

The Communist Party of Australia's Involvement in the Struggle for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Rights 1920-1970¹

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At a memorial in the Waterside Workers Hall in Sydney when Frank Hardy died in 1994, veteran activist Hal Alexander put the communist author's work in the Gurindji's land rights struggle in the 1960s in this context:

When Frank Hardy went north he had behind him a mixed and maybe confused background of attempts by the CPA to understand and assist the movement for self determination. About the time he joined the party (1934, when Hardy was 17) it produced the first attempt at a marxist analysis/program for Aboriginal people. Tom Wright, Secretary of the Sheet Metal Workers Union and C.C. member was responsible, and it was basically adopted by the NSW Trades and Labour Council. The party was largely responsible for setting up the FCAA. Comrades Joe McGuinness and Faith Bandler and others played leading roles...

The Gurindji struggle was not the first of its kind. On the first day of May, 1945, aboriginal workers in the Pilbara went on strike. Tribal whitefella and communist, Don McLeod, Dooley and Clancy McKenna were the main leaders, immortalised in Dorothy Hewitt's poem. In the NT in 1950/51, Aboriginal workers in the Department of 'Native Affairs went on strike influenced by wharfie comrades George Gibbs and Brian Manning. The Northern Australian Workers Union played a part in these and other events. Other actions have taken place over the years. So that for at least forty years the party had attempted to link the working class with the liberation struggle of the Aboriginal people...²

Labour history lives through such oral traditions of activists, as much as through historical research, and the story of the CPA's involvement in the Indigenous rights movement is still largely buried in old activists' recollections, racist and anti-communist tracts of the new and the old right, and the coy, sometimes derisory references of liberal 'revisionist' historians in contemporary Indigenous Studies. This paper excavates a new version of that story from CPA documents, ASIO files, secondary sources, my own experiences in the CPA and the Indigenous rights movement, and those of activists like Alexander whom it has been my pleasure to know. In doing so, it celebrates a vibrant tradition of working class activism in support of Indigenous rights, one which pre-dated the 'discovery' by liberal academia of this issue by several decades, and from which there may still be things to learn before reconciliation becomes a reality.

Early stirrings

When the CPA formed, in October 1920, Indigenous peoples already had over a century's experience of organised struggle against white imperialism, from the armed 'guerilla' raids on outposts of settlement, still occurring in the 1920s in 'frontier' regions, to less violent forms of resistance against the settler-states' administrations' of their lives in more 'settled' regions.³ This resistance intensified in the first two decades of the century, a result of increased pressure on the frontier and on 'reserve' lands, and more draconian legislative regulation. In the CPA's first decade, massacres in the Kimberley (Forrest River) and Central Australia (Coniston) attracted national attention, and bitter struggles were fought in communities like Cumeragunja where there was "hand-to-hand fighting over land, farms and children, with board managers and, less frequently, Aborigines

themselves, firing guns".⁴

Stories criticising ALP policy on Aborigines began appearing in *Workers Weekly (WW)*, the CPA's newspaper, in 1925. In 1927, *WW* printed several articles refuting the "commonly accepted view that settlement of Australia had occurred without bloodshed and that Aborigines were, and had been, well treated in the outback...", arguing instead "that a campaign of physical extermination had accompanied colonisation from the outset and that 'inhuman exploitation, forced labour and actual slavery' continued in the present day".⁵ In the late 1920s, founding CPA member and novelist Katherine Susannah Prichard published several plays and a novel, *Coonardoo*, describing exploitative conditions on the pastoral stations of NW Western Australia.⁶ Darwin wharfies, C. Mahoney and J. Waldie campaigned between 1928 and 1931 for the North Australian Workers Union (NAWU) to change its rules excluding Aborigines, and when their fellow unionists proposed to boycott low paid Aboriginal workers, *WW* urged that the correct policy was to fight for equal wages for all workers, irrespective of race.⁷

Communists who took up the cause of Indigenous rights in the 1920s were clearly reflecting concerns more widely held in non-Aboriginal society, concerns stimulated by Indigenous peoples' own struggles, but this does not explain why they adopted such 'advanced' positions, nor why, alone among working class political organisations, the CPA consciously set out to become a major force in the movement for Indigenous rights. Australian communists were led to this position largely by the international movement of which they were members.

The Comintern and 'National Minorities'

In 1922, the CPA became the Australian affiliate of the Communist International, the Comintern, and Australian communists regularly attended Comintern Congresses which reviewed their work. With other left wing trade unionists, they also took part in meetings of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), established by the Comintern to promote its international work among unionists. In this way, Australia's communists came into contact with representatives of independence movements among colonised peoples from all over the world. The Comintern and the RILU strongly promoted struggles against colonialism and imperialism, and the rights of minority peoples, in their theoretical writings and in practical work and propaganda. This included setting up the Pan Pacific Trade Union Secretariat in 1926, headed up by CPA leaders Jock Garden and Jack Ryan, which required affiliates to pay close attention to the question of imperialism and the rights of indigenous peoples in the region.⁸

In 1928, the Comintern developed its 'Theses' on *The National Question*, providing communists with a new framework in which to analyse Indigenous rights issues. In his account of the debates on these Theses, Afro-American communist Harry Haywood wrote that an intervention of Black delegates from the CP USA and criticism of the all-white delegation from the CP of South Africa prompted the Comintern's Sub-Commission on Minorities to abandon the view that the interests of Black national minorities could be met by a monolithic, monocultural socialist revolution. The new line recognised Blacks interests as a national group, distinct from

their interests as part of the working class, and in areas where they formed a majority, such as parts of the southern US, they were entitled to a state of their own:

Blacks were essentially an oppressed nation whose struggle for equality would ultimately take an autonomous direction.... it was the duty of the Party to channel the movement in a revolutionary direction by raising and supporting the slogan of the right of self-determination for Afro-Americans in the Black belt, the area of their greatest concentration.⁹

This position derived from the line the Russian Bolsheviks had negotiated with the national minorities and colonised peoples of the Great Russian Empire in forging their anti-Tsarist alliance prior to 1917. Although the CPSU under Stalin broke these agreements,¹⁰ in theory they guaranteed national minority peoples' rights to self-determination, including to the maintenance of their own languages and political systems, and even the right to secede, and this provided the communist movement with its *theoretical model* for relationships between the working class and movements both of colonised peoples and of national minorities existing within the borders of large states.

Tom Wright and the 1931 Policy

In 1929, a new 'Bolshevised' leadership in the CPA began challenging the ALP more aggressively, developing the party's own detailed policies and programs. Tom Wright, CPA General Secretary 1925-29, and a Central Committee member for many more years, became a key figure, surviving the leadership changes in 1929-1931 which removed his friend Esmonde Higgins, who along with another comrade, Norm Jeffery, had gone to Moscow in 1928 for the Comintern and RILU Conferences, and reported the decisions back to the CPA.¹¹ Wright was active in the Unemployed Workers Movement and in the Militant Minority Movement, leading in 1936 to his election as NSW Branch Secretary of the Sheet Metal Workers Union, a post he held until 1972. In the mid-1930s he won the vice-presidency of the NSW Labour Council.

