HTAV

BEST OF AGORA

YEARS 9 & 10

Articles addressing Australian Curriculum: History

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Cover images:
FRONT: (main): Junk boat in Cairns Harbour. Photograph by Robert Hoffman; (inset): Entrance of the National Association Opposed To Woman Suffrage headquarters; Female factory workers; Civil rights march on Washington, D.C., 1963. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

BACK: (inset): Boxers on trial before the High Court, China. LC-USZ62-74494; Interior of eighteenth-century English textile mill (© Steven Wynn / iStock); Negro drinking at 'colored' water cooler in streetcar terminal, Oklahoma City, 1939; The 1965 Freedom Riders. Photograph by Wendy Watson-Ekstein; Melbourne from the Yarra (*Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*, 1886).

CONTENTS

Foreword

It has been a number of years since the HTAV published a *Best of Agora* compilation.

Now, with a new national curriculum upon us and an additional seven years' worth of *Agora* articles to draw from, now is the perfect time to bring teachers a new *Best of Agora* series.

Best of Agora: Years 9 & 10 and its partner title, *Best of Agora: Years 7 & 8,* have been carefully compiled with the realities of teaching to a new curriculum firmly in mind. With no History syllabus left unchanged, these volumes offer articles that will familiarise teachers with the content of each year's overviews and depth studies, as well as articles that will bring practical learning into (and outside of) the classroom. Those already familiar with our journal will recognise the *Thema*, *Praktikos* and *Sungraphô* tabs in the top corner of each page as an indication of the type of article involved, whether it be perspectives on a theme (*Thema*), ideas for the classroom (*Praktikos*) or a peer-reviewed scholarly piece (*Sungraphô*). **See pages 5 and 67 for where each article fits into the Australian Curriculum: History**.

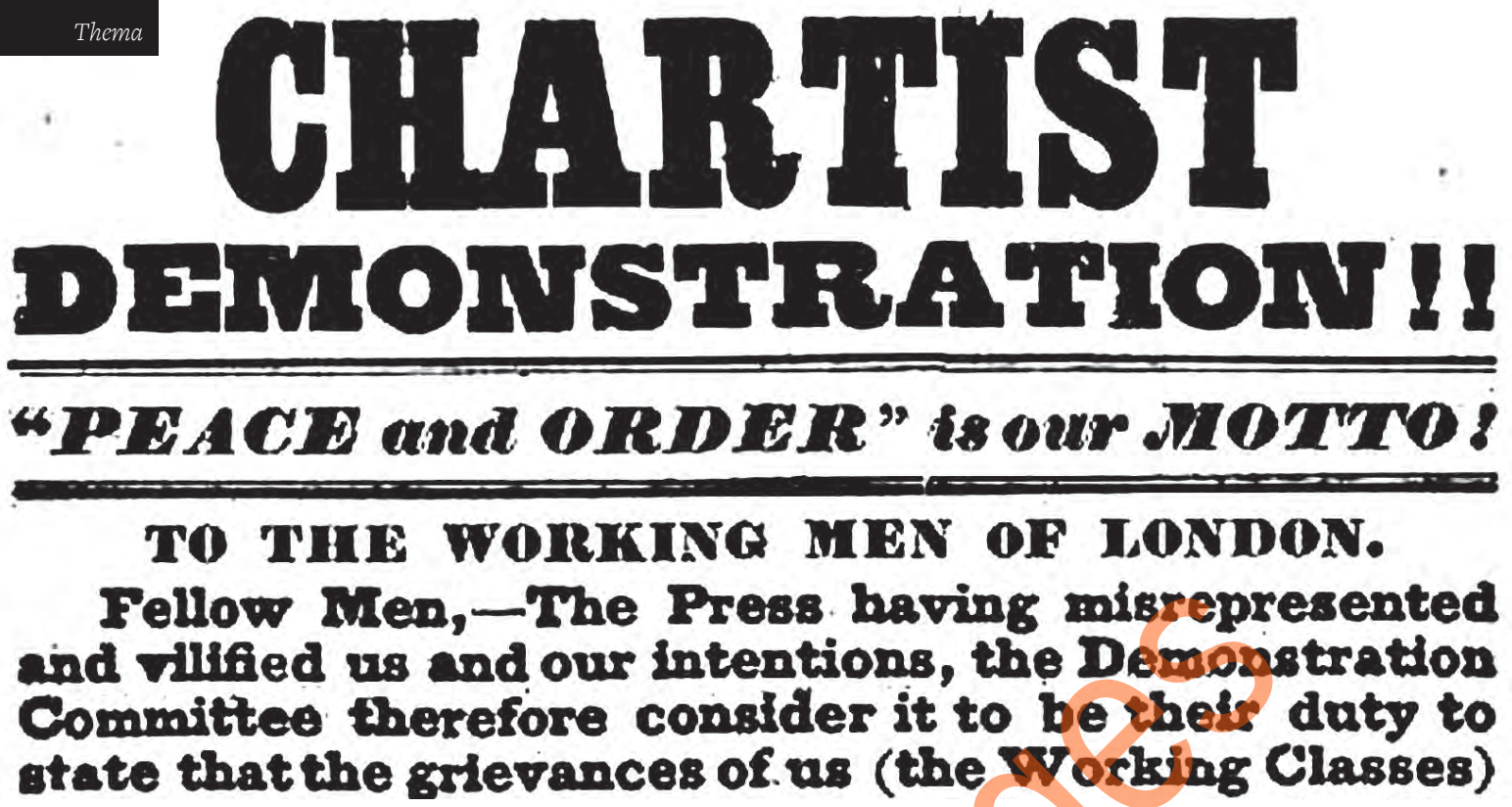
This compilation includes articles dating back to 2007, before the Australian Curriculum was announced, whose authors seem to have predicted facets of the new curriculum with eerie accuracy; as well as more recent contributions whose authors have used the curriculum drafts and, eventually, the final document, to inform their pieces.

I thank all the contributors to *Agora* over the past seven years, and in particular those who have graciously allowed their work to be republished in this new volume. Without their efforts and the efforts of those still to come, *Agora* would not be able to offer HTAV members the quality and quantity of content that we have become accustomed to producing.

I hope that you find *Best of Agora: Years 9 & 10* both useful and enjoyable.

Lucy Singer
Series Editor

YEAR 9


CHARTIST
DEMONSTRATION!!
"PEACE and ORDER" is our MOTTO!
TO THE WORKING MEN OF LONDON.
Fellow Men,—The Press having misrepresented and vilified us and our intentions, the Demonstration Committee therefore consider it to be their duty to state that the grievances of us (the Working Classes)

A Lesson Lost? Chartism and Australian Democracy

As Australians we tend to overlook the pioneering work of British Chartists in securing the rights we take for granted.

Prof. Paul Pickering, Australian National University

When they enter a polling place, vote in privacy and put their ballot paper into a sealed box, few Australians realise that they are living out the hopes and aspirations of a generation of working men and women who struggled for democratic reform in the 1830s and 1940s. Few realise that the democratic rights we take for granted were once regarded as wild nostrums and that those who advocated them were feared as dangerous agitators bent on pushing Britain over a precipice into bloodlust and misrule.

