

1968

INTRODUCTION TO DRAFT POLICY ON VICTORIA'S WATER DISTRIBUTION.By
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The enclosed draft was prepared before Bolte made his pre-election statement on April 21st 1964 that irrespective of the findings of the State Parliamentary Public Works Committee on Melbourne's future water supply, his Government would not permit the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works to take any water from north of the Dividing Range and added insult to injury to his own experts on April 24th by admitting that his government had had such an opinion even before setting up the Committee of Enquiry.

The "GUARDIAN" statement by Rex Mortimer of April 30th is based on this draft, and was published to challenge Bolte's unprincipled vote-catching attitude on the issue.

However our policy needs to be examined carefully and critically by all comrades likely to have some knowledge about different aspects of it, with a view to evolving a water-plan for Victoria.

It should be noted that schemes for future water distribution are inseparably connected with plans for future distribution of population i.e. on decentralisation measures, and any views held on this issue would also be helpful, e.g. is the whole of the Thompson's River's waters likely to be required for the LaTrobe Valley?

A few news items which have come to hand since the enclosed draft:

1. BOLTE SPEAKING AT MORSHAM IN SUPPORT OF LIBERAL CANDIDATE FOR SWINGING SEAT OF LOWAN: "23,000 people in small towns would get a reticulated water supply. Under the present formula for assisting town and country water supplies 160 small farms could not expect a supply. But the Government would guarantee that over the next ten years it would give these towns a reticulated supply at a rate not exceeding 3/6." (Sun 12/6/64)
2. "BEAUTIFUL BUT SUSPECT" "The River Seine ... is rapidly becoming little better than a giant sewer. This alarming information has emerged from a current agreement between scientists and experts over the present and future problems of keeping Paris supplied with reasonably pure drinking water ... Professor Jean Boyer, addressing a congress on hygiene at the Pasteur Institute said categorically that most tap water in the capital was unfit for human consumption. The filtering process failed to eliminate dangerous viruses and poisonous substances from the Seine's polluted waters" ... "bottled mineral water for most families is too expensive for every meal..." (AGE article by William Millinship 27/5/64).
3. OPTIMUM SIZE OF MELBOURNE: Mr. Stoneham: "The Metropolitan Board has several times asked the Government for a decision on the optimum size of Melbourne, but Mr. Bolte has always ignored his obligations to produce a plan to divert some industrial activities to provincial centres. By permitting over-concentration of industries in Melbourne, the Government has forced the Board to provide a greatly increased water supply" (AGE, 23/4/64).
4. GIPPSLAND Sir Herbert Hyland: "It is a pity Mr. Bolte had not reached his decision before setting up the costly inquiry. We are now anxious to know what he intends to do about the proposal to divert water from Gippsland". (AGE 23/4/64).
5. GOULBURN VALLEY "There is no doubt that the majority of the farming community here do not favor this conversion" (i.e. to Melbourne) "I would say that Bolte was using this for political purposes. He did not even wait for the Parliamentary Committee's report. He wanted to curry favor against the Labor Party and Country Party. The Liberal Party is standing a local chap against Moss, the deputy leader of the Country Party". (opinion of Party member living in this area 30/4/64).
6. PROPER SURVEY DEMANDED "Mr. H.A. Lenne chairman of the Chamber of Agriculture of Victoria and president of the Victorian Dairy Farmers' Association said he regarded the (i.e. Bolte's) "statement as highly political... both organisations represented are strongly opposed to diversion of water without a proper survey... If such a survey showed that there was ample water for both irrigators and Melbourne's supply then the V.D.A. would 'go along with it'"
 - (ii) Shepparton's Mayor Cr. J.C. Stewart congratulated Mr. Bolte
 - (iii) Mr. J.P. Cornish, president of the Australian Canning Fruitgrowers and a member of the executive of the Northern Victoria Fruitgrowers Association ... "all members of the Association would be pleased .. only common sense that water north of the Divide should be utilised for purposes in that area".

(iv) Mr J.H. Brown secretary of Goulburn Waranga Water Users United League "... executive was pleased .. some 6% of the average annual flow at Goulburn weir is not regulated. In a dry year, all the flow would be regulated and the proposed diversion would have necessitated a reduction in sales quota from 30% to 23½% of water rights ... water rights plus sales to at least 65% are required to enable increased return and off-set increased cost .. any interference with northern water used for irrigation would be disastrous and seriously retard the development of the Goulburn Valley. We are fortunate that a very dry year has not arisen for some time ..."

