

THE WHITLAM MYTH.

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"what history teaches us is to avoid illusion and, make-believe, to lay aside dreams, moonshine, cure-alls, wonder-workings, pie-in-the-sky to be realistic....."

Graham Swift.
Waterland.

Since its destruction in the CIA-engineered coup of November 1975 (1), the period of the Whitlam Labor Government has taken on the aura of a social democratic paradise denied. For many associated with the Labor Party and the labour movement, confronted with the blight of contemporary depression, a longing for the brighter Whitlam era obtains. Nostalgia for a better past is far preferable than the grim realities of the present.

Much of this Fabian dreaming for the lost land of Gough is confirmed by a growing library of books dedicated to the "Whitlam years". (2) Although its earlier editions examined the Whitlam period with a critical eye, all of these books concentrated unduly either on Whitlam as the great helmsman or the tragedies and achievemants of Whitlam's ministers. Or, more rarely, the policies of the Whitlam administration. Overall, these works form the "Whitlam industry" which continues to perpetuate the "Whitlam legend". Gough is made a demigod.

If the authors of the "Whitlam industry" do consider Graham Swift's warning about history's teachings, it is confined to the weaknesses and excesses of Labor parliamentarians. Their writing teaches us, in retrospect, not to attempt to civilize capitalism too swiftly or the voyage to Byzantium will end in disaster. All of the great dramas of the Whitlam period are enacted within the panelled walls of Parliament House. In such an arena, Whitlam's eloquence becomes a thing of wonder for the "makers" of the "Whitlam mystique".

Because many of these "makers" were former press secretaries or speech-writers of various Labor ministers or closely aligned to the Labor Party, intellectually, the dreams, the cure-alls, and the realism become a matter of rhetoric. They are the "singing-masters" of the "Whitlam" soul (3). Mentally, there is a need to relive the Whitlam years because so much was invested in parliamentarism and the Labor Party under Whitlam.

Such an observation is underlined by two recent additions to the "Whitlam legend" by Whitlam himself and the collection of Fabian essays entitled "The Whitlam Phenomenon". Without a hint of self-criticism, Whitlam, over several hundred pages of text, lists the achievements of his government. At a fateful hour, Sir John Kerr and Malcolm Fraser scuttle the Whitlam ship of state bound for Byzantium. And so the legend, like all Labor myths, persists. Everything could have been achieved according to Whitlam had not the blackguards Kerr and Fraser overthrown parliamentary traditions and the Australian Constitution.

Nothing can be learnt from Whitlam's book, only perhaps that tall Labor poppies too can be cut down. The Whitlam legend remains intact. The Whitlam Phenomenon, with few exceptions, compliments Whitlam's views of himself and "his" government. The legend is reworked not unmade by any of the Fabian essayists.(4)

Excess in the form of "moon-shine" pervades Graham Little's psycho-social contribution to the collection. When Little contrasts Whitlam's "masculine" political style with the "Reichian feminism" of Jim Cairns we are witnessing not only the creation of a "living legend" but the abandonment of material reality for make-believe. No doubt Little's argument will have significance in the period of the Hawke Government, where style is all as the working class are abandoned and a form of state corporatism is imposed in the interests of monopoly capital. But Little's consideration of political style tells us nothing of substance about the Whitlam Labor Government.(5)

S Essentially, the "Whitlam industry" has three dominant
S characteristics. The first is its concentration upon
, Whitlam as the heroic individual or great man.

a Following Lenin, the second characteristic might be
F described as as antipodean form of "parliamentary
) cretinism". That is, all makers of "the Whitlam legend"
I are enchanted by the "wonder workings" of Parliament
House, Canberra. Even when the great debates of the
Whitlam period are set within the broader framework of
Australian capitalism, it is the debates which are
emphasised rather than the class alignments, divisions
and power which shaped these debates.
Characteristically, words are allowed to replace the
class struggle.

The third characteristic of the "Whitlam industry"
practitioners is the collective effort to keep the
experience of the Whitlam years suspended in a legendary
past. It is a form of emotional embalming. We are given
"every tatter in mortal dress". Class lessons are
scrupulously avoided as the "Whitlam" makers pursue the
manna of Labor's glory years.

If historical continuities do intrude into their
mythologizing, the curious lesson learnt from the Whitlam
years is to snail along the gradualist path. Be thankful
for any reform. Zeal will only precipitate the kind of
disaster which befell "God Gough". The deadly logic
which informs such a political line is one of acceptance
of the rule of capital as "things can always get worse".
It is the line of least resistance, of capitulation and
collaborationism.

While the historical continuity of this Labor strategy
is ignored by the "Whitlam" commentators, it allows them
to accept the brutal realism of the Hawke Labor
Government in the present as they escape mentally into
the "sensual music" of the past. A kind of political
paralysis has taken hold of the "Whitlam" myth makers.
Notwithstanding the hardships endured by the popular
masses under the corporate outlook of the Hawke
administration, writers of the "Whitlam" years see no

respite from this class oppression.