Few have heard of the People's Charter; few of the appellation 'Chartist.' What was the People's Charter, and who were the Chartists?

Published in 1838, the People's Charter codified into six principal demands the radical programme that had been developed over the years since the passage of the Great Reform Act in 1832. The first of the six points, the heart of the Chartist programme, was universal ('manhood') suffrage: a vote for every man twenty-one years of age or over and not undergoing punishment for a crime. Despite an increase in the British electorate as a result of the Reform Act, the vote remained the privilege of a small minority: one in five adult males in England and Wales and one in eight in Scotland (the figure for Ireland was even lower). For example, in Manchester, the 'shock city of the industrial revolution,' the population in 1840 was just under 250 000; the electorate was about 13 000.

It is important to stress that the Chartists demanded the vote for men. The right of women to vote was supported by only a small minority, even among those regarded as radical reformers. Many Chartists used gendered language to advocate an idealised masculinist vision of domestic life. The prevailing argument, shared by many women, was that a man, as head of his family, would best represent the interests of his wife and sisters. The main contribution of women to the struggle was seen to be the education of the next generation of radicals; in fact they played many other key roles in the campaign, including collecting petition signatures and enforcing consumer boycotts against opponents of reform. Women were also a conspicuous part of Chartist rallies and parades, though they rarely addressed the crowd.

The second point of the Charter called for annual elections. Underpinning this desire to exercise more

OPPOSITE: Poster advertising the 'monster' Chartist demonstration held on 10 April 1848, proceeding to Kennington Common.

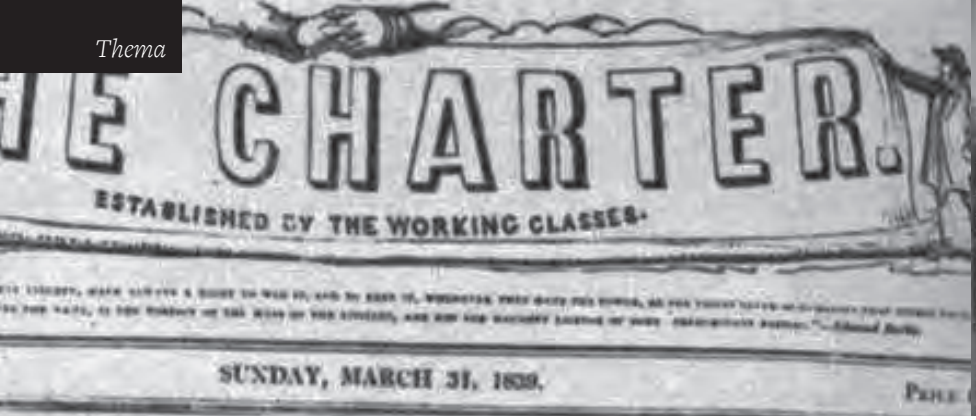
frequent power over MPs was a belief in the efficacy of a more direct form of representation. At this time many MPs subscribed to a time-honoured theory of representation: that once elected an MP was free to exercise his conscience. The Chartists attempted to force MPs to articulate their views before an election and to make them 'pledge' that they would vote accordingly in the House of Commons. MPs often bitterly resisted this attack on their independence but it was a battle that was ultimately lost. Pledging is a forerunner of the politics of electoral pressure, caucusing and election manifestos. In their internal structures and, in some cases, as holders of public office, Chartists gave practical effect to this principle by holding annual public meetings to seek the confidence of their 'constituents.' At the same time the Chartists simply sought to make MPs more attentive to their duty as local members. This was an era when backbenchers often spent their time carousing in London's 'hells and clubs' and visited their constituencies rarely if at all during what was a seven-year term. Some MPs boasted of the fact that they only visited their constituencies for the purposes of re-election.

The third of the famous six points demanded the secret ballot. At the time the Charter was drafted voting was conducted publicly: everyone knew who voted for whom. Chartists regarded voting in secret as the lesser of two evils, believing that in an ideal world a person should not be afraid to declare their opinions in public. However, especially in rural areas where voters were tenants of the local MP, persecution was a common experience and bribery, intimidation and violence were endemic during election campaigns in town and country alike. Secret voting would thus provide some protection for livelihoods and reduce the threat to personal safety.

The fourth demand of the Charter was for equal electoral districts, a claim that reflected the vast differences between the numbers of electors in existing constituencies. Perhaps the most notorious example of what were known as 'rotten boroughs' was Old Sarum. An ancient village in Salisbury, Old Sarum was officially uninhabited yet it still sent a Member to the House of Commons (the owners of the land retained the right to vote even if they did not live there). The Reform Act of 1832 abolished Old Sarum and a number of other rotten boroughs but substantial inequality remained: eight seats had fewer than 200 voters; thirty-five had fewer than 300; 121 had under 500; and 256 had under 1000. Rural constituencies were substantially smaller than urban ones, favouring the landed gentry over the industrial middle classes. The Chartists envisaged the nation divided into 200–300 single-member constituencies of equal size. This was the most controversial element of the programme because it would have resulted in far greater representation for Ireland (which had about one-third of the population of the United Kingdom at the time).

Points five and six of the Charter addressed impediments that stood in the way of the election of working men to the House of Commons. The fifth point called for the removal of the property qualification for parliamentary candidates. In the 1840s a man needed to own a substantial amount of property that produced an annual income of £300 (£600 for County constituencies) in order to be eligible to stand for election. Established in 1710, the property qualification was designed to ensure that MPs had a 'stake in the country.' Some idea of the level of this qualification can be gained from the fact that, in 2009, the equivalent of £300 was approximately £230 000. The final point sought the payment of MPs. Obviously without payment for their services working men could not afford to become Members of the House of Commons. The Chartists called for an annual wage of £400 (a substantial income in today's terms).

To press their case on a reluctant state the Chartists used a range of strategies from massive public demonstrations to 'monster' petitions. This repertoire of public protest was 'constitutional,' that is, the activities were not illegal. On the contrary, petitioning and meeting in public were sanctioned by long-standing precedent. Indeed, many Chartists insisted that they were the true patriots, demanding their rights as 'free-born Britons' in the face of arbitrary government. This form of 'popular constitutionalism' drew upon an interpretation of British history which held that in the past free-born Britons had enjoyed democratic rights that subsequently had been eroded. In



ABOVE LEFT: The *Charter*, a weekly newspaper published by William Lovett from 1939 to 1940.

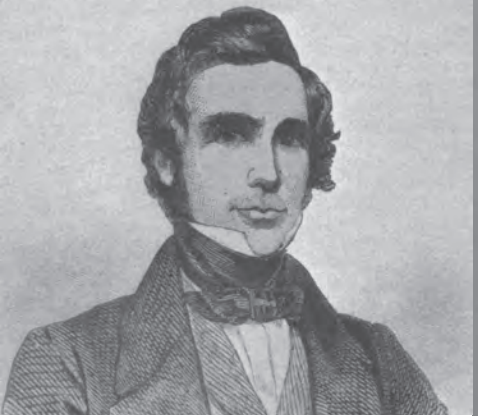
ABOVE RIGHT: The Great Chartist meeting on Kennington Common, 10 April 1848.