Middleton's account of the CPA's involvement in Aboriginal rights says Wright "received encouragement (from the Comintern) to apply to the particular conditions in Australia the National and Colonial Policy developed by that body under the decisive influence of Lenin,"¹² and the Comintern's influence is evident in a policy statement the CPA adopted in 1931, drafted not by Wright but by Bert Moxon.¹³ *Communist Party's Fight for Aborigines: Draft Programme of Struggle Against Slavery* included a call for the abolition of all forms of forced labour; equal wages; abolition of the Aboriginal Protection Boards - 'capitalism's' slave recruiting agencies and terror organisations'; release of all Aboriginal prisoners and the empanelment of Aboriginal juries to hear cases involving Aborigines; the restoration of Central, Northern and N-W Australia to form independent Aboriginal republics; and the development of Aboriginal culture.¹⁴

Three decades later, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), reproduced the entire policy in a secret 1962 briefing paper, *Communist Party of Australia Policy and Penetration in Australian Aboriginal Activities and Organisations*, drawing particular attention to the demand which called for:

The handing over to the aborigines of large tracts of watered and fertile country, with towns, seaports, railways, roads, etc., to become one or more independent aboriginal states or republics. The handing back to the aborigines of all Central, Northern and North West Australia to enable the aborigines to develop their native pursuits. These aboriginal republics to be independent of Australia or other foreign powers. To have the right to make treaties with foreign powers, including Australia, establish their own army;

governments, industries, and in every way be independent of imperialism.¹⁵

ASIO also noted the important link, theoretically and practically, between the Comintern 'line' on the Aboriginal struggle and the anti-colonial struggle in New Guinea.

In the analyses the Comintern worked out with the CPA, Indigenous and colonised peoples' rights were linked to the issue of racism (which they called 'race chauvinism') within the white working class, in particular attitudes towards immigrant workers and support for the White Australia policy. In 1934, the CPA wrote in its *Response by Central Committee to ECCI XIII Plenum*:

As opposed to the attempts to set the Australian born workers against Italian workers, against Chinese and Japanese workers (the 'White Australia' policy) the Party must advance the principle of proletarian internationalism. In this regard it is necessary to expose the immigration laws ... A real fight against chauvinism demands that the Party sharply exposes the exploitation and oppression of the natives of New Guinea by the Australian bourgeoisie, raising the demand for the right of self determination for these people. The attempts to rouse a pogrom spirit against the aboriginals which have become more pronounced and open in the course of the last year must be laid bare.¹⁶

Throughout the 1930s, the CPA garnered support for its policy within all movements in which it had influence, involved itself in specific campaigns and developed its links with other activists in the Indigenous rights movement.

1930s Activism

Communists continued working on both fronts on the Darwin waterfront in this period,¹⁷ while in rural NSW in 1931, Coonamble Aborigines contacted Norm Jeffery, who was organising for the Pastoral Workers Industrial Union, an affiliate of the RILU set up in opposition to the right-wing Australian Workers Union. The next year, Aboriginal activists Tom Peckham and Ted Taylor convinced the CPA-influenced Unemployed Workers Movement in Dubbo to protest the refusal of rations to unemployed Aborigines, and to campaign for the abolition of the Protection Board, and some of the activists involved joined the CPA in 1935.¹⁸ In Sydney, Lucy Eatock, an Aboriginal woman from Queensland who was a CPA member was active with her sons Noel and Dick in the Unemployed Workers Movement where Wright played a leading role.¹⁹ In Melbourne, communist women helped organise the 1934 International Women's Day rally, where Aboriginal activist Anna Morgan "denounced the 'black flag of the Aboriginal Protection Board' and called for legal changes and access to social welfare,"²⁰ while Aboriginal activists in the Australian Aborigines League (AAL) developed "close personal connections" with members of the CPA; in 1936 the League affiliated with the communist-influenced Peace Council.²¹ Wright helped organise the nation-wide protest against the decision of an NT court to hang two Aboriginal men convicted of murder²² and forty five of one hundred and forty seven letters of protest received by the Commonwealth were "from communist front organisations or organisations in which communists were prominent..."²³

Communists no doubt influenced the 1933 resolution by the NSW Labor Council "that Aborigines themselves should be given the powers to prevent trespass by Europeans on tribal sanctuaries"²⁴ and in 1937 Wright, now the Council's Vice-President, organised for Aboriginal activist and unionist William Ferguson to address the Council.²⁵ This prompted the Council to pledge full support for the Aborigines Progressive Association (APA), and to adopt "a detailed policy on Aborigines.... calling for full social and political rights, award wages, full unemployment benefits, abolition

of all indentures, and homes or missions 'which are exterminating the aboriginal race by segregating the sexes and sending the girls to domestic slavery', full representation on the Aborigines Protection Board...and land rights".²⁶ In most respects the policy mirrored the CPA's views, constituting "the most radical demands being made by, or on behalf of, Aborigines till the 1960s."²⁷ In January 1938, when the APA and AAL organised a national all-indigenous protest during the sesqui-centenary celebrations, the now-famous Day of Mourning Rally, the CPA press criticised the Aborigines for excluding whites from the meeting,²⁸ but Wright nevertheless organised trade union support and helped draft the Manifesto the meeting issued, which the party printed and distributed around Australia.²⁹ In the following year, Wright produced a new detailed program for Aboriginal rights, which included an analysis of Australia's colonialist history and a discussion of the concept of national minorities' rights to self-determination. The CPA published it as a pamphlet, 'New Deal for Aborigines'.³⁰

Gerald Peel and the Torres Strait Islands Program

Communist influence extended to the Torres Strait, where in 1936 Islanders working on the Queensland Native Affairs Department pearling luggers went on strike. Already, according to Sharp, "home rule had become a specific demand" among the Murray Islanders, half a century before Mabo, and one participant she interviewed remembered this of a strike leader:

I think he was with the communists before. He had a lot of contact with old-time buddies like one South Sea man in Cairns. He'd been feeding him that stuff from the watersiders in Cairns...

The strike leaders, Sharp found, had "longstanding experience in the principles of trade unionism and direct action... For Islanders...who had associated with unionists, with the white left, and with communists, there was a continuity between the Islanders' conceptions of 'sharing' and the ideals of communism..." *WW* condemned 'Terrorism against Aborigines', reporting that "Islanders were pressing for 'the actual payment' rather than credit in the government sponsored stores of the Aborigines Industries Board, a position of 'slavery in all but the name'". In February, the Brisbane Telegraph reported thirty arrests, and the Protector told his superiors that "some of the more advanced boys (sic) are reading the papers and trying to emulate the seamen's strike now being carried on in Australia"³¹, but Sharp argues that the Islanders' strike was not so much about wages, as a strike against the protection system and for a transfer to Commonwealth administration.³²

The CPA drew on this experience a decade later, to develop a specific program for the Torres Strait Islands, written by party organiser Gerald Peel, in response, he wrote, to a request by a Torres Strait Islands serviceman who visited the CPA's Sydney office during WW2. Peel, an Englishman, was an experienced 'propagandist' in the anti-colonial movement, having already written CPA pamphlets on Indonesian independence and the situation in India.³³ With help from comrades Ted Laurie, Fred Patterson, Dick Dixson, Tom Wright and Fred Rose, he produced a booklet, *Isles of the Torres Strait. An Australian Responsibility* in which he described the 4,000 Islanders and one million New Guineans as "oppressed subjects of the Australian government". It was the "democratic responsibility of Australia, and particularly of the Australian Labour Movement" to find a solution for these "oppressed peoples within our own boundaries". At the end of his 140-page booklet on the islands' history and current conditions, Peel outlined the general approach the Australian Labour Movement should take. "A more detailed fighting program," he said, should be worked out at a later date, "after discussions and agreement with the islanders' leaders themselves".³⁴

