

WANT
FOR ATTEMPTED
OF AUSTRALIAN

MENACE

— A film by John Hughes.

The Federal Election of December 1949 saw R.G. Menzies emerge from political failure in the '40's' to become the Prime Minister of the newly elected L.C.P. Coalition. It was an era when the Communist Party of Australia (C.P.A.) was to come under the gravest attack to its existence.

The C.P.A. emerged out of the Second World War with a membership of 23,000; the largest in all its history. Its influence in the state union movement accompanied this rise. In the period 1946-8 the Communist-led trade unions, through a series of strikes, gained the 40 hour week and won considerable wage increases. Beyond these economic objectives, the Party saw its role as "exposing the role of the capitalist state, the Labor Party and reformist leaders and . . . opening the way to the passing of the masses over to the side of the Communist Party". However, 1949 marked a decline in the Party's influence.

It was at this time that Menzies set about his all-out attempt to destroy the C.P.A. (and all progressive forces for that matter) through the Communist Party Dissolution Bill. The film **MENACE** sets out to expose this attempt. Meandering through paper clippings and old Movietone News shorts, and laden with recollections of people directly involved, this film documents the 'attempted murder of Australian democracy'. At least, that is the stated aim of the film. However, it goes much further than that, and in doing so spreads itself a little too thin.

It touches upon the large area of the Australian Left from the Depression through to the present day. Granted, any particular area of examination cannot be viewed in isolation. However, the reasons why people involved

themselves in left politics, the nature of Stalinism and the emergence in the sixties of new views in left activity (theoretical & practical), could be topics of films unto themselves. The 'attempted murder of Australian democracy' in the 1950's and the ominous threats to 'democracy' now, cannot be summed up by presenting the situation then, and then crossing to May Day 1976. The film tries to do this, but in doing so it ignores the transformations on the left that have occurred between then and now. You might say it only takes a November 11th Coup to put democracy back twenty years; but those twenty years have repudiated Stalinism and brought forth new forms of left and democratic thinking. Dare I say the left (i.e. the viable Left?) is more democratic now even if the society isn't.

Overall, the film presents some extremely interesting material especially the personal recollections of individuals involved (these are some of the people who courageously stood up for democracy and who suffered personally for doing so). There could have been a better handling of these recollection sequences; possibly by interposing a little more commentary, news cuttings and Movietone clips. Apart from this, these statements stand as valuable historical insights into the period. Finally it is admirable that at last some one has got around to making an Australian political film. (Hopefully in the future there will be more).

I'd say the **MENACE** is well worth seeing.

** R. Dixon to May 1948 C.P.A. Congress. (Full reference available at Lot's).