first issue, 'History and Theory', Anderson argued that Marxism is a *scientific* socialism because it treats society historically and seeks to predict the future of society as based on the operation of deterministic laws.⁸ It is the working class, he argued, which is entitled to be regarded as the 'society of the future', that 'history is on their side', for they have developed the power of co-operation as a defence against oppression. Anderson continued writing for The Communist during the first half of 1928 where he contributed two articles 'The Moral Factor in the Proletarian Revolution' and 'Reformism and Class Consciousness'.⁹ In the former article he put forward his belief that the motivation of the proletariat for revolution is not only economic, but is also moral as "a demand for a particular way of living, broadly describable as freedom". Hence he argued that the development of capitalism prepares the way for the proletarian revolution by revealing their moral and economic degradation and exploitation. The great virtue of a proletarian dictatorship over a bourgeois dictatorship, he argued, was that the former was committed to destroying the State and hence creating a classless society free from exploitation. In the latter article he argued that in the conflict between reformists and revolutionists in the socialist movement, the reformers are thoroughly individualistic, relying on the cult of the leader, cut off from working class conditions. The reformist does not take production as socially fundamental, but believes that the re-distribution of wealth within the existing capitalist system can best serve the needs of the workers. Such an ideal of 'individual betterment', he concluded, has no place in a socialist system. Similarly the reformers' distaste for working class violence indicated their collusion with the capitalist system.

In a 1928 address to the Economics Society at the University, Anderson emphasised the theoretical importance of Marxism to his Realist social theory when he defended Marx's theory of historical materialism as a determinist and materialist theory of history and, in keeping with his empiricist philosophy, he argued that every social and historical event is causally determined.¹⁰ Anderson also organised a petition to Prime Minister Bruce, signed by thirty university lecturers and professors, protesting about the censorship imposed on radical political literature and, when this proved to no avail, he wrote an article for the Labour Monthly on 'Censorship and Public Policy'.¹¹ At about this time, he also gave a paper on 'Literature and the Proletarian

Outlook' where he criticised the crude proletarian view that art and literature is merely 'reflex' propaganda of existing economic conditions, the validity of which is determined by the class origin of the artist.¹²

When it is said that cultural conditions are 'a mere reflex' of economic conditions, it cannot be meant that cultural conditions are identical with economic conditions, for this would be to say that economic conditions reflect themselves. But if they are different, then the difference is not to be explained in terms of economic conditions, and so there is something more in culture than class propaganda.

On his own view, the artist is a worker like any other who has materials that he has to work with and to demand that art should be propagandist is to demand that it should not be art.

Putting the matter generally art is a social product, but it is not therefore bound to be *about* society. A work of art is the presentation of some subject (no matter what), as a balance of forces, or succession of phases, which together build up the whole; it shows us the construction of the subject, and leaves it at that; it doesn't tell us what to do with it. To demand of art that it should be propagandist is to demand that it should not be art.

He also contributed a short piece to The Workers Weekly where he argued that the prohibition of liquor was a movement towards regimentation and for a more and more open dictatorship and the militant response to this is to see the issue as a sharpening of the struggle between workers and the bourgeoisie.¹³ However Anderson concluded that even the Communist Party may be 'drunk' on an obsession with efficiency.

With Hitler's rise to power and the growth of local Fascism, Anderson became involved with the United Front Against Fascism (U.F.A.F) and in a paper, 'Against Fascism', he argued that the U.F.A.F. stands for the maintenance of working class rights of organisation, agitation and demonstration against the disruptive and dictatorial schemes of Fascist bodies such as the New Guard.¹⁴ Further, in a paper to the Communist Party in July 1930, 'What is Social Fascism?' he presented both a close analysis of the meaning of Fascism and of the relation of Social Fascism to the Communist movement.¹⁵ He argued that the distinctive nature of Fascism as a form of government is "...the application of State dictatorship, and the abrogation of democratic forms, in every organisation and institution and public activity in the country." Illustrating his point, he argued that Fascism was the cultural appropriation of the Imperial Roman symbol of the bundle of rods (*fascis*) carried by the attendants of the chief magistrates, which symbolised the magistrates power to flog and kill in the name of the State. Relating this to the Social Fascism of Labour and Social Democratic parties, he argued that Social Fascism is "the carrying out of the policy of Fascism by those who set themselves up to be the social saviours of the workers; it is the enrolment of the workers' leaders as *police and executioners* of the masses in the interests of Imperialism."¹⁶ He argued further that Social Fascism was particularly prevalent in Australian working class history with its boss-controlled Unions, support for the 'White Australia' policy, the protection of scabs and the bludgeoning and shooting of workers by Labor governments and their police. He concluded with a call for the Communist Party to become the leader and defender of the working class masses against the Labor traitors, with all propaganda and agitation being directed towards exposing the treachery of these Social Fascists.

