The Labor Party and the Industrial Groups in South Australia 1946-55: precluding the split

Malcolm Saunders

The third and most devastating split suffered by the Australian Labor Party (ALP) occurred some fifty years ago and has since been the subject of much attention from journalists and academics. It is generally claimed that, while the Victorian and Queensland branches of the Party witnessed the worst schisms, South Australia suffered the least; indeed, after the dust had settled, it could hardly be said to have split at all. The events of 1954-56 had barely begun to unfold when Adelaide's morning broadsheet newspaper declared that South Australia was likely to be 'the least affected' of all the states in the aftermath of the split made formal at the famous ALP federal conference in Hobart in March 1955. Similarly, immediately after returning from that conference, 'Mick' O'Halloran, leader of the state parliamentary Labor Party, insisted that there was 'no possibility whatever' of any split in South Australia; the following day Senator Jim Toohey, who had also attended the conference, assured the press that there would be 'no trouble' in the state branch and that 'the existing unity would be preserved'. Months later, a leading political scientist at the University of Adelaide, W.G.K. Duncan, reported to his colleagues around the country that, while the Labor split had been 'a major political development' in most states, it had 'occasioned hardly a ripple' in South Australia.
Of course, Labor leaders in South Australia had a vested interest in avoiding a split and thus their statements to the media were as much warnings as they were predictions. And Duncan’s remark was a trifle premature. A branch of the Australian Labor Party (Anti-Communist) – subsequently renamed the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) – was formed in South Australia a few weeks before the federal elections in December 1955, and its electoral support, while small, was sufficient to prevent the ALP from winning the third seat in the Senate that it coveted. Arguably, there was a split in the Labor Party in South Australia, and political scientists writing in later years were careful not to totally deny that one had occurred. Thus, Hetherington and Reid, in a book that laid the foundations on which much of the post-war political history of South Australia has been written, noted that a number of developments within the state branch in the early 1950s ‘prevented any major split in the party’, while Dean Jaensch, doyen of South Australian political scientists since the 1970s, remarked even more guardedly that ‘the Labor split was not as cataclysmic in South Australia as elsewhere’. Clearly, South Australian Labor did witness a split in its ranks, but one that pales in comparison with those experienced by its counterparts in the eastern states.

Thus, during the mid 1950s – possibly the most turbulent years through which the ALP (and the labour movement) has ever passed – the South Australian branch was distinguished by its unity. How and why South Australia avoided a split as damaging as that which occurred in the other states is mentioned in numerous works and discussed at some length by the present writer in another publication. A multitude of factors was at work. Some – such as the reintroduction of the ‘card vote’ and ‘the consensus method’ of sharing power – had to do with earlier internal reform of the branch. Others – such as the small proportion of Catholics in South Australia vis-a-vis other states and the refusal of the Catholic Archbishop of Adelaide (Matthew Beovich) to support a breakaway party from the ALP – had to do with the Catholic Church’s low profile in the state. Still others – the low level of communist influence in the trade union movement and the equally low level of industrial strife – relate to the culture of the labour movement in South Australia. Not least were historical factors, memories of the state branch’s devastating split over the Premiers’ Plan in the early 1930s undoubtedly playing a part. There were probably others.

Interestingly, Reid and Hetherington, writing only a few years after the split, cited few of these. In fact, to them only two really mattered: ‘The introduction of the card-vote and the banning of the Industrial Groups had effectively decided the issue of control within the South Australian Branch of the ALP well before the matter came to a head in the eastern States.’ The reintroduction and use of the card vote – it had been tried before – has been examined at some length because it explains why the Labor Party in South Australia survived the storm of the mid-1950s and also why it was easily the most united state branch of the Labor Party from the mid-1940s to the early 1980s. But the part played by the suppression of the Industrial Groups in precluding a split in the South Australian Labor Party has been little more than mentioned in passing. Don Rawson examined the Industrial Groups throughout Australia and Douglas Blackmur has focused on their operations in Queensland, but to my knowledge no one has discussed the role they played in South Australia in the decade before the ‘great split’.

The historical background: 1931-53
The advent of the Industrial Groups in South Australia in the mid-1940s coincided with the revival of the Labor Party there. The end of the Second World War in the winter of 1945 had seen the branch in the doldrums. The Great Depression, running into the early 1930s, had perhaps wreaked more havoc on the ALP in South Australia than on the Party’s branches in any other state (except possibly Victoria). Disputes about how the Party should respond to that unpre-
edented crisis had brought about the fall of Lionel Hill's Labor government in 1931 and the disintegration of the branch into three distinct factions: those supporting the controversial Premiers' Plan (mainly state parliamentarians); those supporting the radical plan of the even more controversial premier of New South Wales, Jack Lang; and those remaining with the official Labor Party (centred around Trades Hall). Over the next few years the Liberal and Country parties amalgamated to form the Liberal and Country League (LCL) and established a virtual hegemony over the Treasury benches that was to last for more than thirty years (1933-65).

