

**Today the Students, Tomorrow the Workers!  
Radical Student Politics and  
the Australian Labour Movement 1960-1972**

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**PhD**

**1999**

### CERTIFICATE

I certify that this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me and that any help that I have received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lani Russell', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lani Russell

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*Abstract*

This thesis provides a national overview of Australian student politics between 1960 and 1972. It explores firstly the ways in which student movements have been understood theoretically, especially the idea of student protest as an early "new social movement". To establish context, I discuss structural and cultural changes in the tertiary education system during the 1950s and 1960s and some relevant aspects of the politics of the postwar boom. Several chapters are then devoted to an analytical narrative chronicling the rise of student protest from 1960 onwards. They explore the rise of student protest in opposition to racism in the early 1960s and the politics of the groups involved; then the particular role of students in the development of the anti-Vietnam war movement and other social movements which arose in this period. The growth of student radicalism over particular on-campus issues is also canvassed. The second part of the thesis focuses particularly on the relationship between the student movement and the labour movement. The course and nature of the interaction between radical students and the Labor Party and Communist Party is analysed. The politics of radical students is then discussed, in relation especially to Maoism, Trotskyism, Humanism, Self-Management and the New Left, with particular emphasis on ideas about the relationship between students and the working class. Some key episodes of student/worker cooperation are then examined, and the final chapter outlines the rise of a new, more militant trade union movement over the course of this period. The conclusion discusses the implications of this thesis for social movement theory and how the "sixties" is remembered today.

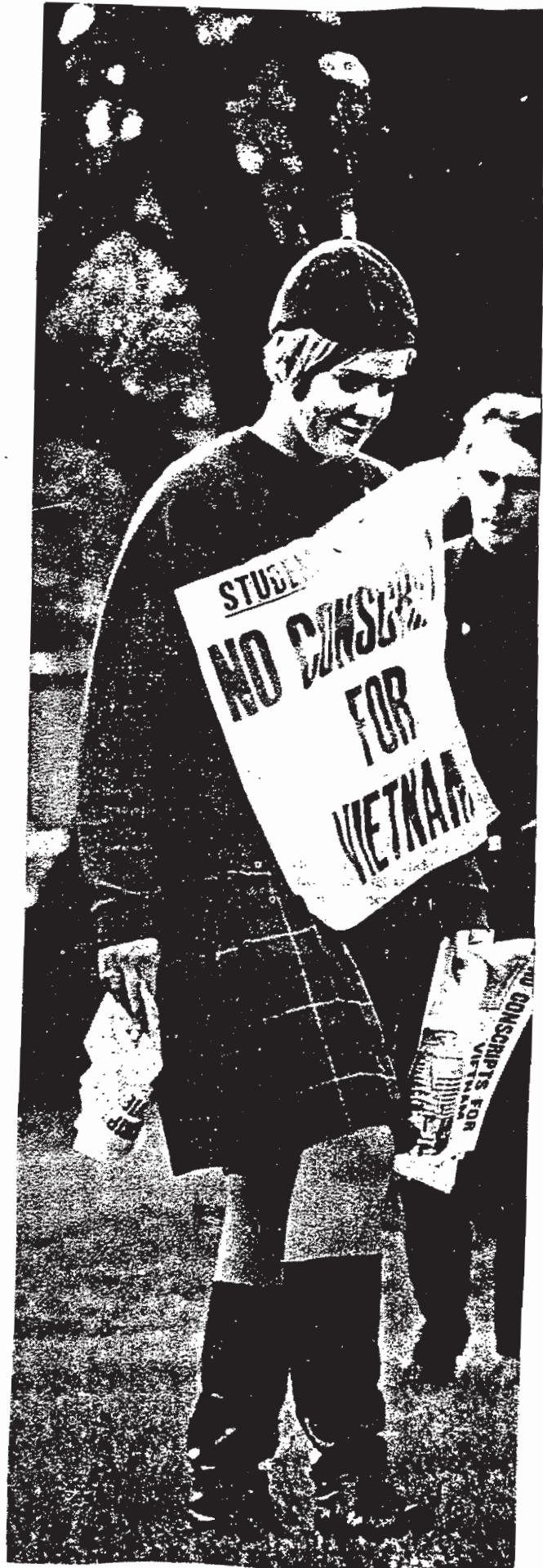
## Abbreviations

AAM	Anti-Apartheid Movement
ABSCHOL	NUAUS support section for Aboriginal students
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
AICD	Association for International Co-operation and Disarmament (NSW)
ALF	Action for Love and Freedom
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ANL	Australian National Line
ANU	Australian National University
ARU	Australian Railway Union
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
ASLF	Australian Student Labor Federation
AUC	Australian Universities Commission
AUS	Australian Union of Students
AVCC	Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee
BIT	Bendigo Institute of Technology
BLF	Builders Labourers Federation
BWIU	Building Workers Industrial Union
CAE	College of Advanced Education
CAMP	Campaign Against Moral Persecution
CICD	Congress for International Co-operation and Disarmament (Vic)
CMF	Campus Military Force
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
CPA(M-L)	Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist)
CSM	Contemporary Social Movement
CUF	Campaign for University Freedom
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
DLP	Democratic Labor Party
DRM	Draft Resistance Movement
DRU	Draft Resisters' Union
EU	Evangelical Union
EYL	Eureka Youth League



FCAATSI	Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders
FMWU	Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union
GLF	Gay Liberation Front
MAS	Monash Association of Students
MLC	Monash Labor Club/Member of the Legislative Council
MULC	Melbourne University Labor Club
MUTA	Monash University Tiddlywinks Association
NCC	National Civic Council
NLF	National Liberation Front (Vietnam)
NMC	New Middle Class
NSM	New Social Movement
NUAUS	National Union of Australian University Students
PAC	Public Affairs Committee (Monash University)
RAR	Royal Australian Regiment
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
RSA	Revolutionary Socialist Alliance
RSSA	Revolutionary Socialist Student Alliance
SA	Student Action
SAFA	Student Action for Aborigines
SARS	Student Action for the Rights of Students
SCM	Student Christian Movement
SDA	Students for Democratic Action
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society
SHAC	Socialist Humanist Action Centre
SLL	Socialist Labor League
SOS	Save Our Sons
SMG	Self-Management Group
SPA	Socialist Party of Australia
SRC	Student Representative Council
US	United States
SWAG	Socialist Workers Action Group
SWP	Socialist Workers Party
SYA	Socialist Youth Alliance
TLC	Trades and Labour Council
TUDC	Trade Union Defence Committee
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNSW	University of New South Wales

UQ	University of Queensland
UWA	University of Western Australia
VAC	Vietnam Action Campaign
VCE	Victorian Central Executive (ALP)
VDC	Vietnam Day Committee
VMC	Vietnam Moratorium Committee
WAP	White Australia Policy
WL	Women's Liberation
WWF	Waterside Workers Federation
WSA	Worker Student Alliance
YCAC	Youth Campaign against Conscription
YCL	Young Communist League
YLA	Young Labor Association
YSL	Young Socialist League



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## *Introduction*

The following chapters investigate the course of student radicalism in Australia between 1960 and 1972, with the specific aim of establishing the nature and circumstances of relations between radical students and workers in this period. In writing this thesis, I have taken as my model those broad-ranging works of social history associated with writers connected with, for example, the British Social History workshops of the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> I have given particular attention to synthesising the best of prior research pertaining to my subject alongside original research of my own. My aim has been to write a history "from below," focusing on student and worker movements while relying on secondary sources for contextual analysis of government policy.<sup>2</sup>

I have sought not to write a history of each and every campus or trade union movement, but to capture the character and dynamic of those movements as a whole. To bring depth and specificity to my subject, I have focused on the relationship between radical student protest and radical politics generally; and in particular, between students and the radical wing of the Australian labour movement. It is my hypothesis that our understanding of the nature and course of student protest in Australia in the 1960s is enhanced by this approach. My research focuses on events in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, with some discussion of the situation in Adelaide, but refers to other centres only in passing. Given the focus on radicalism, I have chosen to say little about the politics and activities of conservative student groups and the political mobilisations of students of technical colleges, Colleges of Advanced Education or high schools, which are all substantial topics in their own right.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Samuel (ed.), *People's History and Socialist Theory*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> Based on official archives unavailable to other researchers, the recently published Official History of the Vietnam war is an essential though apologetic source on this aspect of the period (P. Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997).

My interest in this topic arises from my own involvement in radical and student politics in Brisbane in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As a student socialist, I saw myself as one of a small group of activists attempting to keep alive a tradition of radicalism on campus. I was particularly conscious of our frequent reliance for our "collective memory" on a small number of individuals who acquired their political training in the late sixties and early seventies. Most of these individuals were no longer students, though still active in radical politics. It was because of their involvement, and the involvement of their protégés, either in organised socialist groups or in looser, more informal groupings, that we were aware of radical university traditions such as "no cops on campus". Since researching this thesis I have become even more aware of how our ideas and modes of action in campus politics were inherited from the "Sixties" generation.

Yet history embodied in individuals is a fragile commodity at a time when radicalism is under threat. As a socialist I am conscious of the ways in which written history has provided the trade union movement with reference points against which to assess our progress, or regression, as the case may be. There is very little equivalent written history of the Australian student movement. Frequently we found ourselves fighting battles that we knew had been fought before but whose history could not be found in any published source. Further, it was not only traditions of activism which were being lost, but traditions of student activism which also prioritised a self-conscious association with labour movement organisations and mobilisations.

The first political demonstration I attended was a protest on August 20, 1985, outside the Queensland Parliament. The demonstration was in defence of 990 sacked electricity workers and was violently dispersed by Queensland police. Some years later I chose this dispute as the topic of my History Honours thesis. In my research on the South East Queensland Electricity

Board (SEQEB) dispute, I was impressed by the importance for the outcome of that dispute of an extra-parliamentary milieu. That milieu was not only sustained by the trade union movement but could be seen as representing the residue of the 1960s student and radical movements. Individuals and practices from that era were still associated in many ways with university campuses through radical staff members; the campus-based alternative radio station; individual ex-students still active in radical politics; and socialist groups trying to agitate and recruit on the campus. In 1991, as a member of staff at the University of Queensland (UQ), I participated in the group UQ Staff Against the Gulf War, in which several prominent personalities from that earlier period played a leading role.

The process by which the individual memories of participants in the movements of the 1960s becomes part of collective memory is an ongoing one. It is a ceaseless, contested process, with different social and political groups favouring particular aspects, experiences and events of the period in their attempts to frame its history in particular ways.<sup>3</sup> Even as "the Sixties" was occurring, this process of selection was already underway. As Ken Mansell has noted, experiences and events not considered newsworthy tend to be left unrecorded.<sup>4</sup> Those which are recorded may be left to gather dust because historians do not consider them to be important.

My own dusting of secondary sources revealed that prior to the late 1960s, material referring to Australian student activism is scarce, being restricted mainly to references in autobiographies<sup>5</sup> or texts about the Left in general.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See K. Darian-Smith and P. Hamilton (eds), *Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> K. Mansell, *The Yeast is Red*, MA thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, 1994, p 10.

<sup>5</sup> R. Milliss, *Serpent's Tooth*, (Ringwood: Penguin, 1984); V. Buckley, *Cutting Green Hay: Friendships, Movements and Cultural Conflicts in Australia's Great Decades*, (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> R.A. Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists: Communism and the Australian Labour Movement 1920-1955* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1985); A. Barcan, *The Socialist Left in Australia, 1949-1959* (Sydney: Occasional Monographs 2, 1960); P. O'Brien, *The Saviours: An*

Most works specifically devoted to students were written during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the period in Australia which has been remembered as our "Sixties". Here, distinctions between primary and secondary source material become problematic, not only because of the proximity of these events. Student activists are extremely self-reflexive, and could be said to have begun to write their history even as they were making it. Moreover, they did not stop writing it: the field today is still dominated by scholars who are former participants in the movement.

Barry York, for example, a leading La Trobe activist jailed in 1972, is the author of one of only two published books devoted to student radicalism in Australia. Though his book, *Student Revolt! La Trobe University 1967-73* (1989), does address questions of the broader sociological base and context of Australian student radicalism, it nonetheless focuses primarily on events at one university.<sup>7</sup> The same holds true of the earlier publication *It is Right to Rebel* (1972), a book written by a group of Maoist activists which describes in colourful detail the course of events at Monash.<sup>8</sup> The strength of both books, especially of *It is Right to Rebel*, is in evoking the vitality, energy and anger with which the most militant wing of the movement developed. A considerable number of unpublished postgraduate theses exist which also provide accounts of student radicalism on specific campuses<sup>9</sup> and, in one

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*Intellectual History of the Left in Australia*, (Richmond: Primary Education Publishing, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> B. York, *Student Revolt! La Trobe University 1967-73*, (Campbell: Nicholas Press, 1989). See also "Sources of Student Dissent: La Trobe University, 1967-72," *Vestes*, 7:1, 1984, pp 21-31, and *Sources of Student Unrest in Australia with Particular Reference to La Trobe University, 1967-73*, MA, University of Sydney, 1983.

<sup>8</sup> M. Hyde *et al*, *It is Right to Rebel*, (Marrickville: Free Association Press, 1972).

<sup>9</sup> These include: A. Draper, *Adelaide Student Radicals: Then and Now, 1968-80*, BA Hons, Adelaide University, 1980; M. Henry, *La Trobe: A Study of the Idea of a University*, MA, La Trobe University, 1971; N. Marshall, *La Trobe University: The Vision and the Reality*, MA, La Trobe University, 1969; J. Ockenden, *Anti-War Movement and the Student Revolt at Monash: an Examination of Contending Ideologies 1967-70*, BA Hons, Monash University, 1985; B. Pola, *Perspectives on the Australian Radical Student Left Movement 1966-1975*, PhD, School of Education, La Trobe University, 1988 (mainly about La Trobe University); C. Rootes, *Australian Student Radicals: the Nature and Origin of Dissent*, BA Hons, Government Department, University of Queensland, 1969 (mainly about the University of Queensland); C. Walker, *The Protestors on Campus: Opposition to the Vietnam War and National Service Act*

case, an off-campus centre for student radicals.<sup>10</sup>

More general texts also exist. They include an article by C.A. Rootes<sup>11</sup> based on interviews with over 100 former participants, which provides a rare and useful attempt to survey the organisational development of the different campus groups nationally. York has written an article about police violence and campus radicalism.<sup>12</sup> Students are also mentioned in literature about the intellectual history of the period, since, as Altman has noted, the Australian New Left was largely, though not exclusively, based on the student movement.<sup>13</sup> Student radicalism has also been discussed in the contexts of youth culture<sup>14</sup> and of the women's movement.<sup>15</sup> Two important works, which will soon supplement this literature specifically devoted to student protest, are Ann Curthoys' history of the Australian "Freedom Ride" in New South Wales and Ken Mansell's PhD on student radicalism in Australia (both forthcoming).

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*in the Three Sydney Universities, 1968-1972*, BA Hons, Macquarie University, 1994; B. York, *Sources of Student Unrest in Australia with Particular Reference to La Trobe University, 1967-73*, MA, University of Sydney, 1983.

<sup>10</sup> K. Mansell's thesis, *op cit*, is about the Bakery, a Melbourne centre for Maoist students from Monash and La Trobe universities.

<sup>11</sup> C.A. Rootes, "The Development of Radical Student Movements and Their Sequelae," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 3:2, 1988, pp 173-186. J. Walter's thesis, *The Perception of Conflict: Profiles from Student Politics*, BA Hons, La Trobe University, 1974, is also a general text, dated, but with useful historical background.

<sup>12</sup> B. York, "Police, Students and Dissent: Melbourne, 1966-1972," *Journal of Australian Studies*, 1984, pp 58-77.

<sup>13</sup> D. Altman, "The Personal is the Political: Social Movements and Cultural Change," in *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, ed. B. Head and J. Walter, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), p 309. See especially R. Gordon (ed.), *The Australian New Left. Critical Essays and Strategy*, (Melbourne: William Heinemann Australia, 1970); R. Cahill, *Notes on the New Left in Australia*, (Sydney: Australian Marxist Research Foundation, 1969).

<sup>14</sup> B. York, "Power to the Young," in V. Burgmann and J. Lee (eds), *Staining the Wattle: a People's History of Australia since 1788*, (Fitzroy: McPhee Gribble Publications, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> A. Curthoys, "Doing it for Themselves" in K. Saunders and R. Evans (eds), *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, (Sydney: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1992).



Analysis of the student protest movement overlaps, however, with a much more substantial body of literature pertaining to the anti-Vietnam War movement in this period. From the 1970s to the early 1980s, a number of authors, again often ex-participants, began the process of charting the development of that movement. Their framing of these events reflects their own perspectives from within the movement, usually its more "respectable" wing. Chris Guyatt and Ralph Summy both provided early descriptions of youth organisation involvement in the movement at its outset.<sup>16</sup> Ralph Summy's 1970 article regarding the debate about moderation versus militancy in the movement was published at a time when that debate was perhaps at its most fierce, and reflects his stance in favour of "moderation".<sup>17</sup> Michael Hamel-Green's account of the development of the draft resistance movement overlaps heavily with student activity on the campuses and captures the excitement and anger of the movement in which he participated in Melbourne.<sup>18</sup> Malcolm Saunders' unpublished but detailed account of the Vietnam Moratorium movement in his 1977 doctorate<sup>19</sup> is the first of several contributions by this author, who also collaborated with Ralph Summy in the 1980s.<sup>20</sup> Donald Horne's 1980 book *Time of Hope: Australia 1966-1972* provided a surprisingly sympathetic and

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<sup>16</sup> C. Guyatt, "The Anti-Conscription Movement, 1964-1966"; R.V. Summy, "A Reply to Fred Wells" in R. Forward and B. Reece, (eds) *Conscription in Australia*, (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1968).

<sup>17</sup> R.V. Summy, "Militancy and the Australian Peace Movement, 1960-1967," *Politics*, November 1970, pp 148-162.

<sup>18</sup> M.E. Hamel-Green, "The Resisters: A History of the Anti-Conscription Movement 1964-1972," P. King, (ed.), *Australia's Vietnam: Australia in the Second Indo-China War*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983), pp 100-128. See also "The Sydney Peace Movement 1966-1973," *Flinders Journal of History and Politics*, 8, 1982; "Conscription and Legitimacy, 1964-1972," *Melbourne Journal of Politics*, no 7, 1974-5; *The Legitimacy of the 1964-1972 Australian Conscription Scheme*, MA, Political Science, University of Melbourne, 1976.

<sup>19</sup> M. Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement in Australia: 1969-1973*, PhD, Flinders University, 1977.

<sup>20</sup> M. Saunders, "'Law and Order' and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement: 1965-72," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 28:3, 1982, pp 367-378; See also *A Bibliography of Theses and Unpublished Papers on the History of the Australian Peace Movement*, (Canberra: Peace Research Centre, Australian National University, 1986); M. Saunders and R. Summy, *The Australian Peace Movement: A Short History*, (Canberra: Peace Research Centre, Australian National University, 1986).

vibrant account of the movement in the context of changes within society more generally, and was an early attempt to frame the period as a whole.<sup>21</sup> A number of post-graduate theses also contributed to a sympathetic understanding of the movement against the war.<sup>22</sup>

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, historians used these earlier works as a basis for more detailed research, attempting to fill in the spaces left by earlier historians whilst tending to share their focus on the middle-class character of the movement. These include works by Keith Maddock<sup>23</sup> and Ann Mari Jordens.<sup>24</sup> Ex-activist Ann Curthoys has published widely about the anti-war movement in the 1990s, exploring the relationship between different social movements, including the student movement and the anti-war movement;<sup>25</sup> comparing the movement with its US counterpart,<sup>26</sup> and more recently, investigating the ways in which the period is being actively remembered.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup> D. Horne, *Time of Hope: Australia 1966-1972*, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1980).

<sup>22</sup> C.J. Hanlon, *The DRU: Opposition in Melbourne and Sydney to Conscription for the Vietnam War 1970-2*, BA Hons, Government, Sydney University, 1985; F. Mietchen, *An Analysis of Australian Involvement in the Vietnam War and the Gulf War*, BA Hons, Government, Sydney University, 1991; J.O. O'Callaghan, *Perspectives on Peace: Aspects of the Analyses, Policies and Practices of the Peace Movement in NSW c. 1950 - c. 1970*, BA Hons, History, Sydney University, 1986; S. Matheson, *Radical Dissent in Australia in the Late 1960s and early 1970s: A Case Study of a Social Movement*, BA Hons, Government, University of Sydney, 1988; M. Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement in Australia: 1969-1973*, PhD, Flinders University, 1977.

<sup>23</sup> K. Maddock, "Opposing the War in Vietnam - the Australian Experience" in J. Dumbrell (ed.), *Vietnam and the Anti-War Movement: an International Perspective*, (Aldershot, Hants., England; Brookfield, USA: Avebury, 1989).

<sup>24</sup> Ann Mari Jordens, "Conscription and Dissent: the Genesis of Anti-War Protest" in G. Pemberton (ed.), *Vietnam Remembered*, (Sydney: Weldon Publishing, 1990); "Review Article: Australian Voices on the Vietnam War," *Labour History*, 68, May 1995.

<sup>25</sup> "Disturbing the War. History, Memory and Vietnam," *Arena Magazine*, June-July 1994, pp 52-6; "Mobilising Dissent. The Later Stages of Protest" in G. Pemberton (ed.), *Vietnam Remembered*, (Sydney: Weldon Publishing, 1990).

<sup>26</sup> "The Anti-War Movements" in J. Grey and J. Doyle (eds), *Vietnam: War, Myth and Memory. Comparative Perspectives on Australia's War in Vietnam*, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> A. Curthoys, "History and Reminiscence: Writing about the Anti-Vietnam War

Understanding of the history of the anti-Vietnam War movement has also been substantially enhanced by the recent publication of five diverse books. John Murphy's *Harvest of Fear: a History of Australia's Vietnam War*<sup>28</sup> and Peter Edwards's *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*<sup>29</sup> are ambitious publications which situate the movement in relation to the course of Australian involvement in the war and society more generally. Murphy's book is notable for its intimate and reliable investigation of the anti-war movement itself, focusing especially on its moderate wing. Edwards' work, the Australian War Memorial's official history of the war, shows a concern—which is lacking in earlier official histories—to understand anti-war activism as an important aspect of the conflict. Its strength, however, lies in what is revealed about government motivations and policies, owing to the author's privileged access to previously unseen official records.

Greg Langley's *A Decade of Dissent, Vietnam and the Conflict on the Australian Homefront*, is a collection of excerpts from interviews with participants in the movement.<sup>30</sup> Like Ronald Fraser's 1988 work *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt*,<sup>31</sup> a compilation of material from a large number of interviews with participants in the international student revolt, it provides a vivid glimpse of the movement which defies trite and uni-dimensional understandings. The authors of these publications are not silent, but express their views through selection and omission, rather than

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Movement" in S. Magarey (ed.) *Writing Lives. Feminist Biography and Autobiography*, (Adelaide: Australian Feminist Studies Publications, 1992); "Vietnam: Public Memory of an Anti-War Movement" in K. Darian-Smith and P. Hamilton (eds), *Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>28</sup> J. Murphy, *Harvest of Fear: a History of Australia's Vietnam War*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1993).

<sup>29</sup> Edwards, *op cit.*

<sup>30</sup> G. Langley, *A Decade of Dissent: Vietnam and the Conflict on the Australian Homefront*, (North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992).

<sup>31</sup> R. Fraser *et al*, *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1988).

through assertion and counter-assertion. The virtue of this approach is in the weight given to relatively "raw" material, whose effect in both works is to emphasise contingency and contradiction, though also prohibiting a more explicit and purposeful exploration of continuities in the movement. Finally, Siobhan McHugh's *Minefields and Miniskirts: Australian Women and the Vietnam War*<sup>32</sup> and Philip Mendes' *The New Left, the Jews and the Vietnam War, 1965-1972*<sup>33</sup> shed light on the gender and ethnic aspects of the movement respectively. Each of these books contributes significantly to our awareness of aspects of the student protest wing of the anti-war movement and to providing a more diversified understanding of the period.<sup>34</sup>

There is one constituency of the anti-war movement, however, which has been the subject of very little specific analysis. The lack of attention given to the role of the trade union movement noted by Saunders in 1982<sup>35</sup> has continued, though its role in the early 1970s has received greater attention.<sup>36</sup> Verity Burgmann's recent book *Power and Protest: Movements for Change in Australian Society* analyses social movements which arose in this period by investigating class tensions within the movements, and their relationship with the labour movement.<sup>37</sup>

Despite these absences in commentary about the student movement,

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<sup>32</sup> S. McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts: Australian Women and the Vietnam War*, (Sydney: Doubleday, 1993).

<sup>33</sup> P. Mendes, *The New Left, the Jews and the Vietnam War, 1965-1972*, (North Caulfield, Victoria: Lazare, 1993).

<sup>34</sup> Two other recent works focus on particular constituencies of the movement: V. Noone, *Disturbing the War: Melbourne Catholics and Vietnam*, (Melbourne: Spectrum, 1993) and B. Scates, *"Draftmen Go Free": A History of the Anti-Conscription Movement in Australia*, (Richmond: Bob Scates, 1992).

<sup>35</sup> M. Saunders, "The Trade Unions in Australia and Opposition to Vietnam and Conscription: 1965-73," *Labour History*, no 43, Nov 1982, p 64.

<sup>36</sup> See for example M. Burgmann, *A New Concept of Unionism: the New South Wales Builders' Laborers' Federation, 1970-1974*, PhD, Macquarie University, 1981.

<sup>37</sup> V. Burgmann, *Power and Protest: Movements for Change in Australian Society*, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1993).

unused primary source material is abundant. The most valuable sources include student newspapers and personal collections, some of which have been accommodated in official archives, notably Albert Langer's collection of 52 "boxes" (a number of these are tea-chests) at the Noel Butlin Archives. From my conversations with student movement veterans, I believe there are very many more collections being stored in boxes in the garages of ex-activists, where they are in danger of being lost.

Also available, of course (also in abundance) are the activists themselves. I have chosen to personally conduct comparatively few interviews. This is because of the great availability of written material from the period, including material based on interviews which have already been conducted,<sup>38</sup> and the large variety of student newspapers, leaflets and letters which exist and provide a memory of events uncontaminated by passing time, as well as dates which can be more easily verified. Activists' memories of demonstrations and campaign meetings, alas, though vivid and layered with meaning, are often difficult to situate in relation to one another. It must also be acknowledged that, as Curthoys has noted, stories about the past are given from a speaking position in the present, shaped by what has happened to the person since the event or period being remembered.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, I conducted interviews late in my research, with the aim of assessing the accuracy of the impressions and beliefs I had formed through my perusal of written sources and of filling in some of the gaps where the written sources fall silent. I have also made use of film and television archives, valuable sources which Australian historians of this period have been slow to embrace.

In researching and writing this thesis, I have taken the Marxist method as my model. It is my view that Australian society today continues to hinge on a fundamental inequality, that between capital and labour. This inequality is

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<sup>38</sup> Rootes, *op cit*; Mendes, *op cit*; Walker, *op cit*.

<sup>39</sup> A. Curthoys, "Writing Lives. Feminist Biography and Autobiography," in S. Magarey, (ed.) with C. Guerin and P. Hamilton, *Feminist Biography and Autobiography*, (Adelaide:

reflected in how Australian history is encoded, both as it is occurring and when it is "remembered" subsequently. When participating in the creation of collective memory about the past, historians engage in a discursive contest which is fought in the context of class struggle. Those involved in this contest use techniques like commemoration or celebration whilst simultaneously screening out or negatively framing aspects of experience which don't accord with the symbolic meanings chosen for that experience.

In developing his theory of history, Marx distinguished between the real and the apparent, between essence and phenomenon. Following Marx, I believe we can speak usefully of a "dominant" framing, one which accords broadly with the views of the powerful in international capitalism, those for whom particular appearances accord with the maintenance of tangible benefits. Historians cannot refrain from participating in these struggles to construct our past in particular ways. Historical experience cannot be "deconstructed" from a value- or theory-free position. When we consider the process of memory-making, we must ask: who makes the makers, why do they choose the symbols they do and if they are historians or "social scientists" what symbols should they choose?

I have seen my aim in this dissertation as consciously discovering and describing particular aspects of social reality at this time and of the student movement which class analysis and general observation suggest have been screened out or neglected. That is, expressed in terms of historical truth, in deconstructing but also reconstructing this episode in Australian history I have sought both a different and a better "truth".

My dissertation is structured in two parts, the first focussing solely on "students", the second on "students and workers". Marx developed his theory of history in relation to other theories, notably that of Hegel, which were popular in his day. That is, in one respect, his theory arose in the course of a polemic with modern idealism. In my first chapter, following

this model. I have attempted to situate myself theoretically in relation to the most prominent theoretical model for understanding social movements which exists today, that characterised as the New Social Movement school of thought. I have attempted to explore continuities and discontinuities between a Marxist approach and that of recent social movement scholars. I have also sought to identify those aspects of recent work which would enhance my own understanding of social movements and to come to some conclusions about how those aspects could be integrated into a Marxist approach to sharpen its power. Later, I revisit these issues in my conclusion.

Having argued in favour of a Marxist history which contextualises social movements within the social system as a whole, in Chapter Two I attempt to describe the wider social and economic circumstances in which student radicalism germinated in Australia in the 1960s. The focus arises from my conviction that to understand the beliefs, desires and conduct of people, it is necessary first to understand the concrete social organisation of production, not only at a national but at an international level, since capitalism is an international system. This approach assumes that concrete reality must be seen as a complex totality, a "unity of the diverse". The emphasis is on understanding how aspects of social reality fit together as part of a whole, rejecting the idea that they can be understood discretely and in isolation from one another. The purpose of the chapter is not to establish the economic base from which cultural events can be "read off" in an economically determinist fashion. Rather, following Marx, I have sought to describe capitalism in this period in its historical specificity, with the aim of establishing the broader economic context of human endeavour at this time.

Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six are organised chronologically. They describe the development of student radical politics from 1960 to 1972, from cautious but angry beginnings to the 1972 election of the Whitlam Labor Government. My aim in those chapters has been to reconstruct carefully the experience and cosmology of several micro-generations of student actors. I have attempted to situate their beliefs and values within broader political

traditions inherited from the past, a project I also pursue, in greater depth, in Part Two. I have sought to understand the ways in which these new actors took the ideological traditions of their predecessors and made new ideas for new circumstances, and finally, the ways in which their actions, based on those understandings, in turn changed the social context of those understandings itself. That is, I was concerned to understand not only how their times made them, but how they made their times.

In reconstructing the period in this way I have been informed by an understanding that these processes of ideological and social change and development do not occur in a serene, linear way. Contradiction and conflict are not incidentals of this process, rather they are central to understanding how and why the old gives way to the new. Again, my approach is also explicitly internationalist, in that I have described overseas politics as an important cause and aspect of events in Australia, rejecting the idea of Australian history as an autonomous phenomenon. These chapters outline the course of events on campuses across Australia in great detail. My concern here has been not only to show the vibrancy and variety of the movement but to highlight the genesis of major shifts of focus and strategy and of new agendas within the context of small but incremental changes which occurred in turn in the context of earlier activity.

In Part Two of the thesis I broaden my focus to incorporate the labour movement in this period. I have been informed in my approach to the labour movement by a model of society as internally contradictory. Social contradiction provides the basis for social change, yet it is human agency which determines the precise way in which those changes occur. As Marx argued, people make history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing. On the basis of these assumptions, in Chapters Seven and Eight I return to events described earlier, but with a sharper focus, discussing the politics of the Australian Labor Party and of the Communist Party of Australia in this period in relation to the student and labour movements. Whilst I reject a monolithic view of either party, my research focuses on



ways in which the dominance of these two parties in the labour movement inhibited the possibilities of student/worker cooperation. In Chapters Nine and Ten I turn my attention to the politics of the student movement, the Left, Old and New, in particular their ideas about workers and working class revolution. In so doing I am focussing not only on what occurred, but on what might have occurred, establishing the parameters of possibility for both student and worker activists.

Having outlined the evolution of those theories and organisations most important in informing the practice of both student and worker radicalism, I use these observations as a basis for discussing, in Chapter Eleven, the problems of constructing the much vaunted student/worker alliance. In my final chapter, I reassert the importance of trade union activism in reframing the field of possibility for student activists. Chapter Twelve describes industrial struggles which gradually gained force through the 1960s, culminating in the 1969 Tramways Strike and creating the basis for a more radical, political style of trade unionism conducive to friendly relations with student protesters. Finally, I conclude by suggesting some implications of my thesis for social movement theory and for the ways in which radical historians contribute to remembrance of the turbulent 1960s.

Chapter One  
Theoretical Issues:  
Students and "New Social Movements"

*At their best they have been the barometers of society, the percipient, emotional, outraged and outrageous harbingers of social clash; many a government has been fool enough to drink the acid of revolt after the students like litmus, have turned red.<sup>1</sup>*

*...student revolt appears to be the assertion of a new set of values against the prevailing ones and can only appear where there has emerged the precondition for these values—of which affluence may be the key.<sup>2</sup>*

*...the students who protested against Australia being a colony of America will lose if the workers of Australia and more particularly Monash do not come together and stop Americans taking over.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> K.T. Fowler, "The Next Wave (The Incoherent Rebellion)," *Outlook*, August 1960, p 8.

<sup>2</sup> D. Altman, "Students in the Electric Age" in *Coming Out in the Seventies*, (Sydney: Wild and Woolley, 1979), p 138.

<sup>3</sup> Leaflet addressed to Monash campus workers, authorised by Patrick Michaels for a worker/student alliance, 1970, Z458/15, Albert Langer collection.

In the following chapters, I offer an account and an analysis of the Australian student and labour movements in the 1960s which aspire to being Marxist. For example, I have approached these movements and Australian society generally in the belief that they can be usefully considered as totalities. More particularly, my account relies on the premise that, because of the centrality of workers to capitalist production, movements of working class people have a social power which movements of students do not have. This approach, however, would be contested by many current theorists of social movements today. For that reason, in this first chapter I explain and defend my use of a Marxist approach in relation to student protest. Some of the ways in which student protest has been understood are summarised, in particular the writings of the currently influential "new social movement" school, and I suggest some problems with their approach. The chapter concludes with some observations about the relevance of these issues to student protest in particular.

Attempts to explain the role of students have reflected more general sociological theories dominant in society at a given time. Serious attempts to characterise student movements theoretically first appeared as a consequence of the world-wide student revolt of the 1960s. Prior to this time, students in Western countries tended to come from upper-middle-class or ruling-class backgrounds, and to consider themselves and be treated as an elite. As a consequence, student strike-breaking was not uncommon<sup>4</sup>, though there were exceptions to this pattern.<sup>5</sup> Industrialising nations provided a more radical model; in Russia and Japan at the turn of the century, for example, university campuses were an important site for incipient nationalism.<sup>6</sup> They played a similar role in the first truly mass

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<sup>4</sup> For example, students from Oxford and Cambridge universities were also used as strike-breakers in the British 1926 General Strike. (G. Stedman Jones, "The Meaning of the Student Revolt," in A. Cockburn and R. Blackburn (eds), *Student Power: Problems, Diagnosis, Action* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1969), p 36)

<sup>5</sup> Notably in the 1930s when British students were important in opposition to fascism, and in the United States where students became heavily involved with radical working class politics there. (S. Spender, *The Year of the Young Rebels*, (New York: Vintage, 1969), p 131, 143; R.S. Brax, *The First Student Movement: Student Activism in the United States during the 1930s*, (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1981))

<sup>6</sup> T. Chuschichi, "Anarchism in Japan," in D.E. Apter and J. Joll (eds), *Anarchism Today*, (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1971); James C. McClelland, *Autocrats and Academics:*

radical movements which arose in de-colonising nations in the 1950s and 1960s. Presented at universities with ideal models of agricultural, medical and governmental practice based on conditions in industrialised nations, a potential new elite who included Fidel Castro and Che Guevara set out to create a reality which matched these models.<sup>7</sup>

The revolt of the 1960s, following on the massive expansion of tertiary education in country after country, saw students for the first time in industrialised countries playing a leading and revolutionary role in radical social change. At the time, a variety of conservative responses characterised student unrest in terms of the supposed psychological abnormality of student activists, or more generally, followed a functionalist model, and viewed student movements as examples of societal "breakdown". For conservatives, the student revolt "simply didn't make sense"<sup>8</sup> because the young had nothing to complain about. They had freedom, democracy and affluence. Writing for newspapers now known to have been funded by the CIA, the American Daniel Bell in 1960 proclaimed "the end of ideology".<sup>9</sup> There were no classes in post-war capitalism and, as a consequence, the mass of workers could no longer be attracted by revolutionary theories.

One conservative thinker who grappled with the issue of student protest was Zbigniew Brzezinski. In 1967 Brzezinski (who by 1969 was the Director of the Research Institute on Communist Affairs at Columbia University) wrote that social unrest was occurring because society was entering "a more self-conscious stage":

... ceasing to be an industrial society, it is being shaped to an ever-increasing extent by technology and electronics, and thus becoming the first *technotronic* society.<sup>10</sup>

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*Education, Culture and Society in Tsarist Russia*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> F. Halliday, "Students of the World Unite," in Cockburn and Blackburn, *op cit*, pp 287-326; T. Cliff, "Deflected Permanent Revolution," *International Socialism*, 1:12, Spring, 1963, p 24.

<sup>8</sup> B. York, *Student Revolt! La Trobe University 1967-73*, (Campbell: Nicholas Press, 1989), p 13.

<sup>9</sup> D. Bell, *The End of Ideology*, (Illinois, 1960); C. Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After*, (London: Bookmarks, 1988), p 2/3.

<sup>10</sup> Z. Brzezinski in *New Republic*, December 13, 1967, quoted in S. Spender, *The Year of the Young Rebels*, (New York: Vintage, 1969), p 153/4.

Post-industrial society was seen as being characterised by the shift to a service economy. Industrial society was making way for a "knowledge society" in which theoretical knowledge and hence the university-trained would play a central role in technical innovation and policy formulation.<sup>11</sup>

Against the conservatives, one theoretical tradition above all others was seen as providing a coherent framework for oppositional politics: Marxism. Many Marxists also found student radicalism puzzling. For Western Marxists, the Cold War had further ossified a mechanical, economic view of class struggle whose emphasis on the structural and economic aspects of social change had impoverished rather than enhanced their understanding of "superstructural" changes. Their analysis seemed to have been thrown into question by a revolt which germinated in conditions of prosperity. This new social upheaval did not seem to fit the "Russian revolution" model. Further, those who led the revolt were not the most impoverished, nor the most exploited, in society. Not only was the revolt not initiated by workers, it was initiated by a group widely viewed as an elite.

The crisis of Marxism must be understood in the context of the rewriting or active suppression of that intellectual tradition in the USSR as a consequence of the rise of the Stalinist regime following the collapse of the Russian revolution in the early to mid 1920s. The subordination of human beings in the drive for industrialisation was mirrored in a "Marxism" which was crude and dogmatic. Stalinism also infected the left in the West through western communist parties, in response to which some Marxist intellectuals sought to reformulate ideas about "base" and "superstructure" with the aim of re-establishing the place of "ideas" and human agency in Marxist explanations of social change.<sup>12</sup> In the context of various attempts to clarify the "real" or, perhaps, the best Marxist tradition, some Marxist responses to student protest suffered from confusion, reductionism and even sectarianism.

The crisis of Marxism, therefore, was to some extent at least a crisis not of the Marxist theoretical tradition as a whole, but of what may be described as

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<sup>11</sup> A. Callinicos, *Against Post-Modernism: A Marxist Critique*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p 121.