Silent acceptance becomes the way to survive politically. Escape into the "Whitlam" legend is taken up by "hearts sick with desire". Mentally, they are still sailing to Byzantium despite its disappearance. Never in these Labor fables is the Labor Party seen as a party of capitalism. Never is the Whitlam Government's period of office examined in the context of class struggle or imperialism. And never are the reforms in welfare established by the Whitlam Government considered as measures of class control and demobilisation.(6)

To grasp the realities of the Whitlam era, we must abandon the scribes of yesterday's happiness marooned on their "summer long" Byzantium and sail against the tide. But what course will we follow? Although some would proclaim the death of Marxism (as such a position allows the avoidance of class oppression under monopoly capitalism), only a historical materialist analysis will offer a class reading of the Whitlam period (7). Such an analysis would emphasise the historical continuity between the Whitlam years and the present political impasse of the Hawke regime.

Our first compass point when redrawing a map of the journey to Whitlam's "holy city" must be the Australian working class victory in 1969 against the hated Penal Powers of the Arbitration system. After the Chifley Labor Government's use of the military to break the Coal Strike in 1949, successive Federal Governments had strengthened the penal provisions in the Arbitration system. Throughout the "boom years" of the 1950s and 1960s, militant sections of the workers movement quietly rebuilt their industrial strength amongst the rank and file in preparation to challenge and destroy these repressive labour laws.

Struggle erupted against the "Penal Powers" in 1969 when Clarrie O'Shea, the Secretary of the Victorian Tramways Union, was gaoled by the Industrial Court in Melbourne. O'Shea had refused to give evidence against

his union or to produce the union books in an action in which the Tramways Union had accumulated \$8,100 of outstanding fines because of their refusal to accept the "penal provisions" of the Arbitration System. For his defiance, O'Shea was imprisoned.(8)

Throughout Australia, over 400,000 workers from every industry took immediate strike action in protest against the gaoling of O'Shea and the oppressive Penal Powers. In Melbourne, tens of thousands of industrial workers and their supporters battled successive cordons of police as they marched on the Industrial Court demanding the release of O'Shea and an end to the Penal Powers.(9) So strong had this proletarian movement become, that the Tramways Union fine was paid by an anonymous employer and O'Shea was freed.(10)

A militant Australian working class in struggle had effectively destroyed the "Penal Powers" as they rescued a fellow worker. It was a significant moment in Australian working class history. The worker's movement had broken out of the bounds of orthodox economic trade union struggle and challenged a central institution of capitalism, the Arbitration system. Although the "Whitlam" myth-makers may ignore the victory against the Penal Powers, their living legend and the Labor Party leadership did not.

After the Labor Party's dumping of Arthur Calwell following the 1963 Federal Election defeat, Whitlam became the new leader of the Labor Opposition. While the "Whitlam industry" writers see this as the rise of Gough to his rightful position, they refuse to examine the removal of Calwell in the context of class struggle and imperialism. Whitlam, like Hawke (who played quite a different political role during this period), owed their rise to the political struggle over the Penal Powers. Whitlam became leader of the Labor Opposition, Hawke established himself as the "militant left-wing" leader of the ACTU.(11)

As leader of a party of capitalism (despite the socialist aspirations of many within the Labor Party),

Whitlam's first duty was to demonstrate to the capitalist class his ability to control the direction of the Australian labour movement. After the penal Powers victory Whitlam as the new Labor Party leader carried out two major political moves; separation of the Federal parliamentary party from the collective control of the trade union movement and and the Labor Party branches and the Federal intervention into the strong left wing Victorian branch of the ALP.(12)

In each of these moves the coalition of class forces which Whitlam represented were successful. By severing the parliamentary wing of the ALP from its working class base, the Federal Labor parliamentarians were no longer charged with the responsibility of carrying out Labor Party policy as devised by the rank-and-file. With the Federal intervention into the Victorian ALP, the forces of the Left were threatened with expulsion if they did not accede to the dictates of the dominant Whitlam faction. Whitlam had begun the task of harnessing the militant tendencies in the labour movement. Taming the Left was to prove as unmanageable as taming capitalism.(13)

Another crucial compass point in our redrawing of the Whitlam period is the war in Vietnam. The Whitlam industry makes much of Whitlam's opposition to the bombing of Hanoi and the mining of Haiphong harbour by the US military forces in the first weeks of the Whitlam Government in December 1972. Whitlam is presented as the "natural leader" of the broad Australian opposition to the war in Vietnam. This was never the reality. Like many in the Labor Party when in Opposition, Whitlam never publicly opposed Australia's involvement in Vietnam.(14)

Calwell, guided by the labour movement, actively campaigned against the war. At Mosman Town Hall an unsuccessful assassination attempt was made against Calwell because of his anti-war stand.(15) With Calwell's departure and as opposition to the war and conscription grew strongest amongst petit-bourgeois university students and sections of young working class people, Whitlam became a late-comer to the anti-war cause.