(v) Mr. J. Daley, president of the Goulburn Valley District Committee of the Australian Primary Producer's Union "... good news ... prosperity would have been lost with the loss of this water".

(vi) All above quotes from "Shepparton News" 24/4/64 which reported that Bolte's statement "received with a mixture of elation and scepticism. Some have refused to comment on what they claim is purely a political action to try and win votes in Northern Victoria".

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DRAFT POLICY ON WATER DISTRIBUTION

WHY IS THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE OF ENQUIRY INTO MELBOURNE'S FUTURE WATER SUPPLY OF IMMEDIATE POLITICAL IMPORTANCE?

The Committee has been sitting for more than a year. It has been thought that its evidence would be completed and a report submitted to the House before the end of May i.e. before the State election.

However it is now believed that this report will not be completed before the State election in June.

Maybe it is so controversial, and so likely to split his own Party that Bolte does not want it to become an election issue.

However, decisions are urgently required because construction of one project or another must soon commence or Melbourne's population within a few years will outstrip its water supply.

It should be emphasised that there are voluminous pages of evidence given to the Committee, and that there are no doubt factors including political factors, not presented to the Committee and that this draft should be regarded as a tentative presentation only of some of the main problems and attitudes.

WHAT ARE THE RIVAL WATER SCHEMES?

The Committee has before it two main contending schemes. One is the master-plan of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) which proposes a 3-stage storage of 3 rivers.

- (a) The Big River by 1969, which flows into the Eildon Reservoir and thence into the Goulburn River.
- (b) Various East Warburton creeks and further damming the Upper Yarra area by 1977,
- (c) The Aberfeldy - Thompson River by 1988 (90% of which flows to waste into the sea).

The MMBW schemes aim to provide water for an estimated population of 5,000,000 by the year 2,000. They are based on the principle of careful preservation of mountain catchment areas, as at present, to give Melbourne one of the purest water supplies in the world.

The extra water provided, capital cost and cost per unit of water (1,000 gallons) for each of the 3 stages is as follows.

			<u>gallons</u>
Big River	£ 4½ million	4d	20 million
East Warburton	£ 21 "	10d	43 "
Thompson	£34 "	8.4d	52 "

The Big River Scheme would divert only 4% of the total water flowing into the Eildon, and there are schemes (Appalock Reservoir, Buffalo River and diversion of Snowy to Murray) for further development which would provide eight times this amount of water for northern farming areas.

The alternate scheme of the State River and Water supply Commission (SR&WSC) is to dam the Yarra at Warrandyte, the Maribyrnong, the Plenty River and Woori Yallock Creek. As the waters of these rivers in their middle and lower reaches are polluted, this involves treatment by chlorination and mixing with purer water. The capital cost of the plant for such treatment and the treatment itself added to the cost of dams, would involve, much dearer water to the consumer (rate increase from 2.4d to 3.8d. in the £1) would require re-treatment of water by a number

of industries that require pure water in their industrial processes, would disrupt present settled areas in the Shire of Eltham, would open the door to the progressive exploitation of the present catchment areas by the timber industry and ruin the lower Yarra below Warrandyte; the inadequate flow creating serious health hazards, stench, and pollution of beaches. Arguments for this scheme include the irrigation interests of farmers, the interests of a possible industrial development of the Latrobe Valley, loss of revenue to the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission by fall in revenue from water passing through Eildon, loss of revenue otherwise obtainable by Forestry Commission by felling timber in catchment areas.

ARE THERE ANY POINTS OF AGREEMENT IN THE RIVAL SCHEMES ?

Yes - the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission say they have no objection to the Boards third stage project for the Thompson River. However, some supporters of the Bard's scheme say, cynically, that the Commission are only supporting this tactically because it is so far in the future (1988) and in the meantime they hope to establish the practice and principle of chlorination treatment for water and breach the Board's practice of preserving mountain catchment areas.

The only possible objection to the Thompson River scheme is from future industrial development of the Latrobe Valley. However, only 2/3rds of the Thompson water is proposed for Melbourne and in any case there are no doubt other Gippsland rivers that could be developed to supply more water for the Latrobe Valley? At the moment 90% of it runs to waste.

WHAT INTERESTS SUPPORT WHICH SCHEME?