<sup>12</sup> L. Althusser (translated B. Brewster), *For Marx*, (London: Verso, 1979).

Stalinism. Today, the continued weight of the Stalinist version of "Marxism" popularised during the Cold War (as well as Marxism's steady retreat in the universities) is reflected in the increasing commonality of "shadow boxing" in non-Marxist references to Marxism. Many who refer to Marx in introductory paragraphs as a springboard to develop other analyses betray their lack of familiarity with the Marxist intellectual tradition. Even John Urry's recent account begins by contending that, in Marx's view, classes, once established, are then "classes-for-themselves," nationally or even internationally unified and with a clear class interest—a simple misunderstanding of the distinction Marx made between classes in- and for-themselves.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, it was felt by some Marxists that the relationship between economic crisis and political struggle could not be adequately understood simply by reference to Marx, who spent a lifetime polemicising against those who did not acknowledge any such relationship. After the restoration of the world economy following the 1848 upheavals, for example, Marx stressed: "A new revolution is possible only in consequence of a new crisis."<sup>14</sup> The writings of early twentieth century Marxists were seen as useful for understanding the kinds of problems which became salient in the 1960s. Trotsky, for example, writing in 1921, rejected the view that there was a mechanical relationship between economic conditions and class struggle: "In general, there is no automatic dependence of the proletarian revolutionary movement upon a crisis. There is only a dialectical interaction".<sup>15</sup> Lenin rejected a sectarian approach to student struggles early in the century, polemicising sharply against those in Russia hostile to supporting a student strike over "academic" issues.<sup>16</sup> Finally, Antonio Gramsci in the 1920s had been concerned to understand the ways in which

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<sup>13</sup> J. Urry, "Rethinking Class," in L. Maheu (ed.), *Social Movements and Social Classes: The Future of Collective Action*, (London: Sage, 1995), p 169.

<sup>14</sup> *Collected Works*, vol 10, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), p 510.

<sup>15</sup> Leon Trotsky, "The Interaction Between Booms, Slumps and Strikes" (extracts from his writings including his report to the Third Congress of the Comintern on 23 June, 1921, and an article in *Pravda* written at the end of the same year), *International Socialism*, 2:20, Summer 1983, p 135.

<sup>16</sup> Lenin wrote: "Our job is to explain to the mass of 'academic' protesters the objective meaning of the conflict, to try and make it *consciously* political." Quoted in "Notes on a Decade ready for the Dustbin," from an article by Carl Oglesby in *Liberation* August-September 1969, reprinted in I. Wallerstein and P. Starr, *The University Crisis Reader Vol 2. Confrontation and Counterattack* (New York: Random House, 1971), p 310/11.

capitalist domination is maintained in Western societies through the hegemony of capitalist ideology rather than through open repression.<sup>17</sup> These thinkers, Gramsci in particular, were eagerly digested by many student radicals in the 1960s.

However, a new generation of radical thinkers chose instead to abandon or never to adopt Marxism. These theorists, in recognition of the new protest movements, rejected the "end of ideology" thesis; yet they also adopted the idea, popularised by Bell and Brzezinski, of a post-class society. Most famously, the wave of student radicalism marked for Herbert Marcuse the rise of a new post-industrial society, of which student movements were the harbingers, displacing the working class as the principal agents of social change.<sup>18</sup>

Though Marcuse's ideas proved not to be enduring, Alain Touraine, whose ideas were similar but more circumspect regarding the potential of student radicalism itself, remains influential. For Touraine, students represented the nodal point of post-industrial society, utopians who in one sense looked wistfully backwards to a past era when education had been less market-driven, yet at the same time looked forwards, frustrated, because the new knowledge society in which they were best positioned to play a pivotal role had barely begun to exist.<sup>19</sup>

Following Touraine and others, a new generation of social theorists today argue that social movements in the second half of the century have changed to such an extent as to be able to be described as "new social movements" (NSM). This school of thought arose as a response to resource mobilisation theories<sup>20</sup>, those theories themselves being a reaction to conservative

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<sup>17</sup> Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith (eds and translators), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, (London and New York: Lawrence and Wishart; International Publications, 1971)

<sup>18</sup> H. Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).

<sup>19</sup> A. Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: an Analysis of Social Movements*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Dennis Altman was an Australian social theorist who articulated similar ideas in "Students in the Electric Age," *op cit*.

<sup>20</sup> See for example, L.A. and C. Tilly (eds), *Class Conflict and Collective Action*, (Beverly Hills: Published in cooperation with the Social Science History Association by Sage Publications, 1981).

collective behaviour theories. Resource mobilisation theories emphasised the rationality of social movements and the underlying structural sources of societal conflict, and stressed the confluence of resources, organisation and opportunity as prerequisites for movement mobilisation.<sup>21</sup> These theories, however, tended not to contextualise the movements they studied within present society, nor to distinguish between different kinds of movements.

More recently, studies informed by critical theory have "sought to locate the distinctive and novel role"<sup>22</sup> of contemporary movements.<sup>23</sup> Cohen, for example, argues that resource mobilisation theories, though offering a corrective to irrationalist "breakdown" theories with their emphasis on strategic outcomes and mean-ends rationality, nonetheless are insufficient: they analyse factors such as values, ideologies and identity only in instrumental terms. Instead, Cohen argues for an analysis of how interpretations of interests are shaped and how aspects of experience affect the capacity of actors to form groups and mobilise, especially in the case of contemporary movements which do not target the state or the economy for inclusion.<sup>24</sup>

The most recent work in this field, especially that produced in Western Europe, has shown a concern for understanding the processes of the creation of meaning in and by social movements. Post-industrial society is increasingly characterised as a society in which the principal conflicts no longer take place at a structural level, but rather at the level of culture and ideas.<sup>25</sup> Attention has focused on the symbolic or ritual aspect of protest

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<sup>21</sup> P. Kivisto, "What's New about the 'New Social Movements?': Continuities and Discontinuities with the Socialist Project," *Mid-American Review of Sociology*, Vol XI, No 2, p 29.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p 30.

<sup>23</sup> J.L. Cohen, "Between Crisis Management and Social Movements: the Place of Institutional Reform," *Telos*, No 52, Summer 1982, pp 21-40; J.L. Cohen, "Strategy or Identity. New Theoretical Paradigms and Contemporary Social Movements," *Social Research*, 52:4, Winter 1985, pp 663-716; K. Eder, "A New Social Movement?," *Telos*, No 52, Summer 1982, pp.5-20; K. Eder, "The 'New Social Movements': Moral Crusades, Political Pressure Groups, or Social Movements?," *Social Research*, 52:4, Winter 1985, pp 869-890.

<sup>24</sup> Cohen, "Strategy or Identity..." *op cit*, p 688.

<sup>25</sup> For a useful and careful summary see J. Habermas, "New Social Movements," *Telos*, No 49, Fall 1982, pp 33-7.



movements<sup>26</sup> and the role of those movements in reconstituting civil society. These theories have been characterised as "identity-oriented"<sup>27</sup>, though this characterisation is by no means universal in a field which is still, perhaps by its very nature, ill-defined.<sup>28</sup>

New Social Movement (NSM) theorists are overwhelmingly opposed to revolutionary change. Their writings reflect a general trend amongst social theorists who focus increasingly on the ways in which citizens have contributed to the making of national states, where an earlier generation viewed state and polity as adversaries.<sup>29</sup> Many advocates of a "New Social Movement" approach are sharply critical of Marxism for imposing totality and unity where there is none. By imposing out-dated categories like class on a reluctant reality, it is argued, Marxists retard the spontaneous development of this new diverse radicalism.<sup>30</sup> Cohen, for example, states that socialists making "universalistic claims" regarding the working class have "fed intolerance."<sup>31</sup>

New Social Movement theorists are also unimpressed by "class analysis". Burgmann and Milner have argued that during the late 1980s, new social movement radicals "tended increasingly to deny the relevance of class altogether"<sup>32</sup> though the publication of *Social Movements and Social*

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<sup>26</sup> C. Offe, "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics," *Social Research*, 52:4, Winter 1985, pp 817-868.

<sup>27</sup> Cohen, "Strategy or Identity. ...," *op cit*, p 673.

<sup>28</sup> Melucci argues that even the term "New Social Movement" is no longer applicable, having been superseded by what he describes as "Contemporary Social Movements" (A. Melucci, *Challenging Codes. Collective Action in the Information Age*, (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>29</sup> A. Curthoys, "Cosmopolitan Radicals: Australian Interactions with International Feminist Texts," in B. Caine *et al*, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Feminism*, (Melbourne: OUP, 1998) (forthcoming).

<sup>30</sup> E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, "Post-Marxism without Apologies," in Laclau's *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*, (London: Verso, 1990), pp 97-132; Melucci, *Challenging Codes...., op cit*.

<sup>31</sup> J.L. Cohen in "The Left after Forty Years," *Dissent*, Winter, Winter 1994, p 10.

<sup>32</sup> V. Burgmann and A. Milner, "Intellectuals and the New Social Movements," in R. Kuhn and T. O'Lincoln (eds), *Class and Class Conflict in Australia*, (Melbourne: Longman Australia, 1996), p 120. See also B. Frankel, *From the Prophets Deserts Come: the Struggle to Reshape Australian Political Culture*, (Melbourne, Victoria: Arena Publications, 1992).

*Classes: the Future of Collective Action*, a collection of essays by leading writers within this school, demonstrates that the concept of class remains, or perhaps is becoming again, a provocative one for these thinkers.<sup>33</sup> One approach taken by these thinkers is to consider class not as an objective category but rather as a kind of "imagined community"<sup>34</sup>, treated as a function of negotiated meanings. There is a tendency to treat the economic realm as "increasingly intertwined with and subservient to the polity."<sup>35</sup> Alternatively, the relationship is treated as entirely contingent, as where "structural" aspects of collective action are included as part of a shopping list of factors.<sup>36</sup>

More particularly, most NSM theorists reject any idea that the labour movement can be seen as having "primacy" in social change. Touraine argued that capitalism had changed to such a degree that the working class might at best be one of an ensemble of progressive forces. NSM theorists today reject any "privileged" position for the labour movement in relation to transformative social projects. Those who champion the New Middle Class on the basis of a critique of "growth" argue that the labour movement has become a conservative force in society.

Despite their distaste for class, NSM theorists make a variety of claims for the new middle class, seen by most within the school as the main constituency of the new social movements.<sup>37</sup> The new middle class is portrayed as more universalistic, utopian and heterogenous than the labour movement, and focused on values and processes rather than on goals, characteristics which were earlier also claimed for student protesters.

In Australia for example, trade union official Patricia Caswell argues that the labour movement could be the place where our visions of equality for

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<sup>33</sup> L. Maheu (ed.), *Social Movements and Social Classes: the Future of Collective Action* (London: Sage, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983)

<sup>35</sup> Kivisto, *op cit*, p 30.

<sup>36</sup> See for example the introduction to "Space, Power and Collective Action," in Maheu, *op cit*, p 120/1.

<sup>37</sup> Cohen, "Strategy or Identity...," *op cit*, p 667.

women and for a rational, environmentally sound economy and culture and socialist objectives could be bound together. However, for this to occur, she argues, the labour movement needs to "escape from the tyranny of everyday demands" and "grow out of past left fictions".<sup>38</sup> Marxism, relying on a "deeply romantic, anti-capitalist vision of the community" with its economism and centralism, damages the radical development of democracy, aligning practical Marxism with authoritarianism. Rather, the Australian Left needs to devote greater attention to the national culture and the establishment of a "credible independent Australia". Trade union officials, doctors and politicians have a special role to play in this project because they are much less materialistic and more collective. It is consistent that Caswell is also a supporter of the Prices and Incomes Accord, an industrial arrangement of the 1980s which worked to restrain wage demands.<sup>39</sup>

Misztal, another Australian supporter of NSM theories, stresses that unlike the old social movements NSMs are non-revolutionary: "Without challenging the State's power, they continue to propagate the neo-romantic myth of society free of power."<sup>40</sup> In response to the increasing State penetration of civil society, NSMs, she argues, represent attempts to reconstitute that society. Their role is to educate: to shape consciousness, redefine meanings and re-orient culture. By symbolically challenging the dominant logic, NSMs have the potential to initiate the revision and "further democratization" of social and political institutions.<sup>41</sup> Trade unions cannot assist in this process, she argues, because it was precisely in response to the bureaucratisation and internal immobility of unions and political parties that NSMs were formed. Australian unions "have been less interested in the pursuit of social justice than in defending their own members;" and this lack of tradition has influenced the political culture of the country, though the unions' campaign to promote industrial efficiency through democratisation of the workplace "can solve important problems".<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> P. Caswell, "Australian workers and socialism: there is hope" in D. McKnight (ed.), *Moving Left: the Future of Socialism in Australia*, (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1986).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> B.A. Misztal, "New Social Movements: Plurality of the Forms of Struggle," *Social Alternatives*, 6:3, August, 1987, p 13.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

The role of NSMs, according to Misztal, is to address the issues that have, by her account, been "screened out" by trade unions and to achieve an extension of democracy. This can be achieved only by creating "a new electorate, believing in the values of democracy and social justice".<sup>43</sup> To do this, NSMs must expose the existing powers, as well as creating a "new democratic culture" in which citizens have a sense of responsibility for their own destinies.

Central to these analyses is the acceptance of the idea of late twentieth society as post-scarcity and post-capitalist, an idea which today goes largely unchallenged within much of the Humanities. Yet its early proponents were quickly accused by commentators of having misinterpreted economic trends.<sup>44</sup> In particular, supporters of the idea of post-industrialism overplayed both the degree and the impact of the decline of the manufacturing section of the working class. As Callinicos has noted, the rise of service industries has taken place primarily at the expense of agriculture, not manufacturing, which in any case never accounted for a majority of the workforce in Western economies.<sup>45</sup> The focus on the decline of manufacturing industry in Western countries also obscures the considerable growth of the industrial working class globally.<sup>46</sup>

Callinicos argues, moreover, that views of class which base themselves on surface appearances such as status (including lifestyles and patterns of consumption), occupation and income are an obstacle to understanding the real divisions in society. Similar patterns of consumption, he argues, may conceal quite different positions within overall relationships of power and privilege. In particular, he gives the example of groups such as school-teachers and nurses. Subjective attitudes and lifestyles are unable to explain the rise of trade-union organisation and action amongst these groups because they do not focus on the intrinsic antagonisms between different

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p 14.

<sup>44</sup> Callinicos, *Against Post-Modernism...*, *op cit*, p 122.

<sup>45</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p 125.

social groups involved in production.<sup>47</sup> Similar criticisms may be made of those who identify students with the much-praised "new middle class". When the idea of "objective interests" is abandoned, discussions of class can easily become impressionistic and superficial.

If, as Ralph Miliband has argued, clerical workers, service and distributive workers, and public and state employees are considered to be workers (and by a Marxist definition based on their relationship to production, they must) then the working class cannot be said to be in decline. Rather, the extraordinary growth in the number of clerical workers and the feminisation of these jobs must be seen as an example of the constant state of recomposition of the working class with the development of capitalism and the labour process.<sup>48</sup>

The expansion of white-collar work is an important feature of recent changes in the workforce. Callinicos argues that, whilst service industry employment bears little similarity to Bell's profile of the "knowledge society" elite<sup>49</sup>, white-collar employment embraces at least three distinct class positions, including managerial capitalists, the new middle class and white-collar workers. The rise of the first of these two groups may be seen as problematic for working class radicalism.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, growing recognition of the increasing "proletarianisation" of certain white-collar and "professional" occupations (university lecturers, for example) undermines any analysis inclined to consider these changes as representing the "embourgeoisment" of the working class.<sup>51</sup>

Theories of post-industrialism imply that changes in the composition of the working class mean that labour as a social force is weaker and more conservative. Yet, as Miliband has noted, Marx himself, in distinguishing

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<sup>47</sup> A. Callinicos in Introduction to A. Callinicos and C. Harman, *The Changing Working Class. Essays on Class Structure Today*. (London: Bookmarks, 1987), p 2-4. See also E. Olin Wright, *Class Structure and Income Determination*, (New York, 1979).

<sup>48</sup> R. Miliband, *Divided Societies: Class Struggle in Contemporary Capitalism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p 46/7.

<sup>49</sup> Callinicos, *op cit*, p 124.

<sup>50</sup> Callinicos and Harman, *op cit*.

<sup>51</sup> See also B. Connell in McKnight, *op cit*, p 24.

between "productive" and "unproductive" workers (those more or less crucial to the production of surplus value) considered school-teachers and writers in the category of "productive" workers. The idea, therefore that only those with blue collars are properly considered workers has no basis in Marx.<sup>52</sup> Industrial workers are usually better organised than workers not involved "directly" in production, but their class consciousness may, for that reason, be limited and economistic. Workers in non-industrial occupations, as I will argue in relation to the Australian labour movement in a later chapter, have often exhibited a high degree of militancy.<sup>53</sup>

Miliband also addresses the arguments, associated with Skidelsky and Gorz, that divisions in the working class, as a result of its recomposition (for example, the consequences of deskilling and automation) mean that there is no longer any unitary "working class," certainly not a working class that could become "for-itself". In fact, as Miliband points out, domination and fragmentation have always been a feature of the working class. Moreover, he argues, to move from the observation that the development of capitalism has not produced homogeneity amongst workers to the conclusion that the working class is incapable of acquiring a *sufficient* degree of unity to achieve radical change is "very rash".<sup>54</sup>

The post-industrial society can be seen as very much a post-revolution society. The roots of "post-industrialism" can be found in a disappointment as powerful as the ill-conceived illusions in which it was often based - in the failure of Third World revolutions, particularly, perhaps, in Vietnam and China, to deliver any substantial improvement to their people; and more distantly, in the defeat of the Russian revolution. This disappointment may be seen as extending also to Western working classes who did struggle, but not enough.

This is, perhaps, one reason why advocates of the New Social Movements can be accused of overstating the novel aspects of these movements and of exaggerating the importance of its new middle class participants over its working class members. For theorists like Christopher Rootes, for example,

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<sup>52</sup> Miliband, *op cit.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

the concentration of those in the "teaching and caring professions" in the British Green Party is taken mistakenly as evidence not of working class but of new middle class support for the new social movements.<sup>55</sup>

In other ways also, "newness" has been mistakenly ascribed to social movements since the 1960s. Heterogeneity, for example, has been identified as a defining feature of these movements; yet as Cohen has acknowledged, all movements are complex.<sup>56</sup> Other features of these movements vaunted as new have also long been features of working class history. The idea that new social movements are universalistic and community-minded, where the labour movement is self-interested and "economistic," is a view which coincides with anti-working class prejudice and with trends within the trade union movement itself. Yet, as Burgmann argues, the distinction made between the altruistic supporters of new social movements and the self-interested labour movement overlooks the broad-ranging nature of issues that have concerned workers movements, especially their more radical sections.<sup>57</sup>

Also important in fostering ideas about NSMs is the utopian, counter-cultural aspect of student movements in the 1960s. The idea that "the system" is to some extent internalised and therefore must be fought at the level of lifestyle and "personal politics"—an approach popularised by the feminist movement—has also been taken as central to NSMs.<sup>58</sup> Yet again, as Burgmann has outlined in relation to modern social movements in Australia, "pre-figurative forms," that is, practices seen as prefiguring a different kind of society, are also a part of labour history.<sup>59</sup> "Identity politics" is also taken to be of special concern for movements based supposedly on the new middle class. Yet, as Burgmann's research again illustrates, the implications of "non-economic" oppressions for working class gays, women and members of racial minorities are greater, not less, than they are for

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<sup>55</sup> C.A. Rootes, "A New Class? The Higher Educated and the New Politics," in Maheu, *op cit*, p 227.

<sup>56</sup> Cohen, *op cit*, p 665.

<sup>57</sup> V. Burgmann, *Power and Protest: Movements for Change in Australian Society*, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1993), p 5.

<sup>58</sup> Melucci, *op cit*.

<sup>59</sup> Burgmann, *Power and Protest*, *op cit*, p 4.

those in better socio-economic situations.<sup>60</sup> For this reason, an emphasis on fragmentation and autonomy counterposed to recognition of any underlying unifying structures is unhelpful in understanding the complexities of lived oppressions. Moreover, such theories are unhelpful as a guide to building the kinds of alliances most likely to help social movements to meet their goals. Modern social movements in Australia have benefited enormously where they have made alliances with the organised working class. Where these were eschewed for alliances with more middle class groups, movement activists have been frequently met with disappointment.<sup>61</sup>

As Meiksins Wood argues, despite their rejection of Marxist materialism and insistence on the relativity of explanatory categories such as class, the logic of post-modern theories of social movements is, nonetheless, to privilege intellectuals, and hence, by implication, also students, in social change. Indeed, Meiksins Wood suggests that the emphasis in the sixties on the autonomy of ideological struggle and the leading role of intellectuals in social change is not inconsistent with radical student support for popular struggles in the third world, which she says was:

...marked by a strong tendency to promote students and intellectuals to the vanguard of history, as the leading agents of human emancipation—perhaps through the medium of 'cultural revolution'.<sup>62</sup>

In order to understand the reverses and retreats suffered by the working class in industrialised countries since the 1970s and the relationship of that class to modern social movements, it is necessary to avoid what amounts (despite its aspirations) to an overly structuralist, economistic model. Fields of vision, instead, must be expanded to encompass issues of ideology, culture and political leadership, so as to understand how experience and tradition currently shape the way in which workers view their lives. Simplistic explanations of the structure and consciousness of the modern

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> B. Frankel, "Social Movements and the Political Crisis in Australia," *Arena Magazine*, December 1992 - January 1993, pp 11-14.

<sup>62</sup> E. Meiksins Wood, "A Chronology of the New Left and its Successors, or: Who's Old-fashioned Now?," *Why not Capitalism? Socialist Register*, 1995, p 30.



working class which reduce the largest sociological group in global capitalism to a negative weight on progressive change must be rejected. On that basis, the significance of the new social movements and of student movements can be more usefully assessed. Ellen Meiksins Wood, for example, emphasises the very positive impact on working class movements of the modern rise of a variety of cross-class struggles over extra-economic issues: gender, race, identity, the environment.<sup>63</sup>

Theories which present new social movements as separate in their origins and direction from the working class can be said to have originated in the widespread identification of movements in the 1960s, including the student movement, as middle class.<sup>64</sup> More generally, other theories of student radicalism of the sixties drawing implicitly on a Weberian analysis of class have viewed students as being, along with housewives and the unemployed, "de-classed,"<sup>65</sup> or, coinciding with popular "common-sense" views, as "middle class," an approach which is supported by major commentators on the Australian student movement.<sup>66</sup>

Many of the arguments for the supposed "privileged" role of students in social change have amounted to little more than the old-fashioned belief that tertiary education imbues the participants with "good values". According to a 1968 Australian article comparing workers and intellectuals, for example:

...an intellectual is more conscious of his humanity; he is more

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<sup>63</sup> E. Meiksins Wood, "Capitalism and human emancipation: race, gender and democracy" in *Democracy against Capitalism. Renewing Historical Materialism*, (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>64</sup> R. Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism: the Social Bases of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1968); S. Encel, "Capitalism, the Middle Classes and the Welfare State," in T. Wheelwright and K. Buckley (eds), *Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism*, vol 2, (Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Books, 1978)

<sup>65</sup> See for example C. Offe, "New Social Movements..." *op cit*; J. Pakulski, "Social Movements and Class: the Decline of the Marxist Paradigm" in Maheu, *op cit*.

<sup>66</sup> D. Home, *Time of Hope: Australia 1966-72*, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1980). Craig McGregor at the *Generations of '68* Conference, NSW State Library, 22 May 1993, spoke of the growth of middle-class radicalism in the 1960s, arguing that whilst there were alliances with the working class, the student movement was middle-class, concerned with moral rather than economic issues. See also S. Encel, *op cit*, p 153/4. Encel applied Parkin's analysis of British CND as middle-class radicalism to Australia.

aware of what he is doing, more anxious to bring the whole of his life into rational order...And because he wishes to carry through the whole of his life activity in accord with his values, is more concerned about the uses of the product of his labour than older style workers.<sup>67</sup>

This kind of analysis, with its implicit negative value judgements about the beliefs and aspirations of working class people nonetheless has an ongoing resonance. Christopher Rootes, in the late 1960s a member of the University of Queensland Liberal Club, today argues that attempts to reconstruct the concept of class and theory of class struggle to accommodate new social movements, particularly student movements, is fundamentally misguided. Instead, he chooses to focus on the values which are inculcated through higher education, which he describes as still being "a relatively critical and enlightening process," much of it retaining the function of:

... upsetting old prejudices, imparting knowledge, broadening social experience, developing skills of critical analysis and enhancing the self-confidence of its beneficiaries so as to make them more tolerant of the diversity of others, to imagine alternative futures and, sometimes, to act to translate that imagination into reality.<sup>68</sup>

This analysis stands in stark contrast to the harsh critique of the "degree factory" put forward by radical students in the 1960s. As Pakulski has pointed out, "all political activism—new and old, Left and Right—attracts a disproportionately high proportion of educated people with professional status".<sup>69</sup> Rather than focusing on student attitudes, which were extremely diverse even at the height of the 1960s unrest, a Marxist approach is to attempt to ascertain objective aspects of the student situation by analysing the relationship of students to capitalist production. Students, however, are not easily categorised in this way: like intellectuals<sup>70</sup>, their relationship to

<sup>67</sup> G.S. and D.W., "Features of the Intellectually Trained," *Arena*, No 15, 1968, p 33.

<sup>68</sup> C.A. Rootes, "A New Class? The Higher Educated and the New Politics" in Maheu, *op cit*, p 230. See also C.A. Rootes, "Student Radicalism. Politics of Moral Protest and Legitimation Problems of the Modern Capitalist State," *Theory and Society*, 9 (3), pp 473-502.

<sup>69</sup> Pakulski, *op cit*, p 77.

<sup>70</sup> See Burgmann and Milner, *op cit*, p 115-118.

production is neither simple nor clear.

Stedman Jones' characterisation of students, written in 1969, remains the best Marxist exegesis.<sup>71</sup> It rejects as confusion the idea that students constitute a class. Touraine's view of students as a new social movement at the core of new forces of production is rejected as "politically reactionary". Stedman Jones also challenges the idea that students constitute part of the traditional middle class, an idea which emphasises the class origin of students. Amongst student radicals of the 1960s, he notes, this idea was associated with those for whom student struggle was trivial or reactionary, a diversion from the real struggle on the factory floor. Its proponents believed that the best that could be expected of students was that a minority of radicals might provide manpower on industrial picket lines. In Czechoslovakia and Poland, he argues, this crude counterposition of workers against students was used to suppress democratic demands by students which had fundamental importance for society as a whole.<sup>72</sup>

The idea that the traditional working class has a monopoly of socialist potential, by Stedman Jones' account, is a mystification. Students cannot be identified with either the capitalist or the working class, but are a *distinct social group*, one of whose most important characteristics is that their situation is transitional. However, he argues:

Any characterization of students as a social group must simultaneously encompass student *origins*, the student *situation* itself, and the social *destination* of students. It is the unilateral insistence upon any one of these factors to the exclusion of the others that has resulted in lopsided or reductionist theories of student consciousness.<sup>73</sup>

In particular, Stedman Jones points to a "permanent contradiction" in universities in advanced capitalist countries. That is, a contradiction

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<sup>71</sup> G. Stedman Jones, "The Meaning of the Student Revolt" in Cockburn and Blackburn, *op cit*, pp 25-56.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, p 34. A similar analysis appears in A. Curthoys, "Women and Class," in *For and Against Feminism. A Personal Journey into Feminist Theory and History*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1988), p 100/101.

between their absolute functional need of a mass of intellectual workers and their inability to tolerate "the realization of the critical potential of this mass".<sup>74</sup>

As a consequence of the retreat of student radicalism from the 1980s, some of the characteristics Stedman Jones attributes to student protest must be queried. For example, his argument that students are, by virtue of their position, less subject to racism, must be attributed rather more to historical context than to general observations which can be made about the nature of student life under capitalism. There is also a certain ahistorical functionalism in Stedman Jones' explanation of the development of modern universities, a common feature of Althusserian Marxism at that time.

On the whole, however, Stedman Jones' emphasis on the importance of student origins, situation *and* destination in understanding students as a group stands as a model which is very useful for understanding the different kinds of student activity that may emerge in different historical contexts. Further, it is difficult to see how the nature of student protest at this time could be understood without reference, as Stedman Jones has made, to the demands being placed on education by capitalism at that time, as well as the implication of circumstances and conflicts in the wider world capitalist system.

Whilst rejecting Rootes' overestimation of the radicalising effect of tertiary education itself, the educational aspect of student experience must also be acknowledged. That experience must be seen as the function of a tension between the ideal of the university as truth-seeking and humanist (an ideal which may be important, for example, in the everyday practice of university lecturers) and the reality of a university system existing within modern capitalism, whose agents demand of the university that it produce graduates according to the current needs of the labour market. The precise ways in which this tension is felt and expressed can only be understood in the context of contemporaneous conditions—in particular, the desire and ability of governments and business to impose market imperatives on the university.

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p 35.

The strength of this "totalising" approach is precisely its flexibility, its sensitivity to changing context. For example, the focus of student protest in many Western countries today, including Australia, has become (in what seems something of a snub to those who laud the more intellectual, less "economistic" outlook of students) opposition to fees and loans systems. The student activists of the sixties chanted "Ho Ho Ho Chi Min, Vietnam is Going to Win". Student activists of the nineties still demonstrate about social issues, following a tradition established by that earlier generation; yet it is also the slogans "Can't pay, won't pay" and "Education for all, not just the rich" which have been most commonly associated with student activism of the eighties and nineties.

This shift reflects changes in student origins (some increase in lower-middle-class and working class students), student situations (the imposition of fees, and so on) and student destinations (employment after graduation no longer being a certainty). Changes in Australian capitalism also provide an essential part of the picture. Pressure has been brought to bear for the State to provide a larger proportion of tertiary educated workers; and a shortage of public funds and a radical movement in retreat have made the successful imposition of fees feasible.

Student politics is certainly diverse and heterogenous. The dynamic, style and politics of student struggle, as this thesis shows, differs substantially across campuses, States and countries. There is, nonetheless, sufficient uniformity to speak usefully of the student movement as a single movement. To assume or impose plurality on social phenomena in advance is surely itself a dogma. In the case of the Australian student movement, such framing can only be unhelpful. As Burgmann has argued, social movements only matter to the extent that they do act as unified entities. "Pluralities" are relevant, not for their own sake, but to discover how a collection of individuals becomes a unified subject.<sup>75</sup> As imagined communities, movements and participants have a symbiotic relationship: they make each other.<sup>76</sup>

Despite their autonomy, students in different campuses were linked

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<sup>75</sup> Burgmann, *Power and Protest...*, *op cit*, p 19.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

organisationally, politically and by their responses to events occurring in world capitalism, including, most of all, the Vietnam war. It is for this reason that there are international linkages and patterns between students movements at this time. The same kind of responses also provided a basis for cooperation between radical students and workers in this period.

As Burgmann again has noted, it is not enough to investigate how movements redefine the political, but the extent to which, as a consequence of doing so, they are able to bring about the political changes they set out to achieve.<sup>77</sup> In the case of student movements, because the everyday activities of students are not immediately necessary for the functioning of capitalism, "student power" beyond the realms of the individual campus can have potency only when student movements find ways to reach out to groups beyond the campus, most importantly the working class. It is for this reason that relations with workers and a commitment to socialism became a major focus of these movements.

Whilst these communities may be considered as "imaginary" in the sense that Benedict Anderson has delineated, we cannot usefully anchor these imaginings without acknowledging their relationship to world capitalism, past and present. Similarly, in promoting the importance of intellectuals the supporters of the new social movements overlook the extent to which the actions and practices of the movements themselves have been responsible for the growth of emancipatory ideologies.<sup>78</sup> Instead, it must be asserted that ideas of community, for example, of relations between students and workers, also have a *material* base.

Though it may be conceded that the ways in which we conceptualise capitalism, class and oppression are only contextualised mediations of reality, there are surely real limits to the potential achievements of "deconstruction". We cannot change the world solely by re-imagining it, nor end capitalism.<sup>79</sup> Ideas about a post-modern reality can themselves be

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p 18/19.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p 7.

<sup>79</sup> J.K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it): a Feminist Critique of Political Economy*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

contextualised,<sup>80</sup> but unless we fall prey to hopeless relativism we must ask: contextualised in relation to what? A basis must be found to justify preferring some categories to others. All else is hopeless relativism in which concepts can only be compared with one another. By this account there is no accessible reality beyond our imagining of it. The distinction between "imaginary" and "real" is a false one, since all that we perceive must be imagined as part of the act of perception.<sup>81</sup>

One result of a perspective which sees all "imagining" as relative is publications like *Seizures of Youth: the Sixties and Australia*, an account of the Australian student movement which privileges works of literature above all as the source from which the meaning of the revolt can be gleaned.<sup>82</sup> If the world outside our perceptions is inaccessible, then social theory as a means of understanding the world is not a valid exercise (and *Seizures of Youth* is a useful portrayal of the Australian student movement). Melucci is one theorist who seems to be moving towards such a view, with his suggestion that real progress in relation to our understanding of social movements would involve a general abdication of any attempts at theorising, since the movements themselves are creating, or will create, new discourses and must, therefore, not be pre-empted.<sup>83</sup> Cohen, for example, suggests that to avoid a "scientist fallacy" about truth we have to learn *from* movements.<sup>84</sup> There is a danger that emphasis on the symbolic, ritualistic, reflexive nature of protest behaviour can verge on irrationalism not dissimilar to that with which conservative commentators met the 1960s movements.<sup>85</sup>

This thesis attempts to analyse the Australian student revolt of the 1960s in

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<sup>80</sup> See T. Eagleton, "Where Do Postmodernists Come From?," *Monthly Review*, 1 July, 1995, 47:3, p 59.

<sup>81</sup> N. Geras, "Post-Marxism?," *New Left Review*, 163, May-June 1987, pp 40-82; see also the reply by E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, "Post-Marxism without Apologies," in Laclau's *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*, (London: Verso, 1990), pp 97-132.

<sup>82</sup> R. Gerster and J. Bassett, *Seizures of Youth: the Sixties and Australia*, (South Yarra, Victoria: Hyland House, 1991).

<sup>83</sup> Melucci, *Challenging Codes....*, *op cit*.

<sup>84</sup> Cohen, "Strategy or Identity...," *op cit*, p 670.

<sup>85</sup> Gerster and Bassett, *op cit*.

the contexts of economic conditions and of the class struggle, rejecting any automatic, one-way or necessary relationship between the two. In particular, the second of its two parts may be seen as a description of the ways in which major organisational and ideological currents in Australian society jostled for dominance. The meaning of the student revolt was the subject of a contest, not only between conservative society and the radicals, but amongst the radicals themselves. The activities of the Labor and Communist parties, for example, can be seen as attempts to preserve and modify their own particular codes for reality. In Marxist terms, this contest has been understood as one for hegemony. To speak of hegemony does not and cannot in itself explain the concrete processes by which class and other identities are formed. Concrete analysis of the particular historical configuration of ruling and ruled social forces, interests and ideas is required.

This thesis can be seen in one sense as a challenge to the New Social Movement/Contemporary Social Movement model of the sixties. It rejects the suggestion that the Australian student movement and the other social movements which arose or re-arose in this period were, in any sense, "post-class" or "post-capitalist". Rather, their ability to transform society cannot be understood in isolation from their relationship with what remains the key productive class in capitalist society, the working class.



## Chapter Two

### Never Had it So Good? Contradictions of the Post War Boom

*... the Hitchcock films of the fifties, with their combination of surface shine and inner turbulence, best sum up the period...in between bouts of hysteria, people of my age were led to believe in a future of unlimited prosperity, which gave us a very different outlook from that of our parents...they encouraged optimism in me, but some of my friends were not so lucky, and in puberty found the tension between their own hopes and the heavy air of disappointment at home increasingly unbearable.<sup>25</sup>*

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<sup>25</sup> S. Hall, "Rethinking the Fifties. Escape from the Killer Step-ins" in "The '50s. Why They Weren't so Bad," (special issue), *The Australian Magazine*, 18-19 September, 1993, p 41.

From 1949 to the late 1960s conservative values in Australia apparently reigned inviolate, underpinned by unprecedented international economic prosperity.<sup>26</sup> They ruled so successfully that it even seemed to many as if the world had changed fundamentally and forever. Indeed, Australian scholarship about the 1950s has for sometime apparently been trapped in this classless vision, imagining the decade, as John Murphy noted recently, as "largely conformist".<sup>27</sup> Yet this complacent view of the Cold War period belies and cannot explain the five short years of 1967 to 1972 in which this apparently tranquil Australia was rocked by social protest and strife, and utterly changed. Murphy's research on the 1950s reflects the approach of recent US cultural historians who have begun to focus on the contradictions between the forces of conservatism and the social anxieties of this period, so as to show how "a period of apparent stasis and complacency" contained dynamics that produced social changes which foreshadowed the revolts soon to arise.<sup>28</sup> This first chapter outlines the ways in which economic prosperity generated new forces and conflicts antithetical to Australian capitalism. In particular, it focuses on changes in the university system and in the Australian working class.

Despite the elite status of students prior to the 1960s, the history of cooperation between radical students and workers in Australia dates, at least, as early as the First World War. The majority of students in this period remained loyal to their social origins, with students in New South Wales, for example, employed as strike-breakers in the 1917 general strike.<sup>29</sup> A minority, however, especially at Melbourne University, were won over to a different set of values. Communist Guido Baracchi was thrown into the Melbourne University lake and later jailed for opposing the war. In July 1919 a meeting of the Public Questions Society at which a Labor politician was scheduled to speak on the subject of the One Big Union was cancelled

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<sup>26</sup> A. Curthoys and J. Merritt (eds) *Australia's First Cold War*, vols 1 and 2, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984); S. Lees and J. Senyard, *The 1950s...How Australia became a Modern Society, and Everyone got a House and Car*, (Melbourne: Hyland, 1987).

<sup>27</sup> John Murphy, "Shaping the Cold War Family: Politics, Domesticity and Policy Interventions in the 1950s," *Australian Historical Studies*, October 1995, p 545.

<sup>28</sup> Murphy, *ibid*, p 544.

<sup>29</sup> L. Taksa, "'All a Matter of Timing': Managerial Innovation and Workplace Culture in the NSW Railways and Tramways Prior to 1921," *Australian Historical Studies*, No 110, April, 1998, p 22. Photographs of the strike-breakers can be found in the Mitchell library "Work and Play" collection (personal communication, Lucy Taksa).

after the Vice-Chancellor protested the meeting would be injurious to the University.<sup>30</sup>

The real politicisation of the student body occurred, however, in the 1930s and with the subsequent post-war arrival of ex-servicemen.<sup>31</sup> In 1930, concern about the effects of the Depression resulted in the establishment of an Unemployment Relief Fund at Melbourne University.<sup>32</sup> Opposition to facism was dominated by leftist political clubs active during the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>33</sup> The Melbourne University Labour Club, for example, published a newspaper called *Proletariat* which:

...brought the values of the Soviet organised United Front Against War and Fascism to the campus, popularised the image of the USSR, called for worker-student alliances, criticised the traditional academic disciplines for their irrelevance to social and political questions of the day and flirted with Trotskyism.<sup>34</sup>

Attitudes to the Spanish Civil War divided the campus, and several members of the Labour Club joined up with republican forces in Spain. As Pola comments: "There was a definite international and socialist flavour to the 1930s at the University".<sup>35</sup> At Sydney University, radical clubs formed in the early 1930s faced virulent opposition. The inaugural meeting of the Labour Club saw 700 students mobilised in opposition. They voted overwhelmingly against the club's formation "amid jeering and the release of tear gas".<sup>36</sup> At one subsequent meeting, the Chairman of the Communist

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<sup>30</sup> G. Blainey, *A Centenary History of the University of Melbourne*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1957), p 171.

