

Editorial .....	1
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## Trailers

Bob Hawke: Capital for Labor? .....	Kelvin Rowley .....	9
Profile of a Congress .....	Lloyd Churchward .....	18

## Articles

Critiques of Mainstream Economics .....	Michael Goddard .....	21
Sociology: Positivism and Dialectics .....	Heinz Schütte .....	33
The Early Thirties .....	Jack Blake .....	43
Technocratic Laborism:		
Introduction .....	Humphrey McQueen .....	53
The Dunstan Government .....	John Lonie .....	57

## Comment

Britannia in Review .....	Noel McLachlan .....	74
A Plea for the English Language .....	Wal Suchting .....	75

## Reviews

Art and Revolution .....	Terry Smith .....	77
Marxism and Asia .....	Kelvin Rowley .....	85

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## A Politics of Culture

*Here and there the beginnings of new revolutionary organization and practice can be seen. Each attempt adds something to practical experience, and deserves analysis. It is not really a criticism to say that almost certainly none of them will succeed in the manner that the originators hope, and only those with certainties unjustified by supporting analysis are able to scorn the efforts. The multiplicity of attempts, even if some are rather similar to the 'popular fronts' of old, where an inner group determines the nature of the organization and the limits of its practice, indicates both the confusion and difficulties of the situation as well as the desire for organization. Alongside this new use of past recipes with the emphasis on struggle as a purely political act, are the sorts of things associated with the newer left, of which women's liberation is a striking current example. There are few attempts which combine political and cultural action. Similarly it has been difficult for any organization to make much progress in understanding or the development of appropriate policies in such mass movements as that of the Victorian teachers. In the plastic situation almost any organization can in the short run generate enough action to give itself the feeling of self-fulfilment. Before*



When the main reliance is primarily on counter-coercion cultural hegemony is precluded as a diversion away from the main arena of struggle. Exponents of ideas concerned with cultural hegemony are readily pigeonholed as reformist renegades, and if they persist, as traitors to the working class and the revolution. The role of intellectuals is denigrated and rejected. Schism and internecine warfare, which are so easily substituted for profound consideration of ideas, are features of movements which proceed along these lines. The maximum penalty of expulsion easily extends to physical destruction if such movements have control of state power.

Total opposition is, it seems to me, a correct position for a revolutionary to adopt. But to leave it at total opposition and confrontation is to indulge in no more than declarative gesture. The serious work of a revolutionary begins in the search to find the ways to separate sufficiently decisive social forces from prevailing standards and values so that they begin to adopt a position of total opposition to these values and to undertake the actions necessary to transcend the society which makes them. It calls for prolonged, painstaking effort in contrast to the ego-satisfying gesture.

To recognize the central position of cultural hegemony does not mean that we ignore or neglect the economic, trade union and political fields of activity. What we need to understand is that these struggles tend towards a see-saw character, or they lead into blind alleys when carried on without the guiding compass of cultural-hegemonic activity. It is this latter sphere of social revolutionary activity which we have most neglected in the past.

## Technocratic Laborism: Introduction

HUMPHREY McQUEEN

*No one could pretend that even the most skilful propaganda or the most scholarly tomes will cause the ALP to lose its mass electoral base. Only the dialectics of class struggle can achieve this. But detailed analyses of the ALP are nonetheless an essential ingredient. At this early stage they can provide the final straw for individual militants. In the heat of future battles these militants, and their understanding of the ALP's nature, will be available to wider audiences as tactics and propaganda. Until quite recently the revolutionary left in Australia had been poorly served in the material available for dealing with the ALP. There was Gordon Child's brilliant fragment How Labour Governs (1923). But that was all. There were a variety of Communist party pamphlets but these were slight in terms of the material they contained and the theoretical apparatus they employed. Works of substance by socialist academics gave the ALP critical support and invariably pictured it as the achievement of a radical working class in the nineteenth century. It was with this legacy that the miniscule revolutionary left fought and lost the 1966 elections as hewers of wood for the ALP.*



Something had gone wrong: if the Australian working-class was what Gollan and others had said it was there should have been overwhelming support for Calwell's anti-imperialist and anti-conscriptionist policies. But there wasn't. In this mood (though unable to articulate it) a group of young revolutionaries in Melbourne planned a week-end conference on the topic 'Which party for socialists?' The movement away from the ALP could not repeat the experience of the 1930s if only because the disillusionment of the 1960s was not with the ALP so much as with the entire tradition of which it (and its Trotskyite and CPA defenders) were part; it was not a rejection of the ALP because a labor government had failed to live up to expectations, but because the ALP's universe was no longer habitable.

