

Can We Move the ALP to Left by Joining It?

Introduction

Within the trade union movement considerable time and effort is being put into organising within the Australian Labor Party (ALP). The idea is put to workers that if you want to be politically active to improve the position of workers you must do it from within the ALP.

Many of those who are engaged in this strategy make quite severe criticisms of the ALP. Most are correct and justified criticisms. It is said the Party is over-run by right wing elements that first and foremost look after the employer's interests. It is said that successive ALP governments have not done away with anti-working class laws, privatisation is rampant and too many politicians are opportunistic and forget where they come from. Policy settings are criticised as being based on appeasing big business and the links with the trade union movement are being eroded and cast aside. It is said that the ALP needs to be dragged back to its working class roots; that it should be a workers' party.

The basis of this pamphlet is to deal with these questions and to demonstrate that the achievement of working class progress cannot and will not be based upon the ALP leopard changing its spots.

With all the organising muscle being dedicated to the task of ALP reform there is very little identification of any specific programmatic goals, beside control of numbers within the ALP to garner electoral success by putting 'better' people into parliament to improve the passage of laws making concessions to the working class. It is an argument based on a reformist outlook that incorrectly contends that the nature and essence of capitalism can be changed only through parliamentary democracy.

This is not a criticism of workers who join the ALP to prosecute a class-based position in the interests of the working class and their trade unions.

It is not a rejection of ongoing united front work across the Left and the Labour Movement against the conservative agenda and struggles against capital and for working class progress. This unity in action with those progressive ALP members is vital and must continue.

It is however a criticism of a view that socialism can be attained through organised entry into the ALP or that the ALP can or will make any strong challenges to corporate power or the privileges of the capitalist class.

It is also critical of the view that more 'good members' can drag the ALP to the 'left'. All of these issues will be dealt with in this publication.

There is also a need from the outset to describe the terms 'left' and 'right' as used in a modern day context. Initially 'left' and 'right' were used in the French Revolution where forces who aligned with the monarchy and aristocracy sat on the right hand side of the Legislative Assembly chamber. The rising capitalist class, the bourgeoisie, did not yet have state power and at that time they were the more progressive elements within the chamber opposing the old class order. They sat on the left side of the chamber. When the nascent bourgeoisie defeated the monarchy they in turn chose to sit on the right hand side of the chamber. The opposition to this rising capitalist class were often socialists and they sat on the left hand side of the chamber.

From about the 1850s the term 'left' was to become synonymous with socialists and communists on a more international scale. This is still very much the case today where numerous 'left wing' socialist and Communist parties are considered to be on the left of politics. The 'right wing' forces in society today are those that support capitalism and who strive to maintain its dominance as a social and economic system.

Hence the terms 'left' and 'right' and their origins. There is a lot of subjectivity to the terms 'left' and 'right' and in many respects they can be relative. Malcolm Fraser being to the 'left' of the Liberal Party is an example. Fraser was an open advocate of capitalist economic policies and implemented them, as do all Liberal Governments. In no way was Fraser actually on the political Left.

I think a good description of the Left generally can be based on the following principles:

Those who recognise the class struggle, who fight in the interests of the working class and who see socialism as a progressive step forward to capitalism.

It is the hope of the author that this booklet prompts a wider debate on these matters.

Formation of the ALP

The ALP has existed since 1891 and developed in various states over the following years. It was a political party set up by the trade union movement arising out of the many disastrous and unsuccessful strikes around that time. The trade unions and working class movement suffered serious setbacks in the Maritime and Shearers strikes of that time. These were tumultuous times of sharp class conflict as Australian capitalism continued to develop away from its convict labour roots and to an increasing recognition of national identity based on the development of Australian Federation

which was a requirement for the developing capitalist class. Capitalists needed to overcome state boundaries and open up national markets to assist the growth of business.

The ALP platform today confirms that the Party had its origins in:

“the recognition by the trade union movement of the necessity for a political voice to take forward the struggle of the working class against the excesses, injustices and inequalities of capitalism”

The capitalist class took the unions by surprise in the early 1890s and deliberately provoked a general strike. True to form, the agenda of the bosses was the annihilation of unionism. The losses, due to a sole industrial focus, drove the thinking that the ‘parliamentary weapon’ must be used, as trade unions correctly realised that they had to have a political strategy and not solely an industrial and economic focus in order to better the position of working people. In essence this position was correct – there was a need for political as well as industrial organisation, though the vision for a political organisation was limited.

The class struggle, the battle between the ruling class and the working class - between capital and labour - needs to be dealt with politically. The ALP’s founders believed that the role of the state was as an impartial body and that political power, in the form of state control i.e. forming government, would be enough to wrest power from big capital and the ruling class. In the strikes of the 1890s, as could be expected, the state sided with the employing class, using anti-working class, pro-business laws to undermine the legitimate struggles of trade unions and the working class as a whole. The state encouraged and organised scabbery across industries in defence of capital.

It was easy to draw the conclusion that if workers, through a political party, could control the state and form government then they could prevent this from happening. The Shearers Union General Secretary reported in 1893:

“With a Labour government in power, there would be an end to the stoppage of work which acts so inimically to our interests”¹

It was believed that a Labor government would prevent the need for strikes and their damaging effect. This view of the role of the state was widespread. It was incorrect as it neglected to factor in the role of social classes and their respective power over society. No Labor government in power has ever stopped the class struggle in its tracks.

¹ General Secretary’s Report to the 7th Conference of the Australian Shearers Union 1893, pp. 12-13

Employers never cease to wage the class struggle. If workers cease to do so then it vacates the political field to the employers and strengthens the employers position. The very essence of capitalism is based on class rule and the exploitation of one person by another. There is no non-class capitalism or non-class state apparatus.

George Black who was a West Sydney MLA explained Labor's initial role in parliament when he said in 1891:

The motto of the labour party in this House is, 'support in return for concessions'. If you give us concessions, then our votes will circulate on government benches, and if you do not give us concessions then we shall withdraw our votes from circulation there...²

The ALP was never intended to be a socialist party by its founders. The Party is an historical contradiction that has arisen due to the unique circumstances of the development of Australian capitalism. A system that was imposed upon the colonies, transplanted from colonial Britain, but based initially upon indentured convict labor. The further capitalism developed in Australia the greater the contradiction became between the working class and the ruling class. One which continues today as massive inequality of wealth is at the centerpiece of current trade union social analysis.

The ALP was always a social democratic party. A party with some significant policy achievements but always operating within the confines of maintaining the capitalist system. In 1920 the Communist Party of Australia was formed. It presented a different view of capitalism and the role of the state. It offered the vision of socialism on the back of events in Russia in 1917 with the Great October Socialist Revolution. There was now an international movement for revolutionary change that identified that capitalism can be removed and that revolutions are possible and working class power is achievable.

V.I. Lenin identified the odd nature of the ALP's development in 1913 when he said:

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

This strange and incorrect use of terms in naming parties is not unique. In America, for example, the slave-owners of yesterday are called Democrats, and in France, enemies of socialism, petty bourgeois, are called Radical Socialists! In order to understand the real significance of parties, one must examine not their

² NSW Parliamentary Debates, 52, pp. 126-128

signboards but their class character and the historical conditions of each individual country.”³

It is impossible these days to view the ALP as anything other than a pro-capitalist party. This position is reflected clearly in the political decisions of the various Federal Labor governments since Federation and the consistent position of the ALP in opposition in never promoting a move away from, or opposition to, the capitalist mode of production.

The ALP in today’s society plays a role in defence of the system itself. It does not challenge big capital nor does it seek to implement policies that are contrary to the neoliberal direction of capitalism.