<sup>31</sup> H. Dow (ed.), *Memories of Melbourne University: Undergraduate Life in the Years Since 1917*, (Richmond: Hutchinson Group, 1983), p xiii, quoted in B. Pola, *Perspectives on the Australian Radical Left Student Movement 1966-1975*, PhD, School of Education, La Trobe University, 1988, p 5.

<sup>32</sup> Pola, *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> J. Spigelman, "Student Activism in Australia," *Vestes*, 11, 1968, p 112.

<sup>34</sup> P. O'Brien, *The Saviours: An Intellectual History of the Left in Australia*, (Richmond: Primary Education Publishing, 1977), p 98.

<sup>35</sup> Pola, *op cit*, p 10.

<sup>36</sup> Spigelman, *op cit*, p 106.

Party was, like Baracchi before him, punished for his beliefs by being thrown into the university pond.<sup>37</sup>

In the late 1940s, in both Sydney and Melbourne, scholarships under the Reconstruction Training Scheme opened the door to large numbers of ex-servicemen who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to enter university. In Melbourne, ex-servicemen played a major role in the Labour Club and the Communist Party branch behind it, which dominated student politics from 1945 to 1948. According to Robin Gollan 110 to 120 of the four hundred members of the club between 1945 and 1947 were communists, others unaligned or, in some cases, ALP or Student Christian Movement members. By 1947, the Labour Club dominated student societies and publications, and its members made important contributions to the intellectual life of Melbourne. It provided the drive behind the strength of radical Australian nationalism associated with the journal *Meanjin*, which had moved to Melbourne in 1945.<sup>38</sup> In 1948, Melbourne University Labour Club and Eureka Youth League members protested in Bourke Street against rising food prices, their demonstration being violently broken up by police.<sup>39</sup>

At Sydney University, due to the huge influence of John Anderson, a Professor of Philosophy who flirted briefly with Trotskyism, the radicalism of students was less nationalist and less pro-Soviet than in Melbourne. In July 1947 students were involved in what newspapers described as a "riot" outside the Dutch Consulate in support of the Indonesian Revolution, with police arresting thirteen students.<sup>40</sup> Radical and communist clubs also flourished in this period at the University of Queensland.<sup>41</sup> The influence of student communism nationally in the 1940s was reflected in the politics of the Australian Student Labor Federation, formed in 1925, which expressed support for the Eureka Youth League and urged cooperation with

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> R.A. Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists*, (Canberra: ANU Press, 1975).

<sup>39</sup> *Farrago*, 16 March, 1948, quoted in Pola, *op cit.*

<sup>40</sup> Gollan, *op cit.*, p 237.

<sup>41</sup> C. Rootes, *Australian Student Radicals: the Nature and Origin of Dissent*, BA Hons, Government Department, University of Queensland, 1969, p 173.

working class youth organisations.<sup>42</sup>

The retreat of student radicalism dates from the end of the 1940s, when the rightwing achieved ascendancy on the campuses. In 1950 Sydney University staff opposed the 1950 Communist Dissolution Act (while stressing their opposition to Communism); but after that campaign, national student radicalism, in Rootes' words, "appears rapidly to have subsided".<sup>43</sup> NUAUS withdrew from the Communist-dominated International Union of Students. As Pola describes:

...stories of disillusionment with Communism began appearing in *Farrago*, and articles depicting Communism as a threat rather than a possible solution appeared, under a guise of objectivity...Rowdy student meetings pivoted on "Communists-under-the-bed," "Better Dead Than Red" fanaticism. The student-Right was truly cock of the roost. Even to speak in opposition invited enraged reaction.<sup>44</sup>

Nonetheless, it was in the universities, until very recently small institutions of privilege, where, by the mid-1960s industrial expansion and ideological crisis combined to produce the political revolt which destroyed the post-war consensus. The rapid and anarchic expansion of the universities in response to the needs of an expanding labour market created an incendiary mix of new problems, hopes and demands. The extent of the changes to universities following the Second World War cannot be underestimated. In 1940, there were just six universities and 12,126 university students in Australia. Australian universities consisted of very small departments (a professor plus two or three lecturers) largely devoted to teaching, and were primarily the responsibility of state governments.<sup>45</sup> Until well after the end of the war, universities remained small institutions which were, in the words of a recent government report, "remote from the

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<sup>42</sup> Pola, *op cit*, p 15.

<sup>43</sup> Rootes, *op cit*, p 173.

<sup>44</sup> Pola, *op cit*, p 18.

<sup>45</sup> B. Bessant, "Privatisation and academic freedom," *Australian Universities' Review*, No 2, 1986, p 12.

concerns and the interest of the vast majority of the population".<sup>46</sup> Students from working class backgrounds were rare.<sup>47</sup>

Two waves of rapid expansion changed this pattern. The first, from 1939 to 1947, saw numbers increase by 106%, fuelled mainly by schemes which provided a living allowance to assist war veterans and others to enter tertiary education.<sup>48</sup> The expansion was expensive. For ten years after 1948, Australian universities faced "severe problems, principally financial,"<sup>49</sup> with Vice-Chancellors in 1952 calling for a national inquiry into the state of the universities.<sup>50</sup> The Commonwealth Government gradually began to play a greater role in tertiary education, based on their recognition of the need for a more skilled workforce for Australia's rapidly developing economy. During the 1950s, it undertook to assist State governments in financing their universities through a system of matching grants, and provided scholarships to support students while they were studying.<sup>51</sup> Under the Colombo Plan, thousands of Asian students were also educated in Australian universities, their enrolment aimed at promoting the development of Asian countries so as to undercut the appeal of communism and consequent imagined threat to Australian security.<sup>52</sup> The university experience in the 1950s was not a liberal one. Staff appointments were made, as Bolton notes, "with an eye to protecting young minds from contentious views," with Russell Ward being refused an academic post in 1956 because of his previous membership of the Communist Party.<sup>53</sup> As

<sup>46</sup> Department of Employment, Education and Training Higher Education Division, *National Report on Australia's Higher Education Sector*, (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1993), p 1.

<sup>47</sup> L. Strahan, *Just City and the Mirrors. Meanjin Quarterly and the Intellectual Front 1940-1965* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1984), p 88.

<sup>48</sup> A. Barcan, *A History of Australian Education*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1980), p 288.

<sup>49</sup> Barcan, *ibid*, p 331.

<sup>50</sup> DEET Higher Education Division, *op cit*, p 7.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>52</sup> D. Day, *Claiming a Continent. A New History of Australia* (Pymble, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1997), p 392.

<sup>53</sup> G. Bolton, *The Oxford History of Australia, Vol 5, 1942-1988: the Middle Way*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990), p 118. See also B. Martin, *Intellectual Suppression: Australian Case Histories, Analysis and Responses*, (North Ryde, NSW: Angus and Robertson, 1986).

late as 1962, a second year History reading list at the University of Sydney included three works by Lenin and one by Trotsky, but with this proviso: "THE ABOVE AUTHORS ARE TO BE TREATED WITH CAUTION".<sup>54</sup>

Added to the pressure on the Commonwealth Government were complaints by State governments about the increasing cost of universities, by university staff about their low salaries, understaffing and a lack of adequate accommodation;<sup>55</sup> and by Communist students about the low level of Commonwealth Student Scholarships.<sup>56</sup> Under pressure, in 1956 Prime Minister Menzies appointed Sir Keith Murray to head an inquiry into the universities. The Murray Report of 1957 recommended further expansion of the universities and greater funding, citing short-staffing, poor facilities and high student failure rates.<sup>57</sup> In particular, the report called for the Federal Government to accept greater responsibility for the finances of the universities.<sup>58</sup> Prime Minister Menzies accepted the report in full and as a result, in Barcan's words, "a tremendous period of expansion opened".<sup>59</sup> New financial resources were provided; an Australian Universities Commission (AUC) appointed to act as an advisory body to the government, and a Grants Committee established which recommended special emergency grants for 1958, 1959 and 1960. A second wave of expansion swept the universities, student numbers growing from a nadir of 28,792 in 1953 to 36,903 in 1957 and 95,380 in 1967.<sup>60</sup> Between 1959 and 1963, expenditure doubled<sup>61</sup> and in the ten years from 1956 to 1966 the number of universities

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<sup>54</sup> "What Goes on in the History Department," *Left Forum*, vol 1, 1962, p 5.

<sup>55</sup> Barcan, *op cit*, p 333. See also C. Pybus' description of "desperate overcrowding" at the University of Tasmania in 1954, in *Gross Moral Turpitude. The Orr Case Reconsidered*, (Port Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1993), p 46/7.

<sup>56</sup> *Left Forum*, 20 May, 1954.

<sup>57</sup> R.J.W. Selleck, E.R. Treyvaud and J. McLaren, *Equal But Cheaper (The Second Century in Australian Education. No 15)*, (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1976), p 81; DEET Higher Education Division, *op cit*, p 9.

<sup>58</sup> DEET Higher Education Division, *ibid*.

<sup>59</sup> Barcan, *op cit*, p 328.

<sup>60</sup> All figures from Barcan, *ibid*.

<sup>61</sup> A.P. Gallagher, *Coordinating Australian University Development. A Study of the Australian Universities Commission 1959-1970*, (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1982), p 72.

grew from nine to fourteen.<sup>62</sup>

In 1960, however, the onset of economic recession caused governments to wonder whether university education for all qualified applicants could be afforded. To investigate cheaper alternatives, the head of the AUC, Sir Leslie Martin, requested the assistance of an advisory committee. The 1961 appointment of the Martin Committee, to report on the state of tertiary education, marked perhaps the first time the central purpose of higher education was explicitly stressed as providing a more skilled workforce for a technological society.<sup>63</sup> Despite the recession, its appointment occurred at a time subsequently considered a "Golden Age" for university education.<sup>64</sup> Visiting Australia in 1963, Sir Keith Murray marvelled at the "fantastic expansion," finding the universities "buoyantly confident and full of hope for the future".<sup>65</sup> Increasingly, as Bolton has noted, the professions looked to universities to find the credentials for admission into their ranks.<sup>66</sup>

The Golden Age was short-lived, however. In 1964 and 1965, the Martin Committee recommended the further expansion of tertiary education and the expansion of Colleges of Advanced Education and teacher training institutions, marking the rationale for a binary system of tertiary education.<sup>67</sup> The 1965 Vernon report on the Australian economy drew attention to the inadequacy of industrial research and development in the private sector;<sup>68</sup> though it would be twelve years before its recommendation for increasing federal support in this area was implemented.<sup>69</sup> The AUC began to face problems in grappling with funding shortfalls.<sup>70</sup> From 1965 to

<sup>62</sup> DEET Higher Education Division, *op cit*, p 10.

<sup>63</sup> S. Davies, *The Martin Committee and the Binary Policy of Higher Education in Australian*, Australian Studies in the Social Sciences, (Melbourne: Ashwood House, 1989), chapter 2.

<sup>64</sup> Gallagher, *op cit*, p 71.

<sup>65</sup> Gallagher, *ibid*, p 80.

<sup>66</sup> Bolton, *op cit*, p 117.

<sup>67</sup> DEET Higher Education Division, *op cit*, p 11.

<sup>68</sup> Bolton, *op cit*, p 101.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>70</sup> Gallagher, "The Chill Winds Blow: 1964-1966," *op cit*, p 83.



1969, financial problems arose mainly due to the financial difficulty of State governments in meeting the needs of university expansion.<sup>71</sup> At the June 1966 Premier's Conference, Victorian Premier Bolte, supported by the other premiers, claimed the situation was intolerable because of what they considered the niggardly approach of the Commonwealth Government.<sup>72</sup> During 1967, Louis Matheson, Chair of the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee and Vice-Chancellor of the new Monash University, championed the cause of the AUC to support universities against what he believed was unfair treatment by the Commonwealth Government.<sup>73</sup> The Federal Labor Opposition, through its education spokesman Kim Beazley, began to advocate a greater role for the Commonwealth Government in university development.<sup>74</sup>

Academic staff were also unhappy, in particular, about the absence of national standards for the establishment of academic salaries and about their lack of representation and consultation in decisions about the future of the universities. Belatedly acknowledging the problems of this expanding group, in 1961 the AUC recommended university staff form a federal union and apply to the Commonwealth Arbitration Court. Members of the new union FAUSA remained dissatisfied with the informal approach to wage rises for its members, and in 1967 there was criticism from within the universities of an AUC review which did not consider the problems of tutors, demonstrators, part-time, library and academic staff. Gallagher argues that policy-making on academic salaries in Australia in the 1960s was "haphazard, complex and subject to considerable change."<sup>75</sup>

Despite these problems, the expansion of tertiary education accelerated. The

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p 5. See "Industry and the University," letter from Andrew Toal, national director, Australian Executive Development Foundation, suggesting that if the government did not provide greater funding and responsiveness to industry in Australian universities, industry might well decide to divert its grants and gifts and set up their own university (*The Australian*, 11 April, 1967). See also "The Campus Crisis: Spectre that Stalks the Universities," *The Australian*, 5 April, 1967, p 1; "The Campus Crisis: Space, Space, Space...Lord, How We Need It Says University Vice-Chancellor," *The Australian*, 4 April, 1967, p 9.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p 95.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, p 117.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p 83.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p 176.

later years of the Menzies Government were considered a halcyon period of university growth, facilitating the growth, "if not of an intelligentsia, of a much enlarged white-collar professional caste."<sup>76</sup> The expansion also continued after Menzies' retirement. Barcan marks 1967 as the point when the most profound and tremendous changes began to occur in the Australian education system.<sup>77</sup> By 1973 there were 133,126 university students in Australia, a 39.6% increase since 1967.<sup>78</sup> The percentage of women students had also increased in those six years from 27.7% to 33.7%, but they were concentrated in particular fields.<sup>79</sup> In 1962-63 the number of women taking a degree in arts and music had overtaken the number of men, but in science, medicine, dentistry, law, agriculture, engineering, veterinary science, commerce and economics, male students were dominant. Between 1959 and 1963, only three women graduated in engineering, one in forestry and none in surveying or divinity.<sup>80</sup>

As a consequence of these waves of expansion, Australian students in the 1960s, entering university with expectations that they were an elite group who would be groomed for leadership and status in Australian society, found that they were not treated like an elite. Whilst scholarships were more easy to obtain, as was holiday employment<sup>81</sup>, the conditions in which students were required to study in the 1960s were, nonetheless, inadequate. Large enrolments enabled university administrations to ensure high failure rates: in 1965 Monash Labor Club President Peter Scherer noted that only 60% of those who entered Australian universities eventually graduated.<sup>82</sup> By the end of the decade, the stereotype of the affluent student failed to recognise the economic problems of a significant minority of students.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Bolton, *op cit*, p 117.

<sup>77</sup> Barcan, *op cit*, p 343.

<sup>78</sup> DEET Higher Education Division, *op cit*, p 11.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Bolton, *op cit*, p 117.

<sup>81</sup> C. Robertson, *Long Youth Long Pleasure. Adventures Behind the Scenes at the University of New England 1956-80*, (Armidale: Cherry Robertson/Lightning Press, 1982), p 145.

<sup>82</sup> P. Scherer, "The Education of Suburbanities (the First of a Series dealing with the Crisis in Tertiary Education)", *Dissent*, Winter, 1965, pp 31-5.

<sup>83</sup> In 1968 *National U* reported that student unions had documented cases of students living in near poverty (6 June, 1968). In 1969 an NUAUS submission to the AUC called for a \$4 million

The expansion of the universities also changed the atmosphere on the campuses, with the impersonality of over-large institutions providing a seedbed for discontent.<sup>84</sup> University education had become more "market-driven," with newer universities, particularly, showing little objection to becoming service stations to provide training for which a social demand (that is, market demand) existed.<sup>85</sup>

"Great is truth and mighty above all things" is the slogan carved into the entrance of one of the original buildings facing the University of Queensland's Great Court. The students who flooded the universities in the 1950s and 1960s, though in many cases the first generation in their families to do so, entered institutions at least superficially steeped in such grand ideals. Under the Menzies Government, however, there was an added expectation of these new students. Their pursuit of truth was to be put to the service of building a better society, a society free, democratic and classless. Former student radicals of this period do not remember these as years of overcrowding and funding shortages. Rather, they experienced higher education as an opportunity to live up to the ideal of studenthood—to use their education as a means of making a better, more moral world:

Material worries were *not* a consideration of students at the time. As far as we were concerned capitalism had reached a stage where it had satisfied material wants...We take the material base, thank you very much, and from that we build a society that is free and equal.<sup>86</sup>

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emergency grant to University libraries and drew attention to the lack of student welfare services for counselling, health and especially housing (*National U*, 10 March, 1969). In 1970 a journalist for the *Brisbane Telegraph* interviewed a nineteen year old student who did not have a Commonwealth scholarship and had only three cents left between him and hunger, surviving normally on one meal per day. The Director of Counselling Services at the University of Queensland said there would be "some scores" of students in the same plight. The Sub-Dean of Melbourne University Arts Faculty said 1,000 of that University's 14,000 students were living on the poverty line, and between 200 and 300 of them were suffering from malnutrition ("Being "broke" at University is no fun," *Telegraph*, 11 April, 1970).

<sup>84</sup> Barcan, *op cit*, p 347.

<sup>85</sup> Barcan, *op cit*, p 335.

<sup>86</sup> Trotskyist Hall Greenland, personal interview.

As in the university system, so in the working class, prosperity and rapid change during the Cold War engendered a social consensus not stable and strong but rife with contradiction and unease. The Second World War had heralded the industrialisation of Australia, providing an impetus to heavy industry, chemicals and specialised engineering.<sup>87</sup> Between 1939 and 1968 the average Australian became almost twice as well off and the amount of goods and services produced trebled.<sup>88</sup> Manufacturing grew, exports boomed, very high tariffs were maintained and foreign capital was welcomed, so that by 1968 well-known international companies were producing Australian cars, chemicals, tobacco and breakfast cereals.<sup>89</sup>

Political ideas and parties changed in ways that reflected this economic prosperity and, more specifically, the belief that the conservative consensus engendered by prosperity would endure. By the early 1960s academic economists in Australia were suffering from disillusionment and a feeling of futility "...for it seemed that the system had been perfected, and they had no new worlds to conquer".<sup>90</sup> Though, as Bolton has noted, there was little about the performance of the Liberal-Country Party Government in the early 1950s to suggest that the Coalition would secure office for thirty of the next thirty three years<sup>91</sup>, boom conditions (as well as a major split in the ALP) helped it to do so, and the Coalition took the credit.<sup>92</sup> Backed by conservative social commentators who argued that the boom would never end, the Government became complacent and unresponsive to social tensions.<sup>93</sup> The initially slow response of the Commonwealth Government

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<sup>87</sup> G.F.R. Spenceley, "Work," in A. Curthoys, A.W. Martin and T. Rowse (eds), *Australians from 1939*, (Sydney: Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates, 1987), p 277.

<sup>88</sup> R. Maddock and F. Stilwell, "Boom and Recession" in A. Curthoys, A.W. Martin and T. Rowse (eds), *Australians from 1939* (Sydney: Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates, 1987), p 255.

<sup>89</sup> Maddock and Stilwell, *ibid*, p 259.

<sup>90</sup> Professor Whitehead, quoted in J. Hagan, *The History of the ACTU*, (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1981), p 216.

<sup>91</sup> Bolton, p 140.

<sup>92</sup> D. Kemp, "Liberalism and Conservatism in Australia since 1944" in B. Head and J. Walter (eds), *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp 322-362.

<sup>93</sup> Bolton, p 139.

associated also with a move of university graduates into the party, reflected in 1960 by the election of Gough Whitlam over Eddie Ward as Calwell's deputy.<sup>101</sup>

Despite a series of industrial defeats in the late 1940s and the anti-communist hysteria surrounding the unsuccessful 1951 attempt to ban the Australian Communist Party by referendum, the Communist Party nonetheless managed to keep alive a tradition of opposition in action and ideas. It resisted the arms race and racial discrimination, fought for equal pay for women and Aboriginal workers, and criticised the US role in the global social order.<sup>102</sup> However, faced with a hostile political environment, the party became more circumspect, focusing mainly on economic issues in the trade unions (like their ALP counterparts), with many members in the unions keeping their membership of the party secret.<sup>103</sup> In the peace movement, the party's most successful political venture (especially after the 1959 Peace Congress), Communist Party activists wore suits and ties and were careful to keep within the law.<sup>104</sup> The early sixties Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, in which the Communist Party played a prominent role, did succeed in mobilising thousands of people for their staid, respectable marches.<sup>105</sup> The Popular Front strategy which underpinned this work, a strategy aimed at toning down communist politics for the sake of unity with ALP, church and other forces, had been perfected in the Second World War.<sup>106</sup> It was a populist policy, conceived in the 1930s as a means for western communist parties to provide support for Russian foreign policy by manoeuvring themselves into Western governments.<sup>107</sup> Faced with a

<sup>101</sup> Bolton, *op cit*, p 146.

<sup>102</sup> T. O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream: the Decline of Australian Communism*, (Westgate: Stained Wattle Press, 1985), pp 89-94.

<sup>103</sup> Hal Alexander, personal interview.

<sup>104</sup> O'Lincoln, *op cit*, p 91/2.

<sup>105</sup> Murphy, *Harvest of Fear:...*, *op cit*, pp 121-129; B. Carter, "The Peace Movement in the 1950s," pp 58-73, and R. Summy and M. Saunders, "The 1959 Melbourne Peace Congress: Culmination of Anti-Communism in Australia in the 1950s," pp 74-95, both in A. Curthoys and J. Merritt (eds), *Better Dead than Red. Australia's First Cold War 1945-1953*, vol 2, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984).

<sup>106</sup> O'Lincoln, *op cit*, p 48-51. See also J. Docker, "Culture, Society and the Communist Party" in Curthoys and Merritt, vol 1, *op cit*, p 187.

<sup>107</sup> J. Danos and M. Gibelin, *June '36. Class Struggle and the Popular Front in France*, (London and Chicago: Bookmarks, 1986), p 25; F. Morrow, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*,

hostile political climate in the 1950s, the party lurched between these Popular Front strategies and sectarianism.<sup>108</sup>

These lurchings reflected an intellectual crisis for Marxists and the Left engendered by the long boom.<sup>109</sup> What had happened to Marx's system of booms and slumps? Could capitalism deliver a humane society after all? The international communist movement was not in a good condition to answer these questions. Though the Australian Communist Party had the embarrassing distinction of being the only party in the world to reject Khrushchev's 1956 speech renouncing Stalin as a fabrication of the capitalist press<sup>110</sup>, some of its members were becoming concerned about the fate of the Soviet Union which they had championed so ardently for many years. Maintaining a party line and strategies based on an unconvincing analysis of the USSR placed great pressure on the Communist Party. Futile policies such as the mass party line of 1958 to 1961 bred cynicism amongst members.<sup>111</sup> Women members of the party were also quietly discontent, their activist commitment undermined by a disjuncture between the party's political support for women's rights but private acceptance of traditional ideas about women. State-sponsored sexism in the "communist" bloc, such as the awarding of medals to women who raised large families in Russia in the 1940s<sup>112</sup> and the stress on obedience to husbands encouraged by the Chinese regime (with whom the CPA was enamoured in the 1950s), provided the basis for an accommodation by Australian communists to traditional attitudes to women.<sup>113</sup>

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(New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974), p 93; L. Trotsky, *Whither France?* (London: New Park Publications, 1974), p 114/5.

<sup>108</sup> W. Higgins, "Reconstructing Australian Communism," *Socialist Register*, 1974, p 157; T. O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream: the Decline of Australian Communism*, (Sydney: Stained Wattle Press, 1985), p 103/4.

<sup>109</sup> Docker, *op cit*, p 186.

<sup>110</sup> O'Lincoln, *op cit*, p 96.

<sup>111</sup> O'Lincoln, *ibid*, p 88; see also Higgins, *op cit*, pp 151-188.

<sup>112</sup> C. Rosenberg, *Women and Perestroika. Past, Present and Future for Women in Russia*, (London: Bookmarks, 1989), p 95.

<sup>113</sup> A. Inglis, *The Hammer & Sickle and the Washing Up: Memoirs of an Australian Woman Communist*, (South Melbourne: Hyland House, 1995).

At the same time, middle class protest groups were frequently hampered by concerns not to associate themselves with communists or their methods. Anti-communist repression in Australia did not reach the heights of McCarthyism in the United States, but it was nonetheless constraining for reform movements. Women's organisations in the 1950s, for example, were frequently riven by splits arising from the concern of their members to avoid any possibility of association with communism. In 1954, a representative of the United Associations of Women in New South Wales was recalled to Australia by a telegram from the Australian Federation of Women Voters after two small newspapers reported that whilst in Europe attending a conference of the conservative International Alliance of Women she had also attended a peace conference.<sup>114</sup> Concern with respectability meant rejecting any kind of action or ideas which might antagonise conservative governments. The alternative to antagonism was to obtain an audience, and those organisations which shared the governments' classless vision of society and its problems were most successful at this. Writing polite letters to politicians and passing motions—avoiding confrontation—became the dominant mode of extra-parliamentary politics.

Trotskyists, who existed in very small groups in Australia from the 1930s, provided an anti-Stalinist socialist alternative to the Communist Party which rejected both respectability and bureaucracy, but Australian Trotskyists were still beholden theoretically to Stalinism in crucial ways. Though the Trotskyist movement refused to recognise the Soviet Union as a communist society, they nonetheless felt bound to defend it because of its abolition of private property. The rise of new "communisms" after the Second World War meant that this stance became the basis for acrimony, splits and theoretical rigidity as different wings juggled criteria for judging which of these regimes might be supported. More importantly, the dominance of the Communist Party as the major organisational opposition to Australian capitalism, reinforced by physical intimidation of Trotskyist supporters, ensured that Trotskyism remained a marginal current.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> United Associations of Women collection, MSS2160, Box Y789, Mitchell library. See also P. Ranald, "Women's Organisations and the Issue of Communism," in Curthoys and Merritt, vol 2, *op cit*, pp 41-57.

<sup>115</sup> The only history of the early years of the Trotskyist movement in Australia is S. Short, *Laurie Short: A Political Life*, (North Sydney: Allen and Unwin in association with Lloyd Ross Forum, 1992); but see also J.A. McClelland, *Stirring the Possum: a Political Autobiography*, (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1989).

Apart from Trotskyism, the first alternative to Stalinism arising on the Australian Left was essentially "reform communist". The emergence of this layer of intellectuals was heralded by the invasion of Hungary in 1956.<sup>116</sup> Disillusionment with the Communist Party produced the Socialist Forum Movement in 1957, which produced the journals *Outlook* and *Dissent* as part of its effort to find a new course for socialists in Australia. Central to its view of contemporary politics was the idea, also popular with the Labor left, that socialism needed a new social base<sup>117</sup>, the working class having been incorporated into capitalism.<sup>118</sup> Writing in *Outlook* in August 1960, K.T. Fowler argued that students had in recent years "lost" many of the issues they had previously campaigned about:

There can be no moral fervour or non-conformist excitement in campaigning for social justice when the worst paid member of our society now lives as well as a skilled tradesman with a job in the thirties; nor in assisting a striking union struggling for legal recognition now that all such are registered with the Arbitration Court...<sup>119</sup>

In this, what has now been identified as the "Old" New Left were echoing the account of conservative intellectuals about the death of class and the end of ideology.<sup>120</sup>

Like other political currents in Australian society, the official trade union movement modified its activities on the basis of its assessment of a possibly permanent conservatism amongst Australian workers. The years following World War Two were years of retreat for the Australian labour movement. Relative affluence and near-full employment were the basis for a

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<sup>116</sup> A. Curthoys, "The Anti-War Movements," in J. Grey and J. Doyle, *Vietnam. War, Myth and Memory*, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1992), p 102; See especially A. Barcan, *The Socialist Left in Australia, 1949-1959*, Australian Political Studies Association, Occasional Monograph No 2, 1960.

<sup>117</sup> G.S. and D.W., "Features of the Intellectually Trained," *Arena*, No 15, 1968, pp 30-33.

<sup>118</sup> A. Barcan, "The New Left in Australia," *Outlook*, 4:3, June, 1960, pp 8-10.

<sup>119</sup> K.T. Fowler, "The Next Wave (The Incoherent Rebellion)," *Outlook*, August 1960, p 8.

<sup>120</sup> E. Meiksins Wood, "A Chronology of the New Left and its Successors, or: Who's Old-fashioned Now?," *Why not Capitalism? Socialist Register*, 1995.



conservative consensus, with the average weekly earnings of Australian workers increasing by about 4% in real terms during each year of the Menzies administration.<sup>121</sup> The 1954-55 Labor Split had consequences as serious for the trade union movement as they were for the Labor Party.<sup>122</sup> The anti-communist "groupers" played a major role in the movement, ensuring that the "middle ground" was a very cautious trade unionism, respectful of arbitration and wary of the rank and file.<sup>123</sup> As Ellem has noted:

...for many Catholics in working class organisations, communism was not so much a feature of international conflict as it was its cause. Communism must be fought everywhere: in the fields of Korea and in the ranks of the trade unions.<sup>124</sup>

Those who believed in "class," in "struggle," and the need for trade unions to involve themselves in political matters were considered, at best, anachronistic, at worst to have a secret agenda which was not based on the real interests of Australian workers. Trade union support for Aboriginal, women and migrant workers suffered in this climate of ideas.<sup>125</sup>

Nonetheless, the trade union movement was not dead, only sleeping. Many who write about trade unions, as Cliff and Gluckstein have observed, present them as "static and outside the changing stream of history," where in actuality trade unions are "deeply affected" by the situation in which they operate.<sup>126</sup> In the unfriendly climate of the 1950s, the movement clung to its

<sup>121</sup> Bolton, *op cit*, p 89.

<sup>122</sup> Murray, *The Split...., op cit*.

<sup>123</sup> See for example W. Eather, "'Exterminate the Traitors': the Wagga Wagga and Districts Trades and Labour Council, Trade Unionism and the Wagga Wagga Community 1943-60," *Labour History*, 72, May, 1992, pp 101-122; D. Blackmur, "The ALP Industrial Groups in Queensland," *Labour History*, 46, May 1984, pp 88-109; J. Warhurst, "The Australian Labor Party (Anti-Communist) in South Australia, November - December 1955: 'Molotov' versus 'Coffee-Shop' Labor," *Labour History*, 32, May 1977, pp 66-74.

<sup>124</sup> B. Ellem, *In Women's Hands? A History of Clothing Trades Unionism in Australia*, (Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1989), p 234.

<sup>125</sup> A. Curthoys and A. Markus (eds) *Who are our Enemies? Racism and the Australian Working Class*, (Neutral Bay, NSW: Hale and Iremonger in association with the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 1978).

<sup>126</sup> T. Cliff and D. Gluckstein, *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle. The General Strike of 1926*, (London: Bookmarks, 1986), p 13, 21.

existing structures and its leadership accommodated to the conservatism of the time. Union leaders reinforced conservatism amongst the rank and file, smoothed over resentments and preached caution, to facilitate negotiations with management. After 1951, and particularly, 1955, strikes became "shorter and fewer".<sup>127</sup> As Bolton has argued, communist trade union officials lost ground to more pragmatic officials, who concentrated on pay and conditions, often using short stoppages as a warning to management of an issue in need of resolution.<sup>128</sup> A minority, even a sizeable one, could be dissatisfied with this approach, but, unlike other social movements, militant workplace action cannot be successful unless the majority of workers in a workplace will vote for it. Whilst the conservative climate predominated it was going to be hard work for dissatisfied workers to achieve change.

Yet prosperity also laid the basis for future industrial militancy. The boom which brought two decades of peace and relative social harmony also generated social changes whose cumulative effect in the late 1960s was to undermine that stability. The proportion of workers in trade unions in Australia had grown to 60% in 1951, and remained high.<sup>129</sup> Industrial workers remained the most militant sections of the working class, with coal miners playing a leading role during the 1950s.<sup>130</sup> Trade union strength and coverage ensured that those within the Labor Party who would have liked to see an end to formal links with the labour movement were not successful. The commitment of Left Labour trade union officials to maintaining union traditions, and pressure from the rank and file, resulted in some Labor Party officials standing on "United Tickets" with communist trade union officials. The period also saw the proletarianisation and numerical growth of white-collar workers, previously a relatively conservative elite. As Bolton argues:

The quest for improved conditions turned white-collar unions into vigorous lobbyists; thus the bank officers who since the nationalisation debate of 1947-9 had nearly all voted Liberal, mended

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<sup>127</sup> Bolton, *op cit*, p 103.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> T. Sheridan, "Bosses and Workers," in Curthoys, Martin and Rowse, *op cit*, p 292.

<sup>130</sup> Bolton, *op cit*, p 103.

their links with Labor in the process of campaigning for the five-day working week...<sup>131</sup>

The sociological complexion of the Australian working class changed dramatically in these years, transformed especially by new migrant and women workers. The growth of manufacturing was dependent on the growth of a new, mostly migrant working class: as Maddock and Stilwell argue, "without migration Australia's population in 1976 would have been ten million, and production would probably have been 30% lower."<sup>132</sup> Nearly 1.8 million migrants came to Australia between 1947 and 1966, contributing nearly half the increase in the paid work-force.<sup>133</sup> Where previously most migrants had been British, labour demand higher than could be met by British migration alone meant that 1950s migrants came mainly from southern Europe. In the 1960s in particular, women, especially married women, increasingly entered the workforce.<sup>134</sup>

These changes affected the nature of trade unionism. The fastest growing unions were in the service industries, especially those employing government workers and women.<sup>135</sup> The migrant and women workers who now swelled the labour movement brought with them special problems and resentments. Non-white immigrants were permitted into the country only very selectively under a policy the Government called "Restrictive Immigration" but which was more accurately dubbed the White Australia Policy.<sup>136</sup> Migrant workers were concentrated in unskilled occupations and, therefore, disadvantaged by a wage system which emphasised margins for skill. In periods of recession there were few jobs for foreigners, sparking demonstrations, for example, of Italian migrants in 1952

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<sup>131</sup> Bolton, *op cit*, p 104.

<sup>132</sup> Maddock and Stilwell, *op cit*, p 259.

<sup>133</sup> B. Ellem, *op cit*, p 234.

<sup>134</sup> Day, *op cit*, p 386.

<sup>135</sup> Sheridan, *op cit*, p 292.

<sup>136</sup> A.R. Downer, Minister for Immigration in his speech "A Case for a Policy of Restricted Immigration," given 4 December, 1959 and reprinted in *Farrago*, Interstate Supplement, April 29, 1960, p 2.

and 1961.<sup>137</sup> The situation of migrant workers was one example of a contradiction between the promise and the reality of an international post-war order free of bigotry. Aboriginal people were still subject to policies whose aim was "to smooth the dying pillow" of what was still seen as a race outmatched by evolution<sup>138</sup>, many having their children snatched from them in "an organised effort to forcible assimilation and cultural annihilation."<sup>139</sup> In 1966, Australia's longest strike, a three-year campaign by rural Aboriginal workers in the Northern Territory to be paid wages, reflected the desire of Aboriginal people in the workforce for equal treatment.<sup>140</sup> Women workers continued to have their wages pegged to a basic male rate, with the introduction of child endowment in 1950 reinforcing their identity as mothers, politicising the domestic sphere and undermining union demands for an increase in the basic wage.<sup>141</sup> Throughout the 1960s the demand for equal pay for women quietly gained support.<sup>142</sup>

The concerns of women in this period also provide one example of how improvements in material life often served to highlight the personal and spiritual contradictions and straitjackets of Cold War morality and capitalism in general. Recognition amongst Australian women of the "problem that has no name" was reflected in the popularity of Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, such texts providing "a space for thinking about the gap between the egalitarian discourse and

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<sup>137</sup> Bolton, *op cit*, p 105, 107. See also J. Collins, *Migrant Hands in a Distant Land. Australia's Postwar Immigration*, (Leichhardt, NSW: Pluto Press, 1988).

<sup>138</sup> B. Attwood and A. Markus, in collaboration with D. Edwards and K. Schilling, *The 1967 Referendum, or When Aborigines Didn't Get the Vote*, (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1997).

<sup>139</sup> Day, *op cit*, p 392.

<sup>140</sup> A. Markus, "Talk Longa Mouth: Aborigines and the Labour Movement 1890-1970" in A. Curthoys and A. Markus (eds), *Who are Our Enemies? Racism and the Working Class in Australia* (Neutral Bay, NSW: Hale and Iremonger in Association with the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 1978), p 157. See also J. McCorquodale, "The Myth of Mateship: Aborigines and Employment," *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 27:1, 1985, pp 6-13.

<sup>141</sup> See Murphy, *op cit*, pp 552-567.

<sup>142</sup> B. Curthoys and A. McDonald, *More than a Hat and Glove Brigade: the Story of the Union of Australian Women*, (Sydney: Bookpress, 1996).

radically inegalitarian gender arrangements of the 1960s."<sup>143</sup> As Murphy argues, the emphasis on the private family resonated with concerns about "mass society".<sup>144</sup> Declines in child endowment through the 1950s and its increasing favouring of Australian born single-income families meant that:

...depictions of the family in conservative political rhetoric and in the cultural representations of women's magazines and consumer goods advertising most reflected the everyday life of the Australian-born middle class, and least reflected that of migrant and working class families.<sup>145</sup>

The bohemian and sexually libertarian Sydney Push was another manifestation of dissatisfaction with the conservative consensus. Though unfriendly towards workers (a sign on the window of the Sussex Street pub inhabited by the Push read "Keep out Alfs"—a warning to "oafish proletarians"),<sup>146</sup> members of the Push rejected the restrained sexual morality of 1950s Australia, modelling sexual libertarianism which would be adopted by many young working class people in the 1970s.<sup>147</sup>

"Youth" was another category with particular salience for the labour movement. A higher proportion of the workforce was young.<sup>148</sup> By the late 1960s, a generation of comparatively disrespectful and ungrateful young workers was entering the workforce. This new generation had never experienced mass unemployment, depression and war, as their parents and grandparents had.<sup>149</sup> For a large proportion of those born from the late 1940s

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<sup>143</sup> A. Curthoys, "Cosmopolitan Radicals: Australian Interactions with International Feminist Texts," in B. Caine *et al*, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Feminism*, (Melbourne: OUP, 1998) (forthcoming). Melbourne student activist Janey Stone also remembers reading Friedan's book before she began university in the early 1960s (personal interview).

<sup>144</sup> Murphy, "Shaping...", *op cit*, p 551.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, p 566.

<sup>146</sup> A. Coombs, *Sex and Anarchy: the Life and Death of the Sydney Push*, (Ringwood, Victoria: Viking, 1996). P.P. McGuinness, however, refers to two members of the Push who were in the WWF ("Interest in the Beats and the Sydney Push grows among the free-thinking young," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 September, 1995).

<sup>147</sup> Coombs, *ibid*.

<sup>148</sup> J. Clarke, "Young Workers and Politics," *Politics*, 2:2, November 1967, pp 167-175.