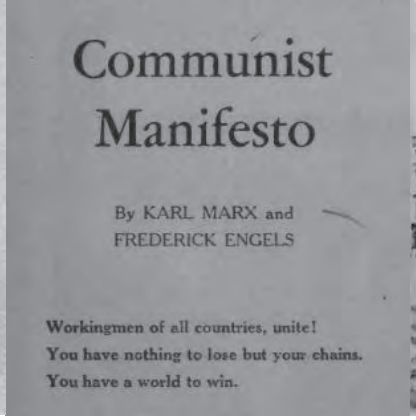
some instances this was true: the property qualification was, as we have noted, introduced early in the eighteenth century and some MPs were paid by their constituencies until as late as 1678. Other rights, especially universal suffrage and annual parliaments, relied on precedents shrouded by the mists of time, such as the idea that in the ancient past Saxon 'freemen' had met annually with the monarch. However tendentious this view of the murky past it held powerful sway.

The first of the key strategies employed by the Chartists was what was known as 'monster' meetings. This history of Chartism was punctuated by meetings of hundreds of thousands of people, usually held in the countryside on the outskirts of the industrial cities of the north of England. Many Chartists marched to the meetings with banners and musical bands. At other times they simply marched the streets of their town or city to demonstrate their resolve and to convince opponents of reform of their strength. During the winter of 1839 they began doing so at night. Although 'legal,' public meetings, demonstrations and parades could be menacing, indeed this was part of their purpose. The catch-cry 'Peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must' was often heard. Tens of thousands of working men parading the streets carrying torches in the dead of night caused a frisson of alarm in polite society, and rumours of Chartists drilling in the surrounding countryside with sharpened pikes undoubtedly caused much hiding under beds. The files of the Home Office are full of hysterical pleas for the dispatch of contingents of soldiers. Although the government proscribed public meetings in 1838–39, 1842 and 1848, with one or two notable exceptions the army was deployed sparingly: the government was determined to avoid provoking an outbreak that would create martyrs to the cause.

One of the principal roles of the public meetings in 1838–39 was to elect delegates to an alternative 'people's parliament' known as the General Convention of the Industrious Classes that would meet in London. The Convention had two main functions. The first was to organise the collection and presentation of a National Petition (a strategy used in subsequent years). In 1839, 1842 and 1848 millions of people signed National Petitions calling on parliament to implement the Charter. These petitions were collected all over the British Isles and, despite a degree of fraud associated with all petitioning in the nineteenth century, in each case the Chartists attracted the support of many more Britons than the total electorate at the time. Presented in July 1839 the first National Petition contained 1 280 000 signatures; Parliament rejected it overwhelmingly by a margin of 235 to forty-nine. The second National Petition was presented in 1842 and it contained over 3 000 000 signatures, requiring sixteen men to carry it to the House of Commons, where it reputedly got stuck in the entrance. The third, presented in 1848, boasted 5 700 000 signatures. This petition was tainted by evidence of false signatures but the key point was lost: it contained millions of bona fide signatures.

Anticipating the rejection of the National Petition, the second role of the 1839 General Convention was to prepare for what it called 'alternative measures,' principally a general strike, also known as the National Holiday or Sacred Month. Many Chartists were trade unionists and not afraid of industrial action, but the strike policy was contentious in the Convention and the movement at large. Although the policy was officially abandoned by the Convention some Chartists took matters into their own hands and attempted to implement the strike. Without mass support it petered out ineffectually. It was the trigger, however, for the government to swoop, and large numbers of Chartists were arrested. As a result of their activities many Chartists were subsequently tried for sedition,





ABOVE LEFT: Portrait of William Lovett.

ABOVE CENTRE: 1910 English edition of Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*.

ABOVE RIGHT: Sketch of the attack by Chartists on the Westgate Hotel, Newport, Monmouthshire.

riot and conspiracy; hundreds were imprisoned and more than 100 were transported to Australia. Most Chartist leaders served prison terms.

The failure of the 1839 campaign led some Chartists to step outside the law and prepare for armed rebellion. Allegations of conspiracy were often levelled at the Chartists but the only actual insurrection occurred in November 1839 in Newport, Monmouthshire. About 3000 armed Chartists marched on Newport at night and attacked the Westgate Hotel where the local troops were headquartered. Their aim was to trigger a general uprising – suggesting a broader conspiracy. The Chartists were easily rebuffed: fourteen were killed outright (a further ten subsequently died) and fifty were wounded. There were 125 arrests, with twenty-one Chartists charged with treason, a capital offence.

Ironically, the trials of these Chartists provoked a significant revival of Chartist activity organising public appeals for clemency. The four principal conspirators were sentenced to death but this was subsequently commuted to transportation for life. Many credited this to the intervention of the young Queen Victoria but nothing could have been further from the truth: she would have happily seen them hung, drawn and quartered. (If the reader needs a reminder of the truth of the well-known adage 'the past is a foreign country,' look up what was involved in this barbarous form of execution. It is not that long ago.)

The revival of Chartism continued into 1840 with the formation of the National Charter Association. This was the first nation-wide organisation of working men, a forerunner in many respects of later socialist and labour parties. From the outset a national newspaper, the *Northern Star*, had sustained the movement. Published in Leeds and later London, the *Star* was crucial in reporting local activity, not only engendering a sense of national solidarity but also providing a venue for the exchange of ideas. At its peak the *Star* sold 50 000 copies a week but this is a poor indication of its reach: articles were often read out at public meetings and in local meeting rooms and pubs, and issues were circulated among friends and comrades; therefore each copy was read by several individuals. There were at least fifty other Chartist newspapers, some with circulations of up to 20 000 at high points in the campaign.

Although the People's Charter focused on political reforms it would be wrong to think that Chartists were narrow in their vision of the future. In his memoirs one Chartist summed up the situation succinctly:

> Chartism was not satisfying. We were Chartists and something more – we young men of Cheltenham. What that something more was we probably could have not at first, if we had been asked, have clearly defined. The Charter, as a declaration of rights, was excellent. But popular power proclaimed – what then?

In fact, there were many answers to this question. Many Chartists were simultaneously involved in a raft of other causes and the Charter was seen as the means to many ends; people had faith in the power of parliament to change the world. After 1850 this faith began to wane. Over the coming years many radicals began to believe that society could only be reformed by a change in the relationship between capital and labour and even to the ownership of the means of production. The first English translation of Marx and Engels' *Manifesto of the Communist Party* appeared in a Chartist newspaper in 1849.[1]

During the 1840s, however, it is possible to discern four major tendencies in the movement. The first of these was what historians have called Knowledge Chartism. Like many Britons in the nineteenth century, numerous Chartists had an abiding faith in the efficacy of

1 Later known as *The Communist Manifesto*.

education. A common catch-cry was 'knowledge is power,' a sentiment that had particular relevance at a time when many working people had access to only the most rudimentary level of education. Indeed there were some among the governing elite who saw education as inherently subversive; better, it was thought, to keep their labourers ignorant. The man who drafted the Charter, William Lovett, was also author of a comprehensive plan for a national education system involving day and evening schools and circulating libraries. In addition to this book (written while he was in prison), Lovett published a newspaper devoted to promoting Chartism and education and eventually he formed a rival association to the National Charter Association to promote the cause.