Capitalism and the State

Capitalism in the 21st century is even more rapacious and profit-hungry than ever before. The world under capitalism suffers massive inequality that is impossible to rectify within the confines of the system itself. In fact, the more “efficient” and “unfettered” capitalism becomes, as it has in recent decades, the worse the inequality has become.

Across the world the 85 richest people have as much wealth as the 3.5 billion poorest. In Australia, the richest 1% are as rich as the poorest 60% of Australians.⁴

Globally the reality is even worse (Figure 1). The 60% figure above has now risen to 70%.

In 2014, the richest 1% of people in the world owned 48% of global wealth, leaving just 52% to be shared between the other 99% of adults on the planet. Almost all of that 52% is owned by those included in the richest 20%, leaving just 5.5% for the remaining 80% of people in the world. If this trend of increasing wealth share to the richest continues, the top 1% will have more wealth than the remaining 99% of people in just two years, ...with the wealth share of the top 1% exceeding 50% by 2016.⁵

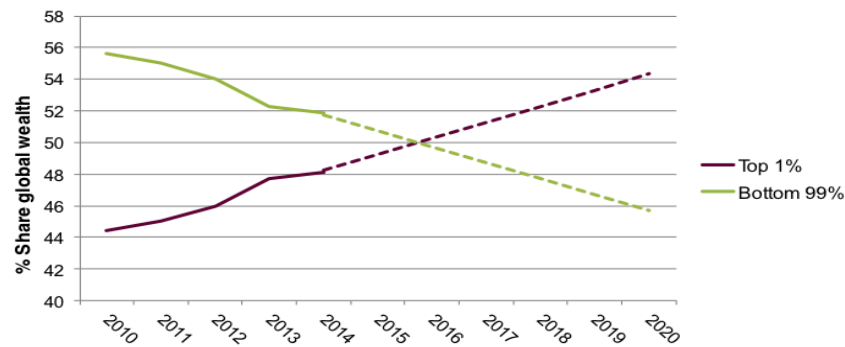
³ *Pravda* No. 134, June 13, 1513.

⁴ Oxfam - <https://www.oxfam.org.au/explore/millennium-development-goals/inequality/>

⁵ Oxfam - <https://www.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/ib-wealth-having-all-wanting-more-190115-embargo-en.pdf>

Figure 1 - Share of Global Wealth

Figure 2: Share of global wealth of the top 1% and bottom 99% respectively; the dashed lines project the 2010–2014 trend. By 2016, the top 1% will have more than 50% of total global wealth.



Under capitalism things are getting worse for working people all over the world. Privileged persons, individually or combined with others, with capital to invest buy the labour power of workers and by only paying for a part of the working day, exploit the labour they employ in order to make private gain. This economic reality is masked via the wages system but has been clearly recognised as the basis of the creation and unjust distribution of wealth under capitalism.

The old adage of the rich getting richer while the poor get poorer is manifesting itself across the globe to devastating effect. After one hundred years and many Labor governments, the reality is that basic social problems and inequality still exist and are now accepted by incoming Labor governments as social and economic realities.

Every worker knows the boss wants the same thing everywhere and when you distill down employer claims and demands there are usually three things the employers seek from the worker.

They want the worker to:

1. Work Longer – increase the working day or the average annual hours
2. Work Harder – increase production numbers, do the same job with less people
3. Work for less – cut or attack wage value, remove penalty rates, working conditions etc

These three things are the means to increasing profits. Productivity, flexibility, and every other employer demand, fits within these criteria. Conversely the workers always claim the opposite in some form or another – shorter hours, more pay and better conditions. This reflects the irreconcilable nature of differences between classes in our society.

A class based political understanding of the nature and role of the state and of capitalism needs to be firmly identified in order to gauge why the reformist social-democratic philosophy has not succeeded and accordingly why it will not succeed in defeating capitalism, with its intrinsic inequity and its many social ills.

The history and development of the state was identified in a concise and clear fashion by brilliant political thinker and forefather of Marxism, Friedrich Engels when he said the state is:

“...a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, these classes with conflicting economic interests, might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have a power, seemingly standing above society, that would alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of 'order'; and this power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state.”⁶

Under capitalism the state defends the status quo.

The state defends the current class 'order' of things and in our current society the objective reality of who makes up the ruling class is very clear. Gina Rinehart, Rupert Murdoch, Kerry Stokes, Twiggy Forrest among others and the big private and for-profit corporations are some of Australia's ruling class. They form part of an international capitalist class with the same drives and interests in perpetuating the capitalist system.

Australian governments, using state power, have always backed the ruling class's right to exploit our natural mineral resources and the workers provision of labour power in order to make profit at the expense of those who create the wealth, the workers. We sell our labour power to a capitalist; the capitalist takes the profits. Social production and private accumulation exist as the 'order' of things.

The state, with various parties in charge of its governmental pillar only administers capitalism, which leads to the very same problems faced by the trade unionists in the 1890s still existing today. Capitalist state power is geared toward and works in the interests of the bosses not the workers. It uses military and police force (public and private) to maintain its control and power.

⁶ Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 3, Moscow, 1973)

“The second distinguishing feature is the establishment of a public power which no longer directly coincides with the population organizing itself as an armed force. This special, public power is necessary because a self-acting armed organization of the population has become impossible since the split into classes.... This public power exists in every state; it consists not merely of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons, and institutions of coercion of all kinds, of which gentile [clan] – [aka tribal⁷] society knew nothing....”⁸

So we have a state apparatus, which is a tool of coercion, used to ensure that existing class rule is maintained. No one has ever seen a capitalist arrested for making profits and furthering their ends. Capitalists' interests clash from time-to-time and some are sanctioned for breaking the agreed rules of the profit-making game. Workers however are constantly prevented from exercising their class power with anti-working class laws that can and do result in the use of armed bodies of men and women against workers when challenged.

Anyone who has been on a picket line can see the coppers are not there for the interest of the workers. Nor do the armies of capitalist states exist for peaceful or even defence purposes. They are used for war and global plunder for the benefit of the wealthy capitalist nations, furthering the ends of their capitalist class rulers.

The only way to truly allow society to flourish and ensure everybody is fully included in and shares society's wealth is for this capitalist state to be abolished and to replace it with a state that rules in the interest of the working class. This is socialism and the qualitative change between the two forms of societies means that building socialism becomes a revolutionary act.

Social Democracy and Socialism

The unfortunate reality is that the ALP is not a revolutionary party. It does not intend to remove capitalism, only administer it. The ALP and social democracy generally attempts to mollify some of the harsher edges of the administration of the state. The essence and role of the state however does not change. At times of arch-conservatism a Labor government can seem a relief but all too often it has been Labor governments that have led the agenda of implementing neo-liberal⁹ policy.

⁷ My addition

⁸ Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works, Vol. 3, Moscow, 1973)

⁹ Neo-liberal policy, sometimes referred to as “supply side economics”, economically “dry” policies, etc. are based in the belief that, markets, left to operate without interference, produce the best outcomes for the economy and society.

Socialism is a system by which the means of production (i.e. the factories, land and the factories – the means to produce commodities) are socially owned and under the control and direction of the working class controlled socialist state. Socialism means not just taking government but structurally reorganising the state to achieve social objectives consistent with the position of the people, to build a society where people actually do come before profits. The basis is that social production should not engender private gain but social gain. With today's technology the practical basis for developing socialism exists, but it won't come without an enormous struggle because it is opposed to everything that capitalism stands for and is based upon. It would mean an end to privilege and class rule of the Murdochs, Packers and Rineharts.

The ALP constitution defines the ALP:

“The Australian Labor Party is a democratic socialist party and has the objective of the democratic socialisation of industry, production, distribution and exchange, to the extent necessary to eliminate exploitation and other anti-social features in these fields.”