<sup>149</sup> Hall, *op cit*.

onwards, a house in the suburbs with a car, washing machine and lawn mower, and the ability to leave one job and find another relatively quickly were not novelties to be marvelled at but norms which they took for granted. Whilst they had never experienced great working class struggles and victories, these young workers were equally unscathed by defeat. Where identifying and carving out a "youth" market meant profits for the producers of music and clothing fashions, the youth culture also became a place where dissatisfaction could find expression. Youth themselves were not merely passive participants in this process. They formed sub-cultures whose identities were based on youthful discontent and disrespect for social "norms". As Jon Stratton's account shows, the "bodgie and widgie" youth culture in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s represented a response of working class youth to problems, including economic problems, which they encountered in Cold War society.<sup>150</sup>

Expansive talk of "affluence" and the Good Life did cement working class conservatism but it also created higher expectations. Household white goods, cars, mowers and televisions changed from being luxuries to be grateful for, to necessities which workers felt they had a right to afford. Moreover, the buoyancy of the Australian economy and very low unemployment right into the 1970s put workers in a strong bargaining position,<sup>151</sup> especially in the newly powerful manufacturing industries. The contradiction between a potentially powerful rank and file and an apathetic bureaucracy was reflected in a large increase in the number of shop stewards and the rise of shop and area committees, groups of rank and file workers who lobbied trade union leaders to take more direct action.<sup>152</sup> The rise of a strong rank and file movement in the building industry, which included

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<sup>150</sup> J. Stratton, *The Young Ones: Working-Class Culture, Consumption and the Category of Youth*, (Perth, W.A.: Black Swan Press, 1992). See also R. Evans, "Heroes Often Fail," *Cinema Papers*, 71, 1989, pp 37-42.

<sup>151</sup> P. Kriesler, *The Australian Economy. The Essential Guide*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1995).

<sup>152</sup> J. Hutson, "Shop Stewards and Shop Committees" in *Penal Colony to Penal Powers*, (Surrey Hills, NSW: Amalgamated Metals Foundry and Shipwrights' Union (Australia), 1983), p 216. See also Chullora Railway Workshop Shop Committee records, Noel Butlin Archives. For a relevant discussion of the shop steward movement in Britain in this period, see D. Widgery, "That was the Affluence That Was: the Industrial Struggle from 1956 to 1964" in *The Left in Britain, 1956-1968* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1976).

many migrant workers, was one example.<sup>153</sup> Shop floor organisation was alien to arbitration, rejecting containment and seeking to challenge and encroach on managerial rights.<sup>154</sup>

There were also limits to prosperity. "Indisputably," argues Geoffrey Bolton, "too many Australians, not all of them Aborigines, missed out on the good things of life".<sup>155</sup> Increased ownership of consumer durables and housing was at the expense of increased leisure and achieved by substantial increases in indebtedness.<sup>156</sup> In 1950, though one of the richest industrial nations, Australia spent only three-quarters of that spent in the US on social security and barely half that spent in the UK. The Menzies Government did little to change this in the subsequent decades.<sup>157</sup> Recognition of the ongoing existence of poverty in Australia was reflected in a comprehensive study of poverty in Melbourne undertaken at the initiative of R. F. Henderson in the mid 1960s.<sup>158</sup>

Workers found many issues around which to campaign. The introduction of new technology was promoted as providing the opportunity for more leisure time; though it often also decreased the scope for workers to exercise skill and judgement and in some cases, most notably in the case of containerisation on the waterfront, led to unemployment. Workers responded by supporting campaigns for greater leisure time and improved conditions, such as long service leave, the extension of paid holidays and Saturday closing. <sup>159</sup> Despite high wages, Arbitration's long refusal to intrude in issues of "management prerogative" meant that Australian workers were well behind most US and European workers in "non-wage"

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<sup>153</sup> See P. True, *Tales of the BLF...Rolling the Right! The battle of the Builders Labourers Rank and File in New South Wales 1951-1964*, (Parramatta: Militant, 1995).

<sup>154</sup> Hutson, *op cit*, p 218.

<sup>155</sup> Bolton, *op cit*, p 90.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, p 102/3.

<sup>158</sup> On the basis of the success of Henderson's survey of Melbourne he was employed to carry out a major national survey of poverty in the early 1970s. E.A. Boehm, *Twentieth Century Economic Development in Australia*, third edition, (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1993), p 249.

<sup>159</sup> Bolton, *op cit*, p 104.

working conditions such as severance pay, reinstatement claims and a say in the impact of new technology.<sup>160</sup>

The complacency bred by prosperity can in retrospect be seen to have been fragile. The success of the Australian economy depended on a favourable international situation, whose main elements were the availability of cheap raw materials, especially oil, from colonies and neo-colonies, international financial arrangements favourable to secure trade and a Cold War balance of power which ensured political stability.<sup>161</sup> Those conditions did not last. Although full-blown international economic crisis did not recur until 1973, throughout the 1960s there were various indications that the boom would not last forever. Internationally, countries less well-placed in the economic order were experiencing economic difficulties well before the end of the decade. As early as 1962 and 1963, these problems were reflected in substantial revolts, not seen since the 1940s, in Italy, France, Spain and Portugal.<sup>162</sup>

In Australia, the complacency of Australian economists in the early sixties lasted less than five short years.<sup>163</sup> By the mid-1960s, basic questions were being raised about whether reliance on the domestic market could sustain growth.<sup>164</sup> In 1965, the Vernon Report on the Australian economy argued unsuccessfully for greater government planning and guidelines for industrial development, to avoid an unfavourable balance of payments or a growth in inflation.<sup>165</sup> From 1965 to 1968 the Australian economy suffered a relatively mild growth slowdown, with the rate of growth of the manufacturing sector in particular slowing down after 1967-68.<sup>166</sup> The

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<sup>160</sup> Sheridan, *op cit*, p 295.

<sup>161</sup> Maddock and Stilwell, *op cit*, p 261/2. See also Bolton, *op cit*, p 90.

<sup>162</sup> Harman, *ibid*, p 18. See also C. Crouch and A. Pizzorno (eds), *The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe Since 1968*, (London: Macmillan, 1978).

<sup>163</sup> Hagan, *op cit*, p 216.

<sup>164</sup> Boehm, *op cit*, p 233/4. See also H.C. Coombs (Governor, Reserve Bank of Australia), *Maintaining Stability in a Rapidly Developing Economy*, 18th International Banking Summer School, Melbourne, 1965.

<sup>165</sup> Maddock and Stilwell, *op cit*, p 262.

<sup>166</sup> Boehm, *op cit*, p 34, 195. On the slowdown in manufacturing see also B. Head (ed.), *The Politics of Development in Australia*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989), p 5/6.



Australian textile industry peaked in 1965, then declined sharply.<sup>167</sup> As Hagan notes, in the late 1960s "some economists began to doubt, for the first time in twenty years, whether full employment could be continued and inflation be restrained."<sup>168</sup>

In the meantime, the contradictions of the Cold War began to manifest themselves in what would become an international ideological crisis. Post-war "security" had always been a strange blessing, underwritten as it was by an international balance of power which was palpably insecure. As a recent account notes, the paradox of that era was the existence of economic stability, growing affluence and personal comfort alongside "growing uncertainty and fear".<sup>169</sup> The Menzies Government was enthusiastic about its role in the battle against communism, sponsoring a uranium rush across northern Australia in the 1950s and in 1960 opening a nuclear reactor at Lucas Heights near Sydney.<sup>170</sup> The Cuban missile crisis of 1961, though far away, served as a reminder that an extremely hot war could result from these Cold War preparations. Following the 1961 crisis, the whole structure of international conflict changed as the Cold War settled down into "peaceful existence".

It was in this international context that the new Australian university students of the 1960s, with their overcrowded classrooms and their great expectations, prepared to make "the Sixties". In the mid-to late-1950s, the rise of liberal opposition tendencies in some Eastern-bloc countries and the intensifying Sino-Soviet split had undermined images of a monolithic communist movement against which Western nations must be defended.<sup>171</sup> US/USSR conflict was now overshadowed by conflicts between the West and colonised nations, with the United States Government, Australia's ally, playing the role of an aggressive world police force.<sup>172</sup> In

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<sup>167</sup> Spenceley, *op cit*, p 277.

<sup>168</sup> Hagan, *op cit*, p 209.

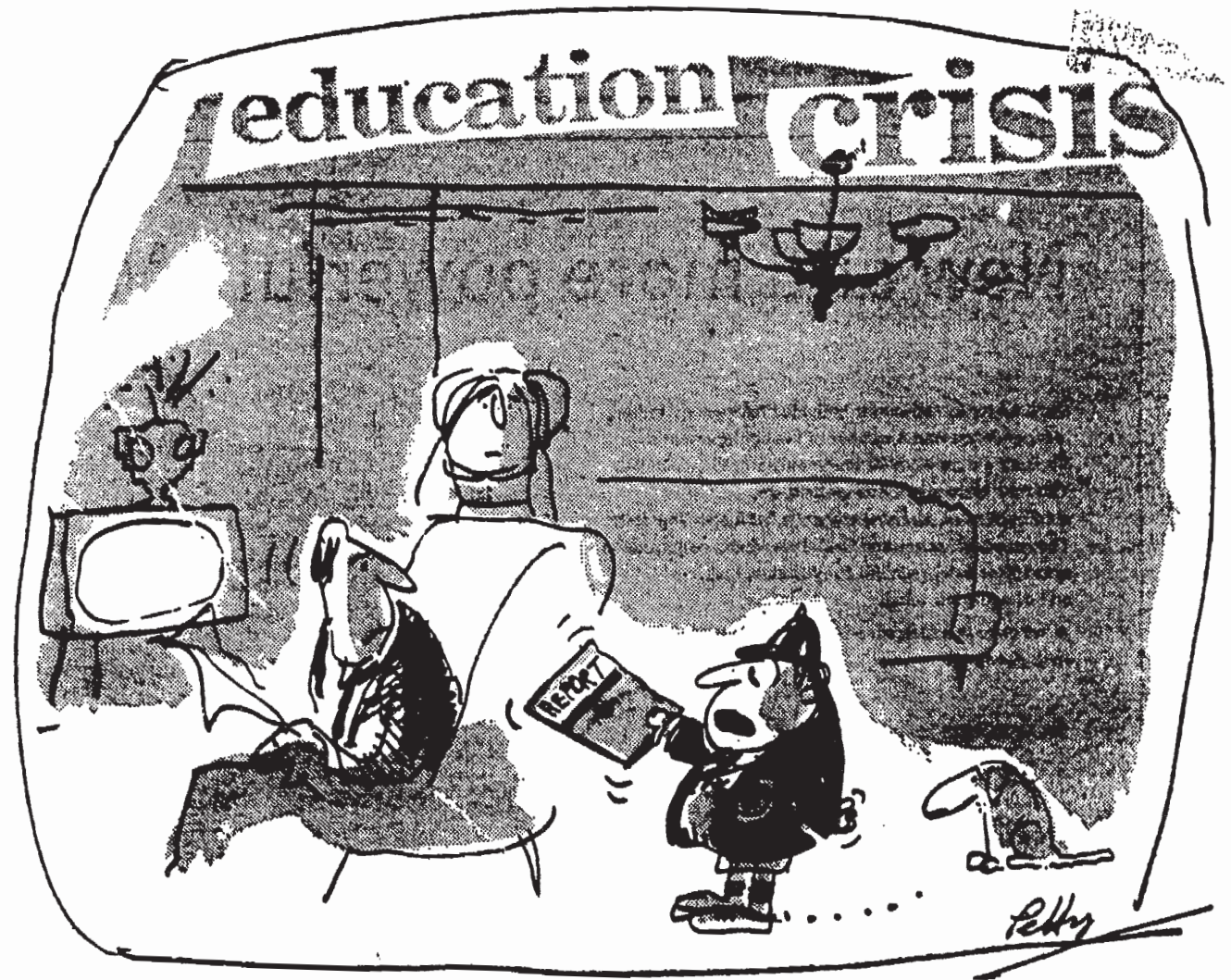
<sup>169</sup> S. Alomes, M. Dober and D. Hellier, "The social context of postwar conservatism" in Curthoys and Merritt, *op cit*, vol 1, p 12.

<sup>170</sup> Day, *op cit*, p 383/4.

<sup>171</sup> B. Pola, *Perspectives on the Australian Radical Left Student Movement 1966-1975*, PhD, School of Education, La Trobe University, 1988, p 142.

<sup>172</sup> G. Stedman-Jones, "The Meaning of the Student Revolt" in A.Cockburn and R.Blackburn (eds), *Student Power*, (Middlesex, Ringwood: Penguin in association with New Left Review, 1969), p 37.

the 1950s, knowing right from wrong and friend from enemy, being a good citizen and contributing to the social good had seemed, to many Australians, fairly straightforward propositions. Now, in the 1960s, a whole network of belief came under question.



Petty, reproduced in D. O'Neill *et al* (eds), *Up the Right Channels*, University of Queensland, July 1970, p 43.

*"I'd like you to bear in mind that the teacher is most likely unqualified."*

## IT'S · MENZIES, THE ACADEMIC



"It's Menzies, the Academic", *The Australian*, 3 April 1967, p 1. Ex-prime minister Robert Menzies is installed as chancellor of Melbourne University. He told the audience: "Freedom is as much the prerogative of the brick-layer around the corner as of the professor in the university".

### Chapter Three

#### "Conscience" Politics: Student Anti-Racism 1960-1964

*Old Bob Menzies he ought to know, White Australia,  
That the divers, they can stay, no more White Australia.  
Arthur Calwell he ought to say, White Australia  
That the divers, they can stay, no more White Australia.  
The RSL is a body mighty...  
They say keep Australia whitey  
Keep us white says RSL...  
Student Action says go to hell.*

(Sung to the tune of "Michael row the boat ashore")<sup>1</sup>

*There have been a few instances of grumbling that the kids are going off half-cocked, &c.; which is true, of course - but unless kids went off half-cocked, nothing would ever happen.<sup>2</sup>*

*Memories of that tumultuous afternoon last a lifetime...the flying gravel, the tomatoes and rotten eggs, the punches, the spit, the shouts: 'Let's string 'em up'...'Get the coons out' 'Get the coons out' 'Get the coons out'...<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in P. Coleman, "The Student Generation. After the Stagnant Fifties, a Revival of Politics," *The Bulletin*, August 11 1962, p 13.

<sup>2</sup> Melbourne University SRC President John Paterson, quoted in P. Sauville, "Sentimentalists and Realists: the Education Project," *Farrago*, 4 March 1963, p 1.

<sup>3</sup> P. Read, *Charles Perkins. A Biography*, (Ringwood: Penguin, 1990), p 111, describing the scene as university students defied a ban on Aboriginal children at Moree Swimming Pool, 1965.

Pre-dating the revival of student protest in the mid-1960s in opposition to the Vietnam War were two important movements of students motivated by opposition to racism. One consequence of the world-wide movement against racism and colonialism was to put the Australian Government's attitude to racial questions under the spotlight internationally.<sup>4</sup> Students in particular were angered by the failure of both the Government and the Labor opposition to respond to international criticism. Their politics and the strategies they adopted reflected the political climate of the time. In Melbourne, Fabian socialists in the right-wing of the Labor Party led demonstrations against the White Australia Policy with the aim of pricking the consciences of politicians and "the public". In Sydney in 1964, a small group of students from a variety of political backgrounds formed Student Action for Aborigines, whose members toured rural New South Wales, protesting against examples of discrimination they found there. Both groups attracted national attention and provided a "dress rehearsal" for the student protest which would shortly occur in response to the introduction of conscription for Vietnam.

The rise of these protest groups must be seen in the context of the retreat of the radical Left during the Cold War. The distinctly "Old Left" tenor of student politics in the late 1960s has been associated with an Australian radical tradition which, from the 1930s, "focused on a worker-based class-struggle and working class industrial and political militancy".<sup>5</sup> In 1948-49 the Left on the campuses, under attack from conservative forces, collapsed<sup>6</sup> and anti-communism became the major current in student newspapers and politics.<sup>7</sup> In the 1950s it was the Evangelical Union and Student Christian Movement which dominated campus politics.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> J. Clark, "'Something to Hide': Aborigines and the Department of External Affairs, January 1961-January 1962," *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 83:1, 1997, pp 71-84.

<sup>5</sup> I. Birrell, 1971, p 66, quoted in J.A. Walter, *The Perception of Conflict: Profiles from Student Politics*, BA Hons, Politics, La Trobe University, 1974. Early student communism is discussed in more detail in Chapter Twelve.

<sup>6</sup> B. Pola, *Perspectives on the Australian Radical Left Student Movement 1966-1975*, PhD, School of Education, La Trobe University, 1988, p 17; C. Rootes, *Australian Student Radicals: the Nature and Origin of Dissent*, BA Hons, Government Department, University of Queensland, 1969, p 173.

<sup>7</sup> Pola, *ibid*, p 18.

<sup>8</sup> H. Knowles, seminar on the subject of University Labor Clubs in Australia in the 1940s and 1950s, Macquarie University, November 1994; see also V. Buckley, *Cutting Green Hay*:

The Melbourne University Labor Club in particular was responsible for the high profile of student communism on that campus.<sup>9</sup> By the early 1960s, however, communist students were embattled, as well as demoralised, by the turmoil surrounding the 1956 invasion of Hungary by the Soviet Union and the subsequent conflict between the Soviet Union and China. In 1956 there was evidence on Australian streets of a new current of radicalism, neither conservative, nor pro-Soviet. That year, on the eve of the Olympic Games in Melbourne, a huge march took place, with banners protesting at British troops in the Suez, Russian tanks in Budapest and Bulganin's threat to bombard London with rockets. Police diverted the march, then moved in to seize and destroy student banners.<sup>10</sup> The continued salience of communist ideas for radical thinkers was, nonetheless, illustrated by the way in which the issue of communism, from 1956, again "came increasingly to the forefront of liberal debate at Melbourne University".<sup>11</sup>

The isolation of student communists, however, ensured that it was students associated with the Labor Party, slowly recovering from the exhaustion rendered by the 1955 Labor split and subsequent conflicts,<sup>12</sup> who initiated the most important student protest of the early 1960s. A revival of student activism had begun, whose principal focus was opposition to racism, but also to "totalitarianism" and war. Cold War foreign and domestic policies in Australia were justified on the basis of the superiority of the "free world," a democratic world committed to colonial independence and to a post-war world free of the racism and bloodshed of World War Two. By the early 1960s, a minority of students became increasingly concerned at the failure of Australian governments to live up to that vision.

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*Friendships, Movements and Cultural Conflicts in Australia's Great Decades*, (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1983).

<sup>9</sup> H. Dow (ed.), *Memories of Melbourne University: Undergraduate Life in the Years since 1917*, (Richmond: Hutchinson Group, 1983); G. Blainey, *A Centenary History of the University of Melbourne*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1957); R.A. Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists: Communism and the Australian Labour Movement 1920-1955*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1985); P. O'Brien, *The Saviours: An Intellectual History of the Left in Australia*, (Richmond: Primary Education Publishing, 1977), p 98.

<sup>10</sup> R. Gerster and J. Bassett, *Seizures of Youth: the "Sixties" and Australia*, (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1991), p 225.

<sup>11</sup> D. Cusack, "Melbourne University, Catholic Liberals and the *Catholic Worker*," *Melbourne Journal of Politics*, Vol 13, 1981, p 59.

<sup>12</sup> Jim Jupp, personal interview.

The US civil rights movement, the conflict between black South Africans and the white government, and the implications of the White Australia Policy for Asian students provided the spark for student action in Australia. In March 1960, a new resistance campaign launched against apartheid by black South Africans met terrible repression in the Sharpeville massacre. Troops opened fire on a demonstration, killing sixty-nine people. The incident inspired protest around the world, and the first student protest of the decade in Australia, occurring at Sydney University. At the initiative of the ALP and Labor Clubs, a meeting was called by all political clubs, including the Student Christian Movement and the Newman Society, though the Evangelical Union tried to stop the march.<sup>13</sup> At that meeting "1000 students debated in high earnestness whether or not to protest".<sup>14</sup> Thousands more arrived at the city demonstration in Martin Place, including homeward bound city workers and members of the Communist Party youth group, the Eureka Youth League. Police attacked the peaceful demonstration, mishandling a news reporter<sup>15</sup> and tearing up placards.<sup>16</sup> Nine participants were arrested and charged with offensive behaviour.<sup>17</sup>

An early indication of preferred radical fashions of the 1960s (and the apparent invisibility of females) lies in *Farrago's* comment: "Every beard within miles seemed to be automatically drawn to the spot".<sup>18</sup> Walters has noted that the underpinnings of early student activism were:

...the emergent tendencies of a youth culture centered on a pseudo-beatnik ethos and characterized by the adoption of beards, duffle-coats, and an enthusiasm for traditional jazz. Now university students were readily identifiable as somehow "different".<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> H. Knowles, *op cit.*

<sup>14</sup> K. Fowler, "The Next Wave," *Outlook*, 4:4, August 1960, p 9.

<sup>15</sup> *Farrago*, 1 April 1960.

<sup>16</sup> Cinesound, 1960 footage, 31 March 1962, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

<sup>17</sup> "Police Clash with Students, Charge Nine: S.A. Protest," *The Age*, 31 March 1960, p 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Farrago*, *op cit.*

<sup>19</sup> Walter, *op cit.*, p 43/4.



In Melbourne, student processions had been banned after the 1956 clash between students and police. In 1960, permission for a procession to mark World Refugee Year was withdrawn, despite exaggerated attempts by the Melbourne University Student Representative Council, who organised the march, to ensure that it would be peaceful. The SRC, for example, kept major details such as the route of the procession a secret from most students until the last moment.<sup>20</sup> The following year, however, Victorian students finally successfully took to the streets over the issue of South Africa. In early 1961, Melbourne University students were angered when Prime Minister Menzies opposed discussion of the Sharpeville massacre at a conference of Commonwealth nations. A general student meeting attracted 800 participants, who donated money for Sharpeville victims and resolved to send a delegation of twelve to protest to Members of Parliament. A further motion put after a speaker from the floor suggested "Let's all go!" was lost.<sup>21</sup>

As a result of that meeting, nearly 350 Melbourne University students participated in the "first downtown procession for four years".<sup>22</sup> A mass rally denounced Menzies and called for a motion of no confidence in the Federal Government. Students held up traffic at intersections and two police patrol cars followed behind, "with police hopping out to hold up traffic for the marchers, on one occasion defying a red light to do so". The march was marred, however, by the banning by student leaders of what the Melbourne University student newspaper *Farrago* described as the "most effective and original banners".<sup>23</sup> SRC President Arthur Latham predicted confidently that the "responsible and self-disciplined" behaviour of students would ensure a "new and more satisfactory" relationship with police.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, later events would challenge that optimistic prognosis.

Conservative Immigration Minister, Alexander Downer, defended "Restricted Immigration" on the basis that the unfettered migration of non-

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<sup>20</sup> "Valiant Town Clerk Preserves City from Students," *Farrago*, 1 July 1960, p 1.

<sup>21</sup> "No incidents in Students City March," *Farrago*, 14 April 1961, p 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Those banned included "Menzies Go Away Again," "Tunku Abdul Rahman for Australian Foreign Minister" and "Menzies and Eichmann both defend Domestic Jurisdiction" (*ibid.*).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

whites would lead to racial "strife".<sup>25</sup> Yet it was those Australians who had most contact with non-whites who were first to spring to their defence. Australian university students had been mixing on campus with students from other countries since the arrival in 1946 of the first Asian-born students, a small, privately financed group from Malaysia.<sup>26</sup> In 1953, Sydney students had demonstrated against racist attacks on Asian students in *Truth* and the *Daily Mirror*.<sup>27</sup> By 1964, under the Colombo Plan of the early 1960s, Australian students were mixing with and befriending African, Indian and Asian students.<sup>28</sup> Ninety percent of overseas students in Australia, however, were not supported by the Colombo Plan, having to finance themselves privately. As the the National Union of Australian University Students (NUAUS) noted, without even a government office to assist them, these students were left "to fend for themselves".<sup>29</sup> Due to the White Australia Policy, many Asian students in Australia would have preferred to have found places at universities in the UK, US or Canada. Yet they were reluctant to say so, some even pretending to support the White Australia Policy, judging that "even in a democratic country like this there is no harm in being cautious".<sup>30</sup>

In 1961, the Minister for Immigration, Mr Downer, became the target of national anger when he refused to allow two Malayan divers, Daris Bin Saris and Jaffa Madunne, to remain in Australia. Saris and Madunne, who had worked in Australia for twelve and nineteen years respectively and lived in Darwin, went into hiding, sparking one of the two largest demonstrations in Darwin's history in their support. Two trade unions

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<sup>25</sup> As summarised by A.R. Downer, Minister for Immigration in his speech "A Case for a Policy of Restricted Immigration," given 4 December 1959 and reprinted in *Farrago*, Interstate Supplement, 29 April 1960, p 2.

<sup>26</sup> H. Knowles, *op cit*.

<sup>27</sup> *Left Forum*, 13 April 1954.

<sup>28</sup> H. Knowles, *op cit*.

<sup>29</sup> "Large Asian Growth Needs Action," *National News* (NUAUS supplement), *Lot's Wife*, 24 June 1964.

<sup>30</sup> "Asian student," writing in "The Case for the Asian Student," *Farrago*, 10 June 1960, p 7. Asian students who did offer their honest opinions also experienced open hostility. See "Australia as Seen Through Open Eyes" by "The Little Chinese Critic," *Chaos*, 22 June 1961, pp 6-10 and subsequent responses from white and Asian students in "Letters".

stopped work in protest at their proposed deportation.<sup>31</sup> The case of the Malayan divers served to highlight student disenchantment with the two major political parties over the issue of race. The Prime Minister refused to overrule his Minister's decision on the deportation order, and amongst Labor Ministers only Jim Cairns "made even the mildest statement" in support of the divers.<sup>32</sup>

The enormously popular campaign<sup>33</sup> to defend the divers was part of a general campaign, led by students, against the White Australia Policy and against Menzies' reaction to the Sharpeville massacre. The issues of the White Australia Policy and of Australian Government support for the South African Government were directly linked because Menzies claimed, probably correctly, that if the Commonwealth Prime Ministers discussed apartheid and Sharpeville, then the precedent would be established for them to discuss White Australia.<sup>34</sup> The Labor Party was also criticised by student activists for failing to distinguish its policies sufficiently from Liberal immigration policy. Opposition leader Arthur Calwell argued that the Australian Government should criticise the South African Government but reject any attempt to draw parallels with the White Australia Policy, which he supported.<sup>35</sup> The Labor Party threatened to expel members of the anti-White Australia Immigration Reform Group, in one case carrying out that threat,<sup>36</sup> though the Immigration Reform Group supported restricted entry of migrants, specifying 1500 as a desirable number from Asia.<sup>37</sup>

In 1960, student opposition to racism received further inspiration from the United States. Five years after Rosa Parkes had refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white man, another wave of activism swept the southern States,

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<sup>31</sup> *Chaos*, 27 September 1961.

<sup>32</sup> "V.Ilyanov," "Students as a Moral Force," *Farrago*, 6 October 1961, p 2.

<sup>33</sup> Jim Jupp, personal interview.

<sup>34</sup> *Farrago*, 6 October 1961, p 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Farrago*, 6 October 1961, p 2; "Federal Labor Move," *The Age*, 31 March 1960, p 3.

<sup>36</sup> A.C. Palfreeman, *The Administration of the White Australia Policy*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1967), p 128.

<sup>37</sup> Immigration Reform Group, (K. Rivett (ed.)), *Immigration: Control or Colour Bar? The Background to 'White Australia' and a Proposal for Change* (Melbourne: MUP, 1962), pp 124-137.

this time led by thousands of black students, who faced police rifles, shotguns and teargas as they defied segregation.<sup>38</sup> Inspired by this example, in October 1961, Melbourne students, organised by a number of groups including the Student Christian Movement and the Melbourne University ALP Club demonstrated outside the West End Hotel, whose owner had asked three Nauruan women to leave. Students carried placards saying "Ban the White Australia Policy" and "Racial discrimination is immoral". Of the approximately 150 students, twenty-five were from the new Monash University—it was their first demonstration.<sup>39</sup>

In mid-1962, Brisbane students held a similar action, picketing a Brisbane hotel whose manager had refused to serve beer to one Indian and two African students. The demonstration ended after two Indian students were finally served, the hotel licensee saying he would consult the Queensland Hotels Association.<sup>40</sup> In August of that year, Brisbane students supported a successful "drink-in" with fellow students born in Asia.<sup>41</sup> Yet the opposition of these students to racism was compromised by their concern to remain within the law. In demanding a statement from the Hotels Association, the students stressed that they were not asking hoteliers to break the law—merely that those exempt from State laws governing Aboriginal people, which included overseas visitors and "exempted Aboriginals," be served.<sup>42</sup> The exclusion of Aboriginal people from Queensland bars consequently remained unchallenged.

By 1961, a minority of Melbourne students were increasingly alienated from the major political parties over their stance on racial issues. Moreover, they were frustrated that the 1961 federal election was to be fought primarily over "economic" issues.<sup>43</sup> They resolved to band together all political clubs and other groups to demonstrate against both parties to give a "moral lead" in

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<sup>38</sup> C. Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After*, (London: Bookmarks, 1988), p 27.

<sup>39</sup> "Demonstration," *Chaos*, 13 October 1961, p 1; *Farrago*, 6 October 1961, p 1/3.

<sup>40</sup> *Chaos*, 19 September 1962, p 1. The students were members of Brisbane's Student Action (see below).

<sup>41</sup> *Farrago*, 3 August 1962.

<sup>42</sup> *Chaos*, 19 September 1962, p 1.

<sup>43</sup> "V. Ilyanov," *op cit*.

the election campaign. It was an opportunity, one student wrote, to "force the politicians to act like statesmen".<sup>44</sup> In October 1961, with these aims in mind, a group of Melbourne University students came together to form what became Student Action, since described as the group responsible for "the most significant student activism of the early 1960s".<sup>45</sup> Like the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley in 1964, Student Action mobilised student clubs right across the political spectrum, including the Liberal Club, Engineering Society, Political Science Society, Newman Society, Student Christian Movement, Arts Association, Rationalist Society and ALP Club.<sup>46</sup> This unprecedented alliance testifies to the way in which ideas of class antagonisms had been obscured, forgotten almost, in the post-war consensus. Yet they had not been eradicated. Two groups were excluded from Student Action: the conservative Evangelical Union, who campaigned against its formation,<sup>47</sup> and the Communist Party.<sup>48</sup>

What was to become the Student Action Committee organised a mass meeting of 800 students who resolved to demonstrate "against both political parties during the coming federal election campaign on issues connected with racialism".<sup>49</sup> A committee of eighteen was empowered to organise these demonstrations, which set up regional committees in each electorate to pressure local candidates. Representatives from Monash University and the Melbourne Technical College also began attending their meetings.<sup>50</sup> In Sydney, Adelaide and Queensland, Student Action was "feebly reproduced".<sup>51</sup> In Melbourne, the group's first initiative was to organise around one hundred students in late-1961 to stage an enthusiastic welcome

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> C.A. Rootes, "The Development of Radical Student Movements and their Sequelae," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 3:2, 1988, p 173.

<sup>46</sup> R. Allen, "Student Action," *Dissent*, 2:1, March 1962, p 18. For information of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, see H. Draper, *Berkeley: the New Student Revolt* (New York, 1965); S.M. Lipset and S.S. Wolin (eds), *The Berkeley Student Revolt. Facts and Interpretations*, (New York: Doubleday, 1965).

<sup>47</sup> H. Knowles, *op cit.*

<sup>48</sup> *Guardman*, 5 December 1961, p 2.

<sup>49</sup> R. Allen, "Student Action," *Dissent*, 2:1, March 1962, p 18.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* See also L. Chipman, "Student Action in Victoria," *Vestes*, 5:1, March 1962, pp 33-4.

<sup>51</sup> Rootes, *op cit.*

for the Malayan divers arriving for their deportation trial, and a public protest meeting on the divers' behalf a few days later.<sup>52</sup>

Student Action members were frequently disappointed at the failure of the press to take them seriously and report their activities accurately. In 1961, student protests over the Sharpeville massacre had been "almost totally ignored" by the daily press "which for years had filled its front pages with news of 'irresponsible student minorities'".<sup>53</sup> The same year, a student prank in which 105 students squeezed onto a mattress in Myers had been covered on the front page with photographs.<sup>54</sup> Press misrepresentation and stories of personal intervention by top-level supporters of the White Australia Policy in the handling of articles reinforced the students' concern about the media and the need for spectacle to attract attention to their protests.<sup>55</sup>

It was during the 1961 federal election campaign that Student Action made a major impact, despite the campaign occurring during the students' examination period. At their protests, they used novel gimmicks and ways of attracting media attention, adapting the style of a previously apolitical student subculture of "rags" or pranks.<sup>56</sup> At one Menzies meeting, five hundred students gathered on the lawn outside Kew City Hall with placards and handbills. A "bearded Bohemian" sang specially composed songs and students pelted arriving dignitaries with anti-White Australia leaflets. The protestors then crowded into the rear of the hall, where they heckled the Prime Minister, two of their number being ejected for pushing a placard in front of Menzies as he was speaking.<sup>57</sup> At a meeting of the Minister for Immigration, Alexander Downer, students painted their faces black and heckled the minister from the audience. The opposition leader, Arthur

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<sup>52</sup> Allen, *op cit.* The meeting was also organised and co-sponsored by the Victorian Association for Immigration Reform. Jim Jupp chaired the meeting (Jupp interview) See also on action in relation to the Malayan divers: "Students March in Two Cities," *Farrago*, 4 May, 1962, p 3; "MPs Forget Refugees for Tour," *Farrago*, 22 June 1962, p 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Farrago*, 28 April 1961, p 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Guardman*, 5 December 1961; see also *Farrago*, 22 September 1961, p 1.

<sup>55</sup> *Guardman*, *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> W. Osmond, in *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 46:8, 7 September 1970.

<sup>57</sup> Allen, *op cit.*

Calwell, received similar treatment. Students disrupted his meetings, attacking him over his stand on immigration and displaying copies of a letter he had written urging candidates not to oppose the colour bar.<sup>58</sup>

As one participant noted, the students learnt lessons from this campaign.<sup>59</sup> They learnt that, under pressure, the underlying racial sentiments of politicians could be made to emerge. Minister Downer had said (in a fit of anger) that he would rather have a migration office in Edinburgh than in Kuala Lumpur, and Calwell, in a "secret" circular to ALP candidates, said that Asian students wishing to stay in Australia were escapists and deserters. Also revealed was "just how solid the establishment really is," with Calwell denouncing the students in stronger terms than Menzies himself.<sup>60</sup> The election roused to political activity "thousands who have [had] for a decade been uncertain, disillusioned and pessimistic".<sup>61</sup>

In 1962, Student Action campaigned against the deportation of Willie Wong, a student and illegal immigrant, to China.<sup>62</sup> They also protested in defence of a Scottish man, Kenneth McBride, who, owing to his part Southern European ancestry, had been judged "a shade too dark" to be admitted to Australia.<sup>63</sup> A student placard warned: "Mind that Tan - They Might Deport You".<sup>64</sup> They protested against attempts to deport three Portugese sailors<sup>65</sup> and outside the US Consulate against nuclear testing.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* See also, "'There are Mean Things Happening in This Land...'," *Outlook*, February 1962, p 19; "A Little Bit of Action," *The Bulletin*, 25 November 1961, p 25.

<sup>59</sup> "Student Action! The Inside Story," *Guardman*, 5 December 1961, p 2. The fate of Calwell's circular illustrates dissent within ALP ranks over the immigration issue, with some ALP candidates "bending over backwards" to have it published, Student Action at one stage having access to three copies.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> "1962: Year of Resurgence?," *Outlook*, February 1962, p 2.

<sup>62</sup> "Downer's Blunders Anger Students," *Chaos*, 11 April 1962, p 9; "Deportation was Wong," *Chaos*, 11 April 1962, p 2.

<sup>63</sup> *Farrago*, 21 September 1962, p 3.

<sup>64</sup> From a photograph of a Student Action picket, *Guardman*, 5 December 1961, p 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> "50 students protest over bomb," *Farrago*, 15 June 1962. Police asked the students what they thought of the Russian bombs. Organisers explained that "we are even more crook on them than the Yanks."

The group consistently drew attention to the failings of Labor as well as Liberal politicians. In mid-1962 students organised an Anti-Hanging Committee, along the same lines as Student Action, to protest against the proposed hanging of Robert Tait. By October the committee had collected over 14,000 signatures on a petition. Waterside workers provided 530 of these signatures, responding warmly when approached by students during "smoke-oh" on the wharves.<sup>67</sup> Victorian Premier Bolte, however, refused to receive the petition.<sup>68</sup> Students held mass demonstrations and marches, including a march of 2,000 which greeted Bolte as he opened the new Secondary Teachers' College at Melbourne University, which resulted in the arrest of one female student.<sup>69</sup> A day and night vigil was maintained outside Parliament House for two weeks.<sup>70</sup>

The protests organised by Student Action played an important role in the defeat of the White Australia Policy. In their determination to find a post-Stalinist alternative to the Labor and Liberal Parties they may also be seen as precursors of the student New Left. Nonetheless, Student Action, and the Melbourne University ALP Club which was central to its formation and activities, were associated with a profoundly conservative wing of the Labor Party. The roots of Student Action lay in a loose grouping who came together to challenge the dominance of the Communist Party and "make a nuisance of ourselves" at the 1959 Peace Congress.<sup>71</sup> Unlike B.A. Santamaria, the leader of Australia's anti-communist forces in the labour movement (who chose not to intervene in the Congress) these anti-communists attended with the aim of establishing a position which was neither pro-Santamaria nor pro-communist.<sup>72</sup> They produced broadsheets advocating a "leftwing social-democratic alternative to the communist

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<sup>67</sup> *Farrago*, September 1962. See also "Is a Noose Necessary?," *Farrago*, 3 October 1962.

<sup>68</sup> "Bolte Spurns Tait Petition," *Farrago*, 8 October 1962.

<sup>69</sup> "Policeman Runs in Student Over Offensive Word," *Farrago*, 8 March 1963, p 1.

<sup>70</sup> *Farrago*, July 1963.

<sup>71</sup> Jupp, personal interview.

<sup>72</sup> Vincent Buckley testifies to the dislike of prominent ALP Club member Bill Thomas for Santamaria, telling how Thomas had come to an apostolate conference looking for "Santamaria men" to attack (Buckley, *ibid*, p 213).



line".<sup>73</sup> In this, their intervention coincided with a wider aim, which was, as they saw it, to render the Victorian Labor Party electable by defeating the left-wing, union-dominated Victorian Central Executive.<sup>74</sup>

The Melbourne ALP Club could be said to have been in the vanguard of anti-communist forces in the "Old New Left" which arose following divisions in the Communist Party at the time of the invasion of Hungary in 1956. The Old New Left in Melbourne consisted of people hoping to achieve a post-Stalinist regeneration of the Left through involvement in the ALP. Some had been communists, but others not; and some even considered communism as the "main enemy".<sup>75</sup> Unlike the more traditional Sydney "New Left," the Melbourne ALP Club members were:

...consciously anti-Communist in the tradition of European social-democracy...deliberately trying to break from Communist clichés in words and thought.<sup>76</sup>

The Club grew rapidly in 1960 and 1961, boasting 300 to 350 members.<sup>77</sup> Prominent figures were lecturer Jim Jupp and student Bill Thomas. Thomas in particular became central in the club's revitalisation.<sup>78</sup> In April 1961, ALP Club members initiated *Dissent*, a Melbourne alternative to the now Sydney-based New Left journal *Outlook*. Unlike *Outlook*, the *Dissent* editorial board included no ex-communists, only ALP members.<sup>79</sup> Club members prided themselves on "harrying" Sam Goldbloom, the organising secretary of the communist-dominated Peace Congress, and his supporters, who tagged them "Melbourne's little clique of Revisionists".<sup>80</sup> In 1961

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<sup>73</sup> J. Jupp, "What happened to "The New Left". Melbourne socialists vs. Sydney fellow-travellers," *The Bulletin*, 15 September 1962, p 30.