Alongside education many Chartists supported moral reform, in particular teetotalism. It was widely recognised among reformers that alcohol was a serious social problem, a legacy of the rough popular culture of previous centuries. These were the years in which nation-wide campaigns promoting the temperance pledge and then teetotalism were gaining widespread support. Some Chartists sought to link the two causes by urging their comrades to take the teetotal pledge and to refrain from holding meetings in pubs. There were even a number of Teetotal Chartist Associations established.

Religion too was linked with Chartism. For many Chartists the struggle for democracy and social rights was sanctioned in the scriptures – Christ was even characterised as the first Chartist. A number of leading Chartists were ministers of religion. Overwhelmingly they were from the dissenting and often fissiparous non-conformist sects; the Church of England was widely shunned as a corrupt adjunct to a bloated aristocracy. Some Chartists established Christian Chartist churches to formalise the relationship between politics and faith and other forms of religious observance; prayers and hymns, for example, were widely used in Chartist activities.

By far the most popular Chartist faction, however, was that known as the Fustian Jackets. Fustian was a heavy, coarse cloth that was worn exclusively by working men; it was an unmistakeable symbol of class. The Fustian Jackets were fiercely independent, rejecting any alliance with middle-class reformers and upholding an abrasive class consciousness. Their motto was 'no surrender.' For them, factory bosses – 'millocrats' – and aristocrats were the 'unproductive classes,' responsible for the misery of the people. In the hands of the Fustian Jackets parliament would be used to fix prices and incomes, to restrict the use of machinery and to legislate for shorter working hours and improved conditions. It is important to note that they did not threaten private property. The undisputed leader of the Fustian Jackets – indeed he coined the term – was Feargus O'Connor. O'Connor was not a working man; on the contrary he was an Irish aristocrat, descended, he claimed, from the ancient kings of Ireland. He was twice elected to the House of Commons, representing Cork in the early 1830s and Nottingham between 1847 and 1852. Previously popular movements had invariably been led by 'gentlemen' whose right to lead stemmed from their status. O'Connor was no different. However, he recognised that by 1840 politics had fundamentally shifted and that working men were now looking to their own order for leadership. In one of the most significant gestures of the 1840s, O'Connor emerged from prison in 1841 dressed in a suit of fustian to indicate his sympathy with the class consciousness of his army of followers. It was an unmistakeable celebration of the birth of class as an essential feature of modern politics.

Led by O'Connor, the Chartist majority rejected the direct association of education, teetotalism and religion with the cause, regarding them as distractions from the main objective: democratic control of the House of Commons. This did not mean that O'Connorite Chartists opposed these ideals as such but their tactical opposition to them led to much acrimony, division and a few blood noses.

Ironically, having purged the movement of those advocating 'distractions,' O'Connor and his followers embarked on a distraction of their own: the Land Plan. Established in 1845, the Chartist Land Company was formed to resettle Chartists on small farms to which about 70 000 Chartists contributed funds (that they could often ill afford).

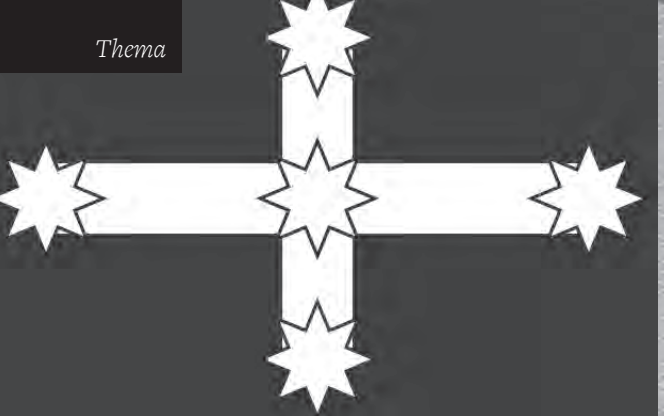
‘The core Chartist demands were adopted in Australia long before they were achieved in Britain.’

For many Chartists the promise of democratic reform would be to provide an opportunity for independence, which, for many, took the form of an idealised life on the land. Political power in Britain was associated with the ownership of land and the Chartists too wanted their stake in the country. By 1850 the Land Company was entangled in financial and legal difficulties, but the passion for rural resettlement still burned fiercely in the hearts of many Chartists.

The campaign for the democratic reform of Britain’s political institutions has a rightful place in British history as the first nation-wide mass movement of working people, but, as I mentioned at the outset, less well known is its place in the history of Australian democracy. The collapse of Chartism as a mass movement after 1850 coincided with a period of concentrated emigration to the Australian colonies, particularly Victoria. Many former Chartists emigrated in search of ‘a better Britain.’ It is important to stress that it was free settlers, not those sent here as punishment, who carried Chartist ideas to the antipodes in their hearts and minds. With one or two exceptions most of the Chartists that were transported for their ‘sins’ either lived out their lives quietly, playing little or no role in local politics, or returned to Britain at the completion of their sentences.

The impact of Chartist migrants was evident in both the issues and strategies of colonial politics. The core Chartist demands were adopted in the Australian colonies long before they were achieved in Britain. Manhood suffrage was introduced in South Australia in 1856, Victoria in 1857, New South Wales in 1858 and Queensland in 1859 (Tasmania and Western Australia did not follow until 1901 and 1907 respectively). The ballot was introduced before manhood suffrage in Victoria (1856), Tasmania (1858) and Western Australia (1877), and at the same time as manhood suffrage in South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. Those points of the Charter relating to the payment and qualification of members were also introduced comparatively quickly in the Australian colonies. Payment of Members was introduced in Victoria in 1870, Queensland in 1886, South Australia in 1887, New South Wales in 1889, Tasmania in 1890 and Western Australia in 1900. The property qualification was abolished in South Australia in 1856, Victoria in 1857, New South Wales in 1858 and Queensland in 1859 (again, Tasmania and Western Australia followed in 1901 and 1907). Shorter (triennial) parliaments were introduced in South Australia in 1856, Victoria in 1858–59 and New South Wales in 1874 (other states did not follow until later: Queensland in 1890, Western Australia in 1899 and Tasmania in 1935). The only point on which comparatively little progress was made was equal electoral constituencies. In Victoria in the early 1850s, for example, urban electorates invariably contained three to four times more voters than rural ones. More generally, in Australia (and Britain) the idea that constituencies ought to represent ‘interests’ was a powerful one – even among some reformers – and continues to have currency in Australian politics. In 1987 the argument was successfully used to oppose a referendum proposal to enshrine equal electoral districts in the Australian Constitution.

Given that Chartism reflected an instrumentalist view of political action, many former Chartists became involved in campaigns in colonial Australia that linked social and political objectives. On the eve of the Eureka rebellion, for example, the diggers (including many former Chartists) adopted a hybrid version of the People’s Charter combining the demand for political rights with reform of the system of mining licences. Former Chartists were also among the leaders of the campaign for an eight-hour working day that was successful in Victoria in the 1850s. Similarly, at the Victorian Land Convention of 1857 the influence of



Chartism was evident both in terms of the cause and the manner in which it was being prosecuted. There were many other examples of 'Chartism and something more' in colonial Australia. Finally, the widespread use of massive demonstrations, parades and petitioning campaigns by colonial reform movements is a further reminder of Australia's Chartist legacy.