Yarra - Maribyrnong Chlorination Treatment Scheme

1. Farmers of Goulburn Valley.

They resist any loss of Eildon weir water as possible future reduction in flow of the Goulburn due to diversion of headwater of Big River to Melbourne. They are organised through the Goulburn Valley Development League.

2. Bolte and (possibly) Country Party Leaders

It is known that Bolte supports it and it is thought possible that McEwan, Federal leader of the Country Party, whose seat covers the Goulburn Valley, may also support it. (Conjecture whether McEwan might have bartered electoral immunity for the Liberal Country Party for Bolte's support?)

3. Australian Paper Manufacturers Want to be allowed into the catchment areas to get cheaper, more accessible timber supplies.

4. Sawmillers - for the same reason.

5. The Forests Commission support access by A.P.M. and Sawmillers.

Query: This attitude derives from increased revenue by sale of timber in lands controlled by Forest Commission. (For example - pine plantations are undertaken by the Forests Commission as a commercial venture).

Query: Periodically the Forests Commission supports access to catchment areas every time the Wood Pulp Agreement Act comes up for renewal?

6. The State Rivers and Water Supply Commission itself which apparently produced the Warrandyte dam scheme very hurriedly in reply to M.M.B.W.'s master water plan which was presented to the Government. (Note; both these Commissions are Government appointed and Government directed and more likely to directly represent monopoly interests than the M.M.B.W., which has some measure of democratic control).

7. The Country Conference of the Labor Party

Annual meeting at Yallourn decided S.R. & W. S.C. should be the supreme authority for water supply with control over M.M.B.W. A.L.P. Country Organiser George Poyser stated "The Premier Mr. Bolte plans to deprive the country of its irrigation systems". "He wants all the water he can get to help fulfil his dreams for Melbourne to hold 5 million people. Mr. Bolte's plan would cause a serious water shortage in country areas especially the Latrobe Valley thus preventing them from benefiting from new industries. The Premier's proposition is fantastic and stupid. It would benefit Melbourne to the detriment of the rest of the State." Conference carried unanimously a decision that Gippsland rivers be harnessed to give security of supply for future industrial, domestic and primary production needs.

Note: Poyser's estimate of Bolte's present position seems incorrect.
Note also policy adopted by Country Conference of the Labor Party does not become Labor Party policy unless adopted by A.L.P. Conference.

8. Timber Workers' Union. (Limited Support).

Support access to catchment areas for timber getting on behalf of members who do not want to migrate e.g. from Healesville or Warburton to Gippsland or elsewhere.

9. The Labor Party (Limited support) Have in the past supported access to catchment areas for timber-getting. (This to be checked).

10. Shire of Upper Yarra (limited support) Oppose the East Warburton (second 1977) stage of the Board's scheme only on grounds that it would involve closing down of all saw-mills in Shire except one, throwing 300 men out of work and in other ways adversely affect Warburton as a township.

11. Potential: Country Interests Generally.

Whatever the interests behind support of the S.R.W.S.C.'s plan (i.e. A.P.M., Country Party squatters, etc) the tendency is for country interests generally to line-up in favour of the S.R. & W.S.C., regardless of traditional class or Party affiliations. Thus already apparently the Country Party, the country members of the Liberal-Country Party, the Country Conference of the A.L.P., the Timber Workers Union and potentially farmers generally, (because of irrigation demands) and country townships such as Latrobe Valley towns (because of potential industrial development).

BIG RIVER - WARBURTON - THOMPSON RIVER SCHEME

1. Residents in Warrandyte - Eltham area

Organised in the Yarra Valley Citizens Committee which called a protest meeting and published a statement putting the MMBW's case and the detrimental effect of the S.R. & W.S.C.'s case by "drowning out" important population areas and ruining the Yarra.

2. Melbourne industries requiring pure water.

Beer, soft-drinks and certain textile industries would need to re-treat any chlorinated-water scheme, and boilers used in other industries could be adversely affected.

3. Melbourne business generally.

Deputy-Premier Rylah and Liberal George Reid are said to support. The then Lord Mayor Sir Maurice Nathan convened a conference of Melbourne Council and Shire representatives to present a common front before the Committee of Enquiry.

4. THE D.L.P. (Limited Support)

Have opposed access to catchment areas by timber interests, possibly in opposition to A.L.P. attitudes.

5. The Communist Party (Limited Support) - have opposed access to catchment areas in opposition to timber interests and in support of retaining pure untreated water supply for Melbourne.