<sup>74</sup> Jim Jupp, personal interview; V.Buckley, *Cutting Green Hay*, *op cit*, p 213.

<sup>75</sup> Jupp, "What happened...," *op cit*.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p 31.

<sup>77</sup> Jupp, personal interview.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas also wrote articles about the Victorian Labor Party in *The Bulletin* in this period (Jupp interview).

<sup>79</sup> Jupp "What happened...," *op cit*.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*. See also, R. Summy and M. Saunders, "The 1959 Melbourne Peace Congress: Culmination of Anti-Communism in Australia in the 1950s," in A. Curthoys and J. Merritt

Goldbloom failed to attend an arrangement to speak to the University Labor Club on nuclear disarmament, a spokesman saying that he "did not like students" and had not agreed to speak.<sup>81</sup> ALP leader Arthur Calwell also hated ALP Club members "with great intensity," considering them agents of Labor Party opponent Gough Whitlam ("which we were") and of Santamaria.<sup>82</sup>

The underlying assumption of Student Action, as Mendes has noted, was that "students were a 'moral interest free elite' whose role was to act as a 'conscience of society'".<sup>83</sup> Its members did not see themselves as in any way representing the wishes of a disenfranchised community. Rather, it was the electorate that was held to be ultimately to blame for bad politicians. During one campaign about education, for example, an ALP Club member stressed that they were not attacking the Government: "The Federal Government is more advanced in its views than the general public".<sup>84</sup> In trying to change public opinion and challenge politicians, Student Action leaders represented a new elite waiting impatiently in the wings. Writing in *Farrago*, a Club member predicted that the intelligence and quality of politics and politicians would improve in the next decade:

...as the parties realise the value of having highly trained individuals, who can cope with the increasing complexity of the purely executive side of Government as their representatives. People who can translate the detailed business of government into non-specialist terms for the electorate at large...<sup>85</sup>

The elitism of Student Action was based on their commitment to

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(eds), *Australia's First Cold War, Better Dead Than Red*, vol 2, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984), pp 77/87/92.

<sup>81</sup> *Farrago*, 6 October 1961, p 3; see also "Bashing at Peace Rally," *Farrago*, 22 September 1961, p 3.

<sup>82</sup> Jupp interview.

<sup>83</sup> P. Mendes, *The New Left, the Jews and the Vietnam War 1965-1972*, (Melbourne: Lazare Press, 1993), p 25.

<sup>84</sup> "Monash Students Join Campaign for Better Education," *Chaos*, 27 March 1963, p 1.

<sup>85</sup> *Farrago*, July 1963.

Fabianism, a particularly "respectable" current in the labour movement originating with British Labour Party members Sidney and Beatrice Webb, on whom some Student Action members consciously modelled themselves.<sup>86</sup> Contemptuous of "these myriads of deficient minds and deformed bodies that swarm our great cities"<sup>87</sup>, the focus of the Webbs' propaganda had been the upper class who they attempted to influence through a policy of "permeating" the Liberal and Tory parties, only turning to Labor "as a poor third".<sup>88</sup> In early 1961, the ALP Club entered and revived the Victorian Fabian Society. Fabianism, or "whispering in the ears of the great"<sup>89</sup> was seen as a way for those in the ALP lacking a trade union base to "sell ideas on their merit":

... Conducting election surveys, producing pamphlets, offering help for the ALP magazine *Fact*, bending the ears of sympathetic parliamentarians, are all very good ways of getting things done...<sup>90</sup>

The ALP Club's Fabianism put limitations on their capacity for radical action. Although they opposed the Government's restriction on Asian immigration, they still favoured only a limited quota of Asian migrants.<sup>91</sup> Further, the Club's anti-communism compromised their ability to intervene effectively in the labour movement. Their relationship to the trade union movement in Victoria illustrates the kind of suspicions arising from Cold War conflicts which tainted student/worker relations in the early 1960s.

The White Australia Policy was an extremely contentious issue in the

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<sup>86</sup> Jupp, "What Happened...", *op cit*.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in T. Cliff and D. Gluckstein, *The Labour Party - a Marxist History*, (London: Bookmarks, 1988), pp 17-22.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*. For a much more sympathetic view, see R. Mathews, *Australia's First Fabians: Middle-Class Radicals, Labour Activists and the Early Labour Movement*, (Cambridge; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>89</sup> Jupp interview.

<sup>90</sup> Jupp, "What Happened...", *op cit*.

<sup>91</sup> "Baseless charges," *Chaos*, 11 April 1962, p 3.

labour movement, having been seen for long generations as a bulwark against cheap foreign labour. In the early 1960s a fierce conflict was occurring, within the unions and the Labor Party, over this issue.<sup>92</sup> Melbourne University ALP students were prominent in opposition within the ALP to the White Australia Policy. For example, they attended ALP conferences as delegates by obtaining the sponsorship of "moribund, little unions that had no members and no money," who allowed students to attend on their behalf, sometimes because they had "no ALP members at all" amongst their memberships.<sup>93</sup> Club members Ray Evans<sup>94</sup> and Barry Jones, in particular, attended ALP conferences, where they moved resolutions about White Australia.<sup>95</sup>

The students had few friends in the union movement, however. In particular, their opposition to "Unity Tickets" made them the target of hostility.<sup>96</sup> The Victorian ALP prided itself in being the only State branch to have cleansed itself of the "groupers," who, in their fervent anti-communism, were prepared to see trade union conditions eroded to keep communists out of trade union office. As a consequence, ALP Club members were unpopular with Labor and communist trade union officials alike, and were tagged as "long-haired intellectual groupers".<sup>97</sup> Communist Party trade union officials opposed the White Australia Policy, though they advocated a quota of immigrants and opposed the "swamping of this country with immigrants, no matter from where they come,"<sup>98</sup> and had arranged the visit of the Malayan divers to Melbourne, a highlight of Student Action's campaign. Yet there was no alliance between communists and Student Action over White Australia:

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<sup>92</sup> N. Viviani (ed.), *The Abolition of the White Australia Policy: the Immigration Reform Movement Revisited*, Australia-Asia Papers No 65, Centre for the Study of Australian-Asian Relations, Griffith University, Nathan, 1992.

<sup>93</sup> Jupp interview.

<sup>94</sup> Evans later helped found the far-right H.R.Nicholls Society in the 1980s.

<sup>95</sup> Jupp interview.

<sup>96</sup> "The Farrago Spy at the Victorian ALP Conference," *Farrago*, 11 May 1962.

<sup>97</sup> "The Farrago Spy...", *ibid*; Jupp interview. See also D. Stephens, "Unity Tickets and the Victorian branch of the ALP," *Labour History*, 44, May 1983, pp 55-74.

<sup>98</sup> L.H. Gould (ed.), *The Sharkey Writings*, Forest Lodge, (undated pamphlet), p 101.

...they didn't really *want* alliances with the students very much...a lot of the voting was on the basis of who moved the resolution...they regarded us as marginal eccentrics really.<sup>99</sup>

Student Action elitism resonated with a contemptuous attitude towards workers evident in student newspapers at this time. In 1962, for example, an "Angry tradesman" complained that members of the building staff had been refused seating in the Monash Cafeteria because of complaints by students.<sup>100</sup> The politics of the ALP Club were also well to the right of those who would soon begin to protest about the Vietnam War. In 1962, for example, an ALP Club member spoke on campus about the need to strengthen non-communist Asian nationalism against the danger of Chinese aggression. This position, adopted by the right of the ALP, became increasingly untenable owing to the fact that non-communist nationalism in South Vietnam proved ultimately illusory.<sup>101</sup> In early 1966, the ALP Club would form a Committee in support of Australian involvement in Vietnam together with conservative student clubs.<sup>102</sup>

The hey-day of the ALP Club was also brief. The death of Thomas in a car accident in 1962 deprived it of its most active member.<sup>103</sup> Thomas may also have been the only link uniting two staff members prominent in the club - Jim Jupp and Czech Psychology lecturer Dr Frank Knopfelmacher.<sup>104</sup> Despite his extremely prominent role in campus politics, Knopfelmacher's

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<sup>99</sup> Jupp interview. Jupp argues that the Communist Party's opposition to WAP was also compromised because they were being protected by Arthur Calwell from the trade union right.

<sup>100</sup> "Workers want to Eat Too!," *Chaos*, 20 June 1962, p 2; see also letter, *Farrago*, 13 May 1960, p 3, disparaging an earlier student letter as "a typical half-baked concoction of a disgruntled grizzle thrown at us by some half-witted watersider - not a revered University student."

<sup>101</sup> "Thunder from the New Left," *Farrago*, 30 March 1962.

<sup>102</sup> A. Jordens, "Conscription and Dissent: the Genesis of Anti-War Protest" in G.Pemberton (ed.), *Vietnam Remembered*, (Sydney: Weldon, 1990), p 74.

<sup>103</sup> "Bill Thomas Killed in Car Crash," *Farrago*, 4 May 1962.

<sup>104</sup> Buckley, *op cit*, p 214. See F. Knopfelmacher, "The Threat to Academic Freedom," *Quadrant*, 2:2, Autumn 1958, p 23. See also F. Knopfelmacher, *Some Shorter Writings of Dr Frank Knopfelmacher*, (Sydney: H.Mayer, 1965); F. Knopfelmacher, *Intellectuals and Politics and Other Essays*, (Melbourne: Nelson, 1968).

eccentricity and conspiratorial anti-communism<sup>105</sup> had been a source of tension. In 1963 his claim that the Profumo Affair showed Britain to be "in a condition of advanced degeneration" sparked a war of words in *Farrago*, with Jupp being associated with those attacking his statement.<sup>106</sup> The Club fell apart.<sup>107</sup> Knopfelmacher later became perhaps the foremost academic opponent of student radicalism in Australia.<sup>108</sup>

The cross-class nature of the Student Action alliance also ensured that such coalitions were short-lived. For example, the Anti-Hanging Committee, a similarly broad grouping, became ineffective due to "the breakdown of co-operation between the different groups".<sup>109</sup> The Anti-Apartheid Committee, likewise, was "constrained by the lively mutual distrust of its members".<sup>110</sup> The concerns and activities of Student Action, nonetheless, contributed to the ongoing revival of student politics in Australia. In September 1962, for example, they initiated a major campaign about the crisis of school and university education in Victoria, designed to create public awareness of the lack of funding for secondary and tertiary education.<sup>111</sup> The campaign began with a public meeting at Melbourne University of 600 students.<sup>112</sup> A rally in the Myer Music Bowl in April 1963 attracted 10,000 people, mainly secondary school students.<sup>113</sup> Over 800 students, most from Melbourne University, but including 350 from Monash University and senior technical colleges, volunteered to participate in the distribution of broadsheets in letter-boxes one afternoon the same month.

<sup>105</sup> Knopfelmacher was convinced that the car in which Thomas had been driving when he was killed had been sabotaged by communists (Jupp interview).

<sup>106</sup> Elsewhere in Melbourne, schoolboy Dave Nadel (later a leading student radical) was censured for making the same argument in a school essay. He remembers that his support for Harold Wilson was not considered nearly so serious as his criticism of Britain (Dave Nadel, personal interview).

<sup>107</sup> See also "Farrago Editors Resist Knopfel's Intuition. Jupp Leaves Country," *Chaos*, 8 August 1963.

<sup>108</sup> See especially public debate regarding student protest, *Four Corners*, 3 December 1966, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

<sup>109</sup> "Student Action and Afterward," *Farrago*, 24 February 1964, p 7.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> "SRCs Education Campaign Begins," *Farrago*, 21 September 1962.

<sup>112</sup> *Farrago*, 21 September 1962.

<sup>113</sup> "Education Rally Works Out Well," *Farrago*, 26 April 1963.

Some 300,000 broadsheets were distributed, supplying 70% of Melbourne's householders. One hundred and seventy-five Melbourne University students and twenty-five from Monash University also volunteered to speak to community groups about the campaign.<sup>114</sup>

These actions laid the basis for radical action on campus over funding for education. For example, on April 30, 1964, a meeting was held at lunchtime in the public lecture theatre to formulate a protest against the "deplorable" conditions in the Baillieu library. A night-time protest meeting in the library resulted. *Farrago* described the scene:

Ragged cheers greeted the 9.40 bell and the 9.50 drew a roar from the now solidly packed masses in the ground floor foyer. Men with flashlights and cameras were pushing through, pamphlets were being thrust from hand to hand, and a few guitars in the corner near the stairs were competing above the din with the shouts of the Committee trying to introduce some order into the proceedings.<sup>115</sup>

Participants stressed that their attack was directed at the University Council and the State Government (in view of the upcoming Victorian election), though later that night divisions arose over whether the protest should be directed at the University Council, the State Government, or both. The final speaker thanked library staff, who sat "perched along the top of the counters," for their voluntary service in staying for the demonstration.<sup>116</sup> A delegation of students also visited Monash library shortly afterwards, complaining about shelving difficulties.<sup>117</sup>

Student Action was also influenced in its opposition to White Australia by the National Union of Australian University Students (NUAUS). Delegates from NUAUS were impressed by international student campaigns against racism and colonialism in southern Africa, campaigned against apartheid

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<sup>114</sup> *Farrago*, 17 June 1963.

<sup>115</sup> "25,000 pound Grant to Baillieu a 'Mere Fleabite' says the Chancellor," *Farrago*, 8 May 1964.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> "Counter-attack," 1 May 1964, Monash Library Staff Memos in Miscellaneous Publications, 1963- , Student Unrest Material, Monash library.

and fuelled concern about immigration policy and the status of Aborigines.<sup>118</sup> In 1955 an NUAUS survey of Australian students on immigration policy led to a national referendum of students; and in 1956 NUAUS reported on their findings to the Federal Government, arguing that immigration policy should change to help overcome racial prejudice towards Asian students.<sup>119</sup>

In turn, NUAUS itself was influenced by the rise of anti-racist campaigning, and tedious lobbying by NUAUS affiliates from Melbourne University. In the early sixties Melbourne activists tried to convince the National Union to hold another survey of student opinion about the WAP, and following a positive result, a student referendum, so as to establish a mandate to organise action against the policy.<sup>120</sup> In 1962 the National Union failed to produce a policy statement on the White Australia Policy due to its commitment to remaining "non-political" because it feared compromising its respectability and hence its ability to provide services for students.<sup>121</sup> For several years, Melbourne University activists had fought to change this, arguing that NUAUS could not avoid politics.<sup>122</sup>

The National Union was extremely resistant even to such moderate proposals. Frustration with NUAUS apoliticism even led some Melbourne student activists to call for disaffiliation from the National Union, whose affiliation charges were expensive, and which had a reputation as being "top-heavy".<sup>123</sup> Yet continued provocative participation resulted in NUAUS coming out against the White Australia Policy policy in 1962 and

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<sup>118</sup> C.A. Rootes, "The Development of Radical Student Movements and Their Sequelae," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 3:2, 1988, pp 173-186.

<sup>119</sup> NUAUS, *Report on Action taken by the NUAUS International Vice-President James B. Thomas, on the Question of the White Australia Policy*, October 1956. (Melbourne University archives).

<sup>120</sup> See "Complacent Generation, says SRC President," *Farrago*, 25 March 1960, p 1; *Farrago*, 1 April 1960, p 1; *Farrago*, 1 July, 1960; *Farrago*, 23 March 1962.

<sup>121</sup> *Farrago*, 23 March 1962.

<sup>122</sup> "Complacent Generation, says SRC President," *Farrago*, 25 March 1960, p 1.

<sup>123</sup> "Comment," *Farrago*, 3 April 1961, p 2; "Interstate Supplement," *Farrago*, 29 April 1960; *Farrago*, 1 July, 1960. Disaffiliation had been raised in the 1950s as well, but in the context of controversy about an NUAUS observer to Moscow (*Left Forum*, 13 April 1954).



calling for a referendum on the issue.<sup>124</sup>

In 1963, Student Action campaigned about apartheid in South Africa.<sup>125</sup> Their anti-apartheid campaign, run in conjunction with NUAUS, in fact represents the early history of the anti-Springboks campaign of 1971. In late 1963, NUAUS called a meeting at Melbourne University about apartheid. Speaker Julian Phillips, in an introduction "as stark as the echo of the rifles in Sharpeville," said:

I come here today with the intention of telling you why I shall not be attending the cricket and I hope to prove to you that by your proposed actions it is not you that are bringing politics into sport but rather the South African government. You will not be introducing politics, that has already been done by South Africa...<sup>126</sup>

The meeting proposed that demonstrations be held on the issue, and a motion was passed "opposing the political aspects of the South African tour" but affirming that the meeting "has no quarrel with the cricketers themselves," as well as supporting the NUAUS campaign.<sup>127</sup> Demonstrations were organized "in Melbourne by a joint Melbourne-Monash Committee, in Sydney by New South Wales, Newcastle Universities and others," the Melbourne demonstration provoking Bolte to refer to university students as "these ratbags and yahoos".<sup>128</sup> In February 1964 a motion in support of a UN motion calling for a boycott of South African goods "was not put to vote, due to the conservative attitude of certain delegates, principally from Sydney University". NUAUS planned to extend the campaign "through contact with other major National Organizations such as Churches and Trade Unions".<sup>129</sup> NUAUS reported

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<sup>124</sup> "NUAUS WAP Poll soon," *Farrago*, 15 June 1962, p 1; "Monash Says 'R.I.P. R.I.P.'," *Chaos*, 19 March 1964, p 10.

<sup>125</sup> "Students picket Africans at Trade Fair: Anti-Apartheid Protest Fails to Stir Crowds," *Farrago*, 22 March 1963, p 1; "Student Action and Afterward," *Farrago*, 24 February 1964, p 7.

<sup>126</sup> "Protest on S.Africa," *Farrago*, 11 September 1963. See also "At National Union," *Farrago*, 11 September 1963, p 1.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> "NUAUS and Apartheid," *Chaos*, 3 April 1964, p 2.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

that in 1964 students demonstrated at airports when the team arrived, and at cricket grounds during matches.<sup>130</sup> In July of that year, South Africa Protest, a Melbourne group campaigning in churches and student councils for human rights in South Africa, also formed Youth Against Apartheid. Their official organ of the same name was edited by sixteen-year-old Albert Langer, later to become Australia's most well-known student radical.<sup>131</sup> In 1965, Melbourne University students demonstrated at airports protesting the arrival of the Springboks rugby team.<sup>132</sup> NUAUS repeatedly declared its solidarity with NUSAS and wrote to the South African Government deploring its persecutions of this body.<sup>133</sup> Through Abschol, NUAUS' section to support Aboriginal students, the National Union also campaigned over Aboriginal issues.<sup>134</sup>

Though NUAUS remained conservative in its attitude to many political issues, including Student Action for Aborigines (to be discussed in the next section), these initiatives represent the beginnings of a significant shift, which by the 1970s would see NUAUS playing an important part in radical student politics and campaigns, especially about international issues. When a more radical and totally new student activism did come onto the scene, it bypassed Melbourne University, whose radical tradition might be said to have weighed heavily on the consciousness of its student leaders. In 1968 a student who had attended both Monash and Melbourne Universities noted that he had not taken part in politics at Melbourne University: "There was such a tradition, such a machine, so much awe". At Monash University, he did become involved:

...because one could feel that one could go and start things oneself. It

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<sup>130</sup> "Australian Action on South African Racism," *National News*, NUAUS Supplement, *Lot's Wife*, May 1964.

<sup>131</sup> K. Mansell, *The Fragmentation of the Australian Left: a History of a Development*, (unpublished, undated), p 7.

<sup>132</sup> Gareth Evans in P. O'Donnell and L. Simons, (eds), *Australians Against Racism. Testimonies from the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Australia*, ((Annandale: Pluto Press, 1995), p 77. Evans was President of the Melbourne University Student Representative Council at the time and had been prominent in Student Action, which he claims to have organised and led.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> "Abschol Conference," *Chaos*, 10 July 1963, p 6; "Who's to Blame?" and "Abschol Week," *Farrago*, 15 May 1964, p 12; Protest on Aborigines," *Farrago*, 13 July 1964, p 3.

didn't matter if you disagreed with the general line being taken.<sup>135</sup>

In the meantime, however, the focus of student radicalism shifted to Sydney. In the 1950s, communist students in the Sydney University Labor Club had worked hard to keep alive a radical tradition on campus.<sup>136</sup> Despite the prevailing conservatism, there were demonstrations. In 1955, for example, the Labor Club organised a demonstration for traffic lights on Parramatta Road outside the university after a female student was knocked down by a car. The demonstration blocked peak-hour traffic and invoked the intervention of the riot squad - and the introduction of traffic lights.<sup>137</sup> In 1959 Sydney students protested against the replacement of trams with buses, police removing students wielding placards and banners from the top of the last tram as it ran from Circular Quay to Woollahra.<sup>138</sup>

In Sydney as in Melbourne, however, racism was the issue that galvanised students in the early 1960s. One reflection of international pressure over Australia's race record was the rejection in 1964 of Australia as a venue for the International Student Conference because of the White Australia Policy and Australia's poor treatment of Aboriginal people.<sup>139</sup> Concern about the situation of indigenous Australians was expressed in the student press,<sup>140</sup> reflecting the efforts of Aboriginal support organisations to draw attention to the issue. The Aboriginal "advancement" organisations of this time were dominated by mainstream liberal and "left-Christian"<sup>141</sup> whites and focussed on welfare work for Aboriginal people, "self-help" programs and the "education" of the public regarding the problems of Aboriginal people.<sup>142</sup> Sympathy for the ideal of "self-determination," supported by the

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<sup>135</sup> "Students, sound and fury," *The Age*, 17 July 1968.

<sup>136</sup> D. Freney, *A Map of Days: Life on the Left*, (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1991); R. Milliss, *Serpent's Tooth*, (Ringwood: Penguin, 1984).

<sup>137</sup> Gerster and Bassett, *op cit*, p 225.

<sup>138</sup> "Students Farewell Tram: Sydney," *Spotting the News*, 7 February 1959, National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

<sup>139</sup> "No Conference for an All White Australia," *National News*, NUAUS Supplement, *Lot's Wife*, 2 June 1964, p 7.

<sup>140</sup> For example, "The Shaborigine, The Shame of Australia," *Lot's Wife*, 13 July 1964.

<sup>141</sup> Read, *op cit*, p 83.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, p 73.

Communist Party, was problematised by the pressures on these groups not to allow their activities to be associated with the Communist Party<sup>143</sup>, but also by a lack of clarity about the implications of "assimilation" policies, portrayed sympathetically by some leaders of these groups as integrative rather than racially segregative.<sup>144</sup>

This was unfortunate, since the Communist Party and, through them, certain trade unions, had been heavily involved in Aboriginal struggles, especially since 1946. After 1951 there had been a decline in action "by and on behalf of Aborigines"; a major reason for this was that the labour movement and communists, "the principal allies of Aboriginal militants"<sup>145</sup> were on the defensive. As a consequence, agitation in the 1950s had been sporadic. In the 1960s, Aboriginal workers and their supporters battled for the support of conservative trade union leaderships.<sup>146</sup> From 1963, however, when the ACTU Congress called for payment of award rates for Aboriginal workers, Aboriginal protest organisations increasingly looked to sections of the trade-union movement for publicity and support.<sup>147</sup>

The formation of Student Action for Aborigines was to provide an important basis for wider recognition of the problems of Aboriginal people, and hence, for greater trade union support for the land rights movement. Sydney students had been involved in "respectable" support for Aboriginal issues through Abschol.<sup>148</sup> The rise of a movement willing to take direct action in support of Aboriginal people, however, occurred as a consequence of student support for black civil rights in the United States. In 1961, white students in the north of the US, inspired by the southern civil rights

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, p 83.

<sup>144</sup> J. Clarke, *op cit*; Read, *ibid*, p 80.

<sup>145</sup> A. Markus, "Talk Longa Mouth: Aborigines and the Labour Movement 1890-1970," in A. Curthoys and A. Markus (eds), *Who are our Enemies? Racism and the Working Class in Australia*, (Neutral Bay, NSW: Hale and Iremonger in Association with the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 1978), p 153.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, p 154-157.

<sup>147</sup> L. Lippmann, *Generations of Resistance. The Aboriginal Struggle for Justice*, (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1981), p 45.

<sup>148</sup> Read, *ibid*, p 97.

movement, had organised "freedom rides," taking long-distance buses to the south to challenge segregation in defiance of local laws, racist mobs and bomb threats. 1963 saw a further upsurge in that movement.<sup>149</sup> In Sydney on May 6, 1964 a demonstration held outside the US Consulate on Commemoration Day to demonstrate against racial segregation in the US stunned organisers, including Hall Greenland and Darce Cassidy, when it attracted 2,000 students. The student leaders ignited a large cross, the demonstration resulting in the first arrests of Sydney University students at a political demonstration in more than a decade.<sup>150</sup> The manhandling by a detective of two "girl" students was featured in the student press.<sup>151</sup> For Greenland, the greater attendance of non-political students at this rally was one of the first signs of the new student mood, which would later explode in opposition to the Vietnam war.<sup>152</sup> The demonstration led to claims, however, that if they were serious about opposing racism, the students should be organising in support of Aboriginal people. An American student group, for example, wrote to the students and thanked them for their interest, but asked why they were so demonstrative about the problems of black Americans when there was much to protest about in Australia because of the treatment of Aborigines.<sup>153</sup> Similar criticisms were made in Australia.<sup>154</sup>

In June, members of the Sydney University Labor Club participated in the annual Australian Student Labor Federation (ASLF) Conference. Established in 1925, the ASLF had provided an important forum for cooperation between communist and Labor Party students; and University ALP clubs had taken over its executive in 1956.<sup>155</sup> Sydney delegates to the 1964

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<sup>149</sup> Harman, *op cit*, p 28.

<sup>150</sup> Rootes, "The Development...", *op cit*, p. 174; see also Gerster and Bassett, *op cit*, p. 42.

<sup>151</sup> "Students 'Riot'," *Farrago*, 8 May 1964; "Police Brutality in Sydney," *Lot's Wife*, 24 June 1964.

<sup>152</sup> Hall Greenland, personal interview.

<sup>153</sup> "'Freedom Riders' and 'White Australia'," *Morning News* (Karachi, Pakistan), 14 March 1965, press cutting collected by the Australian High Commission and sent to the Department of External Affairs, AA1838 557/2 part Four, Australian Archives.

<sup>154</sup> See for example, *Farrago*, May 1964.

<sup>155</sup> C. Rootes, *Australian Student Radicals: the Nature and Origin of Dissent*, BA Hons, Government Department, University of Queensland, 1969, p 43.

conference proposed that a nation-wide demonstration be held on National Aborigines Day the same month, an idea which seemed to have greater resonance in Sydney than in Melbourne, which had a larger Aboriginal population.<sup>156</sup> The Sydney students established a broad organising committee, including members of the ALP, Civil Liberties and Newman clubs, to organise for the Sydney demonstration, which saw 500 students singing "We Shall Overcome," the new battle hymn of the civil rights movement. From this meeting, Student Action for Aborigines (SAFA) was formed, with Aboriginal student Charles Perkins as its President.<sup>157</sup>

The students proposed that they would travel to rural NSW to survey the conditions of Aboriginal people in country towns. The issue of whether the students would also demonstrate (non-violently) to draw attention to instances of discrimination was initially contentious, with opponents fearing a "backlash" against Aboriginal people.<sup>158</sup> However, in making this commitment to direct action in such a hostile environment, SAFA members were committing themselves to a confrontational and provocative stance, though they were perhaps not fully aware of it. The problems they found meant that they very soon found themselves resorting to direct action, with some students abandoning the questionnaire altogether.<sup>159</sup>

When the small group of twenty-nine students set off on 13 February 1965, their ideas about what precisely they would be doing on their trip were vague, but they were determined to develop their own strategy. When Patrick Dawson hummed "We Shall Overcome" he was told to shut up: "We aren't Americans".<sup>160</sup> From the day they arrived at Narema reserve outside Wellington, "self-consciously clutching clipboards and biros,"<sup>161</sup> SAFA members were profoundly shocked to see the third-world conditions

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Read, *op cit*, p 97; Spigelman, "Student Action for Aborigines," *Vestes*, 8:2, June 1965, p 118....".

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, p 106.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, p 101.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

in which Aboriginal people were living.<sup>162</sup> As Peter Read notes, in 1965 there was "scarcely a town in the central-west of New South Wales where a local Aborigine could try on clothes, sit down for a meal, get a haircut, go to secondary school, run for office, join a club, drink in the lounge bar or work in a shop".<sup>163</sup>

Almost immediately, the decision of the students to challenge the status quo, through pickets and defiance of bans, formal and informal, resulted in major confrontations with local whites. Less than a week after they set out, for example, a truck followed them and succeeded in forcing their bus off the road.<sup>164</sup> At Moree the students brought nine Aboriginal children to the local swimming pool where they were forbidden to swim, and staged a sit-down demonstration. They were hissed at, spat on, punched and jostled, and when they left, pelted with eggs and fruit.<sup>165</sup> Hostile critics of the tour accused the students of intervening in a situation they knew nothing about<sup>166</sup>, of causing trouble and of causing racism.<sup>167</sup> Even Abschol (the Aboriginal support section of NUAUS), NUAUS and the Teachers Union echoed similar concerns.<sup>168</sup>

The tour was important, however, in stimulating the confidence of local Aboriginal people and some whites to change the situation. Charles Perkins, who quickly became de facto leader of the group,<sup>169</sup> said later: "It was the beginning of a flood of new relationships, a new era of looking at ourselves as Aboriginal people".<sup>170</sup> At Walgett, after gathering to silently watch the

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<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, p 102.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, p 97.

<sup>164</sup> B. Hauser, "Our Freedom Ride," *Overland*, 32, August 1965, p 38.

<sup>165</sup> Hauser, *ibid*, p 39.

<sup>166</sup> Letters reprinted in *Outlook*, April 1965, p 5.

<sup>167</sup> The Mayor of Moree, for example, said that the students' visit would "put relations between whites and part-aborigines back ten years...Assimilation...had been gradually taking place...However, with the visit of the students, feeling in the town would begin to 'fester'" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 February 1965, quoted in *Outlook*, April 1965, p 5).

<sup>168</sup> "NUAUS wipes Aborigines," *Lot's Wife*, 9 March 1965.

<sup>169</sup> Read, *op cit*, p 103.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, p 103.

students as they picketed the local RSL Club (whose proprietors refused to serve Aborigines), a small number of local Aboriginal people joined the picket line.<sup>171</sup> An Aborigines Progress Association was formed in Walgett, with an Aboriginal President, to which SAFA responded "What we want now is less student action, more Aboriginal action".<sup>172</sup> Direct-action tactics also proved very successful. The Freedom Ride resulted in the desegregation of the Walgett theatre<sup>173</sup> and the Kempsey swimming baths. Following the tour, a rural newspaper reported that the Welfare Board was concentrating its expenditure on towns visited by the students.<sup>174</sup> Perkins became a national figure<sup>175</sup> and the Freedom Ride attracted international attention, causing concern in the Department of External Affairs.<sup>176</sup> In May 1965 the students returned to Walgett to try to force a passage to the back seats of the picture theatre there. Four students and two Aboriginal women were arrested; the first arrests of Aboriginal people for participating in organised civil rights action.<sup>177</sup> The tour also gave confidence to Aboriginal people who travelled to Walgett to support the local Aboriginal people there, and boycotted the Bowraville theatre.<sup>178</sup> Further actions at the end of 1965 resulted in more violent confrontations and arrests.

The relationship between SAFA and trade unions was friendly, though compromised, primarily not by trade union conservatism but by concern amongst some SAFA members to avoid the communist label. The Federated Liquor and Allied Industries Employees Union, for example, had previously stopped beer supplies to hotels found to be discriminating against Aborigines. They offered to do the same if the students identified

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<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, p 104.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, p 114.

<sup>173</sup> "Student Action...", *op cit*.

<sup>174</sup> D. Cassidy, "Black Girls with Sunburnt Skin," *Comment*, April 1966, p 19.

<sup>175</sup> Read, *op cit*, p 113.

<sup>176</sup> Department of External Affairs, AA1838 557/2 part Four, Australian Archives.

<sup>177</sup> C. Perkins, *A Bastard Like Me*, (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1975). See also J. Miller, *Koori: a Will to Win. The Heroic Resistance, Survival and Triumph of Black Australia*, (Melbourne: Angus and Robertson, 1985), pp 187-190.

<sup>178</sup> Charles Perkins, "Aboriginal Militancy" 25 February 1966, courtesy Ann Curthoys.



similar cases. The NSW Teachers Federation, on observing the students' success, passed a new resolution praising the students for their "moral and physical courage" and calling on the Government to immediately introduce legislation to make all forms of racial discrimination illegal.<sup>179</sup> Yet SAFA, at least initially, held those unions most willing to support the campaign at arms length. Several branches of the Building Workers Industrial Union (BWIU) and also the South Coast Labour Council passed motions in support of the campaign; yet concern was expressed that such support could have led to suggestions of communist influence.<sup>180</sup> When an organiser of the Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF) and a reporter from *Tribune* personally delivered loudspeaker equipment to the students at Moree, the press "immediately smelt Communism" and, concerned for their public image, SAFA decided they could not accept the equipment.<sup>181</sup>

But despite SAFA's ambivalence about working with communists and trade unionists, it was not an anti-communist coalition, as Student Action was. It did not exclude members of the Eureka Youth League, for example, or "red diaper babies" (the children of Communist parents). SAFA members included "red diaper babies" in the University Labor Club like Brian Aarons, Patricia Healy and Ann Curthoys. Along with Jim Spigelman, who set up the Sydney University Fabian Society in 1964<sup>182</sup>, and members of groups to the right of Labor, prominent participants in SAFA also included Trotskyists such as Hall Greenland, a major figure in the Sydney University ALP Club. The issue of attitudes to communist regimes and the Australian organisations who defended them was one which would remain problematic for the student movement. For those seeking to go beyond a politics of "conscience" based on a fundamental acceptance of the Australian political system, it was an issue which went to the heart of their radical ideals—just what kind of new society was it that they were hoping to build? And who should their allies be? One consequence of the success of SAFA's direct action was a greater involvement of trade unionists in Aboriginal issues. In August 1965, members of the Builders Labourers' Federation (BLF)

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<sup>179</sup> 10 March 1965, quoted in J. Spigelman, "Reactions to the SAFA Tour," *Dissent*, Winter 1965, p 47.

<sup>180</sup> Spigelman, *ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> Mendes, *op cit*, p 145.

and Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF) accompanied Perkins and other activists on a follow-up trip to Walgett, where fifteen arrests resulted after Aboriginal activists demanded drinks at a local bar.<sup>183</sup> In 1966, industrial unrest amongst Aboriginal workers on cattle stations in the Northern Territory became a focal point for Communist Party activism. SAFA supported the Gurindji strike, collecting money with members of Abschol and the Labor Club.<sup>184</sup>

By late 1965, however, SAFA's high profile was about to be challenged by a new movement. As Read reports, in September of that year the major feature of the ALP Club's newsheet *Wednesday Commentary* was the activities of SAFA; but it also informed readers about a demonstration against the war in Vietnam.<sup>185</sup> The rise of the anti-war movement would temporarily draw attention away from Aboriginal rights; and by the end of 1966, SAFA was finished as a political force, having lost half of its membership.<sup>186</sup> Its legacy, however, was to re-legitimise the strategy of direct action and help lay the basis for a new, more militant, and Aboriginal-led movement for Aboriginal rights, which would arise in the late 1960s. Lyall Munro, for example, who in 1965, aged just fourteen, had braved racist violence with the Freedom Riders at the Moree Pool, would become one of the leaders of that later, more radical movement.<sup>187</sup>

Student protest in Australia in the early 1960s provides an early glimpse of experiences and reactions which in the mid-1960s would turn student reformists into student revolutionaries. They include an unsympathetic response from politicians, media, and university authorities, disappointment with the ALP; and bravery and persistence in the face of often hostile criticism. Yet overwhelmingly, student activists of the early 1960s remained committed to reform, not revolution. Moreover, the leaders of these early movements were mostly white, middle class, male and heterosexual. This reflected the composition of university populations and

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<sup>183</sup> Read, *op cit*, p 113.

<sup>184</sup> "Student Action...", courtesy Ann Curthoys.

<sup>185</sup> Read, *op cit*, p 117.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, p 50, 111.

attitudes on campus and in wider society in the early 1960s. Beauty contests and descriptions of women that began with their "measurements," hair and eye colour were standard in student newspapers at this time.<sup>188</sup> In a debate about homosexuality in 1964, both supporters and opponents of law reform describe gays as "inverts," "handicapped" and in need of psychiatric help.<sup>189</sup> Within a few short years, that was all about to change.

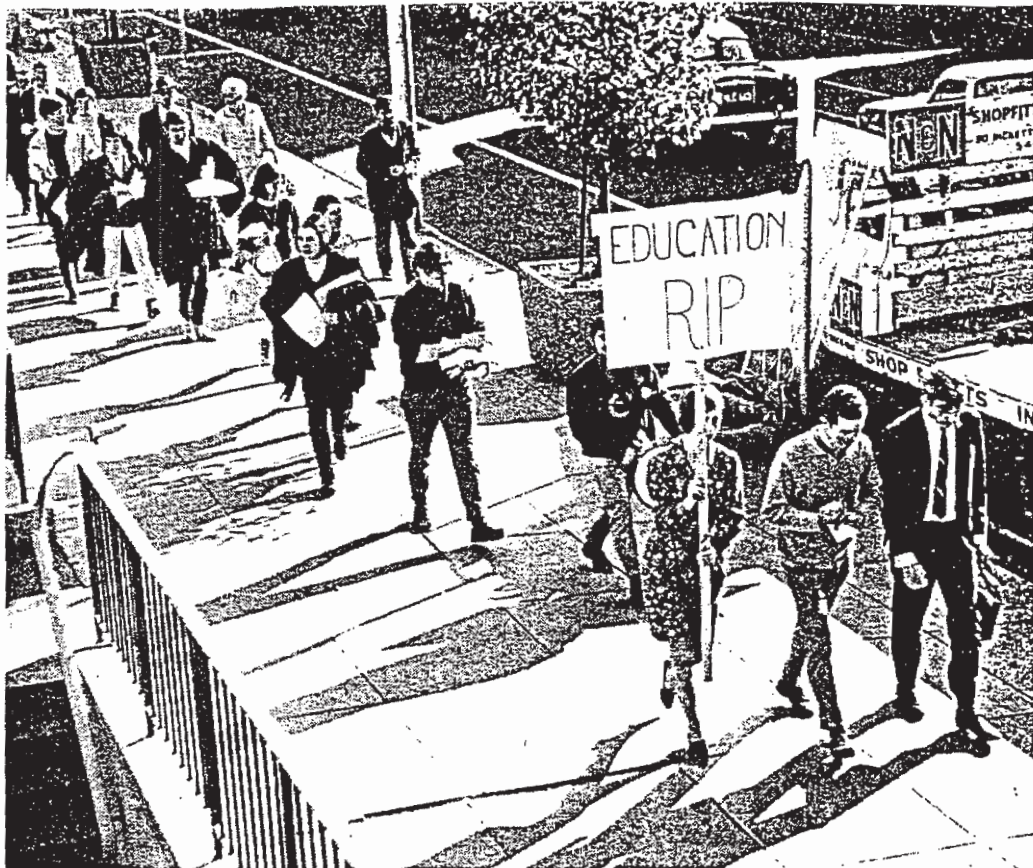
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<sup>188</sup> See "Be Warned!," *Chaos*, 9 March 1963, which warns male students about modern techniques of "mantrapping" by female students, "these venomous creatures".