Jim Cairns, a future Whitlam minister, by his committed pacifist opposition to the war sought to steer the Moratorium Movement away from the more radical programmes of other anti-war activists and towards the safer politics of parliamentary democracy. Many Labor parliamentarians like Whitlam adopted an anti-war position when popular opposition to the war and conscription became mass questions in the period between 1969 and 1972. (16)

Combined, the militant struggle of the working class and the growing opposition to the Vietnam war radicalised large sections of Australian society which the long post-war economic boom had bypassed. Aboriginals, the elderly, the poor, migrants and women were brought into struggle. They raised the demands of land rights, social justice, housing, sexual equality, equal pay, child care, and abortion on demand.

These compass points remain uncharted by the "Whitlam" markers. They are generally seen as those disembodied ideas of the late 1960's which were brought together miraculously in the Whitlam victory in the 1972 election. Somehow, they made up the voices which chanted Labor's electoral slogan "It's time!"

In reality, the worker's struggle and the anti-war movement created the political conditions in which the material interests of those forgotten in the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s - the poor, the driven and the silenced - could be actively pursued. Moreover, the 1969-1972 economic recession propelled those without private productive property into struggle. The Labor Party under Whitlam successfully appealed to this burgeoning extra-parliamentary oppositional force spearheaded by the workers' movement. (17)

From 1969 onwards Labor's electoral strategy depended upon their support. Its appeals were directed to some of their interests: reduction of inflation and unemployment, withdrawal from Vietnam, the ending of conscription, Aboriginal land rights, better housing, health care, schooling, universal child care, equal wages and equal

opportunities for women. Uncharacteristically, Whitlam was expected to ride the tiger of these mass movements. After 1972, they were to be caged in the illusions of parliamentarism. Whitlam sought to be their ring-master. (18)

Whitlam's appeal to sections of corporate capital is another compass point discreetly overlooked by the "Whitlam" fabulists. This attraction had little to do with Whitlam's political style, notwithstanding Graham Little's psycho-social profile. Rather, big business welcomed the class forces and programme Whitlam represented within the ALP.

Whitlam was the quintessential petit-bourgeois. Since 1961 the Labor Party's leadership with the passing of Evatt became increasingly the preserve of the petit-bourgeoisie. They were politicians and administrators with high professional skills. From 1961 to 1972 they had rewritten over 80% of the Federal ALP platform. Always a chimera, the bogey of nationalisation was gently reworded to resemble nothing. (19)

Whitlam was the leader of this ascendant class grouping. They saw themselves as the political managers of the economy. By their tertiary education, they represented a progressive stratum of the petit-bourgeoisie. In the course of the Whitlam Government, this "progressive stance" was revealed as largely illusory. In the main, they were intellectuals, officials and the self-employed. They buoyed up Whitlam during his prime-ministership and became his myth-makers upon his demise. (20)

Like their intellectual ancestors the English Fabians they believed that capitalism could be "rationalized" and "civilized". Expropriation of the capitalist class and the achievement of socialism through protracted class war were anathema to the Whitlam acolytes. Such schemes were irrelevant, crude and ruinous. Their petit-bourgeois programme appealed to the upper reaches of the labor aristocracy, small capital and, for a time, sections of

at the corporate world. Class collaboration was the ugly description of this reasoned road to reform.

Sensibly working people were expected to allow their "sectional interests" to be managed by Labor's professionals. And the anarchy of capitalism would by metamorphosis be transformed into a garden of civility.

Such a managerial strategy found ready friends within Australia's corporate board rooms. Rupert Murdoch's newspaper "The Australian" championed Labor's cause soon after Whitlam took up leadership of the ALP. Apart from his petit-bourgeois hymn of "class peace" and "national unity", Whitlam's ability to moderate the militancy of the unions and other mass movements gladdened the hearts of the capitalist class. A week before the 1972 federal election Whitlam was feted as the next Australian Prime Minister at an exclusive Sydney dinner hosted by the political grouping, "Business for Labor".(21) Gordon Barton of Ipec, Ken Thomas of Thomas International Transport and Rupert Murdoch, toasted their prime-ministerial choice. Labor and Capital were to establish a class peace beyond understanding.

Establishing compass points of militant working class struggle; popular opposition to the Vietnam war; the mass movements of Black Australians, the poor, the old, migrants and women; the ideological changes within the ALP and the early appeal of Whitlam to the nabobs is essential if Whitlam's welfare programmes and the working class are to be examined within the context of class struggle and imperialism. Nostalgia and "wonder workings" should be left to those who are still mentally adrift in the halcyon days of the Whitlam era and politically immobilized in Hawke's Australia.

Whitlam's welfare is still viewed by some, retrospectively, as some kind of socialist panacea. The budget deficit in 1971-72, the last year of the Liberal-Country coalition Government, had been \$187 million. In 1972-1973 the Whitlam Government quadrupled the deficit spending figure (\$774 million). It implemented a wide

variety of welfare programmes. Bill Hayden, Labor's Minister for Social security, standardised benefits and raised their value to 25% of average weekly earnings and a supporting mother's benefit was introduced (1973).