Peel's "Immediate Program" was under four headings. "Extension of Democracy" required "immediate abolition of all discriminatory and undemocratic clauses of the present Act ... full citizenship rights for islanders ... more power to island councils... guarantee of award rates of pay to all island workers... the right of island workers to organise freely in trade unions ... (and) democratic control of 'Islands Industries Board'". Under *Health* it called for "... extra doctors ... adequate facilities for the treatment of T.B., V.D., and other infectious diseases... Dental care Baby Health Centres ... care for mothers, immediate and rapid training of native nursing personnel, etc.". Under *Education*, it called for "Adequate and properly equipped primary schools Radical overhaul of syllabi, to suit island conditions and needs and give the people a pride in their traditions ... island history ... textbooks in the English and island languages ... provision of high school, university, technical and clerical education. Proper teachers college for island teachers and payment to them of the same rates of pay as those enjoyed by Australian mainland teachers." "Economic and Cultural Aid" required "Aid to co-operative owned boats... Assistance to co-operative agriculture, industry and retail concerns ... provision of cheap credit and technical assistance for cooperative and/or island council housing schemes, electricity and water supplies, ... and for provision of agricultural machinery, tools etc. and good roads. Cultural aid in the form of musical and artistic facilities and training, libraries, wireless sets, musical instruments, museums, theatres, concert halls, cinemas, telephones, civilised drinking facilities, and all other elementary cultural needs".³⁵

The 'Long-Range Program' called for transfer of the islands from the Queensland State to Commonwealth administration, declaration of the area as "an autonomous region within the Commonwealth, with sovereign internal rights for its people, including the right to secede", an islands' constitution to be drawn up by a sovereign constituent assembly elected by the people, and the reservation of "all pearling and fishing rights ... and all other natural wealth in the region ... exclusively for the islanders ...". While not seeking to pre-empt the Islanders right to decide themselves their new constitution, Peel "suggested that such constitution be based on an economy of public and/or cooperative ownership of the means of production, barring entry of private enterprise from outside, and that it would be the duty of the Commonwealth to effectively co-operate in policing this"³⁶ The booklet's impact in the Torres Strait is not known, but Sharp referred briefly to it, mentioning also that in 1954 the CPA "published a comprehensive program for the Torres Strait Islands, Let the Sun Shine!, in Kala Lagaw Ya, in Merriam Mir and in English".³⁷

The Pilbara Strike Struggle 1942 -1949

The Pilbara Aboriginal stockworkers strike has been described on many occasions, a foundation story of the post-war land rights movement. The purpose of retelling it here is to highlight the CPA's involvement, and to show the impact this strike and related developments in the NT had on CPA policy, and through the CPA, on the national organisation of the post-war Aboriginal movement. The story began in 1942, when Western Australian CPA member Don McLeod was invited to a meeting at Skull Springs, in the Pilbara region of the state's north-west, after he had helped organise meetings in nearby Port Hedland concerning war-time restrictions authorities had placed on Aboriginal peoples' freedom of movement. The next year, when police used their war-time powers to threaten Aboriginal workers in Port Hedland with "evacuation en masse" from the district when they went on strike against the permit system,³⁸ McLeod travelled to Perth to put their grievances before the Commissioner of Native Affairs. His petitions, including an

application for a 28,500 acre lease for an Aboriginal-owned and run station, were refused and he returned to Port Hedland to establish a branch of the Anti-Fascist League, to which the local Aboriginal Rights organisation, the Euralian Association, affiliated. The local police, advised by the Security Service to keep him under surveillance, twice refused him permits to employ Aboriginal workers. The second time, he had the decision overturned by the courts.³⁹

In July 1944, McLeod wrote to Ironworkers Union Secretary and CPA Central Committee member, Ernie Thornton, "reporting on his work as an undisclosed party member in the task of organising the Pilbara Aboriginal station hands for strike action in 1946".⁴⁰ As the war drew to an end, McLeod's allies from Skull Creek, Clancy McKenna, Captain, Dougal, Dooley Bin Bin and Kitchener, travelled from station to station. A Native Affairs inspector sent to investigate police concerns concluded there was nothing to worry about, that the Aborigines lacked the organisation to act in unison, and that "all that was required was to keep a close watch on McLeod and 'throw the book' at him for the slightest infringement of the Native Administration Act ...".⁴¹ By the time they did, it was too late. On 27th April 1946, Aboriginal stockmen began walking off the stations, and by May 5th, twenty stations were affected. When police arrested McKenna, Dooley and McLeod, communists in Perth recruited allies in a Committee for the Defence of Native Rights (CDNR), which organised a public meeting of over 400 people to endorse the strikers' wage claim⁴² and protest the gaoling of their leaders. CDNR engaged a lawyer to defend them, circulated trade unions,⁴³ women's organisations, churches and local authorities, took the strikers' cause to the World Federation of Trade Unions and the United Nations, and printed a pamphlet on the strike.⁴⁴ Back in the Pilbara, strikers took matters into their own hands, four hundred of them marching on the gaol with crowbars and hammers, forcing McLeod's release.⁴⁵ The campaign forced the WA Labor government to retreat, temporarily. McLeod was given a nominal fine, and travelled south to seek wider support, launching an appeal for the striking workers at the Modern Women's Club.⁴⁶ McKenna and Dooley were released before the expiration of their sentences, Native Affairs introduced an improved ration scale, and in July more pastoralists agreed to wage increases.

When the strikers refused to return to pastoral employment, remaining in their strike camps, the department, the police and most pastoralists considered it "a Communist-inspired plot which had to be dealt with accordingly".⁴⁷ A Detective Sergeant Richards produced a letter, "purportedly written by McLeod, stating that a thousand Aborigines could be recruited into the Communist Party".⁴⁸ The police refused to issue ration coupons to the Port Hedland group, who responded by holding a protest meeting, and McLeod and CDNR President, Rev. Hodge, were arrested, once again escalating the strike. By November 1946, more Aboriginal workers had walked off the stations, and there were around 200 at each of the main camps. When McLeod used his contacts to organise some dock work for the strikers, the police ordered them off the wharves, but the wharfies refused to work without them. The police brought in strike-breakers to unload the boat, but the seamen refused to work with them.⁴⁹

A Native Welfare Acting Commissioner who went to Port Hedland to argue for a return to work in April 1948 "found the strikers well entrenched, especially at the Twelve Mile camp where they had erected a number of permanent buildings and started a school for the camp children..."⁵⁰. In March 1949, as the strike neared the end of its third year, police arrested thirty strikers for allegedly 'abducting' stockmen off stations, enforcing their own law that no one could return to work without permission. The trial prompted a walkout on the remaining stations, bringing the Pilbara pastoral

industry to a virtual standstill. The Seamen's Union called for the release of the imprisoned strikers, threatening to impose a ban on wool from the stations where 'slave conditions still apply that brought about the present strike'.⁵¹ When another group of strikers was arrested in June, the seamen banned wool from the 'black' stations, and Mrs Blackburn raised the matter in Federal Parliament. In October 1949, the Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei Vishinsky, accused Australia in the United Nations of openly violating fundamental freedoms and human rights. The Native Affairs Department finally conceded defeat, and abandoned their support for the pastoralists, in return for an end to 'the troubles.' They even provided a lawyer for the charged strikers, who were acquitted.