6. Potential Melbourne Interests Generally. Retention of an untreated water supply noted as one of the purest water supplies in the world and also one which would apparently be cheaper than a treated water supply tends to incline all Melbourne citizens whether Liberal or Labor to favor continuation of the MMBW's methods and support of the MMBW's plan.

WHAT SHOULD THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S POLICY BE ?

The Board of Works Master plan is a long-range plan based on developments until the year 2,000. Before then there could well be a Socialist Government in Australia, so that it would seem useful to consider both a long-range policy and an immediate policy.

LONG-RANGE POLICY

1. Scientific Planning.

In a Socialist Australia, there would be a plan for a full and balanced utilisation of the whole of the country's industrial and agricultural potential. Such a deliberate and scientific planned development of resources is quite impossible under capitalism.

The planning of the storage and distribution of water-supplies will become an integral part of such a socialist plan and cater in a balanced way for the needs of domestic use, industrial requirements and irrigation.

For such scientific long-range planning it is not possible to accept on its face value the expert advice of engineers advocating various water schemes, however dedicated to their profession such men may be.

This is so because despite sincere attempts to be objective by many of them they are inevitably pushed and pulled around by the pressure of sectional interests like Australian Paper Manufacturers, the claims of the Government for revenue-producing or cost-saving schemes, not to mention the influence of political parties representing competing sectional pressures, they still approach the problems from the standpoint of present trends of capitalist development.

2. Decentralisation.

For such reasons the Communist Party cannot accept the assumptions of the Board of Works, that plans must be adopted on the basis of a population for Melbourne of 5,000,000 by the year 2,000.

The Communist Party supports decentralisation of industry and population, and consequently development of water schemes to serve newly-established towns.

In socialist countries it is recognised that big cities can become too big and a limit to their size is planned. This factor is even more important for Australian capital cities because the Australian preference for individual home-ownership creates a "suburban sprawl" which vastly increases costs of all services and complicates transport and traffic problems. Consequently an Australian-style big city can become too big long before say European-style big cities based predominantly on flats.

Moreover, in Australia especially, the commercial interests of Melbourne and Sydney have had sufficient influence over Governments to smother the development of industry and transport in the countryside, or for other possible ports, in order to steer all commodities possible through the capital city.

As the Labor Party also supports decentralisation, it should be possible to develop common perspectives, not based on the interests of the big commercial and industrial monopolies based in the cities but on the needs of the Victorian people.

Such perspectives should include proposed limits for Melbourne's development, and planned expansion of other Victorian provincial centres. Whilst the Communist Party believes that a thoroughgoing scheme could only be achieved under socialism, it also believes that moves in this direction should be possible under capitalism under a progressive Labor Government and it could help to unite the people around any such campaign. The Communist Party approves, for example, the decision of the Labor Party conference that Gippsland rivers be harnessed to give security of water supply for future industrial and primary production needs of the Latrobe Valley.

3. Irrigation Any plan for decentralisation of industry and population must include also a plan for development of a better deal for the farmers, which includes far more attention to soil erosion, flood prevention, protection of forests, re-forestation of mountain catchments, fertilisers, and more and improved irrigation schemes.

The Communist Party stands for the expansion of water supplies including supplies of artesian water, in areas capable of improving farming and a big improvement in the methods of distribution of water to such areas.

It approves of the decision of the recent Country Conference of the Labor Party suggesting that pipes (maybe plastic pipes) should be used to replace open-channel irrigation systems which often wasted up to 90% of the water entering the channels.

4. Centralised Water Authority.

For all such planning of water-development on a State-wide basis it is clear that there should be a centralised authority. The Labor Party Country Conference advocate this and the Communist Party supports this principle and the principle that such a central body must have authority over the multitude of separate water-authorities now attached to Shire, town or city councils boards or trusts throughout the State.

However the Communist Party cannot agree with the Labor Party Country Conference that this authority should be the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission because this authority, as at present constituted gives every appearance of being an undemocratic body representing sectional interests.

The Communist Party proposes that the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, of which the commissioners consist of delegates elected from municipal councils, should be expanded, for the purposes of water supply problems, to include an equal number of democratically-elected representatives from country, shires, and towns, to constitute a central water-planning committee and that the services of all engineers and technical experts of the Melbourne Board of Works, the State River and Water Supply Commission and provincial and country trusts and boards, be made available as required by such central water authority.