By 1945, Labor's prospects of ever again becoming the government of South Australia looked very bleak. A grossly malapportioned electoral system, the successful and rapid industrialisation of the state, and the restoration of full employment, all served to entrench the LCL as the 'natural' government of South Australia. And, while the conservative forces seemed to have all the advantages - as well as the luck - Labor continued to have more than its share of problems. Although its various sections came together again in the late 1930s, faction-fighting of a different order broke out again in the early 1940s. Labor's vote in state elections recovered only hesitantly and slowly from less than 28% in 1933, just over 26% in 1938, around 33% in 1941, and less than 43% in 1944. For a decade and a half Labor remained disunited, unstable, and unsuccessful. Toward the end of the war, the 'Right', composed principally of young and intensely anti-communist Catholics, effectively controlled the branch. But because their power base was the sub-branches - principally those in the inner-city suburbs to the south and south-east of Adelaide's central business district - their hold on the branch was tenuous and, as we shall see, remarkably brief.

Not long after this, the Australian Workers' Union (AWU), by far the biggest trade union in the state, reasserted its power in the Party. At the branch's annual convention in October 1946, the state secretary of the AWU, Clyde Cameron, was elected president of the Labor Party in South Australia. At 33, he was the youngest man ever to hold that office. For the next thirty years at least, Cameron and Jim Toohey, elected state secretary at the annual convention the following year, together exercised an extraordinary amount of power, in both the state branch and in the federal forums of the Labor Party, notably the federal executive, the federal conference, and the federal Parliamentary Labor Party (PLP). Born in Murray Bridge in 1913, Cameron had a childhood marked by poverty. A shearer at 14, he worked his way up in the AWU in South Australia, becoming its secretary in 1941. He was short, stolid, highly intelligent, always manipulative, and sometimes ruthless. Twenty-five years later - by which time Cameron had long been the Member for Hindmarsh and a leading figure in the federal PLP - the veteran political reporter Alan Reid paid tribute to 'the masterly skill with which Clyde Cameron ... a stockily built ex-shearer and trade union secretary ... prematurely grey haired, with a biting, fluent tongue, a subtle clever mind, and an intuitive grasp of psychological factors operating on his fellow ALP members' was able to get his own way in the Party.

Although strongly influenced by his Quaker mother and raised as a Presbyterian, Cameron was suspicious of organised religion and often hostile to clergymen. He was particularly wary of the Catholic Church, and throughout his long political career unwaveringly opposed state aid for denominational schools. A socialist but never a communist, Cameron was particularly harsh with members of the Party who questioned its socialist objective. (One of the great disappointments of his life was the privatisation of public utilities by the Hawke-Keating governments in the late 1980s.) Indeed, Cameron spent much of his political life in conflict with the Catholics within the Party and, later, those who had left it. Although Catholics were less powerful in the Labor Party in South Australia than in any other state - traditionally, the leadership of the
state branch had been dominated by Cornish Methodists — they were marked by devoutness, loyalty to their church, concern for its struggling schools, and their uneasiness that Labor's socialist objectives could not clearly be distinguished from the communists' ultimate aims. Critically, their feeling that the Party's hallowed 'socialisation objective' was out of date and should be abandoned set them on a collision course with not only the state branch's new president — 'a machine operator par excellence' — but also the bulk of its active membership.

Cameron's dominance of the branch owed much to his reintroduction of the card vote, a device sometimes used at annual state conventions whereby the voting strength of delegates from unions and sub-branches was made proportional to the number of affiliated members they represented. The card vote enabled the AWU, provided that it could win the support of two or three of the other largest unions, to control conventions and hence policy-making. It enabled Cameron, who remained the leading light in the AWU, and Toohey — whose power base was for many years the second largest union in South Australia, the Vehicle Builders' Employees' Union — to operate a form of duumvirate within the branch. Together, over the late 1940s and the 1950s, they developed a strategy that came to be known as 'the consensus method'. Before each annual convention a 'troika' of three — which always included Cameron and Toohey — would meet informally and, in Cameron's words, 'quietly and objectively decide how to allocate positions on our ticket'. But, rather than support one particular faction, the troika would ensure that on the ticket 'every faction was given representation in strict accordance with its floor strength'. Thus, while the card vote enabled Cameron and the AWU to retain leadership of the state branch, the consensus method helped to lessen internal dissent. Together they provided the state branch with what was for those years an unusually high level of stability.

But the card vote and the consensus method were not the only means by which Cameron (along, a little later, with Toohey) kept the Party together. Another was by isolating and 'demobilising' any who threatened the branch's new-found quiescence. The first and most important step in this strategy was the muzzling — and, a very few years later, the disbandment — of the Industrial Groups. The 'Groups' were effectively 'cells' in trade unions, set up secretly by the Melbourne-based Catholic Social Studies Movement (the 'Movement') in most states in the early 1940s and publicly and officially by most state branches of the Labor Party in the mid and late 1940s. Their purpose was to oust communist leaders and their allies from the trade unions and thereby to lessen the influence of communists within the Labor Party itself. The driving force of the Groupers was always the Movement. While communist control of the trade union movement as a whole grew steadily in the 1930s and early 1940s, reaching its peak in about 1944-45, the Movement enjoyed its most spectacular successes in the early 1950s. The Movement — and the Industrial Groups it controlled — were at the zenith of their power within the trade union movement and hence the Labor Party in most states in 1952-53. But in South Australia at that time they were fighting little more than a rearguard action. Why the Groups were so ineffective in South Australia compared with the eastern states is the question being considered here.

