

Study the table carefully and answer the questions that follow. The figures provided can be found on the Parliament of Australia website via www.cambridge.edu.au/historynsw10weblinks.

- 1 Which states voted 'yes' and which states voted 'no'?
- 2 Which states voted most strongly to ban the Communist Party?
- 3 Which states voted most strongly not to ban the Communist Party?
- 4 Comment on the closeness of the national vote, and the votes in Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia. What do the figures suggest about Australian public opinion at the time?
- 5 Did voting 'no' imply support for communism? Give reasons for your answer.

HISTORICAL FACT

One of the ironies of Robert Menzies' time in government came out of the 1961 election. The result of the election was extremely close. The Liberals ended up with a majority of one seat. (They actually had a two-seat majority but having to provide the 'speaker of the house' reduced this to one). The final seat decided in the election was Moreton (a Brisbane constituency). The Liberal candidate Jim Killen won by only 130 votes after receiving 93 preference votes from the Communist candidate. Menzies had warned against the dangers of communism for years, yet it could be argued that in 1961 it was the Communist Party that kept him in power!



The Petrov Affair

During the early years of the Cold War, there was a series of high profile espionage cases in both the United States and Britain. High-level diplomats and scientists like Donald Maclean and Karl Fuchs had been discovered spying for the Soviet Union. Historians believe that Soviet spies such as these did much to make it possible for the Soviet Union to develop the atomic bomb as quickly as it did. The 'spy' would become one of the most popular literary and cinematic figures of the Cold War era.

Australia had its own celebrated spy case in 1954, the Petrov Affair. In February 1954, the Third Secretary at the Soviet Embassy in Canberra, Vladimir Petrov, **defected** to Australia and asked for **political asylum**. Petrov had been working for the KGB and, after his security chief had been shot, feared for his safety back in the Soviet Union. On 3 April, the government granted Petrov asylum and ten days later Prime Minister Menzies announced Petrov's defection to parliament. Menzies also called for a

defect to switch one's allegiance from one's own country to another

political asylum the protection given to a defector when he or she defects

Some spies managed to achieve positions of prestige in the countries against whom they spied. One of these was Anthony Blunt, who spied for the Soviet Union. He attended Cambridge University, worked for MI5, was made Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures and in 1956 was actually knighted. He was found out in 1964 but the government kept the story quiet to avoid a scandal. His treachery was finally announced publicly in 1979.

Royal Commission to investigate possible Soviet spying in Australia and in particular the names mentioned in documents that Petrov had handed to Australian intelligence services.

Petrov's defection was given a very dramatic twist on 19 April. At Sydney's Mascot Airport, Petrov's wife, Evdokia, was dragged to a Moscow-bound aircraft by several burly Soviet agents. Allegedly, Mrs Petrov had not been told of her husband's plans to defect. A large crowd protested against this action and demonstrators even

managed to get on the tarmac next to the plane as Mrs Petrov was being bundled on board. The view of most people was that she was not leaving of her own free will and that she was clearly in distress. (As she was dragged to the aircraft, Mrs Petrov lost her shoe. It can be seen in the Petrov exhibition at the Museum of Australian Democracy in Canberra.) With her husband having defected, there were great fears for what might happen to her once she was back in the Soviet Union.

In the 1950s, planes had to refuel at Darwin airport on the way to Europe. Apparently Mrs Petrov managed to get word to a stewardess that she was not leaving willingly. By the time the plane landed at Darwin airport, there were Federal Police waiting. On **ASIO** orders they boarded the plane, disarmed the Soviet agents and freed Mrs Petrov. Mrs Petrov was allowed to speak to her husband and soon after she also asked for political asylum. The Soviet agents were allowed to leave Australia, minus their guns.

For Menzies, the Petrov Affair was a godsend. He had been warning about the dangers of communism for years, and here was clear evidence of the communist danger. In April 1954, Menzies called a federal election. The Royal Commission began its work on 17 May and on 29 May Menzies won the election, though his Liberal-Country Party coalition lost five seats. In October 1955, the Royal Commission concluded that there was no Soviet spy ring in Australia. In December 1955, Menzies called and won another election, this time gaining eleven seats.

ASIO Australian Security Intelligence Organisation is Australia's internal intelligence body



Source 6.16 Vladimir Petrov was Russia's top spy in Australia before his defection



Source 6.17 Evdokia Petrov, wife of Soviet defector Vladimir Petrov, is bundled by Russian 'couriers' onto a plane at Mascot Airport, Sydney (News Ltd)

Activity 6.3

Below is a mixed-up list of the events surrounding the Petrov Affair. Rearrange them in the correct chronological order.

Menzies wins the 1954 election

Mrs Petrov dragged on to a plane

Menzies calls an election in 1954

Mrs Petrov freed at Darwin

Vladimir Petrov granted asylum

Vladimir Petrov defects

Menzies calls a Royal Commission

The Royal Commission presents its report

Menzies wins the 1955 election

The impact of the Petrov Affair

Mr and Mrs Petrov soon faded into the background and lived in Australia in relative obscurity for the rest of their lives. However, the political impact of the

Petrov Affair was long-lasting. Labor leader 'Doc' Evatt defended certain members of his staff who were accused of having Soviet links. He even sent a telegram to the Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov asking him if there was a Soviet spy ring in Australia. Molotov, not surprisingly, replied 'no'.

HISTORICAL
FACT

Once the excitement of their defections had died down, Vladimir and Evdokia Petrov spent the rest of their lives under the assumed names of Sven and Maria Anna Allyson. They lived in the Melbourne suburb of East Bentleigh. Vladimir Petrov died in 1991; Evdokia in July 2002.

When Evatt announced this in parliament, the chamber burst into laughter. These actions and other erratic behaviour made Evatt unpopular with the more conservative members of the Labor Party. At the same time, anti-communist Catholic party members and Bob Santamaria's 'The Movement' sought to limit communist influence in the Labor Party and the trade unions.

Things came to a head at the Labor Party Conference in Hobart in March 1955. The party split, with the conservative, Catholic members

defecting and going on eventually to form the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) in 1957. This was a crucial development for Australian political life. Though the DLP only ever had a few MPs elected and at best had four senators, it always gave its 'preferences' in elections to Menzies' Liberal Party. In the Senate, it sometimes held the balance of power and invariably supported the Liberals. Such was the influence of the DLP that the Labor Party would not again gain power at the federal level until 1972.

Activity 6.4

- 1 Recall who Evatt and Santamaria were.
- 2 Discuss what fears men like Santamaria had about the Labor Party.
- 3 Explain why Evatt's telegram to Molotov was such a bad idea.
- 4 Recount what happened to the Labor Party in 1955.
- 5 Analyse how influential the DLP was in the 1950s and 1960s.