IMMEDIATE POLICY

5. Improved water supplies to country areas.

The Communist Party is opposed to any scheme, even a stop-gap one, based on an attitude that city interests are more important than country interests, or that country interests are more important than city interests.

As country interests, despite electorates weighted in their favor, are a minority interest compared to Melbourne, it is important that schemes to improve their position should be implemented simultaneously or even before schemes to serve the Metropolitan area.

The Communist Party therefore suggests construction such as that planned for the Eppalock Dam, the projected Buffalo River and the diversion of the Snowy into the Murray for northern Victoria and other suitable country projects, such as harnessing the Gippsland rivers and piping Mallee irrigation water, be commenced or expedited at once.

The Communist party stands for the interests of the industrial and white collar workers and the working farmers and considers that the main threat to both workers and farmers are the big city-based monopolies which are more interested in quick profits from an artificial and short-lived "boom" in Melbourne's industry than they are in the living standards of either farmers or workers, including the "water interests" of both.

6. Untreated water for Domestic Consumption Wherever Possible.

The method of mountain catchments carefully preserved have favored Melbourne and some other Victorian towns with a water of high purity. The Communist Party stands for a continuation of such methods for as long as possible.

It is clear that there are adequate mountain catchment areas near enough to Melbourne to make it possible, even on present population trends to supply Melbourne with untreated water without damaging the water-interests of the country.

THE Communist Party therefore opposes the plan for a dam on the Yarra at Warrandyte and the proposed chlorination treatment for Melbourne's water supply.

The Communist Party believes that the big paper monopoly A.P.M. Ltd., and sawmilling interests are backing the scheme for chlorinating water, not in the interests of Melbourne's public or because they have any real concern for farmers' interests, but because they want access to the timber in the catchment areas to give them cheaper timber and bigger profits.

The Communist Party believes that spokesmen for the Forestry Commission and the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission either support the chlorination scheme from the viewpoint of narrow departmental consideration of revenue, or because they represent the paper-pulp and sawmilling businesses, or the big squatters whose attitude is one of "grab everything you can at no matter what cost to others."

The Forestry Commission would gain by sale of timber in the catchment areas to A.P.M. or the mills, and the State Rivers and Water supply would lose \$30,000 per year revenue if only 4% of the water flowing into the Sildon Reservoir were to be diverted to Melbourne.

None of these narrow interests of the big monopolies, nor of Government Departments that tend to represent them, should be allowed to set aside the untreated supply of pure water to Melbourne.

7. Adopt the scheme that minimises disruption to personal lives of the people and to established industries.

The Yarra Warrandyte dam scheme would ruin the Yarra for residential and recreational purposes, it would sever the Healesville railway line and main roads, it would affect the prosperity of Lilydale and Healesville, it would "drown out" Pantom Hills, Warrandyte and St. Andrews and halt development in the north riding of Eltham. It would possibly also create a health hazard to Melbourne providing an inadequate flow in the lower Yarra to cope with sullage and other polluted drain waters.

The Big River scheme is opposed by farmers in the Goulburn Valley in the belief that their water needs will suffer.

The Communist Party therefore suggests that either the Aberfeldy-Thompson Scheme or some alternate scheme providing minimum inconvenience to either country or city people be immediately commenced.

This would provide the most water of the 3-stage scheme proposed by the M.M.B.W., and would give an adequate "breathing-space" to thrash out a long-term water plan and ensure that sectional interests would not snatch a hasty victory in a situation of urgency.

It is not necessary that 2/3rds of the Thompson water be diverted to Melbourne, but the proportion to be channelled to Melbourne and the proportion to the Latrobe Valley could be determined later when the possible development of both Melbourne and the Latrobe Valley could be better assessed.

This could also provide quite valuable new sources of water to farmers in the Latrobe Valley who do not now benefit at all from this river.

8. Fix the price of water to the Consumer.

The Communist Party demands that the price of water to the country or city consumer should not be increased, on the excuse of the capital costs of any water-construction scheme, and demand, if necessary a subsidy from Federal Finance to the State of Victoria to meet such costs, and fix such prices.

No doubt the Board of Works might object to tackling the Thompson River or some equivalent scheme first in order because it is more expensive than the Big River or East Warburton Scheme.

The health of the people, the prosperity of the farmers, the pure water supply for Melbourne should not be thrown into jeopardy by such financial considerations. These are matters of national development which should be met by Federal revenue and not by the hapless ratepayer.