The task of examining the ALP historically fell to me. There were two models from which I could choose: either an Australian equivalent of Ralph Miliband's *Parliamentary Socialism* or Antonio Gramsci's demand in *The Modern Prince* that the history of a party must be the history of a society from a monographic point of view. The choice had to be Gramsci since it was necessary to start at the beginning if the ALP was to be understood. Fortunately the conference did not take place, because by the time I should have been ready to give the paper in March 1968 I was still thrashing around with the convicts.

Out of this proposed conference paper *A New Britannia* emerged in which I attempted to show that the ALP is umbilically linked to capitalism, that its misdeeds are not contingent, not the result of wicked individuals, that it is irrevocably incapable of achieving socialism. *A New Britannia* did not become the title until a few weeks before completing the manuscript; until then the project (and the filing-cabinet drawer) were labelled *Laborism*. *A New Britannia* ends around 1920 and rigorously excludes the emerging proletariat from the nineteenth century onwards. Even if *A New Britannia* is seen as satisfactory it leaves a vast amount to be done; my chapter "Power without Glory" in John Playford and Doug Kirsner's *Australian Capitalism* is nothing more than a partial sketch of the ALP from c.1920 to c.1960.

Moreover, by concentrating on the past I had failed to absorb fully the important changes which were being attempted in the ALP. As Kelvin Rowley commented when reviewing my essay 'Laborism and Socialism' in Richard Gordon's *The Australian New Left*:

... one could say that the critique of Laborism has come just at the moment it is rendered redundant ... the last five years have been the last gasp of the old Laborism in the ALP. It is currently being isolated and purged by the ascendant forces ... the victors have been the Whitlamites, representing the new petit-bourgeois mentality of what Galbraith called the 'technostructure'. (Farrago, 16 October, 1970.)

John Playford had already provided a solid basis for furthering this investigation with his 1969 *Arena* monograph *Neo-capitalism in Australia*. As Rowley, McFarlane and I were all working on chapters for the Playford-Kirsner volume we arranged a series of discussions which altered the shape of these chapters and spawned my paper to the anti-war conference on "The ALP's strategy for counter-revolution in Asia", an expanded version of which will appear in the Playford-Kirsner collection under the title "Living off Asia". From these background studies and with the emergence of some new

pieces on 'technocratic laborism', discussion quickly turned to expanding and extending the survey to areas such as industrial, social and educational policy. Because Dunstan was the only 'labor technocrat' currently in office it was agreed that a study of his administration should take priority. The result of John Lonie's researches is published in this issue as the first of a number of pieces under the general heading 'technocratic laborism'.

Other comrades have promised material on industrial policy; TPNIG; education; incomes policy; and the NZ Labor Party which has been forced further down the road of open class collaboration because of the chronic economic crisis there. In future issues it is hoped to publish trailers, notes, documents and reviews as well as full-length articles. The preparation of these is *not* by personal invitation but by the willingness of readers to assist. It would be advisable before embarking on any of this work for *Arena* to contact me c/- Department of History, ANU, or the editors of *Arena*, so as to avoid overlapping.

This long explanatory background has been presented so that readers and future contributors can appreciate more fully the implications of what might otherwise appear as unconnected writings. As an exercise in protracted intellectual warfare by a wide-ranging *menage*, the project on 'technocratic laborism' might point the way to appropriate means of fostering socialist scholarship in Australia. By publishing material piecemeal, rather than in a special issue, it is hoped to offer opportunities to correct errors and to redirect emphases. Of course, the material will be largely useless if it cannot penetrate beyond *Arena* subscribers and unless otherwise stated all the items on 'technocratic laborism' are available for reprinting with or without acknowledgements. The material could be useful to discussion groups—even in ALP branches, and we are anxious to receive reports of any such discussions and also of any speeches or actions by Whitlam and his supporters which might otherwise pass us by; country meetings are specially relevant here. Just as the coming battles against Whitlam as Prime Minister must have a mass character so must the ideological preparation for these battles.