The Pilbara stockworkers struggle earned them a place in Australian labour history, for mounting the country's longest continuous strike. In an important sequel, McLeod formed the Pindan Cooperative Mining Company with a group of Aboriginal workers who had not returned to the stations. In 1951, they had six hundred members, and gross earnings of \$96,000. They acquired five pastoral properties, of which Yandeyerra Station became the base for their own school, hospital, and old peoples' accommodation. At one stage, the Co-op had "sixteen Europeans on staff, all of whom envisaged the scheme in either Socialist or Communist terms". After a split among the Aboriginal members, one group joined McLeod to form Nomads Incorporated, which in 1971 purchased Strelley Station.⁵² In the 1960s, Charles Rowley paid this tribute to McLeod, who by then had left the CPA:

Whether McLeod had ever been a Communist I do not know. But his techniques were in the best community development tradition ... Perhaps McLeod's greatest achievement was that he challenged the basic legitimacy of the traditional role of Aborigines on the pastoral stations, and won...⁵³

The Pilbara struggles put Aboriginal rights on the national and international political agenda, setting in train a series of further campaigns and actions which led to the 1967 referendum and beyond that to national recognition of Indigenous rights to land and self-determination.

Citizenship Rights and 'National Consolidation' vs Assimilation

In 1946, a group led by a communist, George Gibbs, won the NAWU leadership in Darwin, "determined to bring about equal wages and conditions for all workers and the abolition of discriminatory Aboriginal Ordinances".⁵⁴ The Federal Labor Government's officials in the NT were not interested in cooperating with the CPA in challenging the pastoral industry, as a *CR article* by Wright suggested they should.⁵⁵ Instead, they convened a conference with the pastoralists, excluding the union, and re-affirmed the discriminatory Aborigines Ordinances pay rates. When the NAWU changed its rules to allow for Aboriginal membership and applied to bring Aboriginal pastoral workers under its award, the Arbitration Commission upheld the arrangement the government had worked out with the pastoralists, condemning NT Aboriginal stockworkers to twenty more years of poverty.⁵⁶

Attention shifted to Darwin, where Aboriginal workers living in the Berrimah Compound who were trucked into town each day to work as domestics and labourers had gone on strike briefly in 1947.⁵⁷ Further strikes occurred at Berrimah in November 1950 and in January and February 1951, after NAWU officials made contact with leaders at Bagot and Berrimah. A Berrimah strike leader was arrested when he organised a march into Darwin, and sentenced to four months imprisonment. His place was taken by Fred Waters, whom the Director of Native Affairs promptly had 'deported' 1500

km from Darwin to Haasts Bluff, a settlement near Alice Springs.⁵⁸ Minister for Territories Hasluck justified this draconian measure on the basis that "the strikes had been part of a Communist plot for 'general industrial disturbance'".⁵⁹ The NAWU responded by sending Aboriginal organiser Jack McGinness to the 1951 ACTU Congress seeking support.

The Commonwealth's actions exposed the tight restrictions Native Affairs authorities maintained on Indigenous peoples civil and political rights, and in 1950, McGinness and two other Aboriginal NAWU members in Darwin set up a Half-Castes Progressive Association, following the example set the previous year by an Alice Springs-based organisation of the same name.⁶⁰ Their objective was to have the provisions of the Aboriginals Ordinance removed from people other than 'full-blood' Aborigines, because employers refused to pay full award rates to people who were under it.⁶¹ The name of these groups and their objectives suggests that activists still accepted, in their public statements if not in their cultural and social lives, divisions among Indigenous peoples produced by colonialism, and which the analysis of the CPA, which distinguished between 'tribalised' and urban Aborigines, also re-inforced. The material basis of these ideas lay in the separation between these groups maintained physically and legislatively by the colonial authorities; it was eventually overcome 'theoretically', that is, in the thinking of the activists and in the CPA's program, as the movement itself began breaking these divisions down in practice. Unity and common interest was *constructed* in the struggle for equal wages and citizenship rights, but in the process, the Indigenous civil rights movement changed to become a national movement, which asserted of all Indigenous peoples collective rights to land and self-determination, rights which initially the CPA and many other activists had seen as applying only to 'tribalised' peoples.

This national movement developed as NT and WA activists established contacts in the southern capitals to assist their campaign, forming links with pre-existing and new Aboriginal rights organisations in these more 'settled' regions. A tour of the eastern states by NAWU President Norris to expose conditions in the Territory was sponsored by the Democratic Rights Council (DRC) which Joe McGinness (Jack's brother) says was an important precursor to the establishment of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (FCAA) in 1957. In 1950, the DRC set up the Australian People's Assembly for Human Rights, whose Commission on Aborigines still reflected the older view when it called for "each separate tribe wherever any tribal organisations survived (to) be given its tribal land with security of tenure with absolute legal ownership of the land and minerals and other resources".⁶²

The Commonwealth's response to the growing national clamour for civil rights provided a major stimulus to change within the CPA. A conference of State and Federal ministers in 1951 adopted a set of objectives to achieve "uniformity... in the enjoyment of the privileges of citizenship" The new policy aimed at ensuring that

all aborigines and part aborigines (attained) the same manner of living as other Australians and lived as members of a single Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs hopes and loyalties as other Australians⁶³.

This new policy, dubbed assimilationism, in some ways simply continued the older regime under a new name. But it was worse, in that "if carried out uniformly and compulsorily... (it) was genocide".⁶⁴

Read's article cited above paid tribute to the CPA's 1963 draft program for attacking the assimilation policy, but the process of developing a new policy framework began much earlier. In 1954, *Communist Review* published "A New Stage in the Development of the Aboriginal People",⁶⁵ signalling a change

from the policy based on 'the preservation of tribalism' to one "of the most rapid social advancement of the Aboriginal people and encouragement of the new process of *national consolidation*":

A new national consolidation is taking place... The old tribal identity is being replaced by new ties arising from common residence, common awareness of themselves as racially and culturally distinct, and, above all, from consciousness of subjection to common oppression... The greater number of aborigines today sell their labour-power on farms and cattle stations... these aborigines are workers, not nomadic hunters and collectors... our particular assistance should go to these most advanced workers who are moving into action.