The advent of the Groups

Scholarly comment on the split often makes the point that the Groups were disbanded in South Australia three years before the ALP federal executive withdrew support from them elsewhere. Actually, what is most intriguing, as Don Rawson suggested many years ago, is not so much why they were disbanded in South Australia, as why they were established so early in this state and even why they were set up at all. Cameron's accounts of their introduction into the branch are not altogether convincing. He claims that when the
A.L.P. FORUM
GROUPS
Counter To "Anti-Labor"

The annual State A.L.P. Convention yesterday instructed the incoming executive immediately to set up industrial groups in workshops, unions and factories, similar to those in New South Wales "in an effort to combat anti-Labor influences so prevalent in the trade union movement."

Supporting the motion, Mr. Quirke, MP, said that A.L.P. groups in New South Wales had performed remarkably good work. If carried, the proposal would be one of the most forward moves of the Convention.

An amendment favoring the setting up of A.L.P. lunch break forums among employees in industry to counteract anti-Labor propaganda from the Liberal and Communist parties was rejected in favor of the motion.

Keen discussion resulted when a motion was submitted that no one over the age of 65 years be permitted to contest a nomination.

Advertiser press clipping, 31 October 1946 (Courtesy Advertiser)

1947 the secretary's report devoted fewer than five lines to the Industrial Groups' committee, merely reporting that it had held several meetings, drawn up a constitution, and distributed it to affiliated organisations. Two and a half years after the Groups had been nominally set up in the branch, it was reported in the press, with masterly understatement, that their activities 'have not been spectacular'. Clearly, Cameron and the AWU found the whole idea of the Industrial Groups repugnant and accepted their establishment in South Australia only under pressure.
But nipping the Industrial Group danger in the bud was just one way in which, from 1946-47, Cameron and Toohey relentlessly pursued their ideal of a broad-based but essentially left-of-centre state branch that would remain stable and avoid the sort of schisms it had suffered earlier. While both the far Left and the far Right resented Cameron's and Toohey's dominance over the branch and occasionally tried to have the card-vote abolished, challenges to the new regime came more often from Catholics in the sub-branches than from socialists in the unions. The Right was far more vociferous, partly because it resented its recent loss of control over the branch and the likelihood that it would not regain it in the foreseeable future. It was also, by definition, much less committed to the socialist objective of the Party than either the Centre-Left or the Left, and more and more concerned about the ideological direction in which Cameron and Toohey intended to take the state branch. But an equally important factor was that, in the late 1940s, anti-communism was on the rise throughout the Western world and especially in the USA and Australia. Yet, while the Right in the eastern states, through the Movement's work in the Industrial Groups, was making substantial gains in both the trade unions and the Party, it had been almost completely thwarted in South Australia by the reintroduction of the card vote and the restrictive charter given the Groups. That it would be extraordinarily frustrated was inevitable.

The Movement in South Australia was, like its counterparts elsewhere, a secret and secretive organisation. Thus it is often impossible to ascertain how many on the Right were members of the Movement or even just Groupers. But in South Australia in the late 1940s and early 1950s, those on the Right within the Labor Party were ideological cousins because of what they had in common: intense hostility to communism, indifference to socialism, suspicion of Cameron, and an adherence to Catholicism (or, at the very least, a willingness to work with likeminded members who were Catholics).

The new regime's first major clash with the Right occurred with P.H. Quirke, who, although a Catholic, was hardly a Grouper. A former soldier-settler and fruit-grower, a veteran of the first ALP and a prominent member of the RSL, Quirke had begun his parliamentary career as an Independent; by 1948 he was the Labor member for the mid-north lower house seat of Stanley. Early that year Quirke refused to advocate a 'Yes' vote in the federal Labor government's referendum to have the states hand over their powers to control prices to the commonwealth, a stance which caused the state Labor Party to suspend him for a year. Later the same year the Clare sub-branch of the ALP, of which Quirke was the most prominent member and his son the president, carried a resolution calling for the deletion of the socialisation objective from the Party's platform because it was 'Communist'. Cameron and Toohey summarily dissolved the branch, and Quirke immediately resigned from the Party, declaring that, unless they were changed, the Labor Party's policy of 'absolute socialism' and its 'hide-bound rule book' would eventually destroy it.

Quirke, once more an Independent, was returned to the House of Assembly for another twenty years and eventually joined the LCL and became a cabinet minister in a Playford government. To the new leadership of the state Labor Party, Quirke never had been and never would be a bona fide member of the Labor Party. Indeed, a biographer of Quirke has described him as 'one of the most un-Labor members of a Labor caucus'. Having left the land, he had become the manager of a cooperative winery and a producers' cooperative in the Clare district. His popularity in his electorate had been based less on his representation of the Labor Party than on his reputation as a parliamentarian who acted independently. That he was never an enthusiastic supporter of the Party's socialisation objective was understandable; that he criticised from the floor of the House of Assembly the Party's concern to centralise powers and that he, above all, in a very public way attacked the most fundamental plank in the Party's platform...
in terms almost identical to those then being used by Labor's enemies, was unforgivable.

