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“In his humiliation justice was denied him”

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LANDMARKS IN AUSTRALIAN POLITICS: No. 1
Dr. Evatt's address to the Federal Executive
of the ALP on 27th October 1954.

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The events of 1954 are crucial to an understanding of Australian politics. In October 1954, Dr. Evatt exposed the activities of a Catholic Action group, which was endeavouring to subvert and control the Australian Labor Party from within. On 27<sup>th</sup> October 1954, at Canberra, Dr. Evatt addressed the Federal Executive of the ALP. He stated that this Catholic Action group was in league with Menzies and the Australian newspaper groups, and that it took its orders from B.A. Santamaria.

Dr Evatt pointed out that the Santamaria group had 15 months foreknowledge of Petrov's defection.

Here is a summary of the main points of Evatt's speech:

**Propositions concerning the Santamaria group**

1. Meetings of the parliamentary Labor party were being used systematically in 1954 as a forum for attacks on Evatt by an organised group within the ALP,
2. False reports of events at the meetings were being fed to the anti-Labor press by this group,
3. The reports were a deliberate attempt to subvert the leadership of the party by systematic defamation,
4. The groups were motivated by “cold and malevolent treachery”,
5. The persons participating in this plan were acting in strict accord with a prior understanding,
6. The attitude of the group was expressed from week to week in the Melbourne paper News weekly,
7. The leader of the group of which News weekly was the organ, was B.A. Santamaria,
8. The parliamentarians prominent in espousing the cause of the Movement belonged to a small minority group located particularly in the state of Victoria. They included Messrs. Keon, Mullens, and W.M. Bourke,
9. These were members who in 1951, failed to oppose Menzies' attacks upon Civil Liberties and paraded their abstention from Labor's referendum campaign in September of that year, to the embarrassment of the ALP,

10. The activities of the group were supported by the Victorian State Executive of the time: all who opposed this Executive were labelled “Comms”,
11. The Movement was not limited to Victoria: it was an organised faction infiltrating Labor Leagues and trade unions in an attempt to gain domination of the whole party.

### **Propositions concerning the Petrov conspiracy:**

12. the defection of Vladimir Petrov from the Russian Embassy in April 1954, was carefully organised and timed to coincide with the May 1955 federal election,
13. Menzies withheld vital information and misled parliament and the Australian people in his original statement announcing Petrov’s defection,
14. News weekly the organ of Santamaria’s Movement, had shown an awareness of Petrov’s impending defection 15 months before it took place,
15. The Australian press glamorised the Petrovs, but Evatt was debarred from the Royal Commission because of his statements over Madame Ollier,
16. When the facts of the Petrov affair were finally known, it would rank in history as an equivalent of the notorious Zinovieff letter of 1924, and of the use made by the Hitler regime of the Reichstag fire of 1933,
17. Evatt’s activities in establishing evidence at the Royal Commission which completely destroyed Menzies’ original statements about Petrov, were bitterly attacked by a member of the Santamaria group within the ALP.

### **Subsequent events:**

All of Evatt's propositions were confirmed by subsequent events. Although it was denied at the time that the church was involved with Santamaria, it was admitted much later that Archbishop Mannix and the Roman hierarchy had supported the movement from the time of its inception in 1941. But in 1953, while Australians remained unaware of the involvement of the church with Santamaria, the 33 bishops of the hierarchy issued a pastoral protesting the ejection of the Santamaria group from the ALP.

### **Petrov:**

The Petrov conspiracy proved to be all that Evatt said it was. In 1967 the conspirators endeavoured to protect themselves by issuing a “D” notice forbidding any reference to Petrov by press, radio and television services. The “D” notice was challenged in parliament. In 1954 Evatt needed not only to win the election but to win it by a majority of more than 14 seats. For, had Evatt become Prime Minister, the conspiracy was so planned as to provide the Santamaria group with an apparently legitimate reason for overthrowing Evatt, if necessary by their defection from the ALP, within 2 months of the 1954 election. This diabolical action did not eventuate because Menzies remained as Prime Minister. The purpose of the Petrov Conspiracy was to ensure the implementation by Australia of a foreign policy acceptable to the Roman Church, particularly in Vietnam.

NOTE:

The Santamaria group now calls itself the Democratic Labor Party.