The CPA should "fight against all attempts to split the aboriginal people ... and struggle for unity of all aborigines, whatever their physical make up". The struggles in the Pilbara and Darwin "showed that the urban and rural workers constitute the most advanced and militant section of the aboriginal people". In a clear reference to the 'new' policy of assimilationism, it condemned the "segregationist and racist approach of the ruling class", and called for "the smashing of all obstacles to aboriginal unity". The CPA should strive for "much closer contact with the aboriginal people, a searching out of those issues which the aborigines themselves are seriously concerned about and ready to fight on". The 'basic demands' included "aboriginal ownership of reserves, the ending of discriminatory laws and the extension of full civic rights to the aborigines, and the rapid raising of their living, education and health standards". These demands should "be carried forward not solely by general agitation, but by struggle around day-to-day issues".⁶⁶

The change in policy saw increased communist activity to build a broad-based movement of support for Aboriginal demands among the trade unions and in human rights and social justice organisations. In 1956, the Waterside Workers Federation took up the call for full civil rights, and as ASIO's analysts noted, "by 1957 various trade union bodies like the NSW Labour Council, the Melbourne Trades Hall Council and the ACTU were drawn into making public statements ... especially concerning the plight of aborigines in the Warburton native reserve".⁶⁷ The success of the CPA's efforts was only possible because of the intensified government and industry pressure on Aboriginal people and their lands, particularly the use of those lands for atomic testing in SA and for bauxite mining in North Queensland, and the continuation under the assimilation policy of severe restrictions on Aboriginal peoples basic human rights.

State-based Aboriginal advancement organisations, with varying degrees of communist involvement, were also increasing their efforts to overturn the state regulation of indigenous peoples' lives. One was the Australian Aboriginal Fellowship formed in Sydney in 1956 on the initiative of Pearl Gibbs, partly, according to Faith Bandler, because Gibbs felt the old Aboriginal Rights Council was "dominated by the communists". Nevertheless, communists who included Bandler herself and Len Fox, to whom she made this comment, played important roles in it. The Fellowship prepared a petition which "called on the Federal government to hold a referendum to alter the Constitution. The framers of this petition were Lady Jessie Street, Brian Fitzpatrick and Christian Jollie-Smith",⁶⁸ a barrister who was a foundation member of the CPA.⁶⁹ Other communists who became involved were Helen Hambly and Charlie Leon, and the Fellowship got support from communist-led unions including the Waterside Workers and the Builders Labourers.⁷⁰ By the beginning of 1957, "the AAF had already collected about ten thousand signatures" to its petition, and the first FCAA Conference, held in Adelaide in February 1957, "agreed to assume responsibility for circulating (it)".⁷¹ The FCAA brought together all the advancement organisations from around Australia. Later that year, the 'New Deal' public meeting at the Sydney Town Hall saw the national launch of

the referendum campaign. Among those on the platform were Aboriginal activists Doug Nicholls, Bert Groves, and Bill Onus, opera singer Harold Blair, and Don McLeod.

From Equal Pay to Land Rights and Self-Determination

In 1958 and again in 1962, unions affiliated with FCAA moved resolutions to the ACTU Congress calling for action on the issue of equal pay and removal of all forms of discrimination, while in Darwin, George Gibbs and another communist, waterside worker Brian Manning, helped establish the NT Aboriginal Rights Council, three of whose other seven original members were Jacob Roberts, Dave Daniels, FCAA's contact in the NT, and Dave's brother Dexter. They established a link with the Victorian Aboriginal Rights Council⁷² whose president Barry Christophers and secretary Shirley Andrews were also communists.⁷³ A major milestone was reached in September 1963 when the ACTU adopted its first policy on Aboriginal Affairs, including total opposition to the unequal wages system. The following year, with the ACTU behind them, the NAWU began negotiations with the Pastoralists Association to implement full award conditions for Aboriginal stockworkers. When these failed, and the union made application to the Arbitration Commission, the pastoralists forced a Full Bench hearing, briefing John Kerr, QC.⁷⁴ The Commonwealth intervened to stop a 'common rule' award being made which would cover pastoral work on missions and settlements. Kerr argued that Aborigines – despite generations of work in this industry – still needed training, because “a significant proportion ... is retarded by tribal and cultural reasons from appreciating in full the concept of work”.⁷⁵ This influenced the Commission's decision, handed down in March 1966, that all Aborigines employed as stockmen were to be paid the same as Europeans, but not until December 1968.

The FCAA attacked the decision in the national media, but the real attack came five months later 'on the ground,' when Aboriginal stockworkers and their families began their historic 'walk-offs' from Newcastle Waters and Wave Hill stations. As the Pilbara strikers had done twenty years earlier, they established a strike camp, on the banks of the Victoria River near the Wave Hill welfare settlement. An attempt by the ACTU to get the NAWU to agree to a deal with the pastoralists and the Commonwealth⁷⁶ was rejected by the union. Actors Equity union sponsored a speaking tour of the southern capitals by Dexter Daniels, now a NAWU organiser, and Mundanganna (Captain Major), a Gurindji strike leader⁷⁷. Negotiations dragged on during the wet season with the NT CAR threatening it would pull every worker off every station when the wet broke and bring the industry to a halt. But, as described by two communists who have chronicled the strike⁷⁸ along with many others, in March 1967 the Gurindji took a step which changed the character of the struggle. They packed up their camp and moved on to a spot in the middle of their own country, Dagu Ragu, known in English as Wattie Creek. The next month they sent a petition to the Governor-General “asking for the return of some 500 square miles of their traditional land in the Wave Hill – Limbunya area”.⁷⁹ When this was rejected, the Gurindji simply continued their 'illegal' land occupation, setting up their own infrastructure in the camp as the Pilbara strikers had also done. They were still there when in 1972, a Labor Government was returned at the Federal level, promising to legislate for land rights.

The Gurindjis' move to Dagu Ragu made a qualitative shift in the struggle of the indigenous movement nationally, forcing the question of indigenous peoples' rights beyond civil and political, or citizenship' rights to issues of land rights and self-determination. This was not, of course, a new demand; the return of some of the stolen lands had been a key demand of the Indigenous movement for over a hundred years.⁸⁰ But now this demand

finally found expression within mainstream national politics, leading in 1969 to its adoption as a plank of the ALP platform and eventually to legislation at the Commonwealth level (in 1976) and in most states between the 1970s and 1990s. This was not however an even development. When the Commonwealth agreed in 1968 to the basic wage on its reserves and settlements, and the Commission's 1966 ruling came into effect in December that year, union support for the NT Aborigines' campaign began to drop off.⁸¹ That year, the conservative government rejected the Gurindji's land demands, despite the Minister responsible, Wentworth, being sympathetic. By then, though, the Referendum had passed, there was increased national focus on indigenous issues, and the movement had a new ally, in the radical student movement developing on university campuses, which was also not without its connections to the CPA.