In the area of public health, Medibank, a scheme which provided universal and automatic entitlement to medical and health benefits, was established, much to the chagrin of the parasitic medical profession.(22)

Upholding the Fabian belief in education as a means of curbing, if not curing class ills, the Whitlam Government abolished university tuition fees and created the Schools Commission which directed much needed resources to "disadvantaged schools" as it reduced slightly Commonwealth funding to elite private schools.

Through Lionel Murphy's determination an Australian Legal Aid system was founded. For the first time the law in all of its majesty was not beyond the pockets of the poor. Justice, however remains a legal wonder.(23) Depressed regions and working class suburbs were promised "equality of access" to culture, education and employment via the Australian Assistance Plan. In the first 18 months of the Whitlam Government a mood of optimism prevailed. Whitlam's welfare system was a significant social advance despite a reverential adherence to "deserving" and "less deserving" categories in its eligibility clauses.(24) In the early Whitlam years the rich displayed an uncharacteristic concern for the poor.

Much activity in the welfare bureaucracies and the Federal Labor Party was given over to numerous commissions of inquiry. Too often these commissions into health, education and the social services were managerialist solutions to the problems of the oppressed. Recommendations were simply made. The working class through its taxes paid for its own welfare as the rich remained safe from the threat of a re-distribution of the social wealth (R.W. Connell, Ruling Class, Ruling Culture, Cambridge University Press Melbourne, 1977, p. 122). Seizure of the means of production, of course, was

never contemplated.(25)

While there was a significant increase in direct Federal involvement in the area of social welfare too much rhetoric is taken up with the Whitlam Government's efforts to alleviate the plight of the poor. For all of its promise, Whitlam's welfare programme was in fact more of the same. It was welfare from the top down, centrally administered and restrictive. Its political aim was to demobilise the mass movements which had gathered momentum after the "Penal Powers" struggle. It was never to be a programme under local popular control nor part of a political strategy of transitional demands in the struggle for socialism.(26) Despite the substantial increases in welfare spending, deep and unequal class inequalities perpetuated. Indeed, by mid-1973 after the jubilation of the Labor Party being in office after nearly a quarter of a century had subsided, Whitlam was enunciating to the Party faithful and big business the need to maintain "fair profits".(27) Through the Industries Assistance Commission the Whitlam Government demonstrated its commitment to corporate welfare without the need of extensive enquiries. Whitlam was generous in his efforts to preserve the class order even as he tried to lessen its inequalities.

Although deficit spending in the area of social welfare dropped from \$774 million in 1972-73 to \$293 million the following financial year, it increased dramatically to \$2560.9 million in 1974-75. If these figures are isolated from their historical context, they reveal little. Perhaps one might say that with the coming to power of the Whitlam Government welfare spending was substantially increased. The next financial year it fell. And in the final year it exploded. Such a simplistic accounting deduction tells us nothing about the class struggle and imperialism's affects on welfare spending.(28)

We must turn to the working class victory against the Penal Powers in 1969 to understand Whitlam's welfare programmes. After their destruction of the Penal Powers

the working class carried out a series of strike waves in various industries to gain significant wage increases denied them throughout the Cold War period. Despite the assumed "generalised private affluence" of the Cold War years, wide sections of the working class knew only want and poverty. The cold charity of the Menzies regime and its successors left them as the invisible then forgotten poor. The 1969 working class victory and the radicalising effects of the Vietnam War propelled those whom only knew deprivation and repression during the Cold War into political action.(29)

In the late 1960's and the early 1970's bourgeois Australia became deeply politicised as working people began to question the legacy of the Menzies years. The Cold War hegemony was beginning to crumble. Everything began to be questioned; foreign economic domination, Australia's junior partner role in the American war against Vietnam; the subordination of women; the plight of the poor and the old; the suppression of the Aboriginal people and the exploitation of migrant workers. This is the context in which Whitlam's welfare programmes must be historically located.

The Labor Party came to office buoyed up by this mounting popular outbreak of discontent. Whitlam's task was to appease and contain this proletarian upsurge. Its welfare programmes are sometimes viewed as excessive. Such an opinion is erroneous. As a social democratic party committed to the preservation of capitalism, the ALP not only had to grant small but real concessions to a mobilised working class breaking free of the Cold war strictures. But it also needed to guarantee the interests of capital, big and small.(30)

Like all Labor Governments since Federation, the Whitlam administration was elected to office at a time of growing crisis, both nationally and internationally. Whitlam's early efforts to modernise the economy won some support from manufacturing and mining capital. "Modernisation" of the economic base, however, was a secondary consideration in capitals' support for Whitlam

in 1972. The ALP's hold over the trade union movement and Whitlam as a figure who could reconcile the contending classes in the interests of "national unity" were the primary reasons the business world could vote for the "class enemy".(31)

In many ways, the Australian working people were heeding Ho Chi Minh's demand to "bring the war home". They no longer accepted the old Cold War order. Australian capitalism needed to make readjustments. Labor's welfare programmes were devised to blunt working class anger and accommodate their demands. The gathering international economic crisis and the class struggle at home determined that welfare would not appease the interests of the working class nor save the Whitlam Labor Government when its utter servility to monopoly capital was revealed in 1975.(32)

Internationally, the long capitalist boom was drawing to an end months before Labor took office. In August 1972 the Bretton Woods agreement, which had made the American dollar "as good as gold" on the international currency markets, was shattered. America's war against Vietnam ceased to be a boon for the American corporations. The war became a widening drain on the American economy.