The Quirke episode almost certainly coloured the attitude of Cameron and Toohey toward the Industrial Groups, which were, as mentioned earlier, conspicuously neglected and had only a nominal existence. Both held, quite correctly that very few unions in South Australia were under communist control and hence there was little need for the Groups in this state. But, while they could discourage the Groups, they could not prevent their establishment, particularly in unions that were not affiliated with the ALP. In the autumn of 1949 there was an upsurge in anti-communist activity in the trade union movement in South Australia and over the next few years prolonged battles between Groupers and the left-wing officials they were attempting to overthrow. The former were assisted by the Menzies government's introduction, under certain circumstances, of court-controlled ballots. The unions most affected by these struggles were the Ironworkers', Shop Assistants', and Clerks' and it is worthwhile to consider each in turn.38

The struggle within the unions

In 1949 the South Australian branch of the Federated Ironworkers' Association had long been under the control of a group of officials centred round its communist secretary, C.J. ('Charlie') McCaffrey. Indeed, not long after the war, it was regarded as 'the most powerful Communist-controlled union in this State'.39 In 1945-46, the union's support for communist-inspired strikes in the eastern states led first the chemical workers and later the munitions workers in South Australia to break off from the FIA and to either set up their own union or join another. As a result the FIA swung even further to the left, questioned whether it should remain affiliated to the ALP, and decided to allow its members to choose whether their annual political levies would be paid to the ALP or the Communist Party of Australia (CPA).40 But dissension continued. In April 1949 right-wing members led by a union shop steward from the Osborne Power Station, R.J. Husdell,41 organised a meeting of about 150 ironworkers in the Hindmarsh Town Hall and formed an Industrial Group within the union.42 Husdell became a constant thorn in McCaffrey's side. With some assistance from the Groupers' national trade union champion, Laurie Short (who had in 1951 won a long and highly publicised court battle against the federal leadership of the FIA),43 the Groupers in the Ironworkers' in South Australia finally prevailed. By the middle of 1954, after a struggle that had lasted several years, Husdell had overthrown McCaffrey and the union had re-affiliated to the ALP, an event which leading Groupers in the state hailed as evidence that the Groups were working not just for the defeat of communism but for the betterment of the Labor party.44

Something similar occurred in the state branch of the Shop Assistants' Union (SAU), although it was a very different sort of organisation. In many ways a 'white collar' union, its membership was very small (possibly only five to ten per cent of those eligible).45 It was not even affiliated to the Labor Party.46 As such, it was perhaps an easy target for communists bent on increasing their influence in the trade union movement wherever they could. In the late 1940s its executive was left-wing and its secretary was Tom Burke. But its most conspicuous official was its organiser, Anita Eckersley, a prominent member of the CPA in South Australia.47 In 1949-50 a Group was set up in the union but it had to battle against both entrenched left-wing officials and apathetic union members. The Group comprised Catholics, who seem to have been drawn mainly from the southern inner-suburban sub-branches of the Labor Party such as Wayville and Parkside. After several years they, too, were victorious.

In May 1953 Groupers made a clean sweep of all official positions contested in the state branch.48 E.J. Goldsworthy, who had been the leader of the union's Industrial Group, became secretary and was hailed in the press as the youngest trade union secretary in South Australia and probably throughout Australia. Elected president was D.S. Killicoat,
a devout Catholic and the vice-president of the Wayville sub-branch of the Labor Party. Moreover, its executive was now composed almost entirely of Labor supporters and it had decided to affiliate with the ALP. In the immediate aftermath of Evatt's famous denunciation of Movement forces in the Labor Party in early October 1954, a meeting of the SAU in South Australia 'overwhelmingly adopted' a motion to ban from office in the union anyone who advocated or encouraged the overthrow by force of established government in Australia. It was a direct, albeit small, slap in the face to Evatt and also to the established leadership of the Labor Party in South Australia.

But possibly the most significant and certainly the most public struggle between the Groupers and their targets occurred in the South Australian branch of the Federated Clerks' Union. The FCU in South Australia developed from the South Australian Association of Clerks (which had been set up in Adelaide in 1905) and was therefore one of the oldest unions in the state. In the doldrums throughout the inter-war period, it was revived by the young but very able Harry Krantz in the early 1940s. After a stint in the armed services during the Second World War, Krantz resumed leadership of the union in 1946 and held it for the next thirty-five or so years. Although the FCU was overwhelmingly a 'white-collar' union – the majority of its members almost certainly voted Liberal rather than Labor – its members gave their allegiance to Krantz (in his younger years a leading rationalist in South Australia). He was possibly the strongest supporter of the federal leadership of the FCU in the form of well-known communist and secretary of the FCU in New South Wales, John Hughes. Thus, although never himself a member of the CPA, Krantz depended on the support of communists both in South Australia and interstate, and was regarded by the Right more as a card-carrying communist than as a 'fellow traveller'. From the late 1940s the FCU, like both the FIA and SAU, was not affiliated with the state branch of the Labor Party. All this, coupled with the fact that it was one of the larger unions in the state, made the Groupers determined to wrest leadership from its left wing.

It almost happened. A number of Catholics – the state president of 'the clerical workers' ALP industrial group' was a J.C. Callaghan, while a leading spokesman was a J. Cronin – set up a Group within the union in May 1949 and over the next year and a half strove to remove Krantz and replace his executive with their own. In their struggle they portrayed the executive as 'members or sympathisers of the Communist Party' and themselves as 'members who are supporters of the Australian Labor Party' whose 'main concern was to help achieve the aims of that party. Accusing Krantz and his followers of being undemocratic and of stifling discussion within the union, they eventually forced a showdown; at a large and memorable meeting in the Tivoli Theatre on 13 July 1950, their motion to depose the executive was defeated by 375 to 272. Very likely, some of
the Groupers present, although clerical workers, were not members of the union and could not vote. Whatever the case, the Group cried foul, insisted that the meeting had been conducted in an 'unconstitutional manner', and sought legal advice. A spokesman also claimed that after the meeting dozens of union members who were perturbed about the matter had applied to join the Group. However, this was the highwater mark of the Group; never again did they have the numbers to topple the Krantz-led executive. For most of the next twenty years or so, South Australia was the only state in the country in which the FCU was not dominated by the Right.