Few progressives could argue with such principles. The fact that the ALP constitution is progressive in parts is indisputable. When these progressive principals are completely undermined and ignored by ALP politicians, who openly and brazenly do the work of big capital, the anger of people, and many ALP members is understandable and justifiable. ALP governments have not just maintained the status quo but with clear policy initiative have expanded the gap between rich and poor in our society.

The many examples of policy backflip by the ALP reflect an astounding disconnection between policy and practice and a severe undermining of internal ALP democratic processes.

The ALP constitution calls for the:

“...redistribution of political and economic power so that all members of society have the opportunity to participate in the shaping and control of the institutions and relationships which determine their lives”

This stated position has turned into a process of allowing the gap between rich and poor to expand due to ALP government's policies. The Accord process of the 1980's leaves a stark reminder of the blunting of union and working class power in the interests of corporate gain. This special period is worthy of examination in its own right and is dealt with in more detail later in the chapter Prices and Incomes Accord.

Further on the ALP platform mandates the:

“establishment and development of public enterprises”

Yet in government the ALP has done the opposite. We have witnessed extraordinary acts of privatisation including QANTAS and the Commonwealth Bank. The 2015 Queensland election victory for Labor was a very first won on an anti-privatisation platform. At the same time the recently elected Andrew’s ALP government in Victoria is going to privatise the ports. This means handing wealth by the bucket load over to big corporations, taking wealth directly out of the public sector and services for the community. The opposition to privatisation is clearly only relevant when in opposition and when there is a well organised campaign by the working class, led in this instance by the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) along with the Queensland Council of Unions (QCU) and the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) in Queensland in the “Queensland Not for Sale” campaign.

Labor Prime Minister Ben Chifley tried to nationalise the banks during his term in office in 1947. While Conservative and Labor governments both established public enterprises in accordance with the needs of capital at the time this was the only Labor government to ever attempt nationalisation. The capitalist ruling class and media barons denounced the Chifley government, turning the tide of electoral fortune against the ALP. Notwithstanding the ruling class reaction, which resulted in electoral defeat, it was found in the High Court that nationalisation was unconstitutional. This effectively rendered the parliamentary and reformist path to socialism null and void. The constitution, which is the basis for Australian parliaments, is a complete capitalist construct aimed at maintaining the class privilege of the owners of the means of production.

Further reflecting the requirement to appease capital within the ALP platform is:

“the right to own private property”

The private property cited here does not mean the family home or car, i.e. personal property, but the fact that someone can own the natural and mineral resources of the country. When ‘private property’ rights are dealt with in political theory it is nearly always a reference to ownership of the means of production (factories, mines and land etc). It is the private property rights that allow ownership of the means of production that leads to the consequential and inevitable exploitation of the working class.

Another noble aim in the ALP platform is for the:

“democratic control and strategic social ownership of Australian natural resources for the benefit of all Australians”

Capitalism demands that our natural resources be owned privately. These resource corporations wield immense power. Natural resources are used for private profit. Public ownership of resources should be used to look after the interests of all people. Natural resources should be publicly owned but, despite some botched moves by the Whitlam government, all Labor governments have failed to deliver this position. Some things are just off limits in the natural ‘order’ of things.

The basic reluctance of Labor governments to remove bad laws, unfair laws, designed to maintain class hegemony, is in stark contrast to the ALP pledge to see:

“the abolition of poverty, and the achievement of greater equality in the distribution of income, wealth and opportunity”

Working people are struggling with unjust laws used by wealthy aggressive employers who are on a constant rampage to destroy the working conditions and slash wages of Australian workers. These laws, put in place through the mechanisms of the state, are used to protect the capitalist system and corporate power and profitability.

The contradictions in the ALP platform are astounding. Ideological theory and practice do not align in the ALP and it is easy to see why working men and women could think that an invasion of the party with the best of Australia’s working class may assist in bringing the ALP back to its roots.

The unfortunate reality is that, despite repeated efforts, it just never works. Even the best Labor governments have looked after the interests of big capital once elected. The nature of class power in our society ensures that no Labor government will get elected and certainly won’t stay there if it betrays its responsibilities to big capital. Sound, progressive, democratically arrived at policy positions from the rank and file are ignored as the ALP politicians are practically able to do as they please once in parliament. You can join the party, but can you achieve a progressive majority in caucus to implement positive change? All evidence since the 1890s indicates that it cannot be achieved.

Comrades who go into the ALP to expose class privilege and promote the class interests of the working class should be applauded. The harsh reality however demonstrates that this course of action has never been able to challenge capitalism and has proved impossible in implementing any form of socialism, which was and always has been the historical goal of working class political struggle since the early 1800s.

No one can deny a progressive ALP would have a generally better position than their conservative counterparts. Many progressive social reforms have been made by the ALP that have benefited Australian workers. The problem with social reforms is they can be undone. Like Fisher's creation of the Commonwealth Bank was easily privatised by Hawke and Keating. Fraser, Hawke, Keating, Howard, Rudd, Gillard, Rudd and Abbott governments have all contributed to winding back Whitlam's free university education.

No one undid Peter Reith's hated Workplace Relations Act. Sure there were some tinkers to the policy but the essence of individualism, enterprise employment, destruction of industry awards and a move to bust union power in the workplace and community was a policy position maintained by all successive governments to varying degrees.

The Australian ruling class have allowed differences around the fringes of policy to be implemented through the two-party system but that 'flexibility' is highly conditional upon maintenance of capitalist relations of production, distribution and exchange.

Across the world historically there have been some interesting examples of social democracy taking its electoral mandate too far for the ruling class to be willing to accept. Whenever the system has been potentially threatened social-democratic governments have been removed, sometimes by military force.

Mohammad Mosaddegh is one such example in Iran. His democratically elected government set about a program of land reform, social security and rent controls. He was a leading figure in bringing about secular democracy to Iran. When he sought to nationalise the oil industry his government was removed by a British (Secret Service) and United States (CIA) coup in 1953.

Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán was elected by a huge majority in 1950 in Guatemala. He continued on the land reform policies of his predecessor to the great chagrin of the United Fruit Company who consistently lobbied the US government to overthrow the government. Eventually the US State Department and the CIA launched a coup on trumped up charges of links to communism and secretly importing Czech weapons into Guatemala.

Salvador Allende's 1970 victory in Chilean elections is another classic example of a social democratic government not being allowed to implement a progressive program. Allende attempted to nationalise the banks and copper mining industry. He sought to bring education and health under government control. He brought free milk to the kids

in shanty towns and continued land reform and social welfare programs. This far too progressive agenda saw the intervention of the CIA and the bloody military coup of notorious dictator General Pinochet.

The ruling class has a pattern of denying any elected social democratic government's reforms. The struggle within the confines of the system demonstrates this time and time again. The dismissal of the Whitlam government is not dissimilar to these events. There was an absolute certainty of CIA involvement in the Whitlam dismissal. John Pilger writes:

An American commentator wrote that no country had

'... reversed its posture in international affairs so totally without going through a domestic revolution.'

Whitlam ended his nation's colonial servility. He abolished royal patronage, moved Australia towards the Non-Aligned Movement, supported "zones of peace" and opposed nuclear weapons testing.

Although not regarded as on the left of the Labor Party, Whitlam was a maverick social democrat of principle, pride and propriety. He believed that a foreign power should not control his country's resources and dictate its economic and foreign policies. He proposed to "buy back the farm".

In drafting the first Aboriginal lands rights legislation, his government raised the ghost of the greatest land grab in human history – Britain's colonisation of Australia – and the question of who owned the island-continent's vast natural wealth.