Stagflation, that intractable combination of inflation and unemployment, gripped imperial America. Soon the entire imperialist world succumbed to the inevitable consequences of America's deep disorder.(33)

Corporate America under President Nixon slumped into deep recession as inflation and the mass sackings of American workers took place. The American dollar was "floated" on the international currency market. It plummeted in value. The American "age of gold" was over. The Bretton Woods agreement which had determined American financial dominance globally for two decades was in disarray. The American drive for empire had destroyed itself in the jungles of Vietnam. A new era of long term recession, instability and repression had begun. The

American empire slipped into terminal decline. (34)

Australian capitalism, part of US imperialism's "southern dominions", was not immune to this deepening economic crisis. Labor's Keynesians believed their deficit spending programmes could dampen down the industrial and social struggles of the working class, achieve "national unity" and avoid the impact of the international recession. Their fundamental belief in the necessity of the capitalist system and the workings of parliamentary democracy ensured that as the economic crisis worsened they would turn against those whose struggles had brought them into office., the Australian working class. (35)

As inflation and unemployment began to cut into their material lives, working people led by militant sections of the trade union movement refused to shoulder the burden of the capitalist crisis. Their militancy was not blunted by the long overdue provision of welfare services. In 1972, 2,010,300 working days were "lost" to strike struggles. In 1973, workers took 2,634,700 days of their labour power from capital. By 1974, as the full effects of the international economic crisis deepened, Australian workers denied their employers 6,293,000 work days.

Despite the escalating inflation rates, the working class had made significant wage gains in the first two years of the Whitlam government. The Keynesian welfare programmes of the Labor Party could not contain the militancy of the working class, however much of its welfare state was applauded by sections of a Labor-voting petit-bourgeoisie and increasingly condemned by the nation's employers. They no longer expected the Whitlam Government to reconcile irreconcilable class interests and establish "national unity" but to crush the militancy of the working masses. An early test for the Whitlam Government to prove its political effectiveness in the interests of capital was Labor's health scheme, Medibank. (36)

Business executives surveyed by A.W. Scott in August 1973 saw Medibank as an example of a move by Labor to nationalise the private medical domain.(37) They wanted it dismantled. Only the united strength of the labour movement, by their campaign to defend and extend Medibank, determined the scheme's survival. Because it was a substantial benefit to the poor and working people the organised working class defended it from the sustained attack of the private health funds and the Australian Medical Association.

As the Australian economy sank deeper into recession in 1974 and 1975, foreign corporations and the Australian bourgeoisie considered a difficult decision: should the Whitlam Government remain in office? It appeared to have lost control if not the loyalty of the Australian working class. It was unable, despite all efforts, to impose the policies required to police the trade union movement, cut wages, reduce welfare payments, eliminate inflation and substantially increase profit levels. Labor's Keynesian economic policies could not contain the high expectations and confidence of a labour movement on the move.(38)

The Whitlam Government's attempts to impose a wage freeze in late 1973 as an answer to inflation and the promise of further welfare concessions was answered with a broadening of strike struggles.. When in January 1974 the British multi-national Leylands closed down its Zetland car factory in New South Wales and sacked 3000 workers, the Whitlam Government refused to intervene. Nationalisation remained not even a Labor illusion. Slowly but inevitably the Whitlam Labor Government abandoned its dreams of "civilizing" capitalism and achieving "class peace" and "national unity".

By early 1975, as the foreign monopolies intensified their capital strike as the corporate media led by the formerly "pro-Labor" Murdoch group orchestrated its campaign of vilification against Labor; and as the CIA sought out its friends in high office to plan the political destruction of the Whitlam Government, the Labor Party abandoned its programme of reform and any

semblance of solidarity with the Australian working class. Political survival became the singular goal of the Labor Party. Ministers in the Whitlam Government were demoted or transferred. Pandemonium reigned.

Inflation began to cut deeply into the wage gains achieved by the working class in 1973 and 1974. Unemployment soared to 350,000, 5 percent of the total workforce, a height not reached since the Great Depression of the 1930's. Days "lost to strikes" fell below those before the "Penal Powers" struggle. Almost the entire body of labour aristocrats who had helped to impose Whitlam's 1974 wage freeze supported the anti-working class Hayden Budget of August, 1975. The former Queensland policeman with a university degree in Economics rapidly forgot his commitment to Keynesianism. A large-scale reduction in spending in social welfare and education was imposed. Indirect taxes were imposed on the working class while corporate capital were granted investment deductions. The young unemployed were denounced by a Labor Treasurer as "dole bludgers".(39)

The Hawke Government's economic policies found their pedigree in the Labor Budget of 1975. As the media-created "loans scandals" plagued various Labor Ministers, the Labor Party turned further to the Right. Progressives in the Party were blamed for the engulfing state of crisis because they doggedly refused to abandon the interests of the working class. This abject Labor betrayal created a deep seated popular crisis of confidence in Labor throughout the Australian working class.