The major shift for Chartist immigrants to the Australian colonies was the access to power: in Britain they had struggled to be part of the political nation; in Australia they campaigned within it. Henry Parkes, one of the 'fathers' of the Australian Constitution, is a good example of this transition. Within two decades of leaving Birmingham where he had been a Chartist, Parkes became a cabinet minister. He was premier of New South Wales before many of his erstwhile comrades in Britain had even achieved the vote. If few Australians know the role of Chartism in the exercise of their franchise, fewer still realise that a Chartist adorned the commemorative five-dollar note.

Paul Pickering is Deputy Director of the Research School of Humanities and the Arts, Australian National University. He is author of numerous articles and three books on the Chartists. He published a biography of Feargus O'Connor in 2008.

ABOVE LEFT: The Eureka flag.

ABOVE RIGHT: Sir Henry Parkes, as depicted on the front side of the Centenary of Federation commemorative five-dollar note.

YEAR 10

Australia and the Vietnam War: Analyses, Actions and Attitudes

What were the main ideological currents in the anti-Vietnam War movement in Australia, and how did the movement affect Australian attitudes to the conflict?

Dr Rick Kuhn, Australian National University

There are many parallels between the explanations of Australian involvement in Vietnam and more recent arguments about Australia's participation in the invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. Conservatives argued that Communists in Vietnam were a direct threat to Australian security. The Islamist Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and Iraq under the secular nationalist dictator Saddam Hussein supposedly endangered people living in Australia. In each case the argument was untrue. Most critics of these military expeditions explained them in populist terms: the conservatives were ignoring the national interest in order to brown-nose US leaders. It was only some far left currents in the anti-war movements which challenged the concept of the national interest itself.

By assessing the debates over why Australia was involved in Vietnam and the tactics of the anti-war movement we can cast light on the usefulness of the national interest framework for discussing politics then and today. This is particularly true if we place them in the context of the dramatic shift in public attitudes towards the war, between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s, and the developments explaining it, the withdrawal of Australian forces and the defeat of the US.

The first of these developments was the continued tenacity of the Vietnamese in resisting French and then US imperialism. Over decades and despite setbacks, they did not end their struggle for national liberation. This, along with the revolt of US soldiers both in Vietnam and at home, meant that the United States and its allies could not win the war. The anti-war movements in Australia, the USA and other countries was the third important factor. These movements were most effective in winning arguments and changing attitudes when they mobilised masses of people in direct action against the policies of their own governments.[1]

The sections below outline the explanations of Australian involvement in Vietnam offered by various political currents and the different tactics advocated by those opposed to the war.[2] The final section assesses the accuracy and contemporary relevance of these explanations.

The justification for war

The government of Sir Robert Menzies and its conservative successors offered several different, though not necessarily contradictory, justifications for sending first Australian 'instructors' and then, in

OPPOSITE: Map and flag of North Vietnam © Stephen Finn. Fotolia.

May 1965, combat troops to Vietnam. Its superficial rhetoric was about defending democracy in the country, which it was supposedly doing by supporting a succession of dictatorial and corrupt Vietnamese regimes. The government's most systematic and serious public explanations of its actions were that it was in Australia's national interest to involve the United States in South-east Asia and that Australian participation in the Vietnam conflict would encourage this.

Zelman Cowan, a senior academic apologist for government policy and later a Liberal-appointed governor-general, made the argument very plain: 'The commitment of Australian forces to Vietnam ... does more than anything else we can do to ensure a continued American presence in an area which is vital to our security.' Two mechanisms were allegedly involved. One – the 'domino theory' – drew on Australian racism and conservative anti-communism. As one conservative politician put it,

> The takeover of South Vietnam would be a direct military threat to Australia and all the countries of South and South-east Asia. It must be seen as part of a thrust by Communist China between the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

The other mechanism was less direct. It amounted to an insurance policy. Australia's commitment to Vietnam was seen as a down payment for US help if Australia were ever attacked.

Labor's zig-zags

Arthur Calwell was the leader of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) from 1960 until early 1967. He and the party opposed both conscription, announced in November 1964, and the dispatch of troops to Vietnam the following year. Electoral competition with Menzies, the emergence of a modest anti-war movement and the conflict with Gough Whitlam over the party leadership led him to toughen his initial stance. In May 1966 the Parliamentary Labor Party endorsed Calwell's commitment that a Labor government would withdraw conscripts from Vietnam 'without delay' and regular forces 'as soon as possible.' Calwell also encouraged demonstrations and, up to a point, the movement on the streets.

Nevertheless, Calwell's framework for judging foreign policy was not very different from that of Menzies. 'All our words, all our policies, all our actions must,' the Labor leader asserted in May 1965, 'be judged ultimately by this one crucial test: What best promotes our national security, what best guarantees our national survival?' For the right and centre of the Labor Party, the US alliance met this test. The conflict between the government and Opposition over Vietnam amounted to a sometimes coded debate (even to the participants) over the most effective means of maintaining a stable world order dominated by the USA, under which Australia could flourish. Nationalism therefore informed the judgments of both.

According to Calwell, the problem was that the US Government and, following it, Menzies had overestimated the possibility of a military solution to the Vietnam 'problem.' This miscalculation was damaging the national interest.

The conservatives were more disposed to confrontation and coercion in foreign and industrial relations policy. The ALP advocated co-optation. Communism could be combated more effectively by improving the lives of the South Vietnamese people. The United Nations should help resolve the dispute. But Calwell's alternative strategy for defeating or neutralising communism in South Vietnam, which Whitlam and the Australian Council of Trade Unions shared, was utopian.

The prospect of the USA, let alone Australia, embarking on a massive aid program to improve Vietnamese living standards while Communists controlled the North and had significant support in the South were minimal. With both the USA and USSR able to veto decisions, the UN was a nullity in cases in which there was any element of superpower conflict.

Gough Whitlam did not think that the USA would necessarily lose the war in Vietnam and thought pressure on the US Government could encourage it to seek a peace agreement with the Communists in Vietnam. This and Labor's poor performance in the November 1966 elections led him to shift the party's position on Vietnam to the right after he took over as leader in 1967.

The ALP's Federal Conference that year expressed general opposition to the continuation of the war and Australian

1 Amongst the best accounts of the war are Joe Allen, *Vietnam: The (Last) War the US Lost* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2008); David Cortright, *Soldiers in Revolt: GI Resistance During the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2006); Gabriel Kolko, *Vietnam: Anatomy of War 1940–1975* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987); and Jonathan Neale, *The American War: Vietnam 1960–1975* (London: Bookmarks, 2001). Specifically on Australian involvement see John Murphy, *Harvest of Fear: A History of Australia's Vietnam War* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993); Gregory Pemberton, *All the Way: Australia's Road to Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987); and Michael Sexton, *War for the Asking: Australia's Vietnam Secrets* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1981).