You will note in the three examples land and nationalisation of resources are all common threads. The ruling class corporate elite will not stand idly by and have electoral processes remove what the capitalist ruling class believe is their god given right. This may explain why the ALP has never effectively taken on these questions. They are not allowed. It is not within the rules of the electoral game. That's why significant social change will only come about by revolutionary means.

Social change is possible. Socialist revolutions have occurred in many countries, many have been reversed, and many have failed for a range of reasons. Rosa Luxemburg' observed in 1900, that,

"It is impossible to imagine that a transformation as formidable as the passage from capitalist society to socialist society can be realized in one happy act... The

socialist transformation supposes a long and stubborn struggle, in the course of which, it is quite probable the proletariat will be repulsed more than once.”

The absolute necessity however is for social development to move towards social wealth being shared in an equitable fashion in a world without exploitation. Socialism is possible. It can be witnessed in shining beacons of hope such as Cuba¹⁰ and continues as a driving force of opposition to capitalism wherever it appears.

There should be no illusion that the ALP can be a vehicle to socialism.

How do we make change?

The ‘workers united will never be defeated’, or ‘workers of the world unite!’ These chants are heard in marches for worker’s rights across the world. They reflect the fact that today’s predominantly capitalist world is wracked with irreconcilable differences within societies – classes. The corporate drive for profit has united the interests of workers internationally as often the same companies operate internationally intentionally prosecuting a race to the bottom, to implement the lowest values and standards they have been able to extract, usually in under-developed nations.

The simple concept of a union being an organisation that bands workers together to achieve change in their collective interests is a recognition that change comes through unity and sticking together. When this unity comes from the largest section of our community, the working class, it is an extremely powerful force.

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.”¹¹

People have always made change. Oppressed classes have always had the power to change society. When social contradictions reach a critical stage they tend to shift the balance of class relations through revolutionary processes. This has seen slavery overtake primitive communalism. Feudalism with its kings, queens and nobles put an end to slave relations of production. It was the capitalist class that overthrew the wealth and privilege of the feudal lords. The struggle in the modern era is to overthrow capitalist class rule and build socialism. Any failure to realise this in terms of tactics

¹⁰ What has socialism done for the people of Cuba? - <http://www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk/revol.htm>

¹¹ The Communist Manifesto – Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

within the trade union movement leads workers to a consistent treadmill of exploitation and misery.

Around the world, millions of fighters for freedom, democracy, workers' rights, national independence, peace, the environment and socialism are confronting capitalism. It is this struggle, which is the motor of development of society and the guarantee of social progress.

The struggles are many and varied and people are making change through uniting and prosecuting the class struggle. This is evident not only on the broader historical stage but in every campaign against every greedy employer, against government decisions hurting the working class and for peace and the environment and for social justice. Standing in solidarity with left and progressive forces in society is vital in making change. The strength of the working class is the key component. Workers hold a unique position under capitalism as they undertake all production, and create all wealth.

While the government makes laws on behalf of classes, it is equally important to understand that the excesses of the state and of capital can be turned around.

If you look at conservative attempts to introduce a co-payment for visiting a doctor, the rejection of that policy was not resolved through parliamentary opposition but by social opposition and organising by people in their thousands. Unions, communities, pensioners and students opposed many of the 2014/2015 budget measures. It is safe to say that these changes would have gone ahead without mass activity outside of the parliament. People reacted and fought the budget. It will not sway the Liberals in seeking to increase profits for their ruling class mates nor to continue to seek ways to privatise all our public assets but it was a victory and is only a fraction of what we can do as a united organised social force with the working class, their trade unions and working class Party at the centre of the struggle for peace, justice and socialism.

The building of mass movements and the creation of alliances and coalitions is a real and proven effective mechanism for the development of social change. This is more effective than a strategy entirely dedicated to changing the ALP from within.

When the ALP works with and campaigns with the political Left and trade union movement a significant social force is unleashed. This was witnessed during the Your Rights at Work (YRAW) Campaign against the dreaded Howard Government's assault on the rights and conditions of Australian workers. A mighty campaign was unleashed reaching from the heart of the trade union leadership to the rank and file activists, to Left and progressive political parties and community organisations and individuals. The YRAW campaign hit a nerve with the people who wanted to see Howard's WorkChoices

industrial policies torn up along with the previous wave of reaction in industrial relations, the dreaded Peter Reith's Workplace Relations Act (WRA). This WRA was anti-union to the core and harshly and overtly carried on from where the previous Hawke and Keating governments had directed the industrial relations agenda during their terms in office.

The YRAW campaign (2005-2007) was a clear manifestation of united front political work drawing together vast numbers against particularly harsh industrial relations laws. It was a campaign that saw off Prime Minister Howard as he lost his seat and saw a Rudd ALP Government come to power.

The Rudd Government's lack of action in repealing the anti-worker industrial laws in this country was appalling especially considering the efforts of ordinary working people through the YRAW (morphing from being worth fighting for to worth voting for) campaign that ensured Rudd's victory.

The ALP forces, on the victory of Rudd receded into the woodwork and left the YRAW Movement languishing, fearful of the power of a united and active working class especially considering what turned out to be a complete lack of action by Labor to repeal the bad industrial relations laws.

This episode in Australian working class history lets us know that the previously unique and 'friendly' relationships that unions had with the ALP now need to be replaced by an absolute commitment to engage in the class struggle even if it is against the interests of an ALP government. YRAW again demonstrated that Labor governments must be forced to act in the interests of the people, even if these are only reforms and not real change to the system itself. It is very dangerous in the trade union movement to have an all-encompassing allegiance to solely the ALP. Communists, socialists, Greens and independents are vitally important within unions in ensuring that no single organisation directs or in the case of YRAW, rejects the struggle.

Getting 'better' people into the ALP with a view to changing these circumstances maybe a noble venture. However, we must be certain that we are not leaving behind the mass movement, which is ultimately our only protection and our main vehicle to achieve social change.

If workers are encouraged to join the ALP without a defined purpose and without an understanding of fundamental ideological questions and the lessons of labour movement and working class history, of bitter struggle, they are doomed to repeat the same mistakes throughout history. Such an activity will ultimately be a drain on

resources and an ideological illusion and disappointment for workers resulting in future setbacks.

Can we change the ALP from within?

The argument is that the ALP needs to be shifted back to the left. This argument starts from a perspective that the ALP was at some time in the past a left organisation, a socialist organisation and should be again. But the ALP was never a socialist organisation committed to fundamental social change and we should not be under any illusion that it can ever become such a radical party. So let's rule out joining the ALP to create and build a political alternative and socialism.

That leaves us with the stated aim to shift the ALP towards the adoption of laws favourable to the working class. This is required because at present ALP governments, besides throwing some 'concessions' around have failed to address serious questions about the direction of Australian society.

While it is possible to get some good policy positions into official ALP policy it again makes no difference to most of the politicians in power. Too often policy is abandoned by MPs for political expediency or outright political rejection. Small concessions in specific industries are from time to time gained but nothing fundamentally to assist worker's power in relation to the power of the bosses.

The ALP rules provide for this domination of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party above all else.

ALP Rule 5(d) says:

The Federal Parliamentary Labor Party (FPLP) shall have authority in properly constituted Caucus meetings to make decisions directed towards establishing the collective attitude of the Parliamentary Party to any question or matter in the Federal Parliament, subject to:

(i) at all times taking such action which may be possible to implement the Party's Platform and Conference decisions;

(ii) on questions or matters which are not subject to National Platform or Conference or Executive decisions, the majority decision of Caucus being binding upon all members in the parliament

(iii) no attitude being expressed which is contrary to the provisions of the Party Platform or any other decision of National Conference or National Executive

There is example after example of these 'subject to' principles being dismissed by MPs in daily political life. The rank and file are relegated by the rules to be subordinate to the desires of either factional leaders (or in some cases corporate masters – Martin Ferguson!) who in turn only respond to the mundane spectacle of the 24-hour news cycle, spent avoiding any controversial issues which could be subject to attack by the corporate media barons. Laying low to survive is not exactly a visionary approach to resolving global and national inequity and basic class elitism within an ingrained and deep-rooted social crisis.