<sup>189</sup> "The Homosexual Villain," *Lot's Wife*, 7 August 1964, p 4; "The Villain...Queerys and Comments," *Lot's Wife*, 21 October 1964, p 4/5.



"Student Action! The Inside Story", *Guardian*, 5 December 1961.



Students mourn Victorian Education

"Students Mourn Victorian Education", *Lot's Wife*, 9 May 1967.

"Police Brutality in Sydney", *Lot's Wife*, 24 June 1964. Commemoration Day, 6 May, students march on American Consulate in support of civil liberties. A *Daily Mirror* journalist reported: "The police seemed to be afraid of being identified. One policeman I saw punching a teenage girl student removed the identification number from his uniform before he moved in".

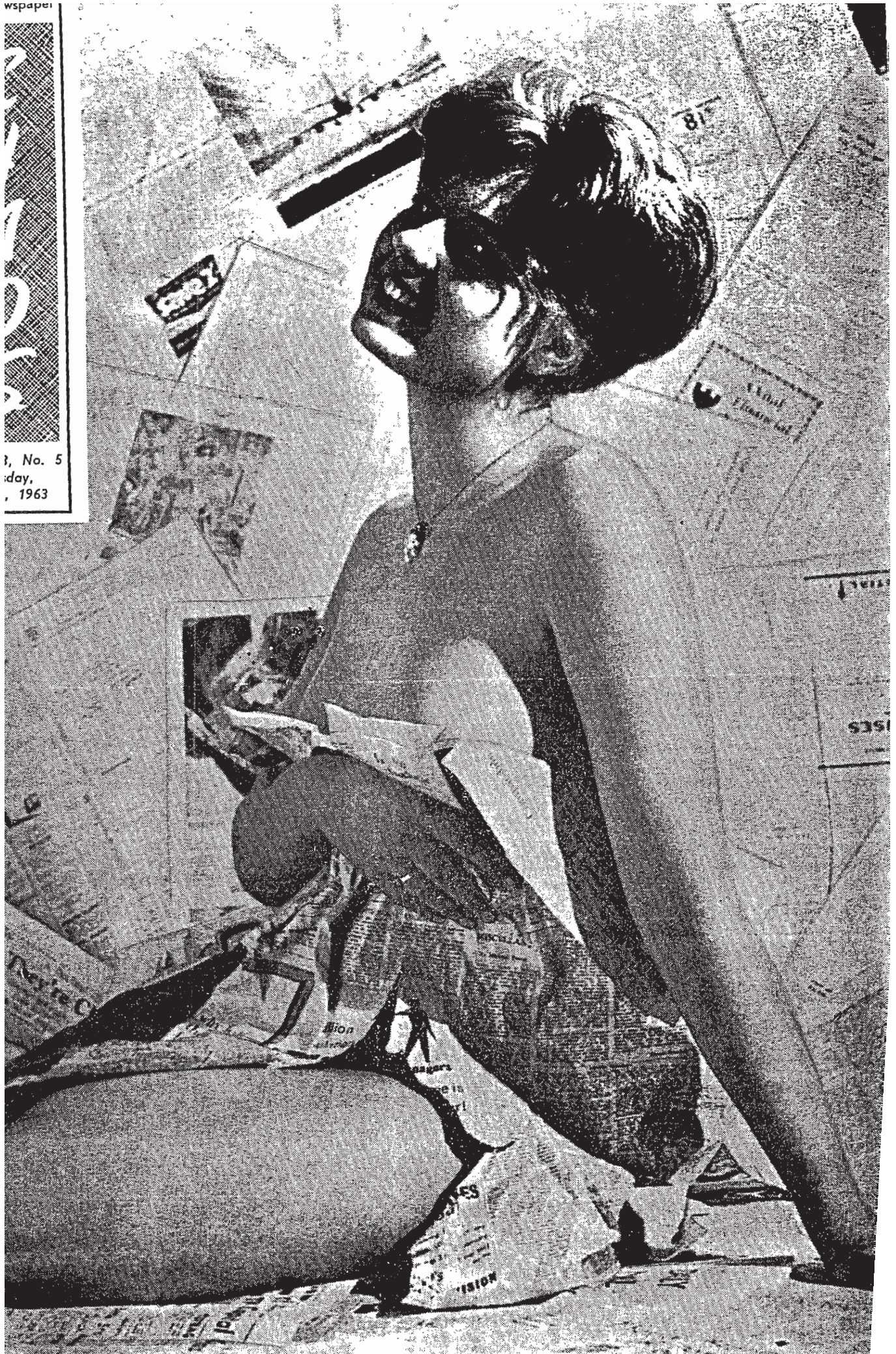


The SAFA bus at Boggabilla; Confrontation with reserve management, probably Moree, February 1965. From Peter Read, *Charles Perkins. A Biography*, (Ringwood: Penguin, 1990).





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, 1963



Chapter Four  
"Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh: Vietnam is gonna win"  
A Single Spark: 1965-1967.

*...I was a strong Young Liberal supporter in 1966...At the time of the first sort of rumblings about conscription YCAC called for a demonstration...I went along to have a look—had never been to a demonstration...I was very scared actually, and there were some funny looking people there... I got arrested, quite by chance, it wasn't because I was really involved or anything: I refused to move on when a policeman said to move on. I was standing watching the demonstration... I got thrown into this watch house cell with a young Communist League member...I was really scared of him...I sat diagonally opposite, the furthest away from him I could in case I was contaminated...<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Mitch Thompson, personal interview.

Writing in 1976, radical English lecturer Dan O'Neill argued that the Vietnam War was "the fire that burnt down the rotten framework of Cold War politics".<sup>2</sup> In Australia, as in the United States, opposition to the war was the major factor sparking the rise of radical student protest. As Ann Curthoys has argued, Australian borrowing of ideas, images, slogans and organisational practices from the US was an expression not only of borrowing, but of "similar responses in similar kinds of societies to very similar sets of circumstances".<sup>3</sup> Several accounts now exist of the early development of the anti-war movement in Australia which describe in some detail the leading role played by student radicals in that movement.<sup>4</sup> This chapter makes extensive use of those accounts; but also, by incorporating material relating to student radical action around issues besides the Vietnam war, it illustrates the dynamics behind the rise of revolutionary opposition on the campuses in a way that literature focused primarily on the anti-war movement alone cannot. The turnover of university student populations is comparatively rapid, with most students in the 1960s forming part of those populations for only three years. As a consequence, the character of student politics could change enormously within a university in a very short time. The commitment of Australian troops to the Vietnam War and the introduction of conscription in late 1964 dramatically changed the style and content of student radicalism between 1965 and 1967.

Since the defeat of the French and the division of Vietnam in 1954, the United States had been allied with Ngo Dinh Diem, the then Prime Minister of South Vietnam. The US Government provided Diem with aid to assist him in his conflict with Ho Chi Minh's National Liberation Front. From the early 1960s, the United States attempted to find support from other nations

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<sup>2</sup> D. O'Neill, "The rise and fall of radical consciousness," *Semper Floreat*, 46:6, 20 May 1976.

<sup>3</sup> A. Curthoys, "The Anti-War Movements," in J. Grey and J. Doyle, (eds), *Vietnam: War, Myth and Memory. Comparative Perspectives on Australia's War in Vietnam*, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1992), p 98.

<sup>4</sup> In particular, J. Murphy, *Harvest of Fear: A History of Australia's Vietnam War*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1993); A. Curthoys, "Mobilising Dissent. The Later Stages of Protest" and A.M. Jordens, "Conscription and Dissent: The Genesis of Anti-War Protest" in G. Pemberton (ed.), *Vietnam Remembered*, (Sydney: Weldon Publishing, 1990); P. Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997).



for military intervention in Vietnam.<sup>5</sup> In 1962, the Australian Government sent military equipment to Saigon and thirty military advisers in July, claiming troops would not be sent. In April 1963, the administration increased defence spending by 41 million pounds, citing "acute problems in South Vietnam" amongst the reasons<sup>6</sup>, and increased army target strength in July .

Cold War fears about the threat of Asian communism—principally Chinese and Indonesian—to Australia, and the retreat of Britain from South-East Asia ensured the willingness of the Australian Government to intervene in Vietnam. It was believed that Australian intervention would stiffen US resolve in the region.<sup>7</sup> In August of 1964 the infamous Tonkin Gulf Incident, a supposed attack by North Vietnamese patrol boats on a US destroyer in the Gulf, was used as a pretext for the United States to bomb North Vietnam.<sup>8</sup> In November 1964, having denied for over a year that conscription would be introduced, Menzies announced the reintroduction of National Service.<sup>9</sup>

The National Service Act, passed on November 11, 1964, was of special concern to students.<sup>10</sup> It required all twenty-year-olds to register, and, unlike previous legislation, obliged conscripts to serve overseas if called upon to do so. A theoretically random ballot system chose conscripts according to the day on which they were born. Conscripts were needed because, at a time of full employment, the level of volunteering was low. As Jordens has argued, conscription enabled the Government to "draw upon a more educated and

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<sup>5</sup> G. Lockhart, "Fear and Dependence: Australia's Vietnam Policy, 1965-1985" in K. Maddock and B. Wright (eds), *War: Australia and Vietnam*, (Artarmon: Harper and Row, 1987), p 16.

<sup>6</sup> M.E. Hamel-Green, "The resisters. A History of the anti-conscription movement 1964-1972," in P. King, (ed.), *Australia's Vietnam: Australia in the Second Indo-China War*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983), p 103.

<sup>7</sup> M. Sexton, *War for the Asking: Australia's Vietnam Secrets*, (Ringwood: Penguin, 1981); G. Pemberton, *All the Way. Australia's Road to Vietnam*, (North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Lockhart, *op cit*, p 15.

<sup>9</sup> Edwards, *A Nation at War...*, *op cit*, p 21.

<sup>10</sup> See for example, "The Call-Up: 64% Monash Medical Students Conscripted," *Lot's Wife*, 28 September 1965, p 1.

skilled section of the workforce than it was currently attracting".<sup>11</sup> Full-time students were entitled to limited deferments until their primary qualifications were completed, but all remained liable until they were twenty-six, with post-graduates liable until they were thirty.<sup>12</sup>

The Vietnam war and conscription were also issues that resonated with the concerns that had motivated student activism in the early sixties: concerns about the contradictions of US policy during the Cold War; sympathy with anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia; and opposition to racism and paternalism. Michael Hamel Green, a Melbourne student activist, remembers that time:

One of the things which moved me, as it did so many people throughout the world, was the Buddhist monks who burnt themselves to death. That was in 1963, during the worst excesses of the Diem regime, and I was in my second year at university. It caused me to read about Vietnam and opened my eyes to what was happening there.<sup>13</sup>

Yet students were not the very first to organise about Vietnam. Rather, it was the Communist Party, which had played a dominant role in the peace movement in the sixties, and maritime unions which took the first action in response to the US bombing of North Vietnam after the Tonkin Gulf incident in August 1964.<sup>14</sup> The Annual Hiroshima Day marches the same month and the communist-influenced October Congress for International

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<sup>11</sup> Jordens, *op cit*, p 67. See also B. York, "Power to the Young" in V. Burgmann and J. Lee (eds), *Staining the Wattle: A People's History of Australia since 1788*, (Fitzroy: McPhee Gribble Publications, 1988), pp 231-4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* See also S. Langford, "Appendix: the National Service Scheme, 1964-72" in P. Edwards, *A Nation at War. Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1997), pp 355-380; R. Forward, "Conscription, 1964-1968," in R. Forward and B. Reece (eds), *Conscription in Australia*, (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1968), pp 79-142.

<sup>13</sup> M. Hamel Green, interviewed in G. Langley, *A Decade of Dissent: Vietnam and the Conflict on the Australian Homefront*, (North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), p 8. See also "Buddhist manifestations by Students," *Farrago*, 18 October 1963.

<sup>14</sup> A. Curthoys, "The Anti-War Movements" in J. Grey and J. Doyle (eds), *Vietnam: War, Myth and Memory. Comparative Perspectives on Australia's War in Vietnam*, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1992), p 90. Chapter Eleven describes trade union opposition to the war in more detail.

Cooperation and Disarmament also offered opportunities for early opposition to the war.<sup>15</sup>

The first meeting of students on the issue was held at Sydney University the day after the National Service Act was passed, to discuss conscription.<sup>16</sup> Three days later, six members of the Steering Committee for the Youth Conference of the October Congress established a Conscription Protest Meeting Committee and organised a public meeting for November.<sup>17</sup> From a mailing list compiled at that meeting, young student members of the Labor Party established the Youth Campaign against Conscription (YCAC).<sup>18</sup>

In the United States in late November, 800 US students at the Berkeley campus of the University of California were arrested after they occupied a University building over a civil liberties issue.<sup>19</sup> In Australia, however, the movement was still in its infancy. Though students were to play a major role in the anti-war movement, especially as participants in organisations like YCAC and the Vietnam Action Campaign (VAC) (established the following August) the movement was not yet "student-led," and campus-based action around "student issues" was rare.<sup>20</sup> Most students were still, at this time, "remarkably conservative".<sup>21</sup>

The first six months of 1965 saw relatively little specifically student protest. Exceptions were the "Freedom Ride" of Sydney students in February, and a street procession of less than fifty university students in Sydney when the first conscript marbles were drawn in March.<sup>22</sup> In June, however, following

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*; Jordens, "Conscription and Dissent...", *op cit*, p 62.

<sup>16</sup> Jordens, *op cit*, p 75.

<sup>17</sup> C. Guyatt, "The Anti-Conscription Movement, 1964-1966" in Forward and Reece, *op cit*, p 178; See also Jordens, *op cit*, p 75.

<sup>18</sup> Murphy, *Harvest of Fear...*, *op cit*, p 143.

<sup>19</sup> C. Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and after*, (London: Bookmarks, 1988), p 39. See also H. Draper, *Berkeley: the New Student Revolt* (New York, 1965); S.M. Lipset and S.S. Wolin (eds), *The Berkeley Student Revolt. Facts and Interpretations*, (New York: Doubleday, 1965); P. Marriot, "The Berkeley Student Revolt," *Lot's Wife*, 19 April 1966, pp 10-11.

<sup>20</sup> R. Gordon and W. Osmond, "An Overview of the Australian New Left," in R. Gordon (ed.), *The Australian New Left. Critical Essays and Strategy*, (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1970), p 25.

<sup>21</sup> Jordens, *op cit*, p 138.

<sup>22</sup> Curthoys, "The anti-war movements," *op cit*, p 91; B. York, "Power to the Young...", *op cit*,

the commitment of combat troops including conscripts, the anti-war movement "burst onto the national scene"<sup>23</sup>, with students at the forefront of the most radical actions. At the beginning of the month, fifteen university students in Canberra for the Australian Student Labor Federation (ASLF) Conference were arrested when they peacefully sat down in a city-centre intersection in protest at the war.<sup>24</sup> The ASLF was an organisation which had provided a link between Communist Party and Labor Party students throughout the 1950 and 1960s.<sup>25</sup> Those arrested included Communist Party and Labor Party members and "others more Trotskyist in political orientation".<sup>26</sup> They had tried and failed to win the support of the conference for a demonstration, and the conference did not offer them support after the arrests.<sup>27</sup>

Nonetheless, the 1965 ASLF conference can be seen, as Trotskyist Jim Percy wrote, as the "starting point of the new wave of student protest in Australia".<sup>28</sup> Debate amongst the approximately fifty delegates on the Vietnam war revealed a "surprising unanimity of attitude" on the subject. Normally right-wing delegations joined with "extreme left-wingers" in denouncing the Australian Government's subservience to American policy as "futile and self-defeating".<sup>29</sup> "Moderate" Labor students maintained the upper hand, however, lobbying successfully for a new vote which changed a

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p 231.

<sup>23</sup> A. Picot, "Vietnam: How We Won Last Time," *Socialist Review*, Winter 1991, issue 4, p 114.

<sup>24</sup> Curthoys, "Mobilising Dissent..." *op cit.* Curthoys, the only woman arrested at the demonstration, describes what happened (p 140). The students pleaded guilty and paid their fines.

<sup>25</sup> R. Kuhn, "The Australian Left, Nationalism and the Vietnam War," *Labour History*, 72, May 1997, p 180.

<sup>26</sup> Curthoys, "Mobilising Dissent..." *op cit.*, p 140.

<sup>27</sup> P. Scherer, "ASLF Conference," *Lot's Wife*, 14 June 1965, p 15. Those arrested included three Monash University students: Mick Counihan, Charlie Smith and Dave Nadel. Nadel in particular became a leading activist in the Monash Labor Club.

<sup>28</sup> J. Percy, "A Brief History of ASLF Conferences" (from a Discussion Bulletin put out in Easter 1969 by the Sydney Section of the Socialist Students Alliance, in Communist Party of Australia records at Mitchell library, Box 62 (159)). See also W. Osmond in *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 46:8, 7 September 1970; P. Mendes, *The New Left, the Jews and the Vietnam War 1965-1972*, (Melbourne: Lazare, 1993), p 25.

<sup>29</sup> Scherer, *op cit.*

motion declaring solidarity with the leaders of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF) to one expressing conditional support. Participants also voted to collect medical aid for Vietnam, but no action was taken.<sup>30</sup> The ideas and actions of this tiny handful of radicals mobilising to influence the ASLF would soon become a reference point for thousands of others on the campuses and in the anti-war movement.

Within weeks, university students were again drawing attention to the issue of the war. On June 19, 144 "young Australian males of military service age," many of them university students, declared their opposition to the National Service Act in a signed newspaper advertisement.<sup>31</sup> In late July, Australia's first teach-in, inspired by a wave of similar forums in the United States<sup>32</sup>, was held at the Australian National University, and another was held just days later at Monash University. Minister for External Affairs Paul Hasluck and ALP left-winger Jim Cairns were among the speakers. The Monash University National Forum on Vietnam drew "upwards of 2,000 students" and attracted wide media coverage.<sup>33</sup> The teach-ins can be seen as reflecting attempts by the Second World War generation "to stimulate the interest of students in Australia's involvement in Vietnam".<sup>34</sup> In contrast to those in the more polarised United States at this time, the early Australian teach-ins were organised by students and aided by

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<sup>30</sup> They were aided in their demand for a new vote by the pointed withdrawal of invited speakers Arthur Calwell and Fred Daly (*Ibid.* See also A. Clark, "Aiding the NLF," *The Age*, 27 July 1967, p 4).

<sup>31</sup> York, "Power to the Young," *op cit*, p 231.

<sup>32</sup> In March 1965, academics at the University of Michigan in the United States, attacked by the State Legislature and the Federal Administration for their proposal to hold a one-day strike against the Vietnam War, organised instead an all-night "teach-in" to give students an alternative view and give publicity to arguments opposing the war. A blare of publicity sparked a wave of imitations across the country, culminating in a teach-in at Berkeley lasting 35 hours and drawing in crowds of up to 12,000 at any one time ("Viet Forum Reconvened. The Teach-In Movement," *Lot's Wife*, 5 September 1967, p 4). See also, from J. Wolfenden in Washington, "Political Rebirth on the Campus," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 June 1965, p 2.

<sup>33</sup> A second teach-in was held at Monash on 29 July ("Minister Blames Communists for Continued War," *The Age*, 30 July 1965, p 6). See also "The Teach-in on Vietnam," *Lot's Wife*, 10 August 1965, p 1,3-7. See P. Edwards, *A Nation at War...*, *op cit*, p 68-71 and Jordens, *op cit*, p 75, for more detailed accounts of the teach-ins. Similar forums continued to be held. See for example, "Conscription. An Address to the Beaumaris Teach-in by Max Teichmann," *Lot's Wife*, 19 April 1966, p 16; "The National Vietnam Teach-In," *Lot's Wife*, 26 September 1967, pp 1/9; "On the teach-in," *Lot's Wife*, 10 October 1967, p 2, "National Vietnam Teach-in 1967," p 6-7.

<sup>34</sup> Jordens, *op cit*, p 75.

a "usually cooperative Government" allowing direct confrontation between Government ministers and their critics.<sup>35</sup> One participant has since argued:

It was maybe the last time I can remember in political history when both sides actually debated it out face-to-face and countered what each other had said in the literature...<sup>36</sup>

Teach-ins were also held on the subject of the education crisis<sup>37</sup> and New Guinea.<sup>38</sup> The appetite for political discussion over Vietnam and other foreign policy issues was also reflected in NUAUS activities. In May 1966 in Canberra, ninety students from all Australian universities participated in the NUAUS Model UN Trusteeship Council, debating, UN-style, Australia's administration of Papua New Guinea.<sup>39</sup> In 1967 the Model UN Security Council debated issues relating to China.<sup>40</sup> As Edwards has argued, the immediate response of students to the Vietnam war was equivocal.<sup>41</sup> Yet for a minority of students, the teach-ins crystallised their ideas and arguments against the war.

As the end of 1965 approached, it was clear that Australia was not immune to the pattern of student radicalisation sweeping the United States and Europe. Though radical student unrest still had little impact on the campuses themselves, in September 1965 conservative Victorian Premier Henry Bolte announced his intention to amend the Police Offences Act and Summary Offences Act. Under these amendments the grounds of Monash

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<sup>35</sup> "Viet Forum Reconvened..." *op cit.* In 1966, however, Prime Minister Holt declined an invitation to attend a recent conscription forum at Monash, *Lot's Wife*, 12 July 1966, p 1/4/5.

<sup>36</sup> Jean Curthoys, quoted in S. McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts. Australian Women and the Vietnam War*, (Sydney: Doubleday, 1993), p 215.

<sup>37</sup> Regarding the Monash teach-in on education see "The Education Forum," *Lot's Wife*, 19 October 1965, p 4-5. Education Minister Gorton and the Labor Party's Gordon Bryant "clashed violently," Gorton claiming there was no crisis in education in Australia. Teach-ins about education were also held at Armidale, Adelaide and Western Australia in April, 1966, to coincide with the National "Workout" (*National U*, 2:2, 1966, p 3).

<sup>38</sup> *Lot's Wife*, 8 August 1967, pp 14/15.

<sup>39</sup> *National U*, 30 June 1967, p 1.

<sup>40</sup> Margaret Fisher, "Bashing the Chinese Wall," *Honi Soit*, 7 September 1967, p 16; *National U*, 4 September 1967, p 4.

<sup>41</sup> Edwards, *A Nation at War...*, *op cit.*, p 47.

and Melbourne universities were declared "public places," thereby giving police much greater power on campus.<sup>42</sup>

It was in Sydney, however, that a new confrontational mood first entered the student and anti-war movements, through the Trotskyist-led Vietnam Action Committee. Of those arrested at the May ASLF Conference in Canberra, only one, book-buyer Bob Gould, was not a student.<sup>43</sup> In the early 1960s, Gould, a Trotskyist, had been Secretary of Sydney Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), a body which acted as "a kind of opposition group"<sup>44</sup> to the larger, more moderate peace movement. At the 1964 Peace Congress, CND supporters in the youth section were able to carry unilateralist positions about nuclear war against the opposition of the Communist Party; and motions were also passed against the Vietnam War. Later in 1964 this group became involved in activities organised by the Youth Campaign Against Conscription (YCAC) against the threat and then actuality of conscription.<sup>45</sup>

Gould and the very small group of Trotskyists around him were aligned with a US Trotskyist organisation, the Socialist Workers Party, and adopted their strategy of calling for the withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam, a position more radical than that of the Communist Party which favoured "negotiations," but less provocative than "Victory to the NLF". As a result of their US connection, Gould subscribed to *Intercontinental Press* which enabled his group to closely follow the US radical scene.<sup>46</sup> Following Gould's return to Sydney after his Canberra arrest, this group, inspired by proposals for a US anti-war march on Washington in September 1965, set about organising their own demonstration, in alliance with YCAC. The names of 800 to 900 people who had signed CND peace petitions were used

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<sup>42</sup> *Wednesday Commentary* bulletin, undated (apparently September 1965), courtesy Ann Curthoys. *National U* reported that the Melbourne and Monash Student Representative Councils were to make representations to Parliament over the amendments. Vice-Chancellors and Staff Associations had denied prior knowledge of the changes, and the Attorney-General and police denied that they had sought the amendments (*National U*, 1:1, 29 September 1965) See also "Threats to Student Freedom," *Lot's Wife*, 19 October 1965.

<sup>43</sup> Bob Gould, personal interview.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

as the basis for a mailing list, and small posters were displayed on telegraph poles.<sup>47</sup> To the surprise of the organisers, their September demonstration, scheduled for five o'clock on a Friday night in Martin Place, attracted 400 participants. These included many youth and students as well as older communist-influenced workers previously hostile to Trotskyists in the movement.<sup>48</sup>

On the basis of the success of this demonstration, a meeting of twenty major personalities in CND was organised, unilaterally establishing the Vietnam Action Committee (VAC), of which Gould became Secretary. Timing their plans again on the US movement, they organised a demonstration to coincide with an October march on the Pentagon, which soon attracted immense publicity in Australia. It was Gould's belief that "some kind of civil disobedience" should occur, because demonstrations were at that time legally restricted to the footpaths. Following the success of the September demonstration, the Communist Party decided to join the Trotskyist-influenced VAC.<sup>49</sup>

The October 22 Friday evening demonstration, following the enormous Pentagon march the previous Tuesday, attracted perhaps 1,000 people. By tacit agreement, Gould recounts, the Communist Party had accepted that "civil disobedience" should occur. The protesters proceeded up Pitt Street along the footpath and then, between King and Market Streets, spilled out onto the street and marched with the traffic. Though police were caught by surprise, forty-five men and two women were arrested.<sup>50</sup>

On March 3, 1966, the new Prime Minister, Harold Holt, announced that the number of troops for Vietnam would be increased to 4500, which would include 500 conscripts. As Curthoys describes it, "a wave of activity against conscription followed".<sup>51</sup> Young men burnt their National Service

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<sup>47</sup> Gould says this had not been seen for the previous ten years.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Curthoys, "Mobilising Dissent...", *op cit*, p 141. See also H. Palmer, *Outlook*, December, 1965; R.V. Summy, "Militancy and the Australian Peace Movement, 1960-67," *Politics*, November 1970, pp 148-162.

<sup>51</sup> Curthoys, "Mobilising Dissent...", *op cit*, p 143.



registration cards at a demonstration of 2,000 in Sydney. Fifty students were arrested at a Vietnam Action Committee demonstration. Monash University lecturers addressed a demonstration on the Melbourne City Post Office steps which was, as Perry remarks, "fairly violently broken up by the police, to the bewilderment and indignation of those involved"<sup>52</sup> and, as a result, student resistance of the kind seen at the ASLF conference nearly a year before "was now well established at Monash".<sup>53</sup> Melbourne University students staged a sit-down protest at the Moomba parade and a number were arrested.<sup>54</sup>

On March 28, a rowdy demonstration at Kew Town Hall as Holt opened the Kooyong by-election provided a taste of events to come,<sup>55</sup> as did the collection of over \$500 by the Medical Aid to Vietnam Fund at Sydney University, an initiative of the Labor and ALP Clubs.<sup>56</sup> Though such appeals were legal, and the ALP Club was not seeking money for military purposes, their actions raised the ire of politicians. In September, NSW Premier Robert Askin described the Club's broadsheet *Wednesday Commentary* as "the filthiest thing I have ever seen on paper".<sup>57</sup>

Events in Brisbane that month were also setting a new pattern. More frequent demonstrations, because of the Vietnam war, drew attention to legislation first introduced in the 1930s to combat mobilisations of communists and the unemployed. That legislation made it an offence to carry a placard, hold a meeting, or form a procession without police permission fourteen days in advance. The anti-war movement thus sparked

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<sup>52</sup> P.F. Perry, *The Rise and Fall of Practically Everybody. An Account of Student Political Activity at Monash University 1965-72.* (held at Monash University library, Rare Books), pp 11/12; I. Carrol and D. Nadel, "Vietnam-Conscription Rally," *Lot's Wife*, 5 April 1966, p 2.

<sup>53</sup> Perry, *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Picot, *op cit*, p 114.

<sup>55</sup> Editorial, *Lot's Wife*, 5 April, 1966, p 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Australian Left Review*, No 2, Aug.-Sep. 1966, p 1; A. Clark, "Aiding the NLF," *The Age*, 27 July 1967, p 4.

<sup>57</sup> The editor at that time was Darce Cassidy, who in early 1967 moved to Melbourne, set up house with Dave Nadel and other Monash radicals (Nadel interview) and became the editor of the Monash Labor Club's equally provocative broadsheet *Print*. ("Terror Group Led by ABC Man," *Melbourne Observer*, undated, in Albert Langer collection, Noel Butlin Archives, Canberra); See also, defending *Print*, D. Cassidy, "The Might of Darce Cassidy's Pen," *Lot's Wife*, 9 May 1967, p 23.

a movement about civil liberties. On March 22, 100 demonstrators assembled at the US Consulate in Brisbane to deliver a protest note, and were met by "nearly 150 police and seven police vans".<sup>58</sup> Two days later at a Youth Campaign against Conscription protest of 4,000 in Brisbane's busiest intersection, three people agreed to be arrested, but a scene of "incredible brutality" captured by TV cameras resulted in the arrest of twenty-six people.<sup>59</sup>

Other events in May kept the Vietnam war in student consciousness: Calwell's announcement that he would fight the election on the issue, the Seamen's Union refusal, later reversed under pressure from the ACTU, to man the Vietnam-bound *Boonaroo*; and the death of Errol Noack, the first conscript killed in Vietnam. In early June, Nadine Jensen, a lone protester, smeared red paint on the returned troops of 1 RAR as they marched through the streets of Sydney. It was an act later seen as symbolic of the marginalisation of the movement at this time.<sup>60</sup>

Rootes has noted that in 1966, while there were many demonstrations against the Vietnam war and conscription, they were "at first neither exclusively nor even primarily student demonstrations"; and though students—in particular members of University Labor Clubs—participated, the organising committees were "typically off-campus".<sup>61</sup> Nonetheless, on the campuses, parameters of debate about the war were shifting to the left.

The 1966 ASLF conference was split between "Marxists and left-wing socialists" on the one hand, and what Rootes describes as "an alliance of Whitlamites and pacifists on the other". Despite the polarisation, the

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<sup>58</sup> A. Hall, "The Deep North," *Lot's Wife*, 26 September 1967, p 4. Hall says there were no arrests (though on the spot fines for half the demonstrators for carrying placards) as "police were under instructions not to create an incident at the U.S. consulate".

<sup>59</sup> A section of the Queensland police called Special Branch also contributed to the heightened potential for conflict: "One boy had his arm in plaster and this was twisted up his back. When things calmed down the Police Commissioner announced that ten members of the Special Branch had been transferred to uniform duty because they were psychologically unsuitable for their present work" (*Ibid.*). See also "Civil Liberties and the Queensland Police Force," *Semper Floreat*, 15 September 1966, pp 1/5/6.

<sup>60</sup> See Murphy, *op cit*, p 149.

<sup>61</sup> C.A. Rootes, "The Development of Radical Student Movements and Their Sequelae," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 3:2, 1988, p 174.

conference supported a campaign to collect money for medical aid for the NLF.<sup>62</sup> The conference also passed, with broad unanimity, an anti-nuclear motion.<sup>63</sup> Only five participants voted against the motion, including Albert Langer, destined to become the student movement's most public figure. Langer's membership of the Maoist Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) was still a carefully guarded secret at this time. Yet Dave Nadel remembers being appalled by Langer's defence of Chinese nuclear weapons, the "workers' bomb": "I just couldn't understand it except that I couldn't talk him out of it".<sup>64</sup>

Curthoys suggests that after Jensen's protest, the desire for a Labor victory in the November federal election ensured that demonstrations "appear to have remained largely peaceful during the rest of 1966".<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, the already polarising atmosphere created a heightened potential for violence and threats of violence, epitomised by the shooting of Arthur Calwell after he addressed a meeting of 400 about Vietnam at Mosman Town Hall.<sup>66</sup> In August a VAC pamphlet entitled *American Atrocities in Vietnam* financed by the Monash University Student Representative Council (SRC) was seized by the Victorian Police as "obscene".<sup>67</sup> In seizing the pamphlet, Police Inspector Crowley expressed the view that "there is an undesirable trend towards the protection of what are loosely called civil liberties".<sup>68</sup> The same month, arising from the anti-Vietnam movement, Students for Democratic Action (SDA) was formed at the University of Queensland, later seen as the

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<sup>62</sup> Seventy delegates attended the conference, held in Adelaide (Percy, *op cit*). See also C.A. Rootes, *Australian Student Radicals: the Nature and Origin of Dissent*, BA Hons thesis, Government Department, University of Queensland, 1969, p 47.

<sup>63</sup> Dave Nadel, personal interview.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* Langer had joined the Young Labor Association and Youth Against Apartheid at fourteen. At fifteen he was expelled for catching corrupt councillors rigging a pre-selection, but readmitted at sixteen without his expulsion being recorded because his membership had been invalid because of his youth (Nadel interview).

<sup>65</sup> Curthoys, *op cit*, p 144; See also Guyatt, *op cit*, p 187.

<sup>66</sup> Calwell was unhurt. Prime Minister Holt said: "Australian public life has been singularly free of episodes of violence. I strongly condemn and deeply deplore the violation of our democratic traditions" (quoted in F. Daly, *From Curtin to Kerr*, (South Melbourne: Sun Books, 1977), p 174).

<sup>67</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 13; "Civil Liberties in Victoria," *Lot's Wife*, 5 April 1966, p 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* See also *Vietnam Action*, no 1, April 1967, Mitchell library; "Students can be Fined" (re Vice-Chancellor's office warning re discipline), *Lot's Wife*, 12 July 1966, p 2.

"earliest and purest development of a student New Left of any of the Australian universities".<sup>69</sup>

Student activism was gathering pace. In early October 500 Melbourne University students, under the leadership of a new anti-Vietnam SRC, marched down Swanston Street against conscription.<sup>70</sup> In Brisbane on October 5 an anti-Vietnam demonstration organised by SDA led to twenty-six arrests, and marked the beginning of an ongoing civil liberties campaign against the restrictive State Traffic Act.<sup>71</sup> At the end of October, the anti-war movement captured headlines like never before. Harold Holt, having pledged to go "All the Way with LBJ" and invited the US President to visit Australia, calculating that the strategy to ensure his victory in the November federal election would be to market himself as the Australian politician most in favour of the popular Vietnam war. For the anti-war movement, Johnson's visit to Melbourne and Sydney in October 20-23, 1966, while it showed that the opponents of Vietnam were a small minority, was also a major success.<sup>72</sup>

In Melbourne, protesters splashed Johnson's car with paint, leading to violent clashes with police which resulted in the publication of the pamphlet *Facts about the Anti-LBJ Demonstration* by the Monash University SRC.<sup>73</sup> Nadel remembers that this demonstration "came as a real shock to a lot of people" and produced a "very superficial but nonetheless deeply-felt analysis of state power".<sup>74</sup> In Sydney, students in the

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<sup>69</sup> Rootes, *Australian Student Radicals...*, *op cit*, p 176. A major figure in its formation was Brian Laver, easily the most prominent name in Queensland student politics in these years. SDA is discussed in more detail in Chapter Ten.

<sup>70</sup> Mendes, *op cit*, p 29.

<sup>71</sup> Warren (presumably Warren Osmond), in note "Bris. 1966-9 Key Events" addressed to Dan O'Neill, in 1969-1970 folder, Dan O'Neill collection, Fryer library, Brisbane.

<sup>72</sup> Curthoys, "Mobilising Dissent...", *op cit*, p 146.

<sup>73</sup> *Facts About the Anti-LBJ Demonstration*, Albert Langer Collection, Noel Butlin Archives. Albert Langer contributed to the pamphlet. He had protested with a banner saying "Bob Kennedy for President". On television's *Four Corners* he told how he was singing "I'll sing you a song and it won't take long, all coppers are bastards" when he was arrested, and later bashed in jail ("The Right to Demonstrate," *Four Corners*, 3 December 1966, footage in National Film and Sound Archive). See also, "SRC News: the Motorcade," *Lot's Wife*, 18 October 1966, p 19.

<sup>74</sup> Nadel interview, *op cit*.

demonstration of 5,000 broke from police barricades and had to be dragged away. As a result "everyone now knew there was an anti-war movement in Australia".<sup>75</sup> New South Wales Premier Askin's reaction to the students lying in the road in front of the cavalcade—"Ride over the Bastards"—later became folklore.<sup>76</sup> Conservatives were not amused. In November an article in the *Bulletin* implied that money should be withheld by the Universities' Commission from universities "until leftwing minorities in them had been silenced or rendered impotent".<sup>77</sup> In the Legislative Council Liberal MLC Packer described *Honi Soit* as "filthy and scurrilous" and called for the student body to sack the editor.<sup>78</sup> The low-key student demonstration in Canberra outside the Rex Hotel where Johnson was staying provided a subject which received worldwide attention. A photograph of Megan Stoyles, wearing a T-shirt with the slogan "Make Love Not War," was flashed around the world: "Her youth, her good looks, and her ample bosom with its provocative message, were an instant media hit".<sup>79</sup>

The weeks preceding the federal election of November 26, 1966 saw a wave of draft-card burnings and demonstrations against conscription.<sup>80</sup> Demonstrators disrupted politicians' campaign meetings, their anger fuelled by the case of school teacher Bill White, who, having failed to respond to his call-up, was violently arrested at his home and jailed four days before the

<sup>75</sup> Curthoys, "Mobilising Dissent...", *op cit*, pp 144 and 146.

<sup>76</sup> Edwards, *A Nation at War...*, *op cit*, p 129. The Communist Party's *Australian Left Review* predicted (accurately) that: "The anti-Johnson demonstrations may finally prove to be the most important event of the visit. It is no exaggeration to say this marked a new higher stage in the protest movement against the Vietnam war. A new determination, a wider social base, a more militant spirit, these were new features serving notice upon the Establishment that the opposition is growing wider and deeper" (*Australian Left Review*, no 4, December 1966 - January 1967, p 4).

<sup>77</sup> In the same month ASIO apparently raided the flats of two NUAUS executive members and also asked NUAUS for a list of students planning to participate in an NUAUS trip to China. *National U*, 25 May, 1967, p 12; "An Erosion of Faith," *The Bulletin*, 12 November 1966, p 13.

<sup>78</sup> Students did not respond to his challenge, but the University Senate did, moving in May the next year to cut off funds to *Honi* over the Johnson incident in what *National U* described as the first "overt move" against a student newspaper in an atmosphere in which threats were frequently being made. The attention was over a pre-election front page which showed Johnson with a garland of photographs of atrocities committed in Vietnam around his neck and the word "Welcome" (*National U*, 25 May 1967).

<sup>79</sup> S. McHugh, *op cit*, p 214.