The petit-bourgeois Labor leadership, for all their "managerial" flair, displayed the characteristics of their class origins. If they could not manage the capitalist economy they would not be proletarianised. They chose the side of capital. Pandering to big business was to be their means of political survival. Despite their Fabian illusions in expecting to "manage" or "civilise" capitalism, their political and economic decisions, faithfully carried out by most of the trade

union officialdom, did perform a crucial task for the capitalist class in 1974 and 1975: the demobilisation of a militant working class.

The Whitlam Government floundered in the wake of its 1975 Budget. It had deserted the working class and sought legitimacy from a ruling class impatient to destroy it. In the charged weeks of November, 1975 the Whitlam Government, largely because of its subservience to the dictatorship of capital and by its refusal to rouse the working masses with a militant programme of substantial reform, met its social-democratic fate. Parliamentary cretinism, a refusal to mobilise the working class, its belief in the sanctity of private productive property and a desire to govern above all social classes sealed the doom of the Whitlam government just as surely as the anti-Labor media campaign, the capital strike and the destabilisation programme of Sir John Kerr's "American friends".

The usefulness of the Labor Party to the ruling class had expired. Ironically, Whitlam could only urge his supporters to maintain their rage through the ballot box after his Government had supinely abandoned its programme of reform when faced with the rage of the bourgeoisie. The constitutional coup preserved the legend of the Whitlam years. It also ossified much Labor thinking; the Party must never move too fast nor actively oppose monopoly capital.(40)

The "Whitlam makers" can as time passes, present Whitlam as he would prefer; a great Labor leader tragically struck down by the coup masters. The Whitlam experiment was thus saved from the obloquy reserved for President Hawke of the Labor Corporation. Such a conclusion may seem far fetched given the veneration bestowed upon Gough. Persistence in such "make-believe" by a refusal to realistically examine the Whitlam era within the parameters of class struggle and empire will not rouse us from the present political coma in which Labor governs in the interests of the Prime Minister's billionaire 'mates'.

Despite Whitlam's welfare initiatives, which are noticeably absent in Hawke's gradgrindism, there are unavoidable historical continuities. In the final eighteen months of the Whitlam Government and throughout the Hawke years the Australian working people have experienced "hard Labor". More suppliant than the unpredictable Whitlam Government, the Hawke regime has learnt to do the bidding of big business. In this, it has shed the Fabian illusion which informed the Whitlam Government that it could govern in the interests of all.

The Labor mythologizers of "Whitlam" need their legendary leader not only to relive the good times but to preserve the illusion that only the Labor Party has the capacity to transform Australian capitalism.(41) Abandoning the revolutionary potential of the working class for the sake of deifying Whitlam is a comfortable way of living through the calamities of the Hawke age. As the class struggle deepens, escaping into Labor lost illusions will prove impossible. The unfolding class realities will leave no space for "wonder workings" or "make-believe" ancestor worship and will not exorcise the Labor betrayals of the immediate past or present.

When Whitlam rewrote the platform of the ALP in the 1960's, separating the parliamentary wing of the Party from its industrial heart, the trade union movement, it was fulfilling its historical function as indicated by Lenin who commented in 1913 "...Naturally, when Australia is finally developed as an independent capitalist state the conditions of the workers will change, as also will the liberal Labor Party which will make way for a socialist Labour Party. Australia serves to illustrate the conditions under which exceptions to the rule are possible."(42)

Lenin did not emphasise that this transition from a liberal to a socialist Labour Party would be riven with betrayal, abandonment, internal dissention and interminable class struggle. The Whitlam Government was a moment in this searing transition. The Hawke regime is

its continuation.

A Socialist Labour Party will eventually be forged by the Australian working class, notwithstanding the "Whitlam-makers" or the current Hawke horror. Monuments to the magnificence of Whitlam's social welfare will be swept aside. Class struggle will chart this course to socialism and to the chagrin of those "lords and ladies" of Whitlam's Byzantium. And like W.B. Yeats, who was caught in the revolutionary struggles of Ireland to which there was no retreat, poetry will become prophecy, "Of what is past, or passing or yet to come".

footnotes.

1. Little that the Whitlam mythmakers have published on the Armistice Day coup of 1975 has lead the Labor Party to re-assess its commitment to parliamentary gradualism. All the Whitlam memoir offers is the need for the Labor faithful to maintain their enthusiasm for capitalist democracy. See G. Whitlam, "The Truth of the Matter", Penguin, Ringwood, 1979.