The main tool to moving the ALP to the 'left', or maybe better phrased, a more progressive position, is the mass movement. When people hit the streets in an organised fashion, with the working class as the core of a movement, that is the best possible scenario for extracting concessions or for making significant policy shifts. Without a mass movement, creating change in politics becomes arbitrary and limited to the scope of the two-party system and the system of capitalism. This is not to say that demonstrations will end capitalism, they will play a part but ultimately ending capitalism is a job for the working class organised in a political party that has a socialist agenda and is backed by the masses of people. Nor is it to say that unions should not engage with the ALP, they should. Unions should however spread their net widely and ensure that they are supporting all of those streams of opposition to capitalism, which in the end is the main enemy of working people. Unions should not, therefore, affiliate with any political party.

Even for rank and file ALP members, who are held back by the role of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party in government (and opposition) this position rings true. Politicians and their political parties are subject to a shifting set of values depending on which way the winds of electoral fortune are blowing. We have not seen the core of the ALP platform fought for under any of the ALP governments.

If going into the ALP is about creating progressive policy change then the vexed question of why the ALP's existing progressive policy is not adhered to, or even advocated, must be asked.

A classic example is in international politics. The ALP position is:

“maintenance of world peace; an independent Australian position in world affairs; the recognition of the right of all nations to self determination and independence; regional and international agreement for arms control and

disarmament; the provision of economic and social aid to developing nations; a commitment to resolve international conflicts through the UN; and a recognition of the inalienable right of all people to liberty, equality, democracy and social justice”

It leaves one wondering what went wrong.

The unfortunate reality is the ALP has not maintained world peace but participated in imperialist war. It has ramped up the ANZUS imperialist war alliance, not taken, or even advocated taking Australia down an independent foreign policy position. Australia, with ALP governments at the helm, have advocated and delivered an inter-operability between Australia’s defence forces and the US imperialist war machine. Australia, again with ALP governments, has consistently ignored recognising the inalienable right of all people to liberty, equality, democracy and social justice. This is particularly the case when it comes to recognition of a Palestinian state and is the exact opposite of what various ALP governments, particularly Rudd and Gillard, have practiced with respect to refugees.

No amount of joining the ALP or attempted conversion of ‘bad’ policy into ‘good’ policy will change the fact that the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party has a political and ideological grip over the policy settings regardless of the views of the rank and file and outcomes of ALP national conference. The nature of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party isn’t factional. It comprises all the factions. The reason behind Federal Parliamentary Labor Party retreats is because parliament itself exists to maintain capitalism. The Federal Parliamentary Labor Party plays its part within that system – often referred to as the two-party system.

So is putting good people into parliament the answer? Is it at all possible to undo this scrambled egg of social democracy and subvert it away from its historical role of managing the capitalist system?

History and experience would indicate that this path is not practical or possible. No one in modern times on the ‘left’ of the ALP has ever really succeeded in being elected Prime Minister with the exception of Julia Gillard who for her whole term in office was completely captured by the right wing factions.

Many good ‘left’ people, socialists, have entered parliament for the ALP but they also fail to make the changes they desperately desire. The best and most practical form of action that ALP members with a working class position can do is work to build the mass movement of the working class and its allies. This can be done within the trade union

movement, in Left parties and social movements, in the ALP itself and will in the end impact upon the ALP in a progressive sense.

Only a mass movement with a united working class organised along united front lines can succeed in properly shifting ALP policy or practice.

A classic historical example is, only after the formation of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) in 1920 with a significant movement of workers embracing the Communist Party in the wake of the Russian Revolution, did the ALP even consider the position of 'socialisation'. This occurred in 1921. This principle arose as a reaction to a developing communist movement at home and abroad. It is testament to the fact that the ALP is changed from outside the Party more so than within.

Moving the ALP is best done through contributing to the struggle for the development of a working class mass movement not through exclusively joining the ALP. The stronger the movement advocating left-wing, pro-working class solutions the more likely it is that we will see more progressive ALP policies. But even that shift would still find itself limited to the confines of the capitalist system itself.

At the same time the more the Australian public embraces right-wing policies, the more the ALP has tended to shift to the right. This can be witnessed in areas such as refugee rights, war and peace, racist and xenophobic policy, and privatisation, among many other right wing neo-liberal policies.

The development of a left wing focused mass movement of the working class is the best rebuff to right-wing policies.

A strong and independent working class movement means the ALP will swing to the left (never socialist) in its policy settings while maintaining the same exploitative social and economic relations under capitalism.

The two-party system

The two-party system has dominated Australian political life for over 100 years. The two main parties offer various policy positions, most of which are cosmetic changes, in an effort to win the support of the people at election time. The capitalist ruling class is extremely comfortable with this two-party system. It protects the status quo and it protects their rights to continue to make super-profits at the expense of Australia's working class.

Particularly since the 1980s we have seen a major shift in terms of the policy settings of the two major parties. Both have adopted a neo-liberal approach to the way the

Australian economy and society is run. Both parties have advocated and implemented policies of privatisation, deregulation, regressive industrial reform, shifting of wealth away from the working class through social, industrial and taxation reform. Both parties have embraced casualisation of workforces and free market responses to the rapid globalisation of industry and trade. Both have strived for the removal of any barrier to the movement of goods, capital, labour and services across national borders.

These policies have created an increasing array of social problems including mass unemployment, poverty, homelessness, drug addiction, inadequate or no education, lack of medical care and environmental damage. The neo-liberal policies of the two-parties have created a growing gap between the rich and the poor in every nation and between the major industrially developed countries and the underdeveloped countries. Worker is pitted against worker on a local scale, union against union nationally, country against country internationally in a global race to the bottom.

Both major parties have consistently trashed the rights of Aboriginal Australians. The most recent historical examples are the Abbott Government's attacks on remote WA communities and the Rudd/Gillard maintenance of the NT intervention.

No one on the Left wants to see a Liberal/National Party Government in power. Labor is always placed before the conservatives in any progressive electoral strategy. Many workers and progressives now vote for the Greens and independents. Unfortunately, many vote to the right and support racist and far right forces such as One Nation.

A key aim of progressive workers is to ensure conservatives do not get political power as they are openly and overtly our class enemies. But it is also extremely frustrating to many workers when they see the same neoliberal policies implemented by the ALP.

In this context the mass movement and particularly a united front of the working class is vital in ensuring the parties that rely on working class support, particularly the organised working class are held to account. Membership numbers within the ALP in this regard are not really relevant. The critical factor in moving political opinion is the strength of the mass movement, its aims and objectives and the practical struggle based activity is the main thing.

For unions to exclusively target the ALP as the single solution to progress is incorrect. Unions should indeed seek to engage and unite with all Left and progressive forces that are in a natural alliance against the negative and anti-people consequences and policies that support capitalism.

The Prices and Incomes Accord Process

In 1983 the Hawke ALP government was elected to power. It ushered in the Prices and Incomes Accord between itself and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). The Accord lasted for the entire period of Labor government (Hawke and Keating years) and went through seven stages.

The Accord was an economic and social policy aimed at overcoming inflation, unemployment and high wage growth. It was based upon the following key fundamental political ideas:

- Wage levels are the main and even the sole cause of price inflation;
- As such they are responsible for economic instability and even economic crisis;
- Workers are responsible, at least to a substantial degree, for economic difficulties and consequently have a responsibility to assist overcome those difficulties;
- Capitalism is an acceptable socio-economic formation and must be preserved;
- There is need for collaboration between labour and capital.