In another paper from July, 'Russia and Reconciliation', Anderson presented a concise analysis of both the history and theory of Communism and of the conditions existing in Russia at that time, as could be determined when the censorship imposed by the federal United Australia Party Government banned publications as innocuous as the 'Weekly News Bulletin' of the Russian Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, the 'News Bulletin' of the Russian Co-Operatives, 'Social Insurance in the Soviet Union', the report of a British Workers delegation, 'Soviet Russia Today' and the British 'Labour Monthly'.¹⁷ Anderson's analysis of Communist theory was based on three main points - the economic interpretation of history, the definition of society as organisation for production and the acceptance of the class war as a

struggle between different forms of organisation of production - bourgeois and proletarian. The economic interpretation of history treats society as a thing, with its own ways of working:

Society, on this theory, is defined as organisation for production and the class war is a struggle between different forms of organisation for production (established and nascent); between different *economic forces*. These being fundamental to society, all other social forces are to be estimated in relation to them, at least as far as the progress of society is concerned. This does not of itself imply that production is the sole social value (though it may be, or may be a constituent of all social values), but simply that it is a condition of social survival, the social test.¹⁸

However Anderson criticised the Marxist theory for its neglect of ethical questions and issues and to remedy this deficiency, he turned to the work of Sorel:

But, as Sorel has shown, their (the Marxist's) theory and practice are in a line with the ethic of the *producer*. The position is that all goods are productive activities; but they can be developed, to any great extent at least, only in harmony with the main productive relations of the existing state of society - allowing that a productive force, which has not yet achieved dominance, may nevertheless achieve a powerful social influence and generate and uphold productive (creative) activities, as, on Sorel's showing, the working class movement has already done under capitalism.¹⁹

Anderson argued that the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia was necessary, but only as a dictatorship against the bourgeoisie, and with the proviso that the dictatorship of the proletariat seeks the eventual elimination of the State altogether. Anderson expressed support for the implementation of the Five Year Plans and the 'liquidation' of the kulaks although by 'liquidation', Anderson meant merely the prevention of the kulaks acting as members of the bourgeoisie, arguing that that the kulaks could 'liquidate' themselves by choosing to join one of the Soviet collectives. Anderson also argued that there is no possibility that the Communist International could be controlled by the Russian Government, for the Communist International was comprised of a variety of international groups, which naturally looked to Russia as the inspiration for revolutionary Communism. He concluded that the building of socialism in the Soviet Union was the most decisive work now being done in the liberation of international workers and colonial peoples.

From the start of 1932, Anderson resumed his discussion of Communism, with an article for the magazine *Zest* on political freedom, a theme which he developed in May in an address to the Friends of the Soviet Union.²⁰ However his most important contribution came when he was invited to submit three articles to the journal of the Melbourne University Labour Club, *Proletariat*.²¹ In his first article 'The Working Class', Anderson reaffirmed his determinist interpretation of Marxism, arguing that social theory is only possible with the rejection of the view that society is a collection of 'individual wills' and the recognition that society is a thing with characters of its own, acting in definite ways. Anderson accepted Marx's definition of society as 'organisation for production' which he argued is essentially co-operative and also accepted the Marxist theory of class conflict, whereby developing forms of production come into conflict with existing forms, bringing about a revolutionary period. He argued that the bringing together of the workers into factories will enable social and co-operative relations to develop amongst them and they will be led to create a 'society of producers', where the ownership of private property is abolished. The working class, he concluded, must be internationalist in character and, in exhibiting the 'heroic values' of the producer, is "...the one truly ethical force in existing society - the one force that can annihilate the decadent values of helplessness, philanthropy and patronage".

In his second article for *Proletariat*, 'Freedom and the Class Struggle', Anderson returned to the question of freedom and its relation to the class analysis of society. He argued that proletarian theory differs fundamentally from liberal theory in its recognition of a ruling class and an oppressed class and that the fight for freedom must be conducted along class lines. The struggle of the oppressed proletariat, then, is a struggle for emancipation, not simply for themselves, but from the exploitation of man by man. Proletarian theory, he

concluded, must emphasise the positive nature of freedom as the exhibition of initiative, responsibility and productivity. This positive conception is exhibited by the proletariat in its revolutionary struggle with capitalism and the class struggle occurs within a general producers movement which is not limited to the proletariat, but involves co-operation with intellectuals. Anderson concluded this article by expressing unreserved admiration for the planned economy of Soviet Russia and looked forward to the eradication of classes and the end of the dictatorship of the proletariat at the completion of the second Five Year Plan.