When fight was still to be found in some of Gough's Fabians, sharp analyses of the American involvement in the coup were forwarded. See C. Lloyd and Andrew Clark, "Kerr's King Hit", Cassell Australia, Stanmore, 1976 and Richard Hall, "The Real John Kerr, his brilliant career", Angus and Robertson, Sydney 1978. As the coup faded from the political memory of the mythwriters, Whitlam's tragic stature increased. There was no longer any need to raise the question of American imperialist domination of Australian capitalism. This is the trajectory of the Paul Kelly book "The Unmaking of Gough", Angus and Robertson, Sydney 1979, Graham Freudenberg's "A Certain Grandeur: Gough Whitlam in Politics", Macmillan, Melbourne 1977 and Michael Sexton's "Illusions of Power: the fate of a reforming government", George Allen and Unwin, London 1979.

Despite their shortcomings the best accounts of the coup are provided by the Left. See "The Canberra Coup", Workers News, Sydney 1976; Joan Coxsedg, Ken Coldicutt and Gerry Harant, "Rooted in Secrecy, the clandestine element in Australian Politics", Committee for the Abolition of Political Police (CAPP), North Balwyn, Melbourne 1982; Denis Freney, "Get Gough! and Dr. Jim and Rex and Lionel and all", privately published, Sydney 1977 and Phillip Frazer, "Dirty Tricks Down Under: did the CIA topple the Australian government?", Mother Jones, February/March 1984.

2.

Some of the works of the Whitlam library are cited in the previous footnote. Other notable titles are Alan Patience and Brian Head (eds.) "From Whitlam to Fraser: Reform and Reaction in Australian Politics", Oxford University Press, Melbourne 1979; Laurie Oakes, "Crash Through or Crash; the Unmaking of a Prime Minister", Drummond, Richmond, Victoria 1976; R.B. Scotton and Helen Ferber (eds.) "Public Expenditures and Social Policy in Australia; the Whitlam Years 1972-5, Vol. 1", Longman Cheshire, Melbourne 1978; C.J. Lloyd and P.N. Troy, "Innovation and Reaction: the life and death of the Federal Department of Urban and Regional Development", Allen and Unwin, Sydney 1981; James Walter, "The Leader: A Political Biography of Gough Whitlam", University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia 1980 and of course Gough Whitlam, "The Whitlam Government, 1972-75", Penguin 1985. Apart from these books there are a plethora of influential articles which sustain the Whitlam legend some of which are Peter Wilenski, "Reform and its Implementation; the Whitlam years in Retrospect", in Gareth Evans and John Reeves (eds.) "Labor Essays 1980", Melbourne 1980; Graeme Duncan, "Whitlam and the Problems of Social Democracy", Meanjin 4/1986; Max Teichman, "Assessing the Whitlam Years", Journal of Australian Studies, No.20 1987.

3.

Sol Encel, "Labor's New Class Takes Command", Australian Society, Vol.3 No.5 May 1984.

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Fabian Papers, "The Whitlam Phenomenon".

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Fabian Papers, "The Whitlam Phenomenon".

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Paul Kelly, "The Unmaking of Gough; P. Wilenski, "Reform and its Implementation".

7.

See especially Intervention No. 17, special issue, "The Crisis of Marxism".

8.

Jack Hutson, "Penal Colony to Penal Powers", Amalgamated Engineering Union, Sydney 1966, pp.119-130.

9.

R.M. Martin, "Trade Unions in Australia", 2nd. edition, Penguin, Melbourne 1980, pp.15-17.

10.

Richard Hall, "The Real John Kerr", Angus and Robertson, Sydney 1978, pp.105-106. For an alternative view see "Interview with Clarrie O'Shea", Independent Australian, spring 1977, pp.26-29. Clarrie O'Shea has said that nearer one million workers stopped work. Also, Kerr, in an interview with journalists from the "National Times", said that in his opinion it was ASIO and not the well-meaning employer Macdougall who paid the fine.

11.

A.A. Calwell, "Be Just and Fear Not", Lloyd O'Neil, Kent Town, South Australia 1972, Chapter 25, "Gough Whitlam".

12.

R. Catley and B. MacFarlane, "From Tweedledum to Tweedledee", Australia and New Zealand Book Co., Sydney 1974, pp.9-13.

13.

R.W. Connell and T.H. King, "Class Structure in Australian History", Longman Cheshire, Melbourne 1980, pp.304-305.

14.

H. McQueen, "Living Off Asia", Arena, No.26 1971.

15.

See Calwell, "Be Just and Fear Not" pp.4-9. Calwell's would-be assassin was 19 year-old Peter Kocan who, after a period of confinement in Morrisset Psychiatric Hospital and deemed to be criminally insane, was released and with the encouragement of "Quadrant" magazine became a noted Sydney poet and novelist. At the time of the murder attempt Kocan stated that he had decided to shoot Calwell to prove that he "was different to all the other nobodies". Calwell, "Be Just and Fear Not", p.8. Deranged Kocan may have been but he was also a member of a Nazi group based in the Sydney suburb of Ashfield, whose Fuehrer was a gunsmith and self-proclaimed "Korean war veteran" named Arthur Smith. This information was given to the author in July 1969 by a former member of the Smith Nazi gang who also claimed that Kocan had been instructed by Smith to assassinate Calwell.