The Accord process ignored the fundamental contradiction between labour and capital consistent with previous non-class views expressed throughout the history of the ALP. Even today the conservatives still laud the Hawke-Keating Accord years as being good government with agreeable economic reform. Former Liberal Prime Minister John Howard still reports to this day his support for:

...the Hawke government's major economic reforms such as floating the dollar and reducing tariffs."¹²

In the Hawke-Keating years the ALP was practically unbeatable because they effectively captured the position of the Liberals and did it better. Floating the dollar, reducing tariffs, privatising, introducing enterprise employment, introducing individual contracts, eroding awards, rejecting pay increases (in some instances in lieu of social outcomes that were promised under the Accord), ending centralised wage fixation were some of the many neo-liberal economic reforms introduced by Labor at that time.

¹² SMH June 4, 2014
<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/bob-hawke-and-john-howard-former-political-combatants-impart-lessons-learnt-20140604-39j72.html>

The Accord was drafted prior to the election of the Hawke government by the ACTU and senior Labor members. The National Wage Case - Melbourne, 23 September 1983 explained the benefits as follows.

“The Accord is seen by the parties to it as offering the best prospect for, prolonged higher rates of growth in the economy, employment and living standards. The achievement of this objective is based on direct processes to ensure the resolution of conflicting income claims at lower levels of inflation than would otherwise be the case. "With inflation control being achieved in this way", the Accord states, "budgetary and monetary policies may be responsibly set to promote economic and employment growth, thus enabling unemployment to be reduced and living standards to rise."¹³

The Accord process did not achieve this end. Many, particularly on the Left were very critical:

“in disarming the rank and file of the trade union movement who were withdrawn from struggle, particularly strike actions, while trade union leaderships assumed their place at the table negotiating on behalf of workers under the false illusion that there were common interests between labour and capital.”¹⁴

This occurred through wages being generally consistent with the ‘restraint’ position of the Accord. Struggle was wound back around wages and conditions.

The bosses certainly had benefits from the Accord:

“During this period, however, there were also concerted attacks on unions by employers and conservative state governments, as in many other countries, in no small part due to employer responses to changes in product markets arising from market liberal reforms.”¹⁵

While the analysis within the trade union movement is generally that the Accord had a more negative effect than good, the real impact of the Accord years can be found in relation to some simple sets of social statistics.

¹³ NATIONAL WAGE CASE - MELBOURNE, 23 SEPTEMBER 1983

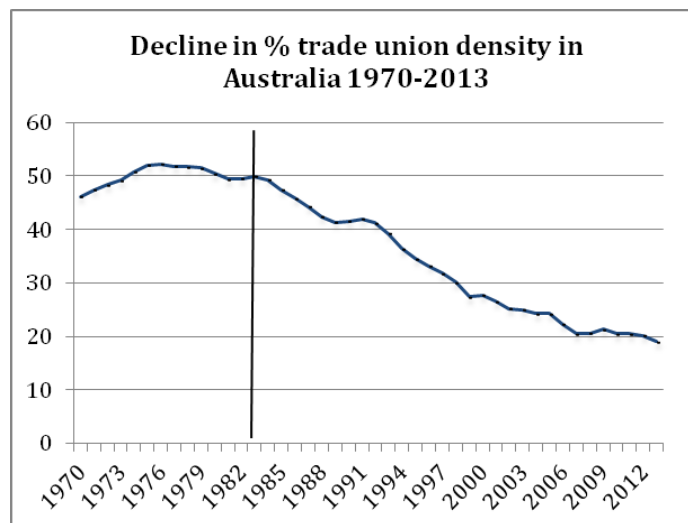
¹⁴ Communist Party of Australia Statement: Industrial Relations for the future
<http://www.cpa.org.au/z-archive/g2008/1392cpair.html>

¹⁵ February 2015 - Are Australian trade unions part of the solution, or part of the problem? | David Peetz, Griffith University -
<http://www.australianreview.net/digest/2015/02/peetz.html>

Trade union density rapidly declined through the Accord years and after. At the beginning it was around 50% today it is at 15% (Figure 2 – p29).

The success of trade unions comes through their willingness to struggle in the interests of their members. The rejection of struggle in favour of restraint through the Accord years left many workers wondering if there was any point being a member of a union. Many workers abandoned unions. This period caused significant and long-term damage to the trade union movement.

Figure 2 - Decline in Trade Union density in Australia 1970-2013



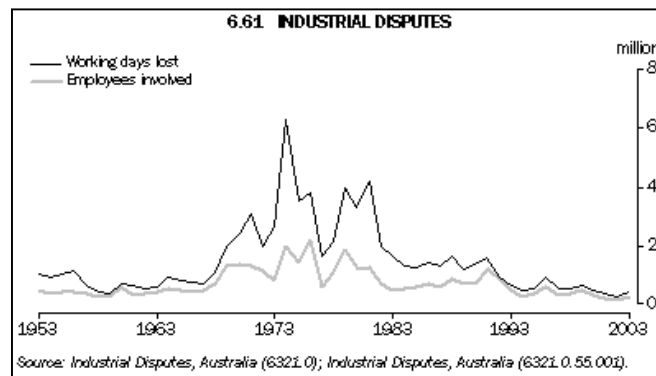
This period of inaction should not be mistaken for tactical approaches to industrial action where strikes may be put on, called off or used in a manner to maximise effect and minimise damage to the workers and the union. The Accord was a period of organised 'restraint' where it was demanded of unions that they comply with the ACTU-ALP agreement. Severe action was taken against unions who pushed too hard for wage outcomes and fought the class struggle.

The deregistration of the BLF and the attack against the Pilots Union during the Accord period remain concerning as to how far the ALP will support unions engaged in class struggle against ALP governments and bosses. The BLF continued to struggle for wage improvements during the period of the Accord. It only lasted till 1986 when the ALP deregistered the union, calling police onto building sites. The Australian Federation of Airline Pilots lodged a 29% claim in 1989 only to be met with deregistration and the removal of their awards.

Support by the Rudd and Gillard governments of the building industry 'police' force in the Australian Building Construction Commission and its successors again highlights the restraints social democracy puts on workers generally.

The number of days of industrial action taken dropped dramatically during the Accord period (Figure 3).

Figure 3 - Decline in number of days of industrial action.



It is clear that industrial action throughout the period of the Accords was wound back. Referring back to Figure 1 it is clear that union density declined as struggle declined. Some would argue that less union density creates less strike actions but that view does not stack up in relation to the period prior to 1970s where union density was higher but strike actions were less. The economic instability of the 1970s led to much sharper conflicts between labour and capital.

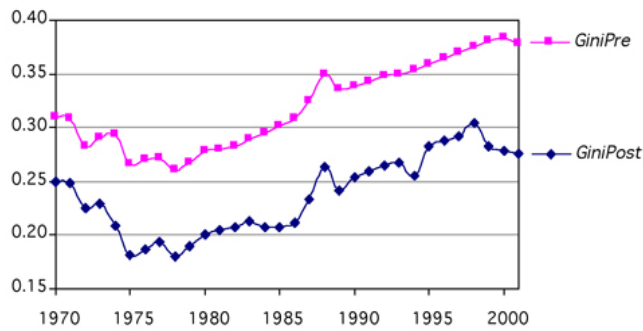
The next graphic relates to the distribution of income across the same period. It plots income-inequality data computed by Leigh (2005) using Australian taxation statistics for the period 1970 to 2001¹⁶ (Figure 4).