<sup>80</sup> Langley, *op cit*.

election.<sup>81</sup> *Four Corners* footage showed an election meeting at Randwick in Sydney where Holt was drowned out by demonstrators calling for the release of Bill White. At Rockdale the same night, Holt "faced the wildest demonstration of his career. A number of people, including radio and press reporters, complained of police violence".<sup>82</sup> Incidents like these provoked calls by both the Prime Minister and NSW Government for new laws to prevent their repetition. In Victoria, the Chancellor of the University of Melbourne was attacked in parliament on the grounds that he had failed to control students sufficiently.<sup>83</sup>

The November 1966 election was the major focus of student activity, especially for members of university Labor clubs. Members of the Monash Labor Club, for example, whose President, Dave Nadel, was a supporter of the ALP left's Jim Cairns,<sup>84</sup> "worked incredibly hard"<sup>85</sup> for the campaign. In 1966 Nadel had led a leftwing takeover of the Labor Club, away from more "theoretical" ALP members, largely on the basis of his reputation as an activist.<sup>86</sup> MLC members were so certain of the morality of their cause that they "could not conceive" that the conservative government could win the election.<sup>87</sup> Yet the election proved a major defeat for Labor. That defeat was a terrible blow for the peace movement,<sup>88</sup> but was felt perhaps most bitterly by radical students. Nadel says: "Everybody in the whole world knew that Labor was going to lose the election campaign except us".<sup>89</sup> He remembers

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<sup>81</sup> The hysterical scene outside White's home as he was dragged out by police was shown on "The Right to Demonstrate" *op cit*. See also Jordens, "Conscription and Dissent...", *op cit*, p 71 and Edwards, *op cit*, pp 130-133 on Bill White.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>84</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 12. Nadel's first political activity was handing out how-to-vote cards for the ALP during the 1961 Federal election, the year he turned fourteen (Nadel interview).

<sup>85</sup> H. McQueen, "A Single Spark," *Arena*, no 16, 1968, p 51.

<sup>86</sup> Nadel interview, *op cit*.

<sup>87</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 14.

<sup>88</sup> Summy, *op cit*, p 156, says that following the election defeat "...a shocked and dispirited movement was confronted with the prospect of how to remobilise. Its problems seemed endless. Six months after the election an *AICD Newsletter* discouragingly commented: 'Seemingly, no matter how much we petition, march or demonstrate our protests make little impact upon our Governments and the war proceeds to escalate regardless'".

<sup>89</sup> Nadel interview, *op cit*.

attending two post-election parties that night. The first, held by the Oakley ALP branch, constituted mainly "resigned wharfies" whose reaction to the expected defeat was: "Jesus, we're going to have the war, let's get pissed". By comparison, at the home of leading Save Our Sons activist, Jean McLean, where YCAC, SOS and student activists gathered, "it was just an absolutely devastated crowd of people".<sup>90</sup>

The students' disillusionment was complete when in February the Federal Labor Party Conference replaced leader Arthur Calwell with Gough Whitlam. Whitlam preferred electoral pragmatism to principle on the issue of the war.<sup>91</sup> As a consequence, the changing politics of student radicalism began to crystallise. At Sydney University, for example, a section of Students for a Labor Victory became the more radical Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), based loosely on the US group of the same name.<sup>92</sup> Members of the Monash Labor Club in particular lost faith in parliamentary politics.

By early 1967, the belief was growing amongst a minority of students, as had occurred in the United States and elsewhere, that the unity of Australian society depended ultimately on State violence.<sup>93</sup> In January, that belief was fuelled by confrontations which occurred over the visit of the President of South Vietnam, Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky, an admirer of Hitler.<sup>94</sup> By this time, student protesters had already "hived off" from the wider movement in order to concentrate on the university campus itself as the arena for protest activities.<sup>95</sup> Student politics developed "a new separatism

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<sup>90</sup> Nadel, *op cit*.

<sup>91</sup> See also M. Hamel-Green, "Vietnam: beyond pity," *Dissent*, Winter, 1970, pp 30-36. Hamel-Green describes 1967 as "the year of paralysis" in which his faith in parliamentary representation "collapsed". Whitlam's stance on Vietnam confirmed his cynicism and his growing conviction that (as British Trotskyist Tony Cliff had paraphrased Lord Acton), whilst "power corrupts...lack of power corrupts absolutely"(p 31).

<sup>92</sup> Rootes, *Australian Student Radicals...*, *op cit*, p 174.

<sup>93</sup> See also: "Security Men in Universities?," *Lot's Wife*, 7 March 1967, p 10; W. Osmond, "Australian Security. Affable Cloak...Any Dagger?," *Lot's Wife*, 21 March 1967, p 7. See B.York, "Police, Students and Dissent: Melbourne, 1966-72," *Journal of Australian Studies*, 1984, pp 58-77.

<sup>94</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, p 141.

<sup>95</sup> Text from photographs for Morgan vs. Osmond, "The State of Student Protest," *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 46:8, 7 September 1970, pp 120/121.

and political independence".<sup>96</sup> The generational split in the movement, according to Osmond:

...left student-based groups free to repudiate the moderate tactics of their elder fellow-protesters, and they took their politics into the universities.<sup>97</sup>

In Brisbane, Ky's visit "occasioned some of the largest and most vociferous demonstrations seen in the city since the Queensland railway strike of 1948. It was also notable for the brutality of political discrimination exercised by the Queensland police.<sup>98</sup> In Canberra six were arrested and charged.<sup>99</sup> At Macquarie University Ky received a "torrid welcome".<sup>100</sup> In Sydney the demonstration against Ky saw a bitter split between the ALP-led peace movement segment of the demonstration and the youth and student component over tactics.<sup>101</sup> In Melbourne the demonstration was less conflictual,<sup>102</sup> yet it was more important for the intense discussions taking place around the event. Following the federal election, Monash Labor Club activists had been involved with YCAC in Melbourne. Supporters of YCAC often met after their activities at the house of Trevor Ashton, the main organiser of the group<sup>103</sup>, as they did the during organising for the Ky demonstration:

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<sup>96</sup> Gordon, *op cit*, p 28.

<sup>97</sup> Osmond in "The State of Student Protest," *op cit*, p 125.

<sup>98</sup> "The Right to Dissent," *National U*, 1 March 1967, p 7. Two students were beaten up afterwards.

<sup>99</sup> *Vietnam Action*, No 1, April 1967, p 15.

<sup>100</sup> Elfrida Morcom, interview, courtesy Crispin Walker, who interviewed Morcom for *The Protestors on Campus: Opposition to the Vietnam War and National Service Act in the Three Sydney Universities, 1968-1972*, BA Hons, Macquarie University, 1994.

<sup>101</sup> Gordon, *op cit*, p 29. According to Summy, *op cit*, p 159, it was at this demonstration that the division between moderates and militants in the anti-war movement "first broke into the open".

<sup>102</sup> This was a result of improved organisation on the part of the Young Labor Association and others involved, according to Dave Nadel, and they were also aided by the support of Calwell: "He really made the protest meeting" (Nadel, interviewed in "Protesting as a Way of Life," *The Bulletin*, 4 February 1967, p 22). See also, editorial, *Lot's Wife*, 7 March 1967, p 2.

<sup>103</sup> See Trevor Ashton letter, *Lot's Wife*, 19 April 1966, p 2.



Albert came out during that time as a Maoist, and a lot of other people were already rethinking our position so in between the political work and during the parties there was a fair degree of dialogue going on...a lot of the shift to the left evolved from the dialogue we were having as we were organising the Ky demo.<sup>104</sup>

In the same month, three hundred attended a National Anti-Vietnam War and Anti-Conscription Activists Conference in Sydney, organised by the Vietnam Action Committee (VAC). The conference reflected a growing impatience with the strategies of the existing movement and was later held responsible in parliament for the rise of more radical protest against the war.<sup>105</sup> Marking a more "extra-parliamentary" flavour in the movement, the conference:

...strongly condemned the leadership of the peace movement for the failure of the election campaigns and strove to develop a program for organising in many different areas of society including, for the first time, high school students.<sup>106</sup>

Nadel remembers the conference as a place where participants were encouraged to make plans for activities on their particular campuses, and where Melbourne and Monash students were exposed to some of the ideas of the American anti-war movement through Sydney Trotskyists.<sup>107</sup>

John Murphy has suggested that immediately after 1966 there was "something of a hiatus" in the anti-war movement<sup>108</sup> and that the

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<sup>104</sup> Mao's Little Red Book also arrived during this time (Nadel interview). See also Hyde *et al*, *op cit*, p 10. Changes in student politics at Monash are also reflected in the choice of student newspaper topics, such as the Special Issue of *Lot's Wife* focussing on the USSR 1917-1967, 4 April 1967, and articles like "Che Guevara and Guerilla Warfare," *Lot's Wife*, 25 July 1967, p 10-11.

<sup>105</sup> *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 1 May 1969, p 1579.

<sup>106</sup> Gordon, *op cit*, pp 28/29; Report on Sydney Anti-Vietnam War Conference, Australia Day Weekend, *Vietnam Action*, No 1, April 1967, p 4. Gould considers the plans made from the conference were vastly over-ambitious for the forces available to the radicals at that time (Gould interview).

<sup>107</sup> Nadel interview, *op cit*.

<sup>108</sup> Murphy, *Harvest of Fear...*, *op cit*, p 159.

marginalisation of the movement at a time when public opinion was becoming more favourable is a conundrum.<sup>109</sup> However, although the anti-war movement appears to have been disoriented in this period, this is not strictly true of the wider student radical movement. In Brisbane, where the student New Left developed early and was less sympathetic to the Labor Party,<sup>110</sup> the campaign against the war was less inhibited by the upcoming October election in 1966.<sup>111</sup> As a consequence, University of Queensland student activists remember 1967 as the highpoint of their movement.<sup>112</sup> In Sydney and Melbourne, opposition to the Vietnam war may have been more sporadic, but on the campuses student politics and organisation were being consolidated around other issues.

In March 1967, for example, the Victorian Government was jolted by a series of scandals. The Victorian Parliament urged the universities to discipline students persisting in public demonstrations; and it was suggested that students who sat during the National Anthem be removed from university.<sup>113</sup> Students were angered by the hanging of Ronald Ryan, with NUAUS expressing "dismay and disgust" at the event as wharf workers stopped work in protest.<sup>114</sup> Melbourne University students planned a student trial of Premier Bolte for "a crime against humanity" but were deterred by the intervention of the Vice-Chancellor. It was suggested that Deputy Premier Rylah had threatened university funding if the Vice-Chancellor did not comply, a claim Rylah branded a "dirty, filthy lie".<sup>115</sup> Premier Bolte was also unimpressed, saying "The anti-hangers are the same bunch of Vietniks that disgraced themselves during the LBJ visit".<sup>116</sup> The

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, p 160.

<sup>110</sup> Mitch Thompson, personal interview.

<sup>111</sup> See Chapter Nine and Eleven for further details.

<sup>112</sup> Mitch Thompson and Bryan Laver, personal interviews. See also *National U*, 28 July 1967, p 1.

<sup>113</sup> "Freedom of Expression Violated" in "Scandals jolt Victoria," *Scope*, 23 March 1967, p 7.

<sup>114</sup> *National U*, 1 March 1967, p 2; Jeff Doube, "Hanging in Victoria," 21 March 1967, p 4; "Capital Punishment," *Lot's Wife*, 18 April 1967, p 13; B. Dickins, *Guts and Pity: the Hanging that ended Capital Punishment in Australia*, (Paddington, NSW: Currency Press, 1996).

<sup>115</sup> "Freedom of Expression Violated" in "Scandals jolt Victoria," *Scope*, 23 March 1967, p 7.

<sup>116</sup> *National U*, 1 March 1967, p 2.

decision by Monash University in late December 1966 to award Bolte an honorary degree proved to have been spectacularly badly timed, sparking a Labor Club campaign which culminated in the honouring of a pig in the University Council chambers.<sup>117</sup> According to Nadel, the anti-hanging campaign, initiated and led by the Monash Labor Club, established the credibility of the Labor Club which gave them the support to launch their controversial Aid to the NLF campaign in July.<sup>118</sup>

At Sydney University, meanwhile, students were mobilising in opposition to an increase in library fines, led by a group organised in O-week called Student Action for the Rights of Students (SARS). Students sat in at Fischer library on four occasions, with the issue of fines becoming one of civil liberties when Max Humphreys, a popular research student prominent in SARS,<sup>119</sup> was charged with gross contempt of authority and with inciting others to show similar contempt by the university, for which he was suspended for one year. In April, following a front lawn meeting, some 1,000 students sat in at the library and also outside the Vice-Chancellor's office in protest at his treatment.<sup>120</sup> This direct action, together with protests from the Staff Association and graduates, led to Humphreys' suspension being lifted.<sup>121</sup>

The annual ASLF Conference held in Sydney in May reflected the changing character of student politics. A motion was passed in favour of "counter-

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<sup>117</sup> "No Pedigree for Pigs," M.Hyde *et al*, *op cit*, pp 13-18; Nadel interview. Monash postgraduate Humphrey McQueen commented: "It would give me the greatest pleasure to see Sir Henry Bolte doctored" (*Lot's Wife*, 21 March 1967, p 12). See also, "Lot's Wife has a word on Sir Henry while everyone goes mad?," *ibid*, p 19, and "Survey on the Bolte issue," p 20; "Survey on Bolte, 68% Against Degree," *Lot's Wife*, 18 April 1967, p 28.

<sup>118</sup> Nadel interview.

<sup>119</sup> Greenland describes Humphreys as "quite a personality": a dope-smoking surfer who had more in common with his students than with the staff (Hall Greenland, personal interview).

<sup>120</sup> According to Greenland, Bob Gould, who was present at the demonstration said "We can't just let 'em go home without doing something". Greenland moved a motion that they occupy the Vice-Chancellor's Office and students voted in favour unanimously (Greenland interview).

<sup>121</sup> See "The Humphreys Affair: Statement of Events" (no author), courtesy Ann Curthoys; H. Greenland, "A Short History of the Humphreys Affair," *Honi Soit*, 3 October 1967, pp 10-11; H. Bryan, "The Fisher 'Sit-Ins' of April 1967," *Vestes*, pp 153-159; R.J. Cahill, "Humphreys Appeal Launched," *Honi Soit*, 3 October 1967, p 12; T. Irving, "The Mass University," *Free U*, February 1969, courtesy Ann Curthoys; *National U*, 25 May 1967, p 3.

escalation," that is, supporting the initiation of wars against the US (for example, in Guatemala) rather than "merely reacting to US offences" as the previous year's support for the NLF had been justified.<sup>122</sup> The conference also urged individual university political clubs actively to collect unspecified aid for the NLF.<sup>123</sup> On July 4, American Independence Day, around one hundred protestors held a twenty-four hour peace vigil outside the US Consulate,<sup>124</sup> and moderates and militants in the Monash Labor Club clashed when some members burnt a US flag. On July 21st the Monash Labor Club provoked an unprecedented reaction when it decided to start collecting money for unspecified purposes (that is, including military purposes) for the NLF.<sup>125</sup> Albert Langer and students influenced by Maoism argued for this action to be taken in line with an anti-imperialist position calling for the victory of the NLF.<sup>126</sup>

It is important to note, however, that much of the impetus for this decision did not come directly from Maoist students. Trotskyists in Sydney had already collected money for medical aid. Political boundaries between different political positions in this period were fluid. Those who formed the large Aid to the NLF Committee in the Labor Club were not only Maoists but liberal students with no distinctive leftist political stance: students like Peter Price, Martha Campbell and Warren Osmond.<sup>127</sup> A motion to collect unspecified aid was also proposed to the Melbourne University Labor Club

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<sup>122</sup> Paddy Dawson, "Student Labor Conference," *Honi Soit*, 8 June 1967, p 2; See also Helen Hill, "Problems of the Student Left," *National U*, 4 September 1967, p 7.

<sup>123</sup> A. Clark, "Aiding the NLF," *The Age*, 27 July 1967, p 4.

<sup>124</sup> B. York, *Sources of Student Unrest in Australia with Particular Reference to La Trobe University, 1967-73*, MA, University of Sydney, 1983, pp 143/144.

<sup>125</sup> "Students Vietnam Aid Week," *The Age*, 24 July 1967, p 5; "More Aid for Vietnam Urged," *The Age*, 25 July 1967; "Students Attack Aid-Viet Cong Group," *The Age*, 27 July 1967, p 3, and A. Clark, "Aiding the NLF," p 4; "Send Students to see Vietnam War," *The Age*, 28 July 1967, p 3; "Police admit Raid on Students," *The Age*, 29 July 1967, p 3; "New Clash Likely on Viet Cong Aid," *The Age*, 31 July, 1967, p 3. These reports coincide with reports about riots in Detroit: "Detroit Looks Like City at War. 23 Dead in Riot City. Army Acts," *The Age*, 26 July, p 1; "Guerilla War Now Rages in Detroit. 33 Dead as Sniper Gangs Fight Troops," *The Age*, 27 July 1967, p 1.

<sup>126</sup> P. Price, "Vietnam - Australian Reactions. Aid for Vietnam," *Lot's Wife*, 11 July 1967, p 13/14; *Lot's Wife*, 8 August 1967, p 2/3/4-7/8; *Lot's Wife*, 8 August 1967, p 28; Letter, *Lot's Wife*, 5 September 1967, p 3; *Lot's Wife*, 26 September 1967, p 2, "Aid and the Viet Cong," p 12; "Aiding the Enemy," M.Hyde *et al*, *op cit*, pp 19-26.

<sup>127</sup> Warren Osmond, personal interview; Nadel interview.

by Doug Kirsner, but not carried.<sup>128</sup>

The Monash Labor Club's actions provoked a major furore. The acting Vice-Chancellor banned the collections,<sup>129</sup> and in September the Defence Forces Protection Act was enacted, making such actions illegal.<sup>130</sup> The campaign earned Monash the reputation for being a "hotbed of communism" reputedly guided by a "soviet" in the Politics Department.<sup>131</sup> On July 24 *The Herald* quoted a Monash student involved in the campaign as saying:

...it would be unfortunate if an Australian conscript was hit by a bullet with Monash Labor Club on it...we don't see that there's any way out of this.<sup>132</sup>

Warren Osmond, to whom this statement was attributed, took legal action against *The Herald* over the alleged statement, which had been originally phrased as a provocative question, to which he had replied that he "could not see any way out of this".<sup>133</sup> For those publicly associated with the

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<sup>128</sup> Doug Kirsner, personal interview; "Students Attack Aid-Viet Cong Group," *The Age*, 27 July 1967, p 3.

<sup>129</sup> "Stop Press," *National U*, 28 July 1967, p 1; "Monash Storm Brews," *National U*, 29 September 1967, p 1.

<sup>130</sup> *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 6 September 1967, p 828, 1004; 19 September, 1967. The issue had been discussed by the federal Cabinet on 15 August who decided to strongly condemn the Club's actions "without magnifying them out of proportion" and to prevent them "to the extent that the Government is able to do so". Having discussed Communist influence in the AICD the same day, Cabinet also decided that the opposition to the war "appeared to be carefully planned and in the nature of psychological warfare" and agreed that greater coordination of information about the movement was needed, perhaps including the creation of special positions in the public service for this purpose (Cabinet Decision 497, 498, 504, series A5840, 1967 Embargoed Cabinet Release, Selected Documents, Australian Archives).

<sup>131</sup> Rootes, *Australian Student Radicals...*, p 175. Important articles on the campaign from the time include I.Turner, "Monash and the NLF," *Outlook*, October 1967, p 24; H.McQueen, "A Single Spark," *Arena*, no 16, 1968, pp 50-56; W.Osmond, "Shock Therapy," *Dissent*, Spring 1967, pp 31-32. See also articles by Peter Price and Martha Campbell, two members of the committee (the third was Warren Osmond), defending their action: "On National Liberation," *Lot's Wife*, 8 August 1967. The campaign was discussed in federal parliament in August. See also "Savage Act to Stop Aid to Vietnam," *Honi Soit*, 7 September 1967, p 1, and "Press banned as Sydney Votes Aid to Vietnam," *Honi Soit*, 14 September 1967, p 1, reporting a meeting condemning the new legislation.

<sup>132</sup> Quoted in Matheson, *op cit*, p 123.

<sup>133</sup> Correspondence, Warren Osmond Collection, University of Sydney; Osmond interview.

campaign, the hostile reaction was extremely unpleasant. Warren Osmond recalls that he was forced to leave home because of the anger of his family over his involvement and, after the campaign was over, he withdrew from student politics entirely for some months.<sup>134</sup>

For the anti-war movement, the Aid to the NLF campaign raised the issue of "lawlessness" more starkly than any other previous event.<sup>135</sup> *It is Right to Rebel*, a book written by Monash students in 1972, defends their actions, arguing that it was the Aid for the NLF campaign that created the basis for a fundamental change in the political climate. Disciplinary action against the students involved made what was originally an "extremist" action into a university issue, which enabled other students to begin to see the Vice-Chancellor as a representative of ruling class interests.<sup>136</sup> More importantly, the Labor Club's stand, they argue:

...cut right through the prevailing anti-Communist atmosphere and forced people to think about what the war was really about. It eventually forced the "official" anti-war movement to abandon its slogan "Stop the Bombing, Negotiate"...and to adopt a position of working for the defeat of US war aims.<sup>137</sup>

An article in *Lot's Wife* also reported that the NLF crisis had resulted in greater public awareness of the complexity of the issue:

"You see any group on the campus or on the street," said one Labor Club member, "and they're discussing Vietnam". People who had previously made no decision about the war and its morality were unable to remain aloof any longer, while those technically in opposition now actively stated their beliefs.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Warren Osmond, personal interview.

<sup>135</sup> M.J. Saunders, "'Law and Order'...", *op cit*.

<sup>136</sup> M.Hyde *et al*, *op cit*, p 20.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, p 49.

<sup>138</sup> K. Marriott and M. Smith, "Monash. Adolescent University (Sixty-seven Reviewed), *Lot's Wife*, 10 October 1967, p 10/11.

Letters sent to Peter Price and the Monash Labor Club in response to the campaign lend support to their claim that they dragged public debate to the left. Seventy-seven letters were kept. Twenty were extremely hostile, others did not support the club's actions but expressed regret at their treatment and admiration for their courage. Most who wrote, however, did so to support the campaign. They included high school students, women and ALP and CP members, and several sent donations. Many of these writers felt so isolated in their opposition to the war that they did not sign their letters. One man summed up the most commonly expressed sentiment of those who wrote in a brief postscript to his letter, which said: "Keep it up. It might be only a small shower, but its a long bloody drought".<sup>139</sup>

In late August, following the introduction of the Defence Forces Protection Act, Vice-Chancellor Matheson, just returned from overseas, strengthened restrictions even further, so that medical aid for the NLF was no longer permitted.<sup>140</sup> The following month, *Lot's Wife* reported efforts by ASIO to infiltrate student politics.<sup>141</sup> In the weeks following the introduction of the Act "things went very quiet" for Monash students.<sup>142</sup> The autonomy and diversity of student politics, however, again worked to the advantage of the movement as a whole. In September, student attention was shifted to Queensland, where the issue of the right to march (which in June and July had provoked large-scale arrests and an offer by the Premier to consider amendments to the State Transport Act<sup>143</sup>) had drawn in the *majority* of the University of Queensland's 8,000 students. On September 8, a march of 4,000 followed by a sit-down in Roma Street provoked 124 arrests.<sup>144</sup> In early October a teach-in on Vietnam was held at Monash University, "a much

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<sup>139</sup> See Appendix for extracts from these letters. They are contained in the Albert Langer collection, Noel Butlin archives, Canberra.

<sup>140</sup> *Lot's Wife*, 5 September 1967, p 2; *Lot's Wife*, 10 October 1967, p 2 and P.J.Hansen, "Student Discipline," p 21; "Government and University Action," M.Hyde *et al*, *op cit*, pp 27-50.

<sup>141</sup> "ASIO agent coerces student," *Lot's Wife*, 5 September 1967, p 3.

<sup>142</sup> Osmond interview.

<sup>143</sup> B.York, "Police, Students..." *op cit*, p 60; *National U*, 28 July 1967, p 1.

<sup>144</sup> 'Warren' in 'Bris.1966-9 Key Events', *op cit*. See also "The Brisbane March," *Nation*, 23 September 1967, pp 11-12 and "The Deep North," *Lot's Wife*, 26 September 1967, p 4/5, which compared Monash and Queensland Universities - where "about a dozen students do the work for the left" at Monash, SDA and Bryan Laver had built up a group of a hundred activists.

more formidable affair" than the first in 1965.<sup>145</sup> Speakers included Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser (Defence Minister), Cairns, Malcolm Salmon (from the Communist Party paper *Tribune*) and academics; the debate was televised live.<sup>146</sup>

At both the University of Queensland and Monash University, the rise of student radicalism also fuelled growing criticism of structures of student representation. At Monash, students associated with the SRC were critical of the reliance of that body on funding by the University Union, on whose Board students were a minority. In May the SRC organised a 200-strong General Meeting of the Union to ask that the Union be run more democratically. Based on surveys of student opinion, the SRC also organised a Conference to discuss restructuring of the SRC, which was boycotted by the Labor Club which believed any restructuring should be decided by students. A student meeting on the issue failed to raise a quorum; and further meetings were overshadowed by the Aid to the NLF Campaign.<sup>147</sup> In Queensland in September, the rejection by a mass forum of students of a march permit negotiated by Student Union President Frank Gardiner with the State Government reflected increasing criticism that existing student representation was not adequately responsive to the rapidly changing wishes of students.<sup>148</sup> Such issues of campus democracy were to become a central preoccupation of students in 1968 and 1969.

Student mobilisation was also sustained and developed by issues other than the Vietnam war, such as the state of education. In July 1965, for example, inspired by the successful example of students in Germany and New Zealand, the ANU Students Association proposed a nation-wide one-day strike of university students to draw attention to the inadequacies of Australian education.<sup>149</sup> In April 1966, nation-wide rallies and "work-outs"

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<sup>145</sup> Matheson, *op cit*, p 126.

<sup>146</sup> Curthoys, "Mobilising Dissent...", *op cit*, p 148.

<sup>147</sup> Hyde *et al*, *op cit*, pp 56-58.

<sup>148</sup> P. Gray and J. Stanwell (compilers), *A Ten Years Restrospective of the Development of the "New Left" in Brisbane 1964-1974*, Research Project for Film Proposal, Nov. 1974, p 14.

<sup>149</sup> The ANU students also proposed asking trade unionists throughout Australia to strike in sympathy with the students. A motion in support of the strike was passed by NUAUS in August ("One-day Strike Call to Varsity Students," *The Age*, 22 July 1965; *National U*, 29 September 1965, p 4; P. Denahy, "Students Meet to Discuss Strike," *Lot's Wife*, 28 September 1965, p 3). Peter Sellers, Education Vice-President of NUAUS insisted "Such action would be a



were held as part of a general NUAUS campaign on this issue. Students, by "...helping in school libraries, art and music departments, setting up experiments, designing teaching aids and doing general cleaning up" would demonstrate their concern about education and show the public that students could do "something constructive to help others in the community".<sup>150</sup> One thousand students were mobilised for a mass rally in Sydney, with 65% of University of New South Wales (UNSW) students supporting a boycott of lectures in favour of the event. In Adelaide 2,000 students deserted lectures to distribute leaflets door-to-door.<sup>151</sup>

On 21 July, 1966 Monash University students held their first on-campus demonstration—an overnight sit-in in the library as part of nationwide protests against inadequate funding, held "with the encouragement and cooperation of the library staff".<sup>152</sup> In 1967, a teach-in and an NUAUS seminar on education were held; and seventeen Monash students dressed in mourning marched in protest at the state of education in April.<sup>153</sup> In Sydney, students campaigned in support of demands by trainee teachers for higher allowances.<sup>154</sup> Late in that year, students and staff at Sydney University established a "free university" with courses determined by the participants, following overseas examples.<sup>155</sup> The rise of student protest also

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demonstration of some kind, but it is not a strike. A strike implies a direct hurt or threat to the group with whom the strikers are bargaining for certain concessions" ("Students to Strike," *Lot's Wife*, 14 September 1965).

<sup>150</sup> Education Vice-President, NUAUS, Patti Warn, *National U*, 2:2, 1966, p 3. *National U* also reported plans for another Workout where Melbourne and Monash students would clear the site for La Trobe University "so as to hasten the building of the university proper". At the University of New England students planned to assist in the building of an extension to a pre-school attached to the Armidale Aboriginal settlement.

<sup>151</sup> *National U*, 2:2, 1966, p 3; *National U*, 2:3, 7 May 1966, p 8; Letters: "Workout I" and "Workout 2," *Lot's Wife*, 5 April 1966, p 4/5; "Workout," *Lot's Wife*, 19 April 1966, p 2; D. McKaskill, "Work-Out Worked-Out," *Lot's Wife*, 3 May 1966, p 17.

<sup>152</sup> "Library Sleep-in," *Lot's Wife*, 26 July 1966, p 9; Perry, *op cit*, p 13, who comments: "A great deal of publicity was obtained, which may have made students aware of the possibilities of using the media by artificially creating 'news'". See also, "The Sit-in," *Lot's Wife*, 18 October 1966, p 19.

<sup>153</sup> *National U*, 29 September 1967, p 14; "A Case of Educational Brinkmanship," 9 May 1967, *Lot's Wife*, p 9.

<sup>154</sup> Ann Curthoys, personal interview; "Teacher Protest Wrecked by Government," *Honi Soit*, 6 July 1967, p 1; S. Spender, *The Year of the Young Rebels*, (New York: Vintage, 1969).

<sup>155</sup> See "Staying the Course," *Bulletin*, 30 November 1968; S. Hall, "Free U gets under way," *Bulletin*, 11 January 1969, p 31-2; *Free U*, February 1969, courtesy Ann Curthoys.

appears to have fuelled criticism in newspapers and in parliament of the federal Government's inadequate funding of higher education.<sup>156</sup>

Student radicalisation was an uneven process best reflected in the lack of awareness and protest around women's issues, despite the leading role played by a number of women across the political spectrum on campuses in this period. As Ann Curthoys has noted, the composition of student groups reflected the under-representation of women at university, where they comprised one third of students and 10% of academic staff. Young women in the late 1960s saw feminism as "bourgeois and sexless" based on their perceptions of existing women's groups, staffed by much older women.<sup>157</sup>

As a consequence, sexism on the campuses appears to have gone largely unchallenged. Student newspapers in this period continue to display women as objects for male pleasure.<sup>158</sup> Accusations of filth and obscenity and threats to censor student publications opposed to the war encouraged student radicals to reject and defy conservative definitions of personal morality more generally.<sup>159</sup> Yet some students showed little awareness of the negative gender implications of some of the material they were increasingly celebrating;<sup>160</sup> and issues like homosexuality seem rarely to

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<sup>156</sup> *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 19 September 1967, pp 1072-1084; 20 September 1967, pp 1106-1110; 4 & 5 October 1967, pp 1729-1730; Melbourne *The Age*: 23 September, 19 October, 21 December 1966, 17 January, 24 February, 11 March, 3 April, 10 May, 1 July, 17 July, 13 August, 18 August 1967; Melbourne *Herald*: 9 November 1966, 18 May 1967; Canberra *Times*: 30 September 1966, 14/15 April 1967; *The Australian*, 7 November 1966; *Bulletin*, 14 April 1967; *Sydney Morning Herald*: 17 April, 12 May, 23 June, 17 July 1967.

<sup>157</sup> A. Curthoys, "Shut up you Bourgeois Bitch': Sexual Identity and Political Action in the anti-Vietnam War Movement," in M. Lake and J. Damousi, (eds), *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1995), pp 7/9; Janey Stone, Brian Laver, personal interviews.

<sup>158</sup> See for example, *Lot's Wife*, 17 May 1966, p 1; letters page illustration, *Lot's Wife*, 21 March 1967, p 2; "Featuring the New 'Girly' Look - More Girls on Page 94...," *Lot's Wife*, 5 September 1967, p 1.

<sup>159</sup> See for example, C. Hector, "Obscenity anyone? or in the Wardens Lounge Room," *Lot's Wife*, 15 March 1966, p 3. Following the banning of *American Atrocities in Vietnam* the front page of *Lot's Wife* showed Prime Minister Holt in his wet-suit with the caption: "This sort of pornography makes me sick". See also "The *Lot's Wife* Censorship Page," (20 September 1966, pp 1/9). The drug culture was also on the rise, see for example P. Price, "Getting Zonked Out of Your Mind with LSD and the Hippies," *Lot's Wife*, 27 June 1967, p 2.

<sup>160</sup> See for example, "Baring the Breast," *Lot's Wife*, 28 September 1965. Student sexism also endured alongside opposition to racism. See for example R. Lansburg, "Asian Students in Australia," *Lot's Wife*, 12 July 1966, p 5, which shows an Asian woman in a mini-skirt with the caption "Do we want people like this in our country?". See also *Lot's Wife*, 5 April 1966, p

have been discussed.<sup>161</sup>

In two short years, fuelled primarily by opposition to the Vietnam war and conscription, the style, aims and motivations of student activism changed enormously. At the same time, though student politics had been wrested from the more theoretical and pro-Labor Party groups, the radical activists of 1967 were—as the response to the Labor Club's NLF aid campaign showed—still a minority swimming against the tide. While their ideas about what it meant to be a radical or revolutionary in most cases had not been clarified, their opposition to the war and adoption of radical tactics were deeply felt. The determination of the Australian Government to resist opposition to the commitment of Australian troops to the increasingly ugly Vietnam war would ensure that the process of student radicalisation continued to spread and deepen.

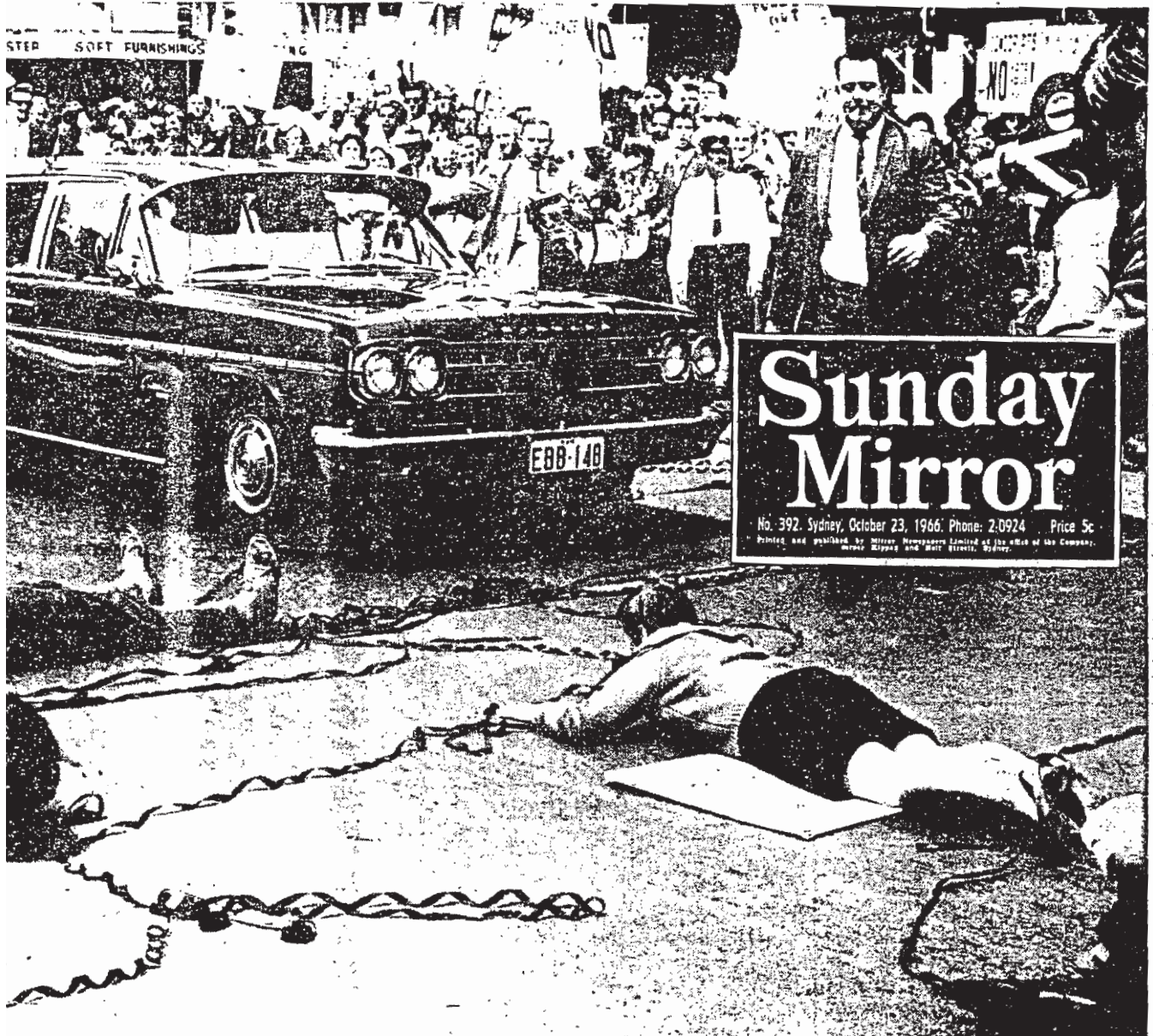
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1, which features a photograph of Arts student Moni Lai, "Miss Fresherette 1966," surrounded by photographs of the male candidates for the SRC. Attitudes towards female sexuality were in a process of change, however (see for example "The Pill and Monash Girls," *Lot's Wife*, 9 May 1967).

<sup>161</sup> Though see "London's Lesbian Microcosm," *Lot's Wife*, 7 March 1967, p 20.

S BROS.  
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# GIRL REBEL



## Amazing LBJ scenes

Over a million people gave President Johnson the greatest welcome of his life in Sydney yesterday. Demonstrators, such as those in this picture, figured in some amazing scenes but failed to mar the historic welcome. The agitators brought President Johnson's motorcade to a sudden halt in Oxford St. by darting out to lie on the road. Det.-Sgt. McNeill, cigarette in mouth, is seen running out to haul away a girl from in front of one of the cars.

See more pictures and stories on pages 2, 3, 5, 6, plus eight pages of pictures in centre supplement, pages 23-30.

Petty, reproduced in D. O'Neill *et al* (eds),  
*Up the Right Channels*, University of  
Queensland, July 1970, pp 113/116/117.





Chapter Five  
The Fire Last Time:  
Australian Student Radicalism 1968-1969

*Joy it was to be alive, and to be young was very heaven.*

William Wordsworth.

*God isn't dead, He just doesn't want to get involved.*

Students for Democratic Action.<sup>1</sup>

— *Senior Constable Taylor, have you attended many demonstrations?*

— *Yes, I have attended a lot of them.*

— *Like this one?*

— *Nah, I don't like any of them.*

Exchange at July 4 "riot" trial, Melbourne, 1968<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SDA leaflet, undated, Dan O'Neill collection.

<sup>2</sup> Exchange between a lawyer and a police officer during the "riot" trial in Melbourne arising from the 1968 July 4 demonstration (*Brisbane Line*, 22 August 1968, p 9).