The most significant of the early student actions were the Freedom Rides organised through rural NSW by Student Action For Aborigines (SAFA), which formed at Sydney University in 1964, modelled on the US civil rights movement, which had “prompted students to examine race relations in their own society”.⁸² The response the students received in some country towns revealed a depth to Australian racism which the media was forced to acknowledge and condemn, and commentators then and since claimed this was a factor in swinging support, especially among urban voters, behind the 1967 Referendum.⁸³ The Freedom Rides are now a respected part of the 'official' history of the movement for Indigenous rights, but at the time the *Bulletin* used them to mount an attack on the movement for its communist links, drawing heavily on ASIO sources.⁸⁴ These claims were not without foundation; at an ANU forum discussing “Indigenous Citizenship” in 1996, one of the Freedom Riders acknowledged that approximately one quarter of the students, herself included, had been CPA members.⁸⁵

Full Human Rights

In 1963, the CPA began once again to revise its own policy and program. An early draft targeted the new policy of the Commonwealth and States:

We must reject Assimilation ... Stripped of pretence it means in effect the elimination of Aborigines as a people through enforced absorption into the general population of Australia ... Assimilation would destroy what they have given to mankind as well as to deny them the fundamental right of all people to preserve their identity and develop along their own lines Assimilationist propaganda cannot disguise or solve the basic cause of the problems of the Aborigines, denial of fundamental rights.⁸⁶

The final version was not produced for over three years, and in the intervening period, the equal wage case was mounted, resulting in the Gurindji's walk off, the Freedom Rides hit the headlines, and the ten-year referendum campaign came to fruition. Over the same period, the party was attempting to recover from a damaging split by its pro-Chinese minority led by Victorian party leader Ted Hill. In February 1967, Ted Bacon, Queensland party secretary, contributed to the pre-Congress discussion with a review of “the course of the Aborigines struggle for equality, dignity and identity” in *Australian Left Review*, which had replaced the *Communist Review* as the party's theoretical journal. “A new stage in the struggle has been reached,” wrote Bacon. Until recent years, indigenous peoples had been frustrated in their efforts to “stand up for their rights ... because they were broken into isolated groups, without much public understanding or sympathy”. Now they were “beginning to get the mass support they need,” he said, referring in particular to the NT struggles and the Freedom Rides as helping to build this growing awareness. The “nationwide movement” had “thrown

up a core of capable, devoted Aboriginal and Islander leaders", and the formation of FCAA had been a "historic step" towards resolving the difficulties of regional and political differences, and of bringing all the disparate elements in the movement "together around a commonly agreed program of aims and action". FCAA had helped to develop the new national indigenous leadership by its "persistent and successful efforts to draw Aboriginal and Islander leaders into positions of responsibility...". Trade union bodies had begun "to take notice of the problem of the people and give help". The three 'urgent tasks' he listed were winning the right of full and free participation by Aborigines and Islanders in North Australian development, intensification of pressure on State and Commonwealth governments for the "abolition of all restrictions ... to make equal rights a reality and to establish special minority rights" and "more systematic study and assistance to the 'ghetto' Aboriginal population of the cities". The only mention of land rights was when, referring to the Gurindji and the Torres Strait Islanders as examples, he commented that "the people are now beginning to fight not only for equal wages, but for other fundamental rights - for the collective ownership of lands, together with mineral rights, for local autonomy, for modern health, education and industrial facilities".⁸⁷

In June 1967, a month after the referendum passed, the CPA's 21st Congress adopted the new program, *Full Human Rights for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders*. "The basic condition of the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders," it said, "remains that of oppressed national minorities. This is emphasised, not contradicted, by the fact that the great majority of them are poverty-ridden labourers." Under "Basic Policy" it included this statement:

Taking as fundamental the right of all peoples to self-determination and the need to develop friendship between all peoples on the basis of equality, the Communist Party believes that Aborigines and Islanders must be enabled to live either as members of the general Australian community or in their own autonomously controlled communities, according to individual choice, and to move freely from one to the other as they wish

This policy came out only a few months after the Gurindji move to Dagu Ragu, and while it did not make land rights the central feature of its immediate demands, the program did say:

Aborigines and Islanders should have inalienable possession of their remaining tribal areas, of the lands now set aside as Government or Mission Settlements or of better land where these are unsuitable, ownership of mineral and other national wealth located on their lands and economic aid to enable them to develop rapidly as modern communities.⁸⁸

By this time, however, the CPA's immanent demise as a major force in Australian politics due in part to its own internal divisions, the growing importance in radical politics of so-called new social movements which more traditional sections of the CPA found themselves unwilling to support, and the fruition, ironically of the Aboriginal movement's aspirations for autonomy which it had worked hard to promote, had all begun to make the CPA less relevant as a major ally and source of theory and demands for the movement. A new younger generation of Aboriginal activists was no longer prepared to share the leadership of their movement with non-Aboriginal activists, communists or any other, and they moved to take over the major national organisation, FCAATSI. Some in the CPA welcomed this change, as evidenced by an article in a 1970 Australian Left Review which was accompanied by a "Statement of Aims on Aboriginal Autonomy", from FCAATSI, the WA Aboriginal Association and AAL (Vic). A contrary view was expressed by communists who eventually became associated with the pro-Soviet Socialist Party when it split in 1972, a view which

saw in the 'Black Power' influences on some of the new younger activists a dangerous 'petit-bourgeois' tendency.⁸⁹ My personal experience of the Aboriginal rights movement, which dates from this time, was that both individual communists and the CPA organisation continued to play a strong supporting role in many campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s, right up to its demise in 1990, but this period is outside the scope of this paper.

The Legacy of Anti-communism

The year after the Commonwealth granted the suffrage to indigenous people, Commonwealth and State ministers responsible for Aboriginal welfare held a Conference in Darwin (July 11 -12th 1963), where they "welcomed the growing national interest in Aboriginal 'welfare', but warned of the Australian Communist party activities which would lead to a worsening of race relations".⁹⁰ The Ministers' 'fears' of communist influence most likely derived from the 1962 ASIO report to which this paper has referred. But Commonwealth Ministers were not the only ones who promoted such Cold War fantasies in their efforts to slow down the movement for indigenous rights, and there is a long record of security police reports on communist 'infiltration' of the indigenous movement finding their way into more, and less, respectable publications.⁹¹ The response by indigenous activists and their non-indigenous supporters to such disinformation campaigns was mainly to play down the role of communists in their movement, but some, including Charles Perkins who came to national prominence in the Freedom Rides, used the government's fear of the communists to justify their own acceptance as spokespeople for their movement. In 1967, just after the Referendum, Perkins was in the United States, and requested a meeting with the Prime Minister Harold Holt who was visiting New York:

Holt agreed, partly because Perkins was a leading Aboriginal spokesman, and partly because the recent referendum giving Commonwealth control had left government without a policy. At the conclusion of the interview, at which Perkins warned of the danger of communists in the Aboriginal movement, Holt asked Perkins to put his views on the future direction of Aboriginal Affairs in writing.⁹²

Wentworth and his advisers took both Perkins and their ASIO briefings seriously, it seems. In Cabinet Submission No.92, of 15 May, 1968, recently released, Wentworth argued for a Commonwealth Aboriginal policy in these terms:

Hesitation in formulating a policy could have quite serious repercussions for us, both internally and internationally. Communists are devoting great efforts to capturing Aboriginal organizations, and unless we have an alternative to offer, they are likely to succeed. They plan both to develop an 'American Negro injustice' image and to focus the hatred of Asian peoples upon Australia.⁹³

Anti-communist sentiment was more often used to justify attacks on Aboriginal rights, an example of which was a book produced during the Australian Mining Industry Council's campaign against the 'preferred model' land rights legislation principles of the Hawke Labor government. Written by an ex-CPA member, Geoff McDonald, *Red Over Black* alleged the land rights movement was part of a communist conspiracy to undermine Australia's security and defence. Similar views are expressed today by One Nation members, including the Mareeba man recently promoted to the Senate seat for Queensland, who claimed his main motivation for becoming politically active was the dangers to Australia he discovered in the text of the United Nations Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples published on the Internet.

The Last Word?