2 Detailed references for material in this article can be found in Rick Kuhn, 'The Australian Left, Nationalism and the Vietnam War,' *www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/interventions/leftvietnam.htm.*

involvement in it. But there was no call for the immediate withdrawal of Australian conscripts. Australian participation, it stated, should end only after an ALP government had failed to persuade 'our allies' to stop bombing North Vietnam, negotiate with the National Liberation Front (NLF) and to 'transform operations in South Vietnam into holding operations.' Much of the party's left was complicit in this position.

When it became electorally advantageous, Labor again took a stronger position on Australian participation in the war. The successes of North Vietnamese and NLF forces during the Tet Offensive in February 1968 demonstrated the fragility of the situation in South Vietnam. The mood in Australia and the United States began to shift. In July, the Federal Labor Conference formally hardened up ALP policy, against Whitlam's position that the withdrawal of Australian forces should occur after a united Vietnam had taken responsibility for affairs in Phuoc Tuy Province which they garrisoned.

But Whitlam's conscience was apparently spurred by an opinion poll result in August that, for the first time, showed a majority opposed Australian involvement in the war. He promised in October that the troops would be brought home by June 1970, if Labor won the 1969 elections. Only in 1971 did the party decide it would repeal the National Service Act, which provided for conscription.

Whitlam was always more insistent than Calwell on the importance of close relations with the USA. He wrote, 'It is not the American Alliance itself which has reduced Australia to a status of diplomatic and defence dependence. It is the Government's interpretation of the Alliance.'

Jim Cairns

Left Labor MHR Jim Cairns was the most prominent opponent of Australia's role in Vietnam. He made it clear that the conservative parties, Liberal, Country and Democratic Labor, used anti-communism as a weapon against Labor and that Chinese expansionism and communist aspirations for world domination were not the basis of resistance to the United States and its clients in Vietnam. Support for communism in Vietnam grew out of the role first of the Viet Minh and then the NLF in resisting foreign domination and corrupt regimes, that is, in leading an essentially nationalist movement. There was no military solution to the Vietnam War. Australia should be offering aid and support for economic progress.

The nationalist explanation of Australian involvement in Vietnam offered by Cairns amounted to the identification of a cultural cringe at the level of foreign policy. The Liberals were just too deferential to the United States. He did not connect this with his own view that the Australian economy was increasingly dominated by a few large and especially foreign companies. This dissociation facilitated his ambiguous attitude to the US Alliance. On the one hand he was critical of Australia's over-dependence on the USA. On the other hand, he assumed the countries had common interests and admired the USA's democratic traditions.

Cairns' far from radical analysis of Australia's place in the world and the war in Vietnam was matched by his political stance. Not only did he comply with Labor's official policies on the war, he also drafted the amendment which watered down the party's position on Vietnam at the 1967 conference. Later he argued that 'Australian influence should primarily be used to end the war, and it could be significant in ending the war ... Withdrawal of forces should come if it appears that Australian efforts to end the war were no longer likely to be effective.' As the most prominent figure in the Moratorium campaign in 1970 and 1971, Cairns demanded that the Australian forces be brought home. It was not this demand but rather his encouragement of mass political activity that distinguished his position from Whitlam's during the early 1970s.

Only in Victoria, where the influence of the Labor left-wing was greatest, was there whole-hearted support from the ALP for the Moratorium campaign, even after Whitlam had decided that rapid withdrawal was an electoral winner. As a consequence, the movement was largest in that state. Only to the left of Cairns did radicals explicitly reject the US Alliance. Most saw government policy as a betrayal of the national interest and as a consequence of direct pressure from US interests.

The respectable left

In order to secure its immediate goal of Australian independence, the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) sought an alliance with the Labor Party, or at

least its left wing, and broad support from workers, farmers, small- and even middle-sized businesses. The enemy was a small group of monopolists, 'the sixty families who owned Australia,' and their government, which was betraying the nation. This led the Communist Party to advocate very moderate positions in the anti-war movement, even if it sometimes made more radical arguments in its own publications.

Its stance was tailored to accommodate allies in the ALP and, in the tradition of the peace movement of the 1950s, amongst 'progressive' intellectuals and ministers of religion. There was a significant element inside the Labor left (probably including some secret CPA members) which took its lead from the CPA and they worked together in the largest peace organisations in Sydney, the Association for International Co-operation and Disarmament and in Melbourne, the Congress for International Co-operation and Disarmament.

So there was an element of feedback reinforcing communist moderation. Particularly after Labor's policy was watered down in 1967, rather than emphasising the demands for an immediate end to conscription and withdrawal of Australian troops the party's position was summed up in the slogan 'Stop the bombing, Negotiate!' until the political climate shifted dramatically to the left in 1968. And while the CPA rejected the US Alliance, for the sake of unity it tended to play this down as an issue in and for the anti-war movement, the biggest opportunity to win an audience for its ideas in decades.

Australian communists recognised that Australia engaged in imperialist policies of its own. This was hard to miss, especially in New Guinea. But their references to Australia as a 'junior partner' of US imperialism did not mean the government pursued an independent, i.e. national, policy. Sir Garfield Barwick, in 1964 minister for external affairs, for example, was lowering 'Australia's stature to that of a stooge for the US gendarmes' by facilitating shipments of barbed wire to South Vietnam.

Labor-left and communist criticisms implied that the government and monopolies themselves did not know how to look after capitalist interests. This expressed the CPA's commitment to an anti-monopoly alliance that might include small capitalists. An element in the party's Stalinist heritage, this 'popular front' tactic, in contrast to the approach of Marx and Lenin, sacrificed workers' defence of their own class interests to achieve alliances with political currents, like the ALP, which served the interests of other classes. For example, *Tribune*, the CPA's weekly newspaper, played down the ALP's dilution of its position on Vietnam in 1967 and stressed that both Labor and the Communists demanded a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam.

The CPA welcomed the successes of the Tet Offensive in February 1968 and issued a call for immediate withdrawal of *Australian* forces and an end of the US Alliance. But the party continued to demand an end to US bombing of North Vietnam and peace negotiations, rather than the immediate withdrawal of *all* foreign forces from Vietnam, and continued to praise, with vague reservations, the ALP's 1967 policy.

The Moratorium movement was a product of the growing appeal of the demand for the immediate withdrawal of troops, after the Tet Offensive. The Labor Party had belatedly reverted to supporting this policy in 1969, removing Communist qualms about making it a demand of the anti-war movement. But the CPA and its Labor-left allies continued to restrain the movement's slogans and tactics. In Brisbane they *physically* prevented a leading militant from speaking. The Communist Party opposed US imperialism, but neither the CPA nor the Labor left was keen on the Moratorium adopting 'anti-imperialist' slogans.

Even the more radical aims of the third Moratorium mobilisation of 30 June 1971 did not raise the issue of imperialism by making links between the structure of Australian (or US) society and foreign policy or the US Alliance. An article in the University of Queensland student newspaper in 1971 expressed the concerns of the radical (Maoist, libertarian and Trotskyist) left about the Moratorium's narrow focus. Australian foreign policy could only be understood, it maintained, in terms of the nature of Australian society and imperialism. A higher profile for these issues, including the US alliance in the anti-war movement might also have encouraged more critical thinking about the ALP in advance of the euphoria over Labor's 1972 victory.