Already it is clear that the federal Labor government will be met by a revolutionary left which will be better prepared—ideologically and organizationally—to deal with the dynamics of labor-in-office than at any previous period. This is no local phenomenon but is indicative of the world situation: of the phase of US imperialism's defeat and destruction. Previous labor governments have largely maintained or regained their mass electoral support because the imperialist power(s) to which Australia was tied were able to play both time and space. But time and space are precisely what British and US imperialism do not have. We are witnessing

... the march of this retreating world  
Into vain citadels that are not walled.

Strategies to deal with particular contradictions such as an ALP split which look to previous splits for guidance are doomed unless they recognize that the principal contradiction now centres on the rout of US imperialism, less than thirty years after its world conquest in 1945. The effect of this rout on Australia in the seventies will be anything but a mechanical reflection of US imperialism's crisis: alternatives for Australia include an accelerated



decline comparable to that of NZ *vis-à-vis* Britain; a switch to the patronage of Japan which is unlikely to feel obligated to maintain our high domestic living conditions; become an imperialist power in our own right. Each of these will doubtless occur to some extent in differing sectors of the economy but for the present Australia is deriving benefits from imperialism's forced retreat. Blainey points out that there is not so much a mining boom in Australia as there is an exploration boom. Minerals are very difficult to find here and once found they are costly to develop but they have one over-riding virtue—they are in a politically stable country. Even Allende's pseudo-victory in Chile led to the suspension of Japanese iron-ore negotiations and their transfer to Australia. (*Financial Review*, 28th September, 1970). Constant supplies of raw materials are essential to maintain markets; disruption for even a few months could lead to a competitor's penetration. As less and less of the world remains quiescent the attractiveness of Australia as a place for mineral investments will increase.

While minerals have helped counter-balance declining primary-product income they produce tensions of their own: they generate a boom economy whose inflationary pressures lead to working-class demands for the maintenance of real-wage levels; they by-pass the old producers and leave small-farmers, for instance, faced with insoluble problems; they intensify the imbalance of public squalor and private affluence. Ultimately, and not so far in the future, they will demand the presence of Australian conscripts in New Guinea and Fiji. That Whitlam fully recognizes this last point is evidenced by his rush to grant formal independence so that he can prop up an independent administration there. These are not answers but areas for investigation and action.

In form the project on 'technocratic laborism' will be like *Arena's* continuing work on education and the intellectually-trained.\* In content, however, it will present an immediate denial of the *Arena* thesis since, at this time, but perhaps only for the present phase, the intellectually-trained are providing Whitlam with his constituency and are not even a secondary motor of revolution. This may change when Whitlam-in-office has exhausted the potential of his rhetoric. The conjuncture of *Arena's* intellectually-trained thesis and the new project on technocratic laborism can be resolved only dialectically. It will not be a matter of choosing one or the other, but of tracing uneven developments. Not the least of the virtues of this confrontation will be the need for the keener theoretical tools offered by Mao's *On Contradiction*.

\* For an excellent exposition of this project see Warren Ommond "Towards Self-Awareness", *The Australian New Left* (Heinemann, 1970) especially pp. 192-198.

## The Dunstan Government

JOHN LONIE

*I am very pleased to be able to address the annual conference of the federation tonight. Especially because as Premier, Treasurer and minister of Development, I am in fact involved in areas in which Chambers of Commerce have a very real interest. It is good that I should meet members of the Federation. We should work closely together. Governments need a go-ahead business climate to ensure that people's employment and prosperity is protected. Commerce needs government encouragement to help to get its job done. We should be able to meet and plan together for the benefit of all.<sup>1</sup>*

Since becoming Attorney-General and then premier of the SA Labor government, D. A. Dunstan has shone as an ALP *wunderkind*. Not only does he win office, a feat in itself for the ALP, but he has achieved nationwide impact because of his seemingly progressive social policies. The above quotation refers to a lesser known side of Dunstan's philosophy and the purpose of this article is to contribute a critique of the technocratic ALP reformism from the experience of the Dunstan government in SA—the general argument being that along with E. G. Whitlam and R. J. Hawke,

<sup>1</sup> D. A. Dunstan, *Speech to Federation of Chambers of Commerce*, 17 October, 1970.