The continued strength of the alliance between racism and anti-communism may be one reason why, despite a massive revision of the history of Indigenous peoples in Australia over recent decades, very little has been written acknowledging the extent of the role the CPA played, especially prior to the emergence of this new liberal scholarship. The *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*, for example, has no entries under communist or communist party, nor does it mention this work in many of the entries where it might have, e.g. in the brief biographies of indigenous people who were involved closely with, or actual members of, the CPA. This may also indicate a concern to emphasise the agency of Indigenous peoples themselves in the struggles which produced the situation today. The problem is that this too easily vacates the ground of reconciliation and black-white alliances to a de-historicised and sometimes over-compensating liberalism which under-rates the continuing importance of non-Indigenous working class activism in achieving any lasting social change.

The problem is not helped by the reticence of Aboriginal activists, communists included, of whom few have written of their experiences in ways which highlights their relationship with the CPA. This surprises me, given my own experience of this movement, in which the oral traditions of activists include many stories of the support they and their movement had from the CPA and the organisations it influenced. The academic student of this history is, however, left with only a few fragments, like this extract from an interview with Louise West:

I joined the Communist Party in 1942. It was still illegal then although this was a bit of a joke. No one really took that seriously, least of all me, because I used to get around with a red handkerchief with a hammer and a sickle on it that my mother had embroidered... I was really thrilled when I joined the party, I was thrilled with everything. I remember one of the first cadres' lectures I attended was on chauvinism (they didn't call it racism then). It explained how capitalism exploited people and used their colour and differences to divide people. All this was very interesting and understandable. So to me the party was the champion of all oppressed people.

Perhaps the clue lies in the fact that many activists did not in practice find that the CPA was sufficiently attuned to the reality of their Aboriginal identity, as West went on to say:

At that time the CPA only regarded tribal people as Aborigines – the rest of us were on the lowest rung of the proletarian ladder and were treated the same as the poorest whites. No one considered that we had any identity or culture... I didn't get involved in Aboriginal organisations until the 1950s and '60s.

West nevertheless acknowledges the CPA played a vital role in her political education. She was secretary of the Surrey Hills branch in the 1940s, and, in her own words, "studying marxist theory like mad.... After I'd done some reading, I was sometimes tutor of a class. The party did a lot of encouraging of people at that stage and I went to a lot of classes and I tutored purely on what was in the book". West left the CPA in the late 1960s, but continued to be active in the indigenous and women's movements, including working in her later years at Tranby Co-operative College for Aborigines and Women's Liberation House.⁹⁴

Other Indigenous members included Gladys O'Shane, and some other members of her family active in North Queensland, who were among those targeted for special attention by ASIO, as was Ray Peckham in NSW, Joe McGuinness from Darwin who was also involved in campaigns in Queensland, Kath Walker, from Stradbroke Island, now known by her ancestral name of

Oodgeroo Noonuccal, and Faith Bandler, an Islander who became prominent in the Referendum campaign. Other indigenous movement activists of the 1940s and 1950s had close associations with the CPA, without necessarily becoming members. Bandler was one who did not mention her party membership, including in a book she wrote on the Referendum campaign with another ex-CPA member, Len Fox⁹⁵. One Aboriginal activist in that campaign whom they interviewed, Charlie Leon, alluded only obliquely to his:

During the early fifties I was a member of a political party that the Prime Minister was trying to drive underground. The people of that party taught me a lot. They were not like the Liberals and the Labors who always wanted to do things for us. They were not for our charity but for our dignity. They taught me that if you stood up and fought hard you would win in the end.... (*ibid.*: 21)

Bandler was perhaps displaying a healthy paranoia towards ASIO, acquired in 1951, when she and a young Aboriginal man from Dubbo, Ray Peckham,⁹⁶ were selected to attend a Youth Festival of World Culture in Berlin:

Ray needed the permission of the Superintendent of the Aboriginal Welfare Board (AWB) to travel, and ... (he) was told that he was not allowed to leave the country. This was the first time I saw bureaucratic racism at work, and realised the extent to which Aborigines were deprived of their freedom. Protests, which included members of the Waterside Workers and Seamen's Unions were organised to pressure the AWB. Eventually, ninety four of us set sail...and Ray was amongst us. However, bureaucratic racism was not the only lesson I learned about my country from this trip...

She then speaks of ASIO's confiscation of their passports, as well as books and gifts on her return, because she had visited an eastern bloc country.⁹⁷

Perhaps the failure of the CPA to change sufficiently quickly, as the movement around it changed, led its Aboriginal members to reject it in the end. In any event, as the last icicles of the Cold War melt, a new generation of Indigenous historians will hopefully be able to re-tell this story from their movement's perspectives, no longer running the risk that they thereby might undermine its credibility or support in contemporary Australia.

Endnotes

- 1 The research on which this paper draws began twenty years ago, when, as a relatively new member of the CPA, I joined a committee to prepare documents on the Aboriginal rights struggle for the 1979 party congress. More recently, I returned to this topic in a chapter of my PhD thesis on the CPA's influence on Australian adult education.
- 2 This is an extract from the notes which Alexander prepared for this speech, a copy of which he kindly provided to me.
- 3 Barwick 1972; Markus 1990; Goodall 1988, 1996.
- 4 Goodall 1988, p. 189.
- 5 Cited Markus 1978:148-9.
- 6 Throssell 1982; Throssell 1990; Beasley 1993.
- 7 *Workers Weekly* 13/4/1928, cited Markus 1978:149. [See also / Martinez, 1999 #676].
- 8 ASIO 1962; Davidson 1969: 35-6; Markey 1994: 200.
- 9 Haywood 1978: 218.
- 10 Claudin 1975: 253-9.
- 11 Davidson 1969:50.
- 12 Middleton 1977: 130-131.
- 13 Stuart MacIntyre, pers.com..
- 14 *Workers Weekly* 24/9/1931, cited Markus 1978:148. See also ASIO 1962, which reproduces the policy in full.