16.

G. Summy, "The Revolutionary Democracy of J.F. Cairns", Politics, Vol.7 1972.

17.

H. McQueen, "Living Off Asia".

18.
R.Catley and B.McFarlane, "Australian Capitalism in Boom and Depression", Alternative Publishing Co-Operative Ltd., Chippendale, Sydney 1981, pp.122-127.
19.
R.Catley and B.McFarlane, "From Tweedledum to Tweedledee", pp.9-11; D.McEachern, "A Classless Society for a Classless State", Arena, No.29 1972.
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Sol Encel, "Political Leadership in Australia", Australia Journal of Social Issues, Vol.1, No.2 1962.
21.
The Australian, 29th. November 1972.
22.
R.W.Connell, "Ruling Class Ruling Culture", pp.122-129. For the Australian Medical Association's class fear of the Chifley ghost of "socialised medicine" see their leaflet "So What's Wrong with Nationalised Health?", Sydney 1974. For a Marxist defence of Medibank see the pamphlet "Defend and Extend Medibank", Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist), Melbourne 1974.
23.
Mary Gaudron's speech to the 9th annual National Conference of the Australian Society of Labor Lawyers, Perth, 18th. September 1987.
24.
R.B.Scotton and H.Ferber (eds.) "Public Expenditures and Social Policy in Australia: the Whitlam Years", pp.125-140.
25.
R.W.Connell, "Ruling Class Ruling Culture", pp.122.
26.
Two articles which theoretically examine welfare under monopoly capitalism are E.Wilson, "Marxism and the Welfare State", New Left Review, 121, November-December 1980 and C.Jones and T.Novack, "The State and Social Policy" in P.Corrigan (ed.), "Capitalism, State Formation and Marxist Theory", Quartet Books, London 1980. For a glimpse of a conventional "social welfare" historian mystified by his own empiricism see Brian Dickey, "Problems in Writing Welfare History", Journal of Australian Studies, No.21, November 1987. Dickey's flight from theory only upholds the enduring traditions of bourgeois empiricism.

27. Whitlam's speech in Parliament, November 12th. 1974, Hansard.
28. Scotton and Ferber (eds.) "Public Expenditures and Social Policy in Australia:the Whitlam Years", pp.148-164.
29. A book of essays which partially captures the spirit of this radical period is J.Playford and D.Kirsner (eds.) "Australian Capitalism; Towards a Socialist Critique", Penguin, Blackburn, Victoria 1972.
30. Informative analyses of these aspects of the political functions of the Labor Party are found in Catley and McFarlane, "From Tweedledum to Tweedledee",chaps.1-4; Catley and McFarlane, "Australian Capitalism in Boom and Depression", chap.6; Connell,"Ruling Class Ruling Culture",chaps.5-6; Australian Marxist Bulletin, "Australia: The Impending Storm", summer 1987.
31. Documents of the Socialist Workers Party, "Towards a Socialist Australia", Pathfinder Press, Sydney 1977, chap.1; Catley and McFarlane, "The Labor Plan: Neo-Capitalism comes to Australia", Intervention No.3, August 1973.
32. Australian Marxist Bulletin, "Australia; The Impending Storm"; Catley and McFarlane, "Australian Capitalism in Boom and Depression", chap.6.
33. R.Lotta, "America in Decline", Banner Press, Chicago 1984; Ernest Mandel, "Late Capitalism", Verso, London 1976 and "The Second Slump", Verso, London 1986.
34. Lotta, "America in Decline", chap.1-"Political Economy in the Epoch of Imperialism and Proletarian Revolution"; Mandel, "The Second Slump"; G. Crouch and E.Wheelwright, "Australia;A Client State", Penguin, Ringwood 1982, chaps.5-9.
35. Socialist Worker's Party, "Towards a Socialist Australia", chap.2; Australian Marxist Bulletin, "Australia;The Impending Storm".
36. K.Rowley, "The Fall of Labor", Intervention, No.6, June 1976.

37.

Cited in Connell, "Ruling Class Ruling Culture", p.127.

38.

Rowley, "The Fall of Labor".

39.

Catley and McFarlane, "Australian Capitalism in Boom and Depression", chap.6.

40.

H.McQueen, "Gone Tomorrow: Australia in the 1980's", Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1982, ppl67-180.

41.

In fact what appears to be happening is a remarkable transformation of the Labor Party itself. A recent survey by I.Ward indicates that the petit-bourgeoisie are numerically dominant in terms of party membership and also hold most administrative positions in the party. Hawke may not be abandoning nebulous "traditional Labor values" as much as fulfilling the desires and aspirations of the petit-bourgeois Labor Party stalwarts. See I.Ward's article on Labor Party membership in "Politics", November 1987.

42.

V.I.Lenin, "June, 1913 in Australia", Collected Works, Volume 16, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1952.



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