



Reference Number: **1989.0122**

Collection/Series Title: **COMMUNIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA.  
VICTORIAN STATE COMMITTEE**

<b>Creator</b>	Communist Party Of Australia. Victorian State Committee
<b>Creator's Activity/Occupation</b>	Political parties

**Creator's Historical Note**

**VICTORIAN STATE COMMITTEE**

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) was formed on 4 November 1920 in Sydney . The Victorian Branch was founded soon afterwards. The Communist Party of Australia had many offshoots and affiliated bodies. Newspapers and other publications played an important role. The Workers Weekly newspaper was formed in 1923 and ran until 1939 when the name was changed to Tribune. The newspaper for the Victorian branch was Workers Voice, but the name was later changed to Guardian. This was later merged with Tribune. In 1927 an affiliate group known as the Militant Womens Group was formed in Sydney and held meetings at the Trades Hall. During the Depression years of the 1930s, the membership of the CPA saw a large increase.

During the 1930s several key figures joined the CPA, including: Lawrence Louis "Lance" Sharkey, Noel Counihan and Ralph Siward Gibson. Gibson was a key party organiser, speaker and writer, and leading figure in the Victorian Branch of the Party. Noel Counihan drew political cartoons that were used in CPA publications. Other Victorian branch figures include Jack Blake Secretary/Leader and Ruth Crow, who also became involved in the Party in the 1930s. Crow went on to have a long involvement in the CPA.

The Marx School was established in 1944 and Bernard Bernie Taft was appointed as Director. Taft went on to become a prominent figure in the CPA. The school offered various courses relating to Socialist theory and maintained an extensive library of books and pamphlets. The CPA was also in control of the International Bookshop which was established in the 1930s. The bookshop sold books relating to a wide range of subjects, including Socialist theory and the U.S.S.R. George Ireland was the first manager of the bookshop. Another affiliate group was the Eureka Youth League, which was founded in the early 1940s, with Audrey Blake as its first Secretary.

In June 1940, during WWII, the Communist Party was banned. This ban was lifted in 1942. During this time several affiliate womens associations were established, including: New Housewives Association formed in October 1946, Union of Australian Women formed July 1950. The Party reached the peak of its influence post WWII, when its membership was at its largest, and a number of its members held key trade union positions. By 1949 the activities of the Communist Party of Australia were again attracting attention from the Government. This was in line with fear of Communist activity worldwide after the end of WWII, including the McCarthy trials of the 1950s in the United States. In June 1949, the Scholl Royal Commission was opened to investigate the activities of the Party. The Royal Commission report estimated that the membership of the A.C.P. in Australia is about 12,000-13,000. In Victoria it is 3,000-4,000. This report outlined the activities of the Communist Party of Australia, and made judgements of their political intent. A key informant was Cecil Herbert Sharpley, a former Party member. The report was submitted on 28 April 1950. The submission of this report was followed by the reading of the Communist Party Dissolution Bill by Prime Minister Menzies and a national referendum to outlaw the CPA was held and defeated. During the 1950s the CPA followed developments in China and Korea. Tribune newspaper covered the story of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg and protests leading up to their execution in 1953 for atomic espionage. George Cunningham became cartoonist for The Guardian from 1961-1963, succeeding Noel Counihan. In the 1960s and 1970s the Communist Party of Australia became involved in anti-war protests, particularly relating to the Vietnam War and nuclear proliferation. Other key issues were the Womens Liberation Movement, the environment, disarmament and the gay rights movement. In the early 1970s the Womens Collective was formed.

In 1963, following controversy at the State Conference, Ted Hill was expelled from the Party. Hill went on to form the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) in 1964. Another split occurred in 1971, when Soviet supporters formed the Socialist Party of Australia. Philip Herington, a political activist, became involved in the CPA at this time and was State Secretary of the Victorian Branch from 1979. The New Left Party was formed in 1989, became active in 1990 and disbanded in 1992. In the 1980s membership of the CPA declined significantly which weakened the Party and it disbanded in 1989-1991. Following the dissolution of the Party, the SEARCH Foundation was formed to administer the remaining affairs of the Party.

**VICTORIAN STATE COMMITTEE**

## Sources:

Communist Manifesto. The Argus, 4 November 1920, p.10

Womens Road to Freedom, Militant Womens Group, Proletarian Press Sydney, 1927

Commissioner Names Long List of Party Members. The Age (Melbourne, Vic. : 1854 - 1954),  
Wednesday 21 June 1950, page 6

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19 October 1946, p.11

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Scholl Royal Commission, p.105

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Communist Split Poses Puzzles. The Canberra Times, Thursday 11 May 1972, p.2

Hawkes Opposition. The Canberra Times, Saturday 20 September 1980

<b>Date Range of Collection/Series</b>	1942 to 1965
<b>Size/Extent</b>	1 Unit (0.50m)
<b>Access Conditions</b>	Access: Open
<b>Scope and Content of Collection/Series</b>	
Tribune, the official organ of the CPA, main run 1954 to 1958 with some breaks, but also editions for June 1942, 1945, 1949, 1952 and 1965.	
<b>Collection Category</b>	Labour, organisations
<b>This document dated</b>	16/11/2015

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<b>Unit/Box</b>	<b>Item Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date Range</b>
1989.0122 Unit 1	1989.0122.0001	Tribune newspaper	24 June 1942
1989.0122 Unit 1	1989.0122.0002	Tribune newspaper	21 June-9 August 1945
1989.0122 Unit 1	1989.0122.0003	Tribune newspaper	9 March-21 December 1949
1989.0122 Unit 1	1989.0122.0004	Tribune newspaper	24 September 1952
1989.0122 Unit 1	1989.0122.0005	Tribune newspaper	6 January-21 December 1954
1989.0122 Unit 1	1989.0122.0006	Tribune newspaper	12 January-14 December 1955
1989.0122 Unit 1	1989.0122.0007	Tribune newspaper	18 January-19 December 1956
1989.0122 Unit 1	1989.0122.0008	Tribune newspaper	9 January-27 November 1957
1989.0122 Unit 1	1989.0122.0009	Tribune newspaper	12 February-21 May 1958
1989.0122 Unit 1	1989.0122.0010	Tribune newspaper	2 June 1965

**End of List**