- 15 Hereafter referred to as ASIO 1962. The document was obtained through Australian Archives, where its reference is Series A6122/39, Item 1416.
- 16 *C.C. Circulars & Statements 1933-1941*. CPA collection. Mitchell Library 5021 add-on 1936, Box 5.
- 17 Martinez, 1999.
- 18 Goodall 1996: 203-4; 182-3.
- 19 Johnson 1990: 41-3. Eatcock's daughter Lindsay married a party organiser, Bill Mountjoy. Stuart MacIntyre, pers.com.
- 20 Stevens 1987: 95.
- 21 Goodall 1996: 186.
- 22 Fox 1982: 165.
- 23 Markus 1978:145, 151.
- 24 Markey 1994: 264.
- 25 Markus 1978; Horner 1974.
- 26 Markey 1994:265.
- 27 Markus 1978: 148.
- 28 Goodall 1996: 234.
- 29 Horner 1974: 57.
- 30 There is a copy in the Noel Butlin archives, and the pamphlet was re-issued in 1944, with an introduction by Katherine Susannah Prichard.
- 31 WW 21/1/1936, cited Sharp 1993,192. The seamens strike helped propel the communist E.V. Elliott to a leadership position.
- 32 Sharp 1993: 222.
- 33 See Symons 1994:66, 95, 97.
- 34 Peel 1947.
- 35 *Ibid.*: 134.
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 Sharp 1993:225; my emphasis.
- 38 These required Aboriginal workers to remain on pastoral stations unless they had a permit to work in town.
- 39 Horton 1994: 679; Biskup 1973: 212-214.
- 40 Symons 1994:13.
- 41 Cited Biskup 1973: 214.
- 42 The claim was for a thirty shillings minimum weekly wage.
- 43 Communist influenced unions acted in support, including the Coastal Dock Rivers and Harbour Works Union which "immediately declared its support for the Aborigines and persuaded the Fremantle District Council to do the same ... The dockies struck a levy of sixpence a week from each member to support the strikers". Macintyre 1984: 101.
- 44 Biskup 1973: 220.
- 45 Rowley 1972b: 253-4.
- 46 The West Australian CPA's activities on Aboriginal rights at this time also extended down to the capital, Perth. In 1944, the CPA's Perth branches supported Aboriginal protests in the Guildford area following an army takeover of a reserve, and the removal of the people to a camp without housing or any sanitary services. Bayswater and Midland Junction CPA branches made representations to the local council and the Native Affairs Department and when the only outcome was the eviction of several families from condemned houses, the CPA helped organise a protest movement, led by an Aboriginal woman, Mary Mordern. Mordern was a member of a women's discussion group which Katherine Susannah Prichard helped form, the Modern Women's Club, which regularly concerned itself with Aboriginal issues and had a number of Aboriginal members Biskup 1973: 211; Radi 1988: 137, 225-6. The Modern Women's Club later gave way to the New Housewives Association and then to the national Union of Australian Women, both organisations initiated by the CPA. The latter included a number of other indigenous women activists, including Louise West, Pearl Gibbs and Gladys O'Shane, and agitated consistently on issues of indigenous rights Curthoys and McDonald 1996: 60-69
- 47 Biskup 1973: 221.
- 48 Macintyre 1984:101.
- 49 This mini-strike was eventually lost when AWU officials in Perth reversed the local branch's approval for the Aborigines to join the union.
- 50 Biskup 1973: 225. The school wa a precursor to the first independent Aboriginal school established some years later on Yandyerra Station.
- 51 Cited Biskup 1973: 237.
- 52 Biskup: 238-9.
- 53 Rowley 1972b: 254-60.
- 54 Markus 1978: 152.
- 55 Wright's article, "Fight for the Aborigines", is quoted in ASIO 1962.
- 56 Stevens 1968.
- 57 Their pay rate at the time was 30/- of which they got only 10/-, the other two-thirds being paid into a trust account. They demanded £4 10/-, and the right to get most of it in hand (Rowley 1972b: 292).
- 58 Watson 1995 describes similar deportations used in 1957 by the Queensland authorities against Palm Island strikers.
- 59 Rowley 1972b: 294.
- 60 Middleton 1977: 101-2. Martinez reports a group of the same name operating in Darwin in the 1930s.
- 61 The Alice Springs group also agitated against the curfew system, which forbade Aboriginal people without a permit from entering the town area. At one stage, they threatened to withdraw all their children from school in protest. Documents relating to this period were reproduced in an unpublished history resource book for the Institute for Aboriginal Development, an Aboriginal-controlled college in Alice Springs. Rowse unpub.. See especially McCoy to Director of Native Affairs, 24/2/1951. A brief account also appears in the Alice Springs Town Council's history of the town , Donovan 1988: 271.
- 62 Quoted McGinness 1991: 58.
- 63 Cited Stevens 1968: 22.
- 64 Read 1982: 24.
- 65 As with similar Review articles, it was based on a report to the Central Committee, this time by the CPA's Minorities Committee
- 66 The article is quoted extensively in the 1962 ASIO report, from where these extracts have been taken. See also Middleton 1977: 131-2.
- 67 ASIO 1962.
- 68 Bandler 1989: 3, 14.
- 69 She attended its first meeting in Sydney in 1920 along with her lover of the time, Bill Earsman, the CPA's first General Secretary. See Macintyre 1998.
- 70 Goodall 1996: 276-7.
- 71 Bandler 1989:14.
- 72 Bandler 1989:16.
- 73 ASIO 1962; for other activites by Christophers, see Taffe 1999.
- 74 The same John Kerr, who, in November 1975 as Governor-General, dismissed the Whitlam Labor government in a 'constitutional coup d'etat', in the midst of debates on that government's Aboriginal Land Rights (N.T.) Bill. Kerr was a member of the anticommunist and CIA-funded Association for Cultural Freedom in the 1950s and early 1960s. Holt 1996: 123-4.
- 75 Rowley 1972: 324-27.
- 76 The 'deal' provided for only 5-10% of the workers to get the full award wage, while the rest would have to settle for an rate still under the Wards Ordinance at the level of the basic wage.
- 77 'Gurindji' was the 'tribal' name the people used for themselves, based on their language, kinship and land owning relationships. Martin (1995) said this tour was "organised principally by the CPA, with funding from Actors Equity".

- 78 Middleton 1977, and Hardy 1968.
- 79 Middleton 1977: 116.
- 80 Goodall 1988; 1996.
- 81 Part of the explanation for the decline in union support may be that from 1968 onwards, union officials in the CPA were divided in another bitter inner-party struggle, prompted in part by the CPA's critical response to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia that year, a struggle which culminated in a major split, and the establishment of the pro-Soviet Socialist Party of Australia (which Middleton herself joined).
- 82 Cahill 1969:27.
- 83 Rowan Cahill, a student activist at the time, wrote his account of the Freedom Rides as part of a research project on the 'New Left' funded by the CPA-backed Marxist Research Foundation in Sydney. Cahill 1969.
- 84 McKnight 1994: 183-4.
- 85 Curthoys 1996.
- 86 CPA, *Draft Policy Statement on Aborigines of Australia*, 7 Dec 1963, pp. 10-11; quoted Read 1982: 24-5.
- 87 Bacon 1967.
- 88 CPA 1967: 20.
- 89 For an example, see Middleton 1977.
- 90 Moy 1963: 4-5; my emphasis.
- 91 In 1965, for example, the *Bulletin* published an article about communist influence in the Freedom Rides which drew heavily on ASIO sources McKnight 1994: 186.
- 92 Read 1990:80; my emphasis. Perkins was not the first Aboriginal activist to use the threat of communism to get government support. In Queensland, the One People of Australia League (OPAL) established itself, with government assistance, on a program of resisting communist influence in Aboriginal politics. One of its early leaders, Neville Bonner, eventually became a Liberal Senator, the first Aboriginal person to be elected to the Australian parliament
- 93 Signed W.C. Wentworth, Minister in charge Aboriginal Affairs. Copy recently released on National Archives website.
- 94 Stevens 1987: 137-45. "The book" was most likely one of the CPA's tutors' handbooks with their detailed lesson plans and hints for tutors. See Boughton 1997.
- 95 Bandler and Fox 1983. Fox's recollections on his work in the AAF and on the work of other communists like Tom Wright and Katherine Susannah Prichard for the indigenous movement are in his autobiographical *Broad Left, Narrow Left*, Fox 1982: 162 ff.
- 96 ASIO's 1962 report marked Peckham as one of those activists who "is or has been a member of the Communist party of Australia". His father Tom had helped Ferguson in the 1930s, and was one of the activists in the Dubbo Unemployed Workers Movement who was in contact with CPA organiser Norm Jeffery Goodall 1996: 277.
- 97 Bandler 1989: 3.