Thus, the Groupers achieved victories in at least two South Australian unions, but both were only tenuously connected to the ALP. In unions that were affiliated to the Labor Party they were far less successful. Certainly, there were Groupers and Grouper-sympathisers at one time or another in several Labor-affiliated unions, most notably four of the larger unions in the state – the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), the Australian Government Workers' Association (AGWA), the Australasian Society of Engineers (ASE) and the Australian Railways Union (ARU) – and several of the smaller ones, such as the Breadcarters' Union, the Hotel, Club and Restaurant Employees' Union, the Telegraphists' and Postal Clerks' Union, and the Tramways Employees' Union. The Gasworkers' Union, which was not affiliated with the ALP, also had a Group. But these Groups do not appear to have achieved either the size and strength of, or to have lasted as long as, better-organised counterparts in the Ironworkers', Shop Assistants', and Clerks' unions. True, the ASE was a staunchly anti-communist union. In the winter of 1948 it was held up by anti-communists as a shining example for other unions to follow when it concluded an agreement with Pope Products Limited – one of the leading 'white goods' manufacturers in the state – to exclude both communists and communist sympathisers from employment in the industry and to insist on secret ballots of members before any strikes were called. But this sort of union-company agreement never 'took on' in the trade union movement in South Australia. The Cameron-Toohey regime, while sometimes paying lip service to the Groups – after all, it was important that the Labor Party from time to time declare its antipathy toward communism and communists – remained quietly suspicious and unsupportive of them.

Against these unions – whose leaders or at least some members of which were active anti-communists – must be set those to whom, like Cameron and Toohey, the whole idea of the Industrial Groups was repugnant. To these mainly left-wing unions it was an article of faith that the unions should control the Party and that neither the Party nor anyone outside the unions should interfere in their affairs. Typical among them was the small but militant Plasterers' Society, whose management in January 1948, with just a hint of anti-Catholicism, informed the state Labor Party that 'we do not think the formation of sectional groups within an organisation are (sic) in the best interests of trade unionism'. Of course, the officials of such unions were typically sympathetic to at least some of the CPA's aims and very often, if not always, dependent upon the support they received within their unions from energetic, committed, and highly organised communists. So, in the forums of the Labor Party and the United Trades and Labor Council, traditionally left-wing unions such as the Plasterers', the Waterside Workers' Federation, the Boilermakers' Society, and the Federated Ironworkers' Association (before its leadership was replaced by Groupers), were usually ready, not so much to defend communism per se, but at least to uphold the rights of communists to join unions and participate in union affairs.

Thus it was officials of these unions who in January 1946 – at a time when the state branch was considering launching an anti-communist campaign in the labour movement – had tried to moderate the actions of the then still very right-wing state council of the ALP. As one delegate from the WWF reminded the council, 'There
were no protests about Communists and Communism when the Russians were our Allies during the war', while another warned that 'a stage was being reached when all workers who took part in strikes would be described as Communists'. And it was from these unions that protests came when, in the spring of 1948, an eastern suburbs council banned communists from holding any street or factory-gate meetings in the municipality. Then there were unions – such as the AGWA – that were always at pains to dissociate themselves from communism but were at the same time conspicuously opposed to the Menzies government's efforts to ban the Communist Party in 1950-51. While unwaveringly hostile toward the ruling Conservative parties, such unions grudgingly accepted that the communists were part of the labour movement and readily understood that the denial of the civil rights of members of one working-class party (the CPA) could easily lead to the same loss by members of another (the ALP).

The demise of the Groups
Significantly, it was in this heightened atmosphere – between the passage of the Communist Party Dissolution Bill (October 1950) and the referendum in which Prime Minister Menzies asked the electorate to amend the Australian constitution to let his government proceed to outlaw the Communist Party (September 1951) – that the Cameron-Toohey regime made its move against the Industrial Groups in South Australia. Significantly, too, it was the AWU that spearheaded the move and the WWF that gave it impetus. In late July 1951 the state branch of the AWU announced that it would ask the ALP in South Australia to disband the Groups because 'certain' of their supporters had engaged in 'anti-Labor activities' and made 'unauthorised public statements' damaging the unity of the Party. Cameron moved the motion, declaring that although the Groups had been set up specifically to educate workers about the Party's socialist objectives, they had instead 'opposed not only Communism, but also democratic Socialism as expounded by the Labor Party'. The AWU acted in concert with the WWF, whose Port Adelaide secretary declared the following day that his union would also ask the next annual convention of the state branch to ban the Groups. Using the same arguments and almost the same language, the waterside workers' secretary declared that the Groups 'were not being used for the purpose for which they were originally intended'.