¹⁶ Some data on Australian income inequality and globalisation - Understanding Australian Income Inequality: The Proper Role played by Globalisation, De-unionisation and the Terms of Trade | http://press.anu.edu.au/agenda/015/01/mobile_devices/ch04s03.html

This paper focuses on three measures — *GiniPre* is the Gini coefficient for pre-tax income, *GiniPost* is the Gini coefficient for post-tax income, and *P9050* is the ratio of the income of an individual at the ninetieth percentile divided by the income of an individual at the fiftieth percentile.^[12] The reason for using both of the first two measures is to distinguish the impact of the progressivity of the taxation system in possibly neutralising the effects of globalisation. The third measure focuses on the issue of whether individuals at the top of the income distribution have fared particularly well during the latest wave of globalisation (as argued by Atkinson, 2003, for example). Notwithstanding their differences, the three measures are highly correlated. Observe that all three measures increased over the 32-year time span — with pre-tax income inequality rising by almost 22 per cent.

See also - http://www.aph.gov.au/~media/Committees/Senate/committee/clac.ctte/income_inequality/report.pdf
Senate InquiryCommunity Affairs References | Bridging our growing divide: inequality in Australia | The extent of income inequality in Australia p36

Figure 4 - Income inequality increases



In a document entitled “Shrinking Slice of the Pie¹⁷” the ACTU provides figures on the labour income share in Australia. The period coinciding with the Accord shows the same story (Figure 5).

Figure 5 - Share of national income



The Accord was critical in turning around a period of gains for the working class and introduced a long period of losses. It began a significant redistribution of wealth away from the working class and into the pockets of corporations and the rich.

The Accord and its class collaborationist approach was based upon the flawed economic concept that higher wages cause inflation. This is an argument that has driven capitalist economic thinking since the 1800s. Karl Marx, in 1865 identified the

¹⁷ ACTU - Shrinking Slice of the Pie | <http://www.actu.org.au/Images/Dynamic/attachments/7852/Shrinking%20Slice%20of%20the%20Pie%202013%20Final.pdf>

flawed logic of seeking to restrain workers wages because of alleged inflationary pressures.

“The dogma that "wages determine the price of commodities," expressed in its most abstract terms, comes to this, that "value is determined by value," and this tautology means that, in fact, we know nothing at all about value.”¹⁸

After a very long scientific analysis of the nature of capitalist production processes and the wages system Marx pointed out in his conclusion:

“After this very long and, I fear, tedious exposition, which I was obliged to enter into to do some justice to the subject matter, I shall conclude by proposing the following resolutions:

Firstly. A general rise in the rate of wages would result in a fall of the general rate of profit, but, broadly speaking, not affect the prices of commodities.

Secondly. The general tendency of capitalist production is not to raise, but to sink the average standard of wages.

Thirdly. Trades Unions work well as centers of resistance against the encroachments of capital. They fail partially from an injudicious use of their power. They fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organized forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class that is to say the ultimate abolition of the wages system.”¹⁹

The error of the Accord was to adopt the economic fallacy that union wage restraint would stop inflationary trends. The net result of harnessing workers engaging in class struggle in favour of having a seat at the table with government was to:

1. Destroy trade union density
2. Stop the working class waging class struggle – the employers continued
3. Shift the national income distribution away from the workers towards the employing classes
4. Lower the standard of living of Australian workers

Such is the effect of ignoring the class struggle.

¹⁸ Karl Marx – Value, Price and Profit

¹⁹ Karl Marx – Value, Price and Profit

The Modern ALP

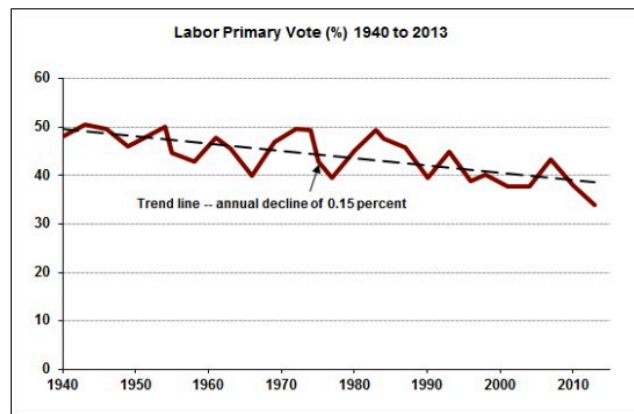
“The widening chasm between Labor's commitment to democracy and our internal practice of it undermines our policy agenda. We must take the lead in restoring trust in politics by reforming ourselves.”²⁰

The ALP's John Faulkner is quoted above and has been a leading figure in the ALP reform process. He pulls no punches in his estimation of the need for a new direction within the ALP, he says:

“There are very few voices among those with formal or informal power within our party who are willing to contemplate, let alone advocate change - despite the increasingly loud calls for reform from members and branches.”

Much of the soul searching is based on trying to arrest the crisis in the falling primary vote of the ALP. It seems that instead of turning to unions and workers the ALP strategy is based on turning its back on workers. The primary ALP vote has an annual decline of 0.15% for each year over a seventy-three year period and that problem will not be fixed with a continued open adherence to capitalism. (Figure 6).

Figure 6 - ALP primary vote 1940 – 2013²¹



The high profile drive for ALP reform is an interesting reflection of the internal struggle of class forces within the ALP. Internal review and self-criticism is fundamental for any political organisation but it would seem that ALP reform processes are more than this. The contradiction between the branch and rank and file desires, often for a more working class approach, fall foul of the ‘pragmatic’ views of many of their

²⁰ ABC The Drum - ALP reform: we must become more inclusive. Updated 9 Oct 2014, 9:03am

²¹ Why Does Labor's Vote Keep Falling? - By Ian McAuley - <https://newmatilda.com/2013/09/10/why-does-labors-vote-keep-falling> | September 10, 2013

parliamentary colleagues.

The leadership contest post the defeat of the Rudd Government in 2013 is also another example of the lack of power the rank and file have in the ALP. This process was touted as a greater example of internal democracy. The battle between Messrs Shorten and Albanese saw Mr Albanese by far win the popular vote only to have a minority of caucus members overthrow the election of a leader by popular demand. It's worthy of note that Mr Albanese is a member of the 'left' faction and Mr Shorten is a member of the 'right' faction. Even the democratisation of leadership ballots has been subverted by the 'right' in favour of outcomes acceptable to the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party.

Mr. Faulkner, a senior 'left' figure, argues to maintain ALP links with trade unions on one hand but obliterate them on the other. He advocates for trade union representation at ALP conferences to be reduced from 50% down to 20%. This is based on trade union density currently being at around 17% of the workforce. This may sound "fair" but it is a critical rejection of the role of the organised working class in making social change and in the historical class make-up of the ALP.

There is little reference, if any, made to the specific types of changes and practical reforms that are necessary or that should be made to make society more "fair". To advocate for a party of reform, to not identify the forces causing the social problems i.e. the bosses, and then attack union representation leaves us with a confusing and contradictory mix of ideas.

The forces that can deliver reform and fight the class struggle are the unions, more than anyone else. No amount of well intentioned middle class professionals are going to be the hammerhead for progressive social reform or class struggle. The class basis of society hasn't changed. The working class will always be the majority of people under capitalism even if the types of jobs they perform change.

This leaves us with the inevitability of further withering away, deliberately, of the working class roots and traditions of the ALP. While many in the trade unions continue to struggle for the relevance of unions within the official structures of the ALP the writing is on the wall more than ever that the Party's intellectual analysis of current day society is one in which the struggle between capital and labour has either ceased to exist or is unimportant. This flows to a view of unions not being necessary organisations of the working class. The ALP recognised the class struggle when it was formed (but not in relation to the state). This has now degenerated to non-recognition of the class struggle almost entirely.