However after an exchange of letters in The Workers Weekly with J.B. Miles, the General Secretary of the C.P.A., Anderson wrote a more critical assessment of Communism under the title 'Leadership and Spontaneity', which was subsequently refused for publication by the Labour Club. Anderson's response to this censure was to publish his article in pamphlet form under the auspices of the Freethought Society, signalling his formal break with the C.P.A..²² In this article, Anderson criticised the management of the C.P.A. as being 'sectarian, pedantic and bureaucratic', an attitude which is based on the fear of spontaneity and gives rise to the personal abuse of dissenters from the 'official' line and the protection of members within the organisation from 'contamination' by those outside of it. He argued further that the bureaucratic nature of the local Communist party had its origin in Communist theory itself, which neglected the independence of social movements and defended the false distinction between subjective and objective factors in history, where Communism is supposed to be the only objective factor in history, with all other forces being merely 'subjective'. Anderson concluded by calling for a necessary alliance between industrial workers and intellectuals to resist the sectarian tendencies of Communism and enable the coming into being of a 'producers society'.

John Anderson's contribution to Communist theory and local Communism was significant, but has been little appreciated. His novel approach to Communism retained a class analysis of society, but rejected the theory of the dialectic which many have believed is essential to an understanding of Communism and Marxism. He also rejected the naive view of the Communist's that the social and cultural superstructure of society is somehow mechanistically determined by the operation of the economic basis. This view allowed him to recognise the important role the bourgeoisie can play in the liberation of the working class and also enabled him to recognise that the motivation of the working class need not be merely economic, but is based on a general theory of freedom for all people. To the C.P.A. Anderson brought outstanding intellectual credentials to a party that was riven by dispute and at a low theoretical level. His revitalisation of their theoretical magazine gave the more intellectual members a forum to discuss issues and assess Anderson's unique theoretical approach. Although never a party member, Anderson was actively involved with many organisations associated with the party and through his outspoken defence of freethought provided a focus for the party to combat the censorship and surveillance instituted by the government. He was often vocal on the right of the Communists and other interested parties to have the right of access to Communist literature, the right of Communists for free association, and the right of the working class to organise themselves as they saw fit. However Anderson was also percipient in his recognition that the 'sectarian, pedantic and bureaucratic' nature of the C.P.A. was not merely a local aberration of Communism or lay merely in the totalitarian activities of Stalinist Russia, but originated in Communist and Marxist theory itself. In the years that followed his break from the C.P.A., he embraced Trotsky's view that Russia was under the temporary domination of the Stalinist bureaucracy, although in time he rejected this view also, as his liberal democratic theories began to take shape. These developments in his political position however, were not mere adventitious exercises in political theory but were the result of a Realistic and logical analysis of the nature of society and its historical operation.

Chapter 7

¹ Schapiro, L. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, 1962.

² MacIntyre, S. The Reds Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1999.

³ Ward, R. A Nation for a Continent Heinemann London 1978

⁴ For a selection of Anderson's political writings see Anderson, J. A Perilous and Fighting Life Pluto Press Sydney 2003 while for a general discussion of his political life see Baker, A.J. The Social Thought and Political Life of Professor John Anderson and Kennedy, B. A Passion to Oppose M.U.P. Melbourne 1996. For Anderson's more developed political writings see Anderson, J. Studies in Empirical Philosophy Angus and Robertson Sydney 1962.

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- 5 The Workers Weekly 10th June 1927
- 6 Anderson A Perilous and Fighting Life pp 25 - 28
- 7 Politics and Publicity: Are we to be allowed to discuss Communism? The Workers Weekly 7/10/1927, p 4
- 8 Anderson op cit pp 29 - 33
- 9 ibid pp 34 - 49
- 10 ibid pp 50 - 58
- 11 'Censorship and public policy' The Labour Monthly 1st November 1928
- 12 'Literature and proletarian outlook' John Anderson Archives, Sydney University.
- 13 'Prohibition' The Workers Weekly 7th September 1928
- 14 John Anderson Archives, Sydney University P 042 Series 17. The conservative reaction to the perceived spread of Communism resulted in the formation of the All for Australia (A.F.A) League at the start of 1931 which boasted a membership of 100,000 members, backed by several secret armies.
- 15 Anderson op cit pp 59 - 65
- 16 ibid p 60 (his emphasis)
- 17 'Russia and reconciliation' in Essays in Social Theory A4 hardbound folder. Personal Papers of Mrs. R. Fowler.
- 18 loc cit his emphasis
- 19 loc cit his emphasis
- 20 Anderson op cit pp 66 - 70
- 21 ibid pp 71 - 81; 82 - 93; 94 - 105.
- 22 The Workers Weekly