Thus, months before the annual convention in October 1951, the writing was on the wall for the Groups. An early warning in the press reported that both ALP and trades union officials are stated to be fearful that the groupers will attempt to seize control of ALP branches and trade unions, even where these organisations are under moderate control. The Clerks' and the Shop Assistants' protested these 'unwarranted and unjustifiable attacks', but to no avail. With unions like the AGWA supporting the ban, they retreated, a spokesman for the Groups declaring that they would support the 'No' vote in the lead-up to the Communist Party referendum. Significantly, as the convention drew near, it was revealed that three unions (AWU, WWF and Plasterers') had asked the convention to disband the Groups, while five sub-branches had urged that the Groups be given 'more active support'. When the convention finally met, the issue was probably the most bitterly fought on the agenda. Cameron launched the attack on the Groups, and his criticism was extraordinary for its vitriol and its comprehensiveness. He accused them of engaging in 'anti-Labor activities', making 'unauthorised public statements', not carrying out their objectives, and of 'attempting to get jobs for various individuals' in the unions. He even claimed that the Clerks' Group had been supporting a vice-president of a Liberal Party sub-branch.

The debate over the issue was described as 'lively', with at one point, as many as eight delegates vying for the right to speak. But Cameron had done his groundwork and seemed almost completely in control of the convention. Three compromise...
amendments to scrap the ‘old’ Groups and establish new ones were lost, and an attempt to allow a spokesman for the Groups to address the convention and even submit to cross-examination was ruled out of order. The AWU motion to withdraw the charter of the ALP’s Industrial Groups in South Australia was ‘carried overwhelmingly on the voices’. The withdrawal of recognition from the Groups marked the beginning of the end of their struggle for recognition and power within the South Australian Labor Party.

The Groups were not the only casualties of the day. In the aftermath of the Communist Party referendum – which was only narrowly lost – the state branch was in no mood to forgive those who had defied the party. Another victim was Cyril Chambers, member for the safe seat of Adelaide in the House of Representatives. Chambers, a practising Catholic and an avowed anti-communist, had earlier told Bardolph and Toohey that he could not support the ‘No’ campaign ‘with a clear conscience’ and had refused to participate in it. He was thus charged with a breach of party discipline. The forces for and against him were almost even. On the one hand, Chambers’ name had been used in the ‘No’ campaign’s publicity and his absence from its activities was a major embarrassment to the Party in South Australia. Left-wing union officials were incensed, and in Cameron they found a ready ally. None could forget that only two years earlier, Chambers, as Minister for the Army in the Chifley Labor government, had ordered troops into the Hunter Valley open-cut mines to break the coalminers’ strike. To people such as Cavanagh, the militant secretary of the Plasterers’ Society, this action had put Chambers beyond the pale. On the other hand, Evatt was anxious to avoid exacerbating the divisions in the Party over how to deal with communism and communists and made it clear that he did not want disciplinary action taken against those federal parliamentarians who had not taken an active part in the ‘No’ campaign. Chambers was reprimanded but escaped further punishment. However, six years later, after attacking Evatt’s leadership, he was suspended from the Party and could thus not be pre-selected for Adelaide – a decision that effectively ended his parliamentary career.

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**A.L.P. Industry Groups Banned**

The annual convention of the Australian Labor Party last night decided to withdraw the charter of ALP industry groups in SA.

The motion was carried overwhelmingly on the voices, and the decision, reached after a long and sometimes bitter debate, was received with applause.

The motion had been submitted by the Australian Workers Union. Three amendments, with the common objective of establishing new groups or under the executive control of the ALP Council. The first amendment, proposed by the State president of the ALP (Mr. Bardolph, MLC) and the State secretary (Mr. J. P. Toohey), sought to withdraw the charter of continuing industry groups, to establish new ones under the executive control in unions which are not affiliated with the party and which are under Communist domination.

**Ruled Out**

On Thursday afternoon the AWU’s propaganda and organizing work in all places of industry so that trade unionists would be aware of Labor’s policy and ideals.

**Schools**

The convention set up a committee to inaugurate a Labor youth movement and week-end political summer schools with the ultimate objective of establishing a Labor college in SA. The Federal ALP secretary (Mr. Kennelly, MLC), in an address to convention, said that there was no place in the party for those extreme Left and extreme Right who would not abide by decisions of the movement.

The party has got to be a militant Labor Party, otherwise it cannot be the political mouthpiece of the masses,” he said.

State executive officers elected were Messrs. Bardolph, C. R. Cameron, MHR, P. R. Walsh, MP. D. S. Fraser, Hutchins, MP. J. C. Sexton, J. J. Sinnings, Miss P. H. Advertiser press clipping, 25 October 1951 (Courtesy Advertiser)
The Groups 'go it alone'  
At the same time the Groups fought back. Although no longer enjoying the imprimatur of the state branch, they could not be stopped from organising in the unions, whether they were those affiliated, disaffiliated, or unaffiliated with the Party. In late November they organised 'a wind-up rally' in the Trades Hall to which they invited all members and supporters of the Groups, as well as all federal and state parliamentarians. They wanted to challenge Party leaders to explain how the state branch proposed to combat communists in the trade unions. But the latter boycotted the meeting, not one attending. As an act of defiance, the seventy or so Groupers at the meeting formally set up the 'South Australian Industries Committee' whose object was to continue to combat communist influence in the unions and whose members were drawn from the Shop Assistants', Clerks', and Ironworkers'. Over the next three years this Groups' committee several times challenged the Cameron-Toohey regime.