Some people may not accept the existence of the class struggle despite the overwhelming evidence of it but it is clear that class society is more pernicious today than ever before and rectification of this inequitable and unfair system will not come about by any force that rejects the primacy of the working class as a vehicle for social change.

Mr Faulkner ends his speech:

“Labor has at our core the values which can revitalise our political system and restore faith and confidence in the power of democratic government to resolve our differences and surmount our difficulties.”²²

Back in 1893 the Shearers Union General Secretary made a similar statement when he said, “With a Labour government in power, there would be an end to the stoppage of work which acts so inimically to our interests”²³

Both statements amplify the illusion that a Labor government can overcome the differences between classes. They are 122 years apart and not only is the lesson not learnt but the concept of classes and class struggle has been abandoned as a basis for policy determination and as an ongoing guide to action.

Should the working class engage in parliamentary struggle?

In short, the answer to this question is a resounding yes. Some advocate that socialists should not participate in bourgeois parliaments. The same line of thinking has historically applied to whether socialists should work in reactionary trade unions. The answer to this question is again a resounding yes.

Parliamentary struggle is not divorced from the general trend of social struggle. Although parliament in Australia is in essence a joint house of managing capitalism, the class struggle is waged from parliament on a daily basis.

Attempts by the conservatives to destroy Medicare, attack universities and have them operate on a free market basis, cutbacks to pensions and social welfare and attacks on the working conditions of Australian workers are all manifestations of the ruling class using the state to engage in the class struggle against the working class.

²² Public Pessimism, Political Complacency: Restoring Trust, Reforming Labor - *The inaugural address of The Light on the Hill Society* - Senator John Faulkner, Revesby Workers' Club, 7 October 2014
<http://www.senatorjohnfaulkner.com.au/file.php?file=/news/IGROPHPZVT/index.html>

²³ General Secretary's Report to the 7th Conference of the Australian Shearers Union 1893, pp. 12-13

Participation in parliament in order to stand up to such policies and advocate a socialist or anti-imperialist direction is a sound and legitimate form of the class struggle. As indicated previously there needs to be an emphasis placed on extra-parliamentary efforts i.e. the struggle outside parliament by the masses of workers. This remains the primary form of struggle over parliamentarism.

In a criticism of the German 'left' Communists who declared, "All reversion to parliamentary forms of struggle, which have become historically and politically obsolete, must be emphatically rejected. . . ." ²⁴

Lenin responded:

"Parliamentarianism has become "historically obsolete". That is true in the propaganda sense. However, everybody knows that this is still a far cry from overcoming it in *practice*. Capitalism could have been declared—and with full justice—to be "historically obsolete" many decades ago, but that does not at all remove the need for a very long and very persistent struggle *on the basis of capitalism.*"

It is an entirely different question as to what parliamentary tactics should be engaged in. The policies that progressives, socialists, left independents should take into parliament should assist working class people and work against the ever-increasing dictatorship of corporate power represented in that so-called chamber of democracy. Policies that fight against corporate power, that stand up for working class people, are badly needed and to have "good people" elected into parliament who will consistently stand up for working people is an important step. We are currently very far from that position. There are some progressive ALP politicians but even the best will rarely break ranks and side with the working class over the electoral interests of the ALP and the decisions of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party. Accordingly, it is much more beneficial to have a genuine progressive elected who will side with the working class consistently and use parliament to expose the nature of capitalism and corporate profit-driven motivations.

Consequently the election of a working class candidate not beholden to factions or parties that generally support capitalism could assist in the development of the mass movement. Several candidates could put progressive policy on the agenda, especially if their efforts were backed by the trade unions and the oft-implemented view of "not

²⁴ V.I. Lenin "Left-Wing" Communism: an Infantile Disorder - 1920

rocking the boat” while Labor is in power is jettisoned. The Your Rights at Work lessons should still ring in our ears.

If any political party wants working class and trade union support they need to win that support. To do that, policies in the interests of workers are required. You just don't get there by supporting capitalism.

What are the solutions?

One of the main points made in this pamphlet has been the primacy of extra-parliamentary working class struggles. The power of the mass movement to change and influence decisions of the state is crucial.

Mass movements consist of a range of forces and there must be room in a broad people's movement for everyone who stands in opposition to the exploitation of capital. This means working together, with different left and progressive political forces with the working class at the centre particularly the trade unions. It means standing with elements of the exploited middle class whose professions are being turned into profit making ventures e.g. doctors. Shopkeepers are being driven out of business by the huge multi-national monopolies like Coles and Woolworths. The breadth of the people's movement can really shake society.

The working class is the only truly revolutionary force due to the fact that society cannot function without workers who physically control the production process and who create all wealth. The working class is some way from taking a revolutionary path at the present time but the requirement to build a movement for socialist and revolutionary change is not something that can be put away, at the back of the cupboard, while safer, easier and less confronting approaches are undertaken. The dominant trade union political approach of putting all of the political organising eggs into the ALP basket alone is limiting and inevitably leads to a dead end in terms of building the real social change that is so desperately needed.

Real and lasting change will come primarily from the working class. This is best achieved through a united front of the working class fighting for issues in the interest of the workers and presenting a view that challenges capitalism and a society driven on the profit motive. The working class is the majority of society its members consistently feel the negative effects of the policies of big capital. This united front should include, trade unions, left ALP members, communists, socialists, trade unionists and workers. It is this organised working class force that gives the broader people's movement direction and actually moves the struggle forward.

Consequently, it is the strength of the organised working class that shifts the political dynamic to a more progressive or reactionary position. The ALP is not independent of that shifting balance of class forces and will move in accordance with the power and strength of a united, organised, politically active working class. The limitation of this is that the ALP is not a working class party. The workers influence within the party has been wound back and is under constant attack. Further the ALP can only move within the confines of the system of capitalism, which bases itself upon the exploitation of workers. Under capitalism political parties represent classes. The irreconcilable nature of classes under capitalism has been demonstrated. Under any test the ALP is not a party that represents the interests of the Australian working class.

If we want to deal with that failing and believe that socialism is actually viable and can be built then a party of a different type is required. A party is needed that truly recognises the class struggle and fights it, alongside the working class. A Party is needed that is unashamedly for socialism and stands against the dictatorship of corporate power that exists under capitalism today.

A revolutionary party is required. There are many parties that claim this position. At the present time none of these parties are truly representative of the working class in Australia. Ultimately the working class will choose which party it believes will lead the class to a socialist future. That choice will be made based upon the capacity of that revolutionary party to win the leadership of the people. The activities of parties reflect a contest of ideas where each party's commitment and dedication to the cause of advancing the working class and socialism are tested. No party can ever proclaim they are 'the' representative of the working class – that honour is bestowed upon a working class party, it is not proclaimed.

Accordingly, the policies and actions of parties are critical – who do those policies support? We need to analyse whose class interests are reflected in the policies of any political party.

There are many parties and left organisations. There are many organised workers in trade unions and in the community. Combined these forces are the majority of society and have control of all the economic levers. We can and should be working now to fight for a society that builds an economy that supports people with public services and production processes. We need to oppose an economy based upon the exploitation and suffering of the majority of the population. We can do this through building a united and organised politically active movement. We may make mistakes and we will learn lessons but why should the struggle of working class people be entirely subordinated to manipulation of the ALP when it does not and will not represent the working class because of its class content.

People standing together make change and it is the unity and determination of the mass movement that fundamentally shifts the balance of power in society.

That is the movement we need to build, working together with patience and with tolerance of different views, but with a recognition that the class struggle is real and that the power of corporate dictatorship must be challenged and ultimately defeated in favour of a socialist Australia.