The ALP and CPA recruited out of the anti-war movement, notably in the period from 1968. But there was also an intimate relationship between the movement and the emergence of student radicalism and the New Left. Labor's failure to win the 1966 election was a turning point in the campaign against the Vietnam War and the development of the Australian left.

The radical left

From 1965, interest in more confrontationist political tactics had started to emerge. Labor's defeat led to a radicalisation of sections of the movement, especially students, who no longer accepted that issues could or should be resolved by elections or in parliament. They condemned the ALP's watered down policy on the war and the CPA's moderation. Greater working-class combativeness during this period also showed that militant struggles were possible and could achieve results. The Maoism of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist–Leninist) (CPA[ML]), in particular, but also Trotskyism and libertarianism, provided more radical critiques of Australian capitalism and justifications for more extreme tactics.

The example of young people turning contemporary China upside down, 'third world' revolutions and the verbal radicalism of the Chinese regime (rather than the vicious practice of Mao's dictatorship) and its Australian supporters in the Melbourne-based, pro-Peking CPA (ML) were very influential on radical students, notably members of the Monash University Labor Club from 1966–67. The CPA (ML)'s political tactics and verbal aggressiveness drew on the Chinese version of the 'third period' analysis of the Communist International in the early 1930s. Unlike the CPA, it denounced the ALP, including its left, as equivalent to the conservative parties. It argued that the CPA and Soviet Union had also betrayed socialism.

The 'Maoists,' like the CPA, believed that the main political cleavage in Australia was between 'the people' and a tiny group of monopolists. But they were fierce in their denunciations of US imperialism and the government's betrayal of Australian independence. Where the CPA tended to argue, from the 1940s through to the 1980s, that Australia was *in the process* of losing its independence, the CPA (ML) regarded this as a *fait accompli*. Australia was involved in Vietnam because the Australian Government was subordinate to the US Government and US corporations.

Student militants of the Monash Labor Club shifted public debate and attitudes to the left through their radical demands and tactics. Other student groups in Australia had already expressed support and raised medical aid funds for the NLF, when in 1967 the Labor Club at Monash started to collect money that could be used for *military* purposes. Activists were subject to violence from right-wing students and disciplinary procedures by the Monash administration. They organised confrontational demonstrations against the US consulate and, with other militants, successfully pushed for a sit-down during the first Melbourne Moratorium demonstration in May 1970.

An unsystematic anti-authoritarianism was characteristic of the student movement. It was usually combined with romanticism about revolutionary struggles in the 'third world.' And its explanations of Australia's involvement in Vietnam, shared with the CPA and CPA(ML), were an unconscious heritage of Stalinism. Brisbane was the only city in which a major element in the movement eventually developed a distinctly anarchist flavour. Undifferentiated anarchist rejection of authority did not generate any original insights into Australia's place in the world or its involvement in Vietnam. But Australian Trotskyism, represented by only a handful of people in the mid 1960s, did.

In Sydney, a few Trotskyists had some influence. Consequently, an understanding of Australian participation in the war, explicitly counterposed to Stalinist populism, had some currency much earlier than in other cities. The Trotskyists were critical of Labor's nationalism and racism and the Communist Party's nationalist propaganda.[3] As a consequence they could recognise that the Australian Government pursued the interests of locally-based capital and was not simply a puppet of the USA. Their rejection of both nationalism and the idea that socialists should be concerned about Australian independence was unique on the left.

It was less their distinct analysis of Australia's involvement in the war that initially won Trotkyists wider support

3 Such racism was evident in the ALP's long-term commitment to the White Australia policy and support for imperialist foreign policies, justified by racist arguments.

than their preparedness to argue for demands and tactics which were, until late 1969, generally more militant than those supported by the ALP or CPA. Their militancy was a consequence of the rejection of nationalism which, in the case of the CPA, justified making concessions to the conservative wing of the anti-war movement. Bob Gould played an important role in the Vietnam Action Committee (VAC) in Sydney and Hall Greenland was prominent in the VAC and at Sydney University. The VAC pioneered civil disobedience at anti-war protests, starting with an October 1965 demonstration. In the years before the Moratoria, it consistently called for the withdrawal of Australian and other foreign troops from Vietnam, unlike the ALP or CPA.

The Socialist Youth Alliance (SYA) emerged at the end of 1969 and was the first Trotskyist organisation to develop a significant public profile, particularly through its newspaper *Direct Action*. It shared some questionable but basic assumptions with the populist and Stalinist left about the political incapacity of the Australian ruling class. However, while the CPA regarded Australian nationalism as progressive, *Direct Action* identified its conservative dynamic and drew attention to the chequered history of the ALP's, including the Labor left's, policies on Vietnam.

Nevertheless, despite their differences over nationalism, in the Moratorium campaigns the tactical position of the SYA and its successor the Socialist Workers' League (SWL) was similar in some respects to that of the Communist Party. Even more than the CPA, the SYA/SWL placed a dogmatic emphasis on the importance of limited slogans to attract broad support for mass demonstrations which it regarded as *the* key to success. This was a step backwards from the approach of Trotskyists in the VAC.

Assessing the arguments

The most popular conservative justification for Australia's involvement in Vietnam, that Australia was directly threatened by developments there, appealed to racism (fear of the 'yellow peril') and anti-communism (worry about the 'red hordes'). These were neatly combined in paranoia about Chinese expansionism and toppling dominoes, aided by the force of gravity propelling them down the map towards Darwin. In the context of the continuing Cold War, such arguments also had an appeal in the right of the ALP. But they had virtually no factual basis.

Cairns provided a good account of the essentially nationalist motivations of the forces in Vietnam opposed to the USA and the regime in Saigon. Objectively, the levels of threat to Australian territory were minimal: none of the countries in the region had an interest in armed conflict with Australia and, even if they had, their military capacity was small compared with Australia's own. The minister for the army noted in his diary in mid-1965 that 'The threat to the Australian mainland remains remote till at least 1970.'

Minister for External Affairs Paul Hasluck recognised in 1965 some of the real interests the USA and Australia had in raising the stakes in Vietnam:

> The United States could not withdraw [from South Vietnam] without necessarily considering the world-wide impact of such a withdrawal on the broader strategies of world politics.

We can understand Australian foreign policy by looking at the structural position of the Australian capitalist class. By virtue of its economic power and the structure of the state, not only could the capitalist class define the national interest as its own, but in an important sense the national interest was the interest of the capitalist class. The main mechanism involved is the way the capitalist economy is structured to produce profits, rather than satisfy human needs. If public policy fails to maintain profit rates, investment falls away, growth stops or goes into reverse, and governments lose elections.[4]

With this fundamental qualification in mind, it is possible to agree with John Howard's 1994 observation that 'Menzies and his colleagues (and often large sections of the Labor Party) believed it to be in Australia's interests to act in concert with those powerful friends – and that in most cases, that judgment was right.' As the world's largest economic and military power, the USA was in a better position than any other state to secure the global private capitalist order it desired. And this pre-eminence encouraged an (ultimately unjustified) optimism about the viability of this project.

4 For a longer account of the national interest see Rick Kuhn, *Class and Struggle in Australia* (Frenchs Forest: Pearson, 2005), 10–13 (Introduction).