In 1952-53, at a time when the Groups in the eastern states were at the height of their power, those in South Australia launched a final assault on the one major state branch that had denied them a role and status in the Party. In September 1952, Groupers who had just won victories in the Adelaide and Port Pirie-Whyalla branches of the Ironworkers' exultantly declared to the press that the Queensland branch of the Labor Party had asked its federal conference - due to be held in Adelaide in January 1953 - to 'deplore the action of the SA branch in dissolving the groups'. In June 1953 Laurie Short addressed a meeting of the 'South Australian Combined Industries Committee' in Adelaide and launched what was described as 'a scathing attack' on 'certain Labor Party leaders' in the state for refusing to allow Industrial Groups in the state branch. In what could only be a reference to Cameron, he deplored the 'medieval religious bigotry' of some Labor leaders who opposed the Groups and declared, 'It was time these people realised that religious differences paled into insignificance before the differences that existed between democrats and Communist totalitarianism.' Later that month, Husdell, then the secretary of the Adelaide branch of the Ironworkers', charged Cameron, under Labor Party rules, for having publicly declared that 'Communists would never be beaten by unions electing opportunists and bosses' men to office', a statement that this leading Grouper rightly claimed could only have been aimed at elected officials of the FIA.

However, while these attacks did arouse the anger of Labor leaders in South Australia, none reversed the seemingly inexorable march of events. The 1953 ALP federal conference refused to discuss the Queensland motion; Short, as in 1952, was dubbed an 'outsider'; and the charge against Cameron was considered, but dismissed. The Groups in South Australia had been beaten, and were in the future only capable of occasional sniping at those who had frustrated them from the outset. While they remained in control of several sub-branches they were still capable of making their presence felt, most notably during the federal elections in May 1954. When the state branch disendorsed the Labor candidate for the federal seat of Boothby (Godfrey) and replaced him with a nominee of the Left (Matthews), several members of the Fullarton-Glen Osmond, Parkside, and Wayville sub-branches and the Unley electorate committee - which were in the electorate - refused to campaign on Matthews' behalf. Four young Catholics - including Brian Nash, who later became secretary of the DLP in South Australia - were subsequently expelled from the Party. It was later reported that '[b]itterness towards industrial groups or Catholic Action elements' in the Party was 'an underlying factor' in these members' expulsion (possibly the first public reference in South Australia to Catholic Action, of which the Movement was a leading part).

It was not all repression; there were attempts at reconciliation. Most Catholic members of the state branch remained in the Party. Don Dunstan - whose elevation in the Party owed much to Cameron and Toohey, and who in the 1970s
A.L.P. BARS CRITICISM
OF S.A. MOVE
Ban On Industry
Groups Upheld

The biennial Federal conference of the ALP in Adelaide last night refused to consider a motion criticising the action of the SA executive in dissolving ALP industry groups in this State.

It also refused to discuss an item suggesting that more moral and financial support be given to ALP industry groups.

It decided instead that as communism is accepted as the enemy of the working class movement, conference congratulated all sections working within the Labor movement in the persistent fight against communism.

Conference commended to State branches the necessity for full moral support to any section working within the ALP or the trade union movement consistent with the principles, rules and platform of the Federal and State branches of the ALP for the complete elimination of Communist influence.

The motion, which was carried unanimously in less than a minute, was moved by the Queensland Treasurer (Mr. E. J. Walsh).

A SA delegate said later that the decision vindicated the action of the State convention of the ALP in 1951 in disbanding the group because of its beliefs.

Consequently, 'the split' was contained in Norwood.

When the split occurred later, we lost no more than six members from the local sub-branches. All others, devout Catholics and associates of Bob's ... stayed loyal to the Party and became staunch friends and supporters.94

If the damage done by 'the split' could be kept at such a low level in this electorate – Norwood contained a disproportionately high number of Catholics, though Italian rather than Irish – then it is likely to have been minimal in others. Moreover, at least some of those who were dissatisfied eventually applied for readmission to the Party and were accepted. For instance, D.S. Killicoat and J.P. Ryan, two of those expelled over the Boothby issue, returned to the Party as soon as they were able.95 It was significant that in early October 1954 – when Evatt launched his famous attack on the dominant Grouper faction in Victoria, whom he blamed for the Party's defeat at the May 1954 federal elections – his statement was welcomed in the state branch of the Party because, after all, one report went, it had 'led the fight' against right-wing 'elements' for several years.96 Similarly, as the ALP throughout the country began to split into Left and Right – or 'Evatt Labor' and the Groupers – the leader of the federal opposition found his staunchest supporters in the South Australian branch.

At the special meeting of the federal executive held in Melbourne in December 1954, Toohey, one of the branch's two delegates at the meeting,
seconded and strongly supported the motion to recommend that the Party's next federal conference withdraw ALP support from the Groups operating in Victoria, the state in which they had been by far most effective. When the federal conference finally met in March 1955, the six-man South Australian delegation was the only one that remained intact and supported Evatt to a man. After the federal president (Eric Reece) delivered a strongly worded address which included the claim that 'the fight against Communism is not the only internal evil which this movement has to combat', it was Cameron who moved that the report be adopted and who congratulated Reece on his 'excellent address'.