Australia had an interest in creating and sustaining a broadly similar world order to that sought by the United States. So participating in some US military adventures was a sensible policy option from the conservative viewpoint. It also involved a substantial free ride. During the Vietnam War, the proportion of GNP Australia devoted to arms expenditure was around half that of the USA.

Australian capitalists had an interest in a growing and profitable global economy. Such a world order could absorb Australian exports and provide both commodities not produced locally and capital flows to cover the typical current account deficits. Both the Labor and conservative parties accepted the organisation of Australia on capitalist lines and sought to promote economic growth within this framework. They therefore expressed the identity of capitalist and national interests. They endorsed the Western side of the contest with the Soviet Bloc and criticised efforts by underdeveloped countries to radically alter their form of integration into the private capitalist world.

No doubt Hasluck regarded these two threats to the global order as identical. It is true that if they won power, national liberation movements, like the one in Vietnam, which had been persecuted by the USA, might provide military advantages to the Soviet Bloc. But, more importantly and realistically, they could limit the scope for private capitalist profit making by imposing restrictions on trade and investment. More importantly in the case of impoverished and resource-poor Vietnam, the victory of a mass struggle against oppression in one part of the world could encourage similar resistance to oppression or exploitation elsewhere, even in developed capitalist countries.

The modesty of Australia's economic and military capacity meant that, alone, Australian governments could not hope to mould the international order, as opposed to affairs closer to home in the South-west Pacific. Since Australia could not police the world, the Menzies Government encouraged the USA to do so. This was also one of the Labor Party's goals, though it differed on the best way achieve it.

The South-west Pacific and South-east Asia were of much greater concern for Australia than they were for the US: they were better prospective trade partners and destinations for Australian investment and sensitive shipping routes passed through them. In 1964 and 1965 the Menzies Government's worries about the region and US involvement were deepened by Indonesia's 'confrontation' with Malaysia in northern Borneo.

In his thorough study of the origins of Australia's involvement in Vietnam, Greg Pemberton observed that 'Australia's strategic and economic interests demanded that Western hegemony be maintained in [South-east Asia].' But since World War II the USA had focused its foreign policy attention on Europe and, especially after the Cuban Revolution, on Latin America. So there was a logic behind Australian efforts to boost the USA's policing activities in South-east Asia. While trapped like most Australian policy makers in an ideology of national defence, whose racist and anti-communist premises had little in common with reality, Norman Harper, a conservative academic, put his finger on this in 1963:

> Attempting to pursue an independent policy, Australia has found that the global strength of the United States has set limits within which diplomatic manoeuvring is possible, and consequently that one of the major tasks of Australian diplomacy has been to collaborate with the United States and to influence, perhaps attempt to orient, American policy in our own area that is often of peripheral interest to Washington.

Far from being a puppet of the USA, the Australian Government attempted to use its limited military resources to manoeuvre the United States into increasing its involvement in Vietnam. The details of the decision to send Australian combat troops to Vietnam are now well known. The Menzies Government took this initiative without a request from the US Government or an invitation from the South Vietnamese regime. Once the US had expanded its military presence in South-east Asia, Australia did not commit many more of its own troops.

Only the Australian Trotskyists, a small section of the left at the time, offered a convincing explanation for the presence of Australian troops in Vietnam. Their rejection of Australian nationalism meant that they could recognise that the US alliance and sending soldiers to Vietnam were not betrayals but expressions of Australian nationalism and Australia's national interests.

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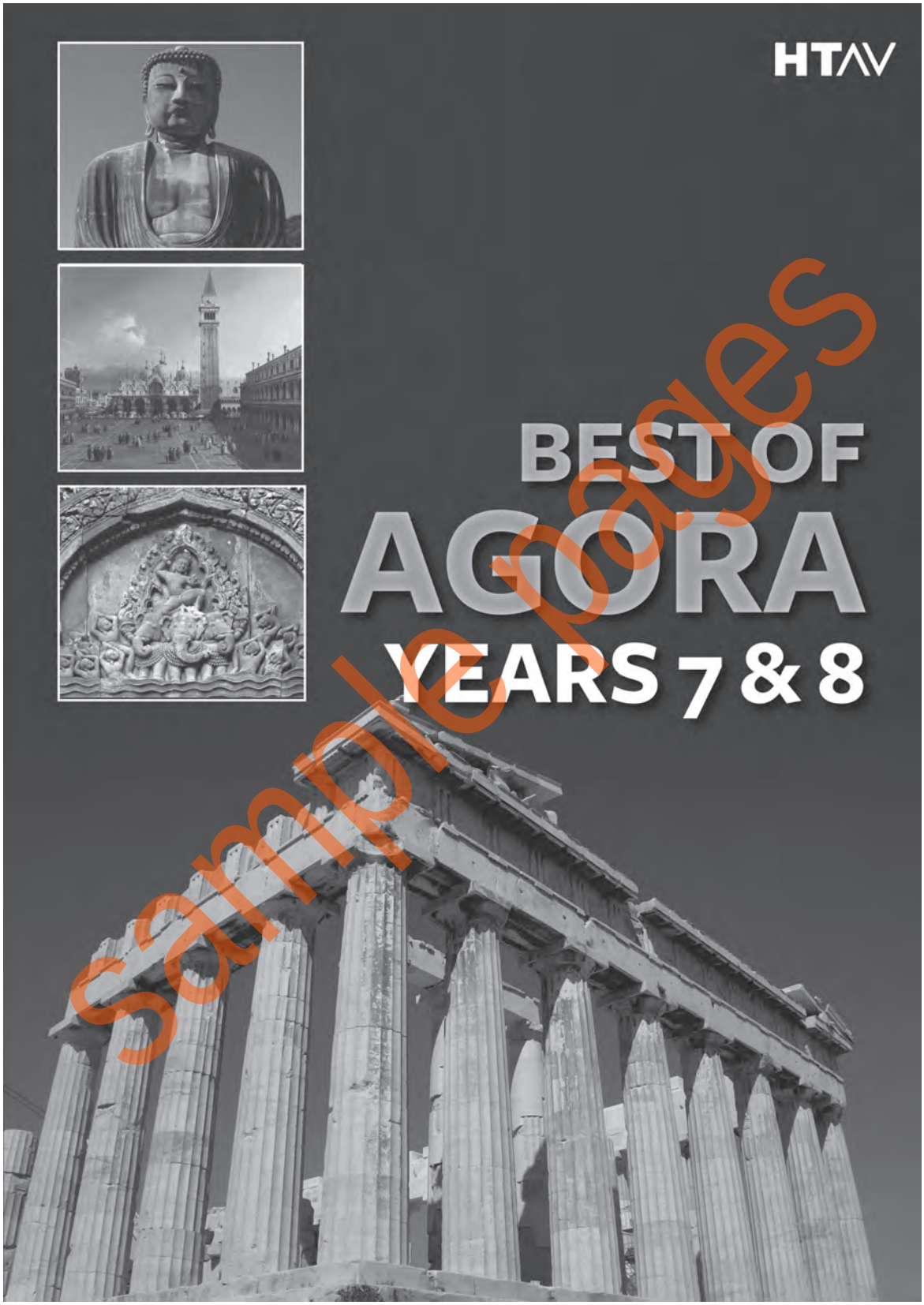

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