Conclusions

It bears repeating that the defeat of the Groupers in South Australia in the decade immediately after the Second World War was only one of several reasons why the ALP in this state managed to avoid the schism that proved so damaging to branches in all other states in the mid-1950s. As mentioned earlier, too, in their brief explanations of this episode, political scientists and historians have more often referred to such devices as the card vote and the consensus method and to such background factors as the low proportion of Catholics in South Australia and the refusal of the Archbishop Beovich to go on supporting 'The Movement' in 1957-58. To some, the Industrial Groups were only incidental; South Australia's avoidance of a split could be sufficiently explained by any number of other and more important factors. However, this close study of the history of the Industrial Groups in this state – particularly in the years immediately preceding the split (1949-53) – reveals that there were ructions within the state branch. Just as deep but nowhere near as wide as those which occurred in other states, they centred around the status given and the role accorded the Industrial Groups. One of the many reasons why South Australian Labor was different in the post-war period was that those who sought to carry on an anti-communist crusade in the state branch

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Clyde Cameron in the 1940s (Courtesy C. Cameron)
Industrial Groups in South Australia

Endnotes
1 Malcolm Saunders has taught history at Central Queensland University, Rockhampton, for many years and written extensively in the areas of peace and military studies, labour history and biography.
2 Advertiser, 19 March 1955, p.3.
3 Advertiser, 22 March 1955, p.3; 23 March 1955, p.3.
9 Hetherington & Reid, p.42.
15 Advertiser, 30 October 1946, p.9.
16 Advertiser, 10 September 1947, p.3.
21 Reid, Gorton Experiment, p.112.
22 C.R. Cameron, 'James Philip Toohey AM', p.2, an obituary written by Cameron in the aftermath of Toohey's death in August 1992; C.R. Cameron, speech of dedication to Toohey delivered in the Jim Toohey Executive Room, Trades Hall, South Terrace, Adelaide, 10 December 1991, p.11.
25 Industrial Groups were never set up in the two least populated states, Western Australia and Tasmania.
28 Interview with C. Cameron, 10 June 2004.
29 Australian Labor Party (South Australian branch), 'ALP industry groups', Adelaide, 1946. Copy in author's possession.
30 Cameron to Saunders, 9 July 2004, p.3.
32 Advertiser, 28 April 1949, p.3.
33 See, for instance, Advertiser, 13 September 1947, 13 October 1947, p.4.
35 Advertiser, 15 September 1948, p.1.
36 Jennings, p.81.
38 News, 12 December 1951, p.3.
40 Advertiser, 4 June 1948, p.5.
42 Advertiser, 27 April 1949, p.1.
44 Advertiser, 16 June 1954, p.3.
Industrial Groups in South Australia

46 Advertiser, 3 June 1949, p.11.
49 Advertiser, 16 June 1954, p.3.
50 Advertiser, 7 October 1954, p.3.
52 David Shinnick, interview, 22 January 2005.
54 Walsh, pp.173-174; Advertiser, 13 July 1949, p.4.
55 Advertiser, 13 July 1949, p.4.
56 Advertiser, 22 July 1950, p.3.
58 Walsh, pp.190, 196-197.
59 Advertiser, 29 April 1949, p.3; 3 June 1949, p.11; 13 July 1949, p.4; 22 July 1949, p.3. (John Hepworth claims that in 1951 there were eight Industrial Groups in South Australia, but he neither lists them nor cites sources. See J. Hepworth, 'The Movement revisited: a South Australian perspective', Honours thesis, University of Adelaide, 1982, p.105.) The present writer's list is based primarily on a thorough coverage of the Advertiser - and, to a lesser extent, the evening daily News - between 1946 and 1955.
61 Advertiser, 26 August 1950, p.3.
62 Plasterers' Society of South Australia, Minutes, Management committee meeting, 9 February 1948, SRG 723/1/6, State Library of South Australia.
63 Advertiser, 11 January 1946, p.9.
64 Advertiser, 2 November 1948, p.3.
68 Advertiser, 20 July 1951, p.3.
69 Advertiser, 21 July 1951, p.3.
70 Advertiser, 25 July 1951, p.3.
71 Advertiser, 20 July 1951, p.3; 27 July 1951, p.3; 22 August 1951, p.3;
72 Advertiser, 11 September 1951, p.4.
73 Advertiser, 24 October 1951, p.3.
76 See, for instance, Advertiser, 11 September 1951, p.4.
77 News, 19 November 1951, p.5.
78 Advertiser, 14 December 1951, p.1.
80 Advertiser, 23 November 1951, p.3.
81 Advertiser, 12 December 1951, p.3.
82 Advertiser, 3 December 1952, p.3.
83 Advertiser, 9 June 1953, p.3.
84 Advertiser, 20 June 1953, p.3.
85 Curiously, Husdell, a staunch Grouper during the late 1940s and early 1950s, appears to have turned against the Groups in later years and remained within the Labor Party, even becoming a supporter of Evatt (Murray & White, The Ironworkers, p.244).
86 Advertiser, 22 January 1953, p.3.
87 Advertiser, 26 June 1952, p.1; 9 June 1953, p.3.
88 Advertiser, 27 June 1953, p.10; 30 June 1953, p.3; 7 July 1953, p.3; 10 July 1953, p.3.
89 Advertiser, 15 January 1954, p.3.
90 Advertiser, 22 June 1954, p.2.
92 Advertiser, 7 October 1954, p.3.
94 Advertiser, 8 September 1954, p.7; 18 September 1954, p.3; 15 October 1954, p.3.
95 Advertiser, 7 October 1954, p.3.
97 Murray, p.227.