Internationally, 1968 and 1969 represented the high point of social unrest in this period and a time when student protest unlocked the simmering anger of major labour movements in countries around the world. The most spectacular of these revolts occurred in May 1968 in France. A liberal issue, the right of students to live in mixed colleges, sparked a student campaign which university authorities attempted, unsuccessfully, to quell. When the government sent in police to prevent protests, clashes on the streets outside the Sorbonne University in Paris drew in discontented French workers, resulting, within a week, in a general strike that threatened to topple the de Gaulle government. The French events provided a model for revolutionary students of the role that students could play in a working class revolution. Student occupations, mass demonstrations and violent, sometimes fatal, clashes with police were occurring across Europe, America and Asia. For millions of people, these movements rekindled the hopes and ideas of years like 1871, 1917 and 1936.<sup>3</sup>

In Australia in 1968 and 1969, protest against the Vietnam war, and, in particular, the rise of the draft resistance movement remained the primary motor of student radicalism. Yet it must also be remembered that the Vietnam war was increasingly seen by students not as an aberration from normal events but as simply the most urgent and cogent example of the irrationality and inhumanity of capitalism. In the case of Britain, for example, the protests and occupations which provided a powerful source of ideas and inspiration for Australian student radicals—through their own press as well as imported radical newspapers like *Black Dwarf* and *Socialist Worker*<sup>4</sup>—were not a response to direct involvement in the Vietnam war, because the British Government did not commit troops for Vietnam.

The Australian student press followed international student movements avidly; student campaigns and occupations in Berkeley, Columbia, Berlin and London were consciously studied and used as models.<sup>5</sup> Comparisons were easy to make, because, as in other countries, student anti-Vietnam

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<sup>3</sup> K.A. Reader with K. Wadia, *The May '68 Events in France: Reproductions and Interpretations*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993); C. Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After*, (London: Bookmarks, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> See for example, Ann Curthoys' personal collection.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Possum, *National U*, 10 June 1968, p 5 and "Europe's Revolting Students," *ibid*, p 12.



mobilisations in Australia led again and again to confrontations with university administrations and, arising from these clashes, to fundamental challenges to the university system itself, its representative structures and its relationship with Government and capitalist society. As student radicalism deepened, its power to draw in new forces also increased. On the most militant campuses, the proportion of students participating in political activity on campus grew. Where some campuses, especially in smaller states and towns, had not previously been much affected by the protest fever, in 1968 and 1969 it became contagious.

The possibility of socialist revolution was an idea that captured the imaginations of a rapidly expanding minority of students. This unifying ideal, the end of capitalism and its replacement with a society "run from below," was a central aspect of the growth of the radical movement. Opposition to the war broadened unselfconsciously to embrace as part of the same struggle opposition to police and state coercion as well as support for the demands of trade unionists and other opponents of the Government. The rise of student/worker co-operation consequently became a major aspect of student politics in Australia in 1968 and 1969; I have chosen to explore the course of that relationship in more detail in a later chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a broader summary of the development of student politics in these two years. With students who were consciously revolutionary now playing a leading role, the student radical movement developed into a movement for control of the campuses themselves: a movement for "student power".

When students returned to campus in March 1968, the mood in the anti-war movement and amongst student activists had already been transformed by the NLF's daring Tet Offensive in February.<sup>6</sup> Though the offensive was defeated, its impact on Allied confidence was dramatic.<sup>7</sup> From Tet on, the

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<sup>6</sup> Front-page headlines in *The Age* tell the story: "Reds Mount Huge Offensive. Eight Major Towns, Air Bases Raided," 31 Jan.; "Saigon Under Siege. Air Strikes called as Battles Rage," 1 Feb.; "Viet Cong Build Up Offensive. Allies Kill 5800 Reds," 2 Feb.; "Red Attacks Smashed: 'Total Defeat' Claimed. 10,500 die in Four Days," 3 Feb.; "ANZACs kill 114 in Fierce Viet Fighting," 5 Feb.; "Reds Strike Khe Sanh; new Saigon attacks," 6 Feb.; "Cholon Burns as 900 Reds Battle in Ruins," 7 Feb.

<sup>7</sup> Robert O'Neill, 1969, quoted in G. Lockhart, "Fear and Dependence: Australia's Vietnam Policy, 1965-1985" in K. Maddock: B. Wright (eds), *War: Australia and Vietnam*, (Artamon: Harper and Row, 1987), p 23, from F. Frost, *The Australian Army in South Vietnam, 1966-1971*, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1976.

course of events in Vietnam caused nothing but trouble for the Australian Government, constantly undermining the rationale for Australian involvement and stoking the anger of the growing ranks of anti-war activists.<sup>8</sup> The self-confidence of the radicals was buoyed again in February when the new Prime Minister John Gorton, in tacit acknowledgement of shifting opinion polls, moved to limit the expansion of troops.<sup>9</sup> In March, activists watched in delight as US President Johnson announced on television that the bombing of North Vietnam would halt and that "I shall not seek, and will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President".<sup>10</sup>

The establishment of Melbourne's Draft Resistance Movement (DRM) in early February by the Young Labor Association (YLA), university Labor Clubs, the Young Socialist League (previously the Eureka Youth League) and ex-members of the Youth Campaign Against Conscription marked the beginning of a more militant approach to conscription, DRM pledging to "wreck," not simply "oppose," conscription.<sup>11</sup> Members of this group, many of them students, chained themselves across a driveway at an intake of conscripts and encouraged an increasing number of young men to risk jail by refusing to comply with conscription, rather than seek exemption. Though DRM collapsed in a few months, its stress on "mounting levels of resistance" was carried on by increasingly militant student groups.<sup>12</sup>

In May 1968 there was a surge of student protest. These events were inspired by the student unrest in France, but also by attempts by the Australian

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<sup>8</sup> Commenting on the impact of the Tet Offensive on the United States, Gitlin wrote that "a nation that commits itself to myth is traumatised when reality bursts through - in living color" (T. Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), p 299).

<sup>9</sup> S. Brodie, *Australia's Prime Ministers*, (PR Books: Sydney, 1978), p 124.

<sup>10</sup> Curthoys tells how pictures of Johnson "heavily lined, worried, broken," so different from the Johnson who had been enthusiastically greeted on Sydney streets only eighteen months before: "From the evidence of Johnson's ravaged features, we started to think the war might actually end" (A. Curthoys, "Mobilising dissent. The Later Stages of Protest," in G. Pemberton (ed.), *Vietnam Remembered*, (Sydney: Weldon Publishing, 1990), p 149). See also "The End of the Way for LBJ" (Sydney University leaflet, undated, Albert Langer collection).

<sup>11</sup> M. Hamel-Green, "The resisters. A history of the anti-conscription movement 1964-1972," in P. King, (ed.), *Australia's Vietnam: Australia in the Second Indo-China War*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983), p 113.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Government to amend the National Service Act to force university officers to provide confidential information on students who were eligible for national service (Clause 22). The move was widely opposed, including by the Academics Union and the Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee,<sup>13</sup> and proved a "humiliating defeat" for the Government.<sup>14</sup> Ministers were almost immediately forced to begin to modify the amendments in order to placate the university community, an aim not achieved for some months.<sup>15</sup> The 1968 ASLF conference in Canberra, also in May, reflected the new tone of the movement. It was timed to coincide with a Freedom Ride of 400 students to the Prime Minister's Lodge, to seek the release of conscientious objectors Simon Townsend and Denis O'Donnell and to end further gaolings and the National Service amendments.<sup>16</sup> The participants were divided over tactical issues. Melbourne University students, aligned with SDS, sat in the Prime Minister's driveway to avoid confrontation, while Monash students, led by the Labor Club, marched onto the main road outside. As a consequence, thirty-eight of the conference delegates held their first session in the Canberra lock-up.<sup>17</sup>

As in 1965-67, a section of academic staff opposed to the war and conscription played an important role in legitimising student opposition. By late July 1968, for example, 250 academic staff had openly expressed opposition to the amendments to the National Service Act.<sup>18</sup> The following year, three academics would receive wide press coverage when, at a public meeting, they called on young men not to register for National Service.

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<sup>13</sup> See A. Jordens, "Conscription and Dissent: the Genesis of Anti-War Protest," in G. Pemberton, (ed.), *Vietnam Remembered*, (Sydney: Weldon, 1990), p 80, and B. York, "Sources of Student Dissent: La Trobe University 1967-1972," *Vestes*, 7:1, 1984, p 135.

<sup>14</sup> Jordens, *ibid*, p 80.

<sup>15</sup> See P. Edwards, "Amendments to the National Service Act," *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), pp 217-219.

<sup>16</sup> Police were on their best behaviour, holding open the doors of the vans and calling "Next please!" and providing table and chairs to enable delegates to re-convene the conference inside the police station (York, "Sources...", *op cit*, p 137). See also *National U*, 22 April 1968, p 1.

<sup>17</sup> B. York, *Sources of Student Unrest in Australia with Particular Reference to La Trobe University, 1967-73*, MA thesis, University of Sydney, 1983, p 137; K. Mansell, *The Yeast is Red*, MA thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, 1994, p 80.

<sup>18</sup> *Tribune*, 24 July 1968, p 9.

Prosecutions were considered, and threats made by the Minister for National Service, but by the end of June over 500 academics had signed "incitement statements".<sup>19</sup>

1968 very quickly became a year which one activist has remembered as "just one demonstration after another,"<sup>20</sup> often with several major incidents occurring simultaneously on the one day in different parts of the country. June 24, for example, saw *National U's* most spectacular front page report:

Unparalleled eruptions of mob violence have bloodied the eastern seaboard of Australia in the last 48 hours with students rioting uncontrollably in both Melbourne and Sydney in scenes of mass insurrection unmatched in the last generation.<sup>21</sup>

The month of July was even more conflictual. On July 2 student demonstrators in Sydney "mobbed" Prime Minister Gorton as he left a Cabinet meeting: "They beat on his car and shouted abuse".<sup>22</sup> In Melbourne, July 4, which was marked the previous year by a silent vigil, became a riot. Mounted troopers were ordered at full canter into crowds outside the US Consulate for the first time in twenty-five years.<sup>23</sup> Stones were thrown at Consulate windows and a pitched battle between 2,000 protesters and police raged as militants attempted to storm the building. Fifty-five people were arrested; and later baton charges were used to break up the crowd who marched to Russell Street Police Station in solidarity, the battle raging on into the night.<sup>24</sup> The following evening, Prime Minister Gorton gave an ultimatum to demonstrators, saying: "The Commonwealth Government will not permit lawlessness, violence and destruction by mobs in

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<sup>19</sup> G. Langley, *A Decade of Dissent: Vietnam and the Conflict on the Australian Home Front*, (North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), p 111. See also Hamel-Green, *op cit*, p 115, and A. Picot, "Vietnam: How we won last time," *Socialist Review*, Winter 1991, issue 4, p 118.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Hamel-Green, quoted in Edwards, *op cit*, p 223.

<sup>21</sup> "East Coast Rocks to Violence," *National U*, 24 June 1968, p 1.

<sup>22</sup> *The Australian*, 6 July 1968, p 1.

<sup>23</sup> "Wild mobs storm US Consulate, police headquarters," *The Age*, 4 July 1968, p 1. See also "July 4th Violence in Retrospect," *National U*, 22 July 1968, p 2.

<sup>24</sup> Picot, *op cit*, p 118; see also B. York, "Police, Students and Dissent: Melbourne, 1966-1972," *Journal of Australian Studies*, 1984, p 68.

Australia".<sup>25</sup> He ordered Attorney-General Bowen to act swiftly with the States to stamp out violence. Victoria's Chief Secretary Sir Arthur Rylah instructed police to take the strongest possible action to prevent a repetition:

The incidents went far beyond a peaceful demonstration. Students who organise peaceful demonstrations must realise that other people who have no respect for law and order or for the rights of the ordinary citizen will batten on to their activities.<sup>26</sup>

The publications of Victorian police indicate their agreement, pledging that police would stand firmly against the "moral rot eating at the mode of life we call the Western civilisation".<sup>27</sup> Participants were charged with "riot," "the most serious legal action for years".<sup>28</sup> Within the movement, the confrontation "accentuated certain internal stresses,"<sup>29</sup> with Sydney SDS Secretary Mike Jones dissociating his group from the protest.<sup>30</sup>

Yet the confrontations continued, the ranks of the militants being constantly swollen by anger at police violence. In Sydney, after fifty students were punched, kicked and arrested by police at a demonstration in Martin Place,<sup>31</sup> John Percy, a Sydney University student under attack for publishing the pamphlet *How Not to Join the Army*, was given sanctuary by students at UNSW,<sup>32</sup> an initiative taken up later by other universities and NUAUS.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "Violence Must End, Says Government," *Australian*, 6 July 1968, p 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* *The Australian* said that the Prime Minister's challenge "was seen in some government quarters as likely to incite student violence". It said it was believed that Bowen's instructions included the use of "all and any legislation to crack down on student demonstrators who step out of line".

<sup>27</sup> *Police Life*, 15 November 1967, quoted in York, "Police...", *op cit*, p 64.

<sup>28</sup> *Tribune*, 17 July 1968, p 1.

<sup>29</sup> York, "Police...", *op cit*, p 68.

<sup>30</sup> "Violence must end," undated, Albert Langer collection.

<sup>31</sup> "1968: the Year that Changed the World" (special issue) *The Australian Magazine*, 27-28 March 1993, p 13.

<sup>32</sup> *Tribune*, 3 July 1968. See also *Bulletin*, 6 July 1968.

<sup>33</sup> Adelaide University students, for example, voted to provide sanctuary in August 1969 (*National U*, 15 September 1969). The *Herald* chose to report the NUAUS decision using a photograph of "former North Melbourne football star Albert Mantello" who "said today he did not know that part of a building he owns had been declared a 'sanctuary for draft

In response to Attorney-General Bowen's call for a report on the same pamphlet, copies were seized from a radical bookshop in Sydney in a police raid.<sup>34</sup> Yet the Government's continued involvement in the Vietnam War was becoming increasingly difficult to defend. The same month new US President Nixon announced that the US expected Asian countries to handle their own defence problems, a policy shift which left the Australian Government "without a paradigm".<sup>35</sup>

Confrontational protests continued throughout the final months of 1968. On October 25, a student march in Brisbane, part of world-wide action about Vietnam that week, resulted in forty-one arrests, with charges of obscene and insulting language and disorderly behaviour being laid.<sup>36</sup> A Melbourne demonstration the same day saw a confrontation comparable with that on July 4.<sup>37</sup> Three days later there was a violent encounter with police in Melbourne when students attempted to burn an effigy outside the offices of Dow Chemical, manufacturers of napalm.<sup>38</sup> Albert Langer could now announce that in his view the militant line had become "completely dominant in the student movement, and also prevails amongst most younger activists".<sup>39</sup>

On December 28 and 29, a combined SDS-Draft Resistance Conference in Melbourne began to organise the nationwide Don't Register campaign, a campaign that would provoke more intense, militant and widespread mobilisations than any yet seen against the war. Launched on January 25, it had already resulted in mass arrests of students before classes began. Student participants, mainly members of SDS, handed out copies of a leaflet which asked "Why register for National Service?". Distribution of the leaflet was

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dodgers" ("Draft 'haven' in his building," *Herald*, 25 August 1969).

<sup>34</sup> "Pamphlet Power," *Bulletin*, 9 July 1968.

<sup>35</sup> Lockhart, *op cit*, p 24.

<sup>36</sup> *Tribune*, 30 October 1968.

<sup>37</sup> M. Hamel-Green, "The Resisters...", *op cit*, p 114.

<sup>38</sup> At that demonstration Langer noted "a definite division...between moderates and militants" and that the militant line had become "completely dominant in the student movement, and also prevails amongst most younger activists" (York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, p 145, quoting Langer in *Vietnam Protest News*, 19, December 1968, pp 4-7).

<sup>39</sup> Langer in *Vietnam Protest News*, no 19, December 1968, pp 4-7, quoted in York, *ibid*.

illegal under the Crimes Act, constituting "incitement," and illegal also in Melbourne under City Council by-law 418.<sup>40</sup> By the beginning of March, over one hundred people had been arrested in Melbourne under the Council by-law. Many refused to pay their fines and were gaoled for five or seven days, with the number facing gaol growing larger every week.<sup>41</sup> In March, SDS activist Harry van Moorst, risking jail by refusing to pay a fine for distributing Don't Register leaflets, was picked out of a demonstration by police and later knocked unconscious by a blow from a police officer at Carlton Police Station.<sup>42</sup> On March 25, a demonstration of one thousand, mainly students, resulted in "so many arrests that police had to rely on a Melbourne City Council truck to haul the violators away".<sup>43</sup> By the end of that month, one thousand students had exposed themselves to the risk of twelve months gaol (the maximum penalty for incitement).<sup>44</sup>

Conflictual anti-war protests were not confined to Melbourne. In Sydney in March, one thousand students confronted police at a symposium in O-week, while at Macquarie University a General Meeting of Students called for the repeal of the National Service Act.<sup>45</sup> A march of two thousand anti-conscriptionists from the three Sydney universities was joined by workers from building sites as they marched to the Commonwealth Centre, where they were set upon by police.<sup>46</sup> In the period from March to April, 302 people were arrested in anti-conscription marches, sit-ins and occupations across the country.<sup>47</sup> The result was a victory. On April 9, by-law 418, which had become increasingly impossible to enforce, was repealed, a "tremendous morale-booster" for student activists.<sup>48</sup> On April 11, anti-conscription

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<sup>40</sup> Hamel-Green says that whilst police were selective about arrests for "incitement" under the Crimes Act, concentrating on a handful of student "ringleaders," many more were arrested under by-law 418, including Jim Cairns, during the January/February registration period (Hamel-Green, "The Resisters...", *op cit*, p 114). *Tribune* also suggested that police wanted to make an example of radical student leaders (*Tribune*, 5 February 1969).

<sup>41</sup> Hamel-Green, *op cit*, p 114.

<sup>42</sup> *National U*, 24 March 1969, p

<sup>43</sup> York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, p 157.

<sup>44</sup> Hamel-Green, "The resisters...", *op cit*, p 114.

<sup>45</sup> *Tribune*, 12 March 1969.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Hamel-Green, "The Resisters...", *op cit*, p 114.

demonstrations led to mass arrests: 110 in what became known as the "battle of Sydney"; and fifty-four in Adelaide.<sup>49</sup>

On May 1, Sydney University students confronted the Sydney University Regiment ceremonial guard as it turned out for inspection by the State Governor Sir Roden Cutler; Cutler was jostled and hit by a tomato. Supporters of the regiment attacked the demonstrators. Some students were kicked unconscious, including Sydney SDS Secretary Mike Jones. Conservative violence was, as it continued to be, enormously divisive. Jones later vowed: "This is the last time I organise a non-violent demonstration," while SRC President and former Freedom Rider Jim Spigelman argued that the left had provoked the confrontation by going ahead with the demonstration despite threats.<sup>50</sup> Two months later, Jones was arrested under the Crimes Act.<sup>51</sup> In July, ten students faced charges arising from the protest before the university's Proctorial Board. Imitating the tactics of radical students in similar circumstances in Berkeley and West Germany, many other students signed a mass admission that they had committed the same offences as those charged.<sup>52</sup> It was plain that Government leaders and their supporters were no longer welcome on several campuses. The May visit of the governor-general, Sir Paul Hasluck, to Flinders University had to be postponed because of "student unrest".<sup>53</sup>

In June 1969, US President Nixon announced that 25,000 American troops were to be withdrawn from Vietnam. Gorton did not follow his example. Instead, efforts to discipline student dissidents, especially those resisting the

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<sup>48</sup> York, "Sources...", *op cit*, p 158.

<sup>49</sup> "New Swing to Police Violence in NSW, SA," *Tribune*, 16 April 1969; Question time, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 29 April 1969, p 1411.

<sup>50</sup> "Dozens of left-wingers, including girls, emerged bleeding after right-wing engineers, DLPers, and plain outsiders attacked them..". ("Demonstrators bashed," *National U*, 12 May 1969, p 17). See also *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 46:8, 7 September 1970. Both *Tribune* and *Nation* noted rising attacks by right wing students on the left in May 1969 (*Tribune*, 7 May 1969, p 12; *Nation*, 17 May 1969; see also "Police thugs and rightist vigilante squads to attack student protests," *Tribune*, 14 May 1969, p 3).

<sup>51</sup> *Tribune*, 5 February 1969, p 8.

<sup>52</sup> *Tribune*, 23 July 1969.

<sup>53</sup> D. Hilliard, *Flinders University. The First Twenty-five Years. 1966-1991*, (Adelaide: Flinders University of South Australia, 1991), p 52.



National Service Act, increased.<sup>54</sup> Early that month, Albert Langer was tried for the criminal offence of "riot," "inciting to riot," and "obstructing a police officer in the course of his duty" at the July 1 protest, together with Dave Rubin, a waterside worker. Melbourne students demonstrated in their support outside the trial.<sup>55</sup> Police were determined to suppress any repeat of events in 1968 when July 1 demonstrations were again called in 1969. After the night was over, even the Australian Universities Liberal Federation acknowledged that:

...there was good evidence that police simply picked men and women out of the crowd, took them aside and clubbed them with their truncheons.<sup>56</sup>

The following day, Prime Minister Gorton announced that he would introduce new legislation to strengthen security precautions on campus and provide for immediate suspension of students and staff members involved in subversive activities.<sup>57</sup>

Several authors have criticised the militants in these demonstrations, echoing press and Government reports which portrayed the violence which occurred at these demonstrations as a reaction to militant provocation.<sup>58</sup> This interpretation, however, neglects to explain why most of these militants had, only years, months or weeks before, themselves attended protests with the intention of avoiding confrontation. In increasing numbers, moderates were won to a commitment to confrontational protest in response to attempts by the State to prevent and disperse their protests, if necessary by injuring protesters. The growing enthusiasm of a minority of those protesters for mainly self-defensive but confrontational action in

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<sup>54</sup> Curthoys, "Mobilising Dissent...", *op cit*, p 151.

<sup>55</sup> *Tribune*, 4 June 1969, p 12.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in York, "Police...", *op cit*, p 69. See also "Statement on July 3 and 4 Demonstrations," Worker-Student and Alliance and other groups, undated, which argues in favour of militancy rather than "moderation" on the occasion (Albert Langer collection).

<sup>57</sup> *The Age*, 5 July 1969; *National U*, 14 July 1969, p 2.

<sup>58</sup> See P.Edwards, *op cit*, p 223; R.V.Summy, "Militancy and the Australian Peace Movement, 1960-67," *Politics*, 5:2, Nov. 1970, pp 148-62; C.Clutterbuck, "Protests and Peace Marches. From Vietnam to Palm Sunday," in K.Maddock and B.Wright (eds), *War: Australia and Vietnam*, (Artarmon: Harper and Row, 1987), p 139/40.

response to police violence did not damage the anti-war movement. On the contrary, opposition to the Vietnam war continued to grow as these protests continued, so that in mid 1969 opinion polls showed that a majority of people in Australia were now opposed to Australian involvement in the war.<sup>59</sup>

By September 1969, radical trade unionists had become an increasingly prominent wing of the draft resistance movement, especially in Melbourne. In early March, nearly two thousand had demonstrated there, demanding the release of jailed postman John Zarb.<sup>60</sup> Draft resister Laurie Carmichael Jr., son of the Federal Secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), was publicly "kidnapped" by his supporters; he was hidden underground for a week before voluntarily giving himself up and then violently arrested in scenes that made front-page headlines.<sup>61</sup> On September 24, radical students joined angry trade unionists demonstrating outside Carmichael's court case at Williamstown Court.<sup>62</sup> At the end of the month, Melbourne students protested outside the *Herald* over its coverage of the Carmichael case.<sup>63</sup>

1969 is widely recognised as a turning-point for the anti-war movement in Australia.<sup>64</sup> In October, ALP leader Gough Whitlam finally announced in his policy speech for the federal election of that month that under a Labor Government there would be no Australian troops in Vietnam after June

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<sup>59</sup> Australia was one of a number of countries including Italy and Britain, where social unrest in 1969 surpassed that seen the previous year (see Harman, *op cit*; E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: the Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1994)).

<sup>60</sup> *Tribune*, 12 March 1969, p 4. Students had demonstrated in support of Zarb on other occasions. See for example *Tribune*, 23 October 1968, p 1.

<sup>61</sup> "Strikes Loom over Court Brawl," *The Age*, 20 September 1969, p1; Hamel-Green, *op cit*, p 116; M. Saunders, "The Trade Unions in Australia and Opposition to Vietnam and Conscription: 1965-73," *Labour History*, 43, November 1982, p 69.

<sup>62</sup> *Tribune*, 24 September 1969, p 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Tribune*, 1 October 1969, p 12.

<sup>64</sup> See for example, Curthoys, "Mobilising Dissent...", *op cit*, p 151, and M. Hamel-Green, "The Resisters...", *op cit*, p 117. This impression extends into the "cultural" arena. For example, L. Douglas and R. Geeves argue that "1969 was a pivotal year in the maturation of rock music and the definition of what was then being described as 'pop culture'" ("Music, counter-culture and the Vietnam era," in P. Hayward, (ed.), *From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism. Popular music and Australian culture from the 1960s to the 1990s*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), p 102).

1970.<sup>65</sup> Though the Labor Party did not win the October 26 federal election, there was a strong swing towards it, and the mood invoked in the activists, in contrast to the 1966 election, was one of "renewed spirit and determination".<sup>66</sup> The following day, having for some time been unwilling to change the law but also unwilling to enforce it, the federal Government finally imprisoned Brian Ross, one of the original resisters.<sup>67</sup> They provoked an immediate reaction. By November, eight thousand people had signed the Declaration of Defiance of the National Service Act. Student and other anti-war activists began preparations for a US-style moratorium in Australia.<sup>68</sup> The following month, in defiance of the Crimes Act, three hundred officials and over 150,000 workers in Victoria met in Fitzroy Town Hall and called on national servicemen in Vietnam "to lay down their arms in mutiny" against the "heinous barbarism" of the Vietnam war.<sup>69</sup> The following day, with US President Nixon promising further withdrawals of US troops from Vietnam, the Australian Prime Minister also announced that one battalion would be brought back to Australia by April 1970.<sup>70</sup>

In the steady escalation of the anti-war movement to this point, and in the rise of radical student protest, Monash University and the Monash Labor Club had played a leading role. The reputation of Monash as the pacesetter was based not only on its role in the anti-war movement itself, but also on the development on that campus of radical challenges to the way that universities were run. As an article in *The Age* commented in July 1968:

Monash, to some Australians, is a dirty word...Less than a year ago the complaint was that Australian students were apathetic, conformist, too immersed in their books...Today the fear of revolution is in the air, "student power" is the catchcry and Monash is believed to be in

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<sup>65</sup> Murphy, *op cit*, p 210.

<sup>66</sup> Hamel-Green, "The Resisters...", *op cit*, p 118.

<sup>67</sup> A "Freedom Ride" to the prison was immediately organised (*ibid*, p 116).

<sup>68</sup> In the United States, the first US moratorium, held on October 15, attracted 250,000 in New York and 100,000 in Washington, inspiring Australian activists (Gitlin, *op cit*).

<sup>69</sup> *Tribune*, 14 January, 1970, and M. Saunders, "The Trade Unions in Australia and Opposition to Vietnam and Conscription: 1965-73," *Labour History*, 43, November 1982, p 70.

<sup>70</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, p 240.

the van.<sup>71</sup>

The growth of student radicalism at Monash University was intimately linked to developments in the movement against the war, but it had an equally important on-campus aspect. In their first term in 1968, Monash students campaigned against the introduction of paid carparking stickers<sup>72</sup> and held a sit-in in the office of a university professor who had arbitrated in favour of QANTAS airways in a wages dispute with Fijian unionists.<sup>73</sup> In April, the Monash University Tiddlywinks Association (MUTA) captured headlines in what was "easily the most controversial event at Monash".<sup>74</sup> MUTA members presented on campus their own irreverent version of the death of Christ. Radical students did not organise or participate in the "mock crucifixion," yet the presence of a *Truth* reporter ensured it received lurid and sensational coverage which provoked a huge public reaction.<sup>75</sup>

As a result of this furore, the State Minister for Education paid a visit to the university's Vice-Chancellor Louie Matheson, a man well-known for his commitment to liberalism, and asked him to take action, as the government arranged for a police investigation.<sup>76</sup> In early May, students involved in the mock crucifixion were given one year "good behaviour" bonds; and students held a sit-in of the Administration to protest about university

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<sup>71</sup> "Students, sound and fury," *The Age*, 17 July 1968. See also, "The emphasis is on changing, not wrecking and on activity, not apathy," *The Age*, 18 July 1968.

<sup>72</sup> P.F. Perry, *The Rise and Fall of Practically Everybody. An Account of Student Political Activity at Monash University 1965-72* (Rare Books, Monash University Library), p 22.

<sup>73</sup> Forty students sat in following a talk by James Anthony, a radical nationalist Fijian PhD student at ANU who had been involved in a major strike in Fiji in 1959 and also in the Berkeley unrest, and attacked Professor Cochrane for his "inhumane" involvement in the dispute. The students demanded he answer these charges, but Cochrane refused to comment (R. Gordon, "Black Power in the Pacific?," *Lot's Wife*, 26 March 1968, p 15).

<sup>74</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 23. He also described it as a "divinely inspired exercise in bad taste and worse public relations".

<sup>75</sup> Students, on identifying the *Truth* photographer present at the incident, chased him with flour bombs ("Students whipped a Mock Christ. 'Other countries would lock them up'," *Truth*, April 1968). The same month, Sydney University students declared their campus "out of bounds" for the media (*National U*, 1 April 1968, p 3).

<sup>76</sup> L. Matheson, *Still Learning*, (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1980), p 127/8. See also notice from R.R.Blackwood, Monash University Chancellor, reporting University Council plans to revise Discipline statutes in light of the event (13 May 1968, Albert Langer collection).

administration co-operation with the police.<sup>77</sup> Large meetings—one comprised of three thousand students—rejected new disciplinary proposals.<sup>78</sup> On May 15, a report in *The Age* that wider disciplinary powers were to be introduced led to a lunchtime meeting the next day and the formation of the Campaign for University Freedom (CUF). CUF was distinctive as the first radical student campaign at Monash that could claim truly mass involvement.<sup>79</sup> Notable amongst the speakers at one of its early meetings was a Malaysian student who encouraged Asian students to defy laws which threatened with deportation overseas students who engaged in political activity.<sup>80</sup> On May 17, 150 students at a student general meeting set a precedent by calling on the university not to request students' dates of birth on their enrolment forms (so as to sabotage the implementation of amendments to the National Service Act).<sup>81</sup> The meeting was also a precedent in establishing the value for student radicals of obtaining legitimacy for their actions by seeking the support of student general meetings.<sup>82</sup>

On June 13, the Monash University SRC, which had found itself peripheral after the establishment of the Campaign for University Freedom, dissolved itself. The same day, the vice-chancellor made a speech to thousands of Monash students on campus via closed-circuit television suggesting that he was sympathetic to student concern about the disciplining of student activists by the university in relation to their off-campus activities.<sup>83</sup> When University Council responded a few days later, students were widely disappointed at its vague formulations;<sup>84</sup> but an assurance that students

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<sup>77</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 23.

<sup>78</sup> "All quiet at Monash meeting," *Herald*, 14 May, 1969; *Tribune*, 14 May 1969, p 12.

<sup>79</sup> Rick Gordon argues that previously Monash's reputation as "Australia's most radical university" had been "largely the result of the 'shock tactics' and organisational strength of the Monash Labor Club, with its "few hundred members" (R. Gordon, "Monash - Repressive Tolerance and the Failure of the Left," *Lot's Wife*, 30 March 1970).

<sup>80</sup> *The Age*, June, 1968.

<sup>81</sup> B. York, *Sources of Student Unrest in Australia, with Particular Reference to La Trobe University, 1967-73*, MA thesis, University of Sydney, 1983, p 136.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> W. Osmond, "A 'Monash' at Monash," *Arena*, no 16, 1968, p 14; R. Gordon, *op cit*.

<sup>84</sup> *Lot's Wife* also claimed that: "the recommendations for 'adequate student representation on the discipline committee' originally read 'substantial student representation.'" ("Council

would not be disciplined for off-campus activities temporarily defused the issue.<sup>85</sup> Yet the confidence of radicals was maintained by a picket of two hundred students, a staff strike which resulted in the reinstatement of popular sacked bookshop manager Ian Free<sup>86</sup> and a sit-in of the Administration over the issue of "cops on campus".<sup>87</sup> A student poll that month found that 73% of Monash students would support mass demonstrations if police were called onto the campus for any reason, and that 83% disagreed with the present national service system.<sup>88</sup> On June 25, a general meeting of 2,000 Monash students voted to replace the SRC with a system of government by mass meeting.<sup>89</sup> President Elliot Gingold, who moved the motion to dissolve, said:

Student action over the last two months has shown that the S.R.C. is not fulfilling any adequate representative function at all. Activist students in the University are by-passing the SRC—for example, the actions of the CUF—and the remainder of the student body is ignoring the SRC completely.<sup>90</sup>

Noel Lethborg, President of the SRC, agreed that it was "totally unrepresentative of, and unresponsive to students".<sup>91</sup> The new Monash Association of Students (MAS) meant that:

...now a large mass of students could be called together at any time; a great strategic advantage for those planning radical action on

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decision dismays," *Lot's Wife*, 21 June 1968, p 1).

<sup>85</sup> "Discipline 1969," Hyde *et al*, *op cit*, p 73; Gordon, *op cit*.

<sup>86</sup> "Dismissed -But Back Again in 24 Hours," *Sun*, 20 June 1968; Perry, *op cit*, p 25.

<sup>87</sup> Perry, *ibid*.

<sup>88</sup> *The Age*, 18 July 1968, p 1.

<sup>89</sup> A report on this meeting in the *The Age*, 29 June 1968, compared Monash with the Sorbonne in France; "S.R.C. dissolved - reform or anarchy?," *Lot's Wife*, 21 June, 1968, p 1. The meeting also asked a member of the Administration about the current "vendetta" being conducted against Monash by the tabloid *Truth* (*Lot's Wife*, 25 June 1968, p 3). See also "No sound and fury," *The Age*, 29 June 1968.

<sup>90</sup> "SRC dissolved..." *ibid*. A profile of Gingold can be found in P.Mendes, *op cit*, p 52/53.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*.

campus.<sup>92</sup>

The July 1 protest marked a high point of Monash Labor Club publicity and influence. Later that month, Albert Langer played a persuasive role in a mass meeting of 500 students and staff who consequently rejected new proposed disciplinary statutes, thereby laying the basis for further dispute in 1969.<sup>93</sup> In the following months much of the energy of radical students at Monash was devoted to the frenetic off-campus campaign against the Vietnam war.<sup>94</sup> But in February 1969, in the midst of the campaign against by-law 418, a new report from the vice-chancellor proposed to reassess his earlier decision and consider the possibility of exclusion and non-admission of students convicted of criminal offences.<sup>95</sup> Students argued that such a course would mean a convicted student would be punished twice, once in the courts, and once by the university, for the same offence. Matheson's actions unleashed a campaign which would seek to challenge the highest structures of university decision-making. In May, following unsatisfactory negotiations with the university administration, several thousand students resolved to occupy the university offices, and several hundred did so.<sup>96</sup>

On July 14 a large number of Monash students, led by the Labor Club, invaded the university offices at the start of a University Council meeting, demanding that a delegation be allowed to speak. The chancellor insisted the students leave and then cancelled the meeting when they refused. A photograph of Kerry Langer sitting in the chancellor's chair with her feet on a table featured in press reports of the incident.<sup>97</sup> The following day the vice-chancellor addressed a student forum. Unlike previous protests on

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<sup>92</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 25.

<sup>93</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 30. See also S. Matheson, *Radical Dissent in Australia in the Late 1960s and early 1970s: a Case Study of a Social Movement*, BA Hons, Government, University of Sydney, 1988, p 130.

<sup>94</sup> This account based on "Discipline 1969," Hyde *et al*, *op cit*, pp 73-103.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, p 73.

<sup>96</sup> Matheson, *op cit*, p 130; Hyde *et al*, *op cit*, p 77; *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, May 1969, p 1666; "All quiet at Monash meeting," *Herald*, 14 May, 1969; *Tribune*, 14 May 1969, p 12. Some of those students involved were later charged with misconduct.

<sup>97</sup> This, and photographs of students with clenched fists, according to Matheson, "...led one of my most respected professional friends to say that for the first time he was ashamed to be a member of Monash University" (Matheson, *op cit*, p 131).

campus, he said, the invasion of the University Council had been an act of violence, and this was not acceptable.<sup>98</sup> The radicals were not deterred. On August 5 they provoked perhaps the biggest student storm of the year when they took over the Monash University Council Chamber where a Disciplinary Committee was hearing charges against eight students. The Committee walked out.<sup>99</sup> *The Age* asked:

Is Monash hurtling headlong into the big league of "Universities of Agitation" like the Sorbonne and Berkeley?...Even their most bitter rivals admit that the Left-wingers are constantly a step ahead.<sup>100</sup>

Two days later, the vice-chancellor met with the Premier of Victoria to discuss the "Monash crisis".<sup>101</sup> That night, Matheson debated with Langer and other student radicals on television, warning that "the kind of activities that Mr Langer and his friends are indulging in do tend, in some places, to lead to the closing of universities".<sup>102</sup> The following day, saying that he wanted to disprove claims that he was afraid to face the students, Matheson spoke to at least 7,000 students over Monash University's closed-circuit TV system. He described the interruption of the council meeting as introducing a "new and frightening feature" at Monash, namely "violence". He repeated his suggestion that Monash might be the first Australian university:

...to go the way of many overseas universities, where student demands were insatiable, finally led to violence, and ended up with police being called in and the university closed.<sup>103</sup>

On August 22, Monash student radicals, Langer, Nadel, Dowsley and

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<sup>98</sup> Matheson, *op cit*, p 131. Matheson does not explain what "violence" occurred, and there is no reference to any "violent" incident in any other description of these events.

<sup>99</sup> "The Escalation," *The Age*, 7 August 1969.

<sup>100</sup> "On a campus of 10,000 only 300 pull the strings...Monash: why it is in revolt," *The Age*, 6 August 1968.

<sup>101</sup> "The Escalation," *The Age*, 7 August 1969.

<sup>102</sup> "Uni 'won't be closed'," *Sun*, 11 August, 1969; "Monash May Close, Matheson Warns," *The Age*, 9 August 1969, p 4. See also, recalling these events, "Monash Comes of Age," *The Age*, 22 May 1982, p 7.

<sup>103</sup> See "Vice-Chancellor attacks the wreckers," *The Australian*, 9 August 1969. See also article in *The Guardian*, 12 August 1969; *The Age*, 7 August 1969; *The Age*, 12 August 1969.



Butcher received suspended expulsions and fines for obstructing the council meeting.<sup>104</sup>

The dissolution of existing student representative bodies and demands for increased student representation on university senates and councils were taking place on other campuses also, notably at La Trobe. Established in 1967, La Trobe University had been scarcely affected by student radicalism prior to May 1968.<sup>105</sup> However, at the ASLF conference in Canberra that year, La Trobe activists established a close bond with those from Monash.<sup>106</sup> The introduction of the National Service Act amendments the same month provided the impetus for the transformation of the La Trobe Democratic Socialist Club into the Labor Club, whose most radical members socialised with the radicals of the Monash Labor Club.<sup>107</sup> The violence of July 1 brought the two clubs even closer, the Labor Club's *Red Moat* announcing: "There now exists a state of war between students and the State".<sup>108</sup> In March 1969, New Leftists in the Labor Club, producing a new organ, *Enrages*, took the Club in a less militant direction, leading the militants to split away and form the radical Communist Club in August.<sup>109</sup>

The evolution of this militant tendency on the campus reflected and ensured the radicalisation of the campus more generally. In June, inspired by the example of Sydney University students, the La Trobe student left commenced a campaign to ensure that no CMF unit would be established on the campus.<sup>110</sup> In July 1969 Malcolm Muggerridge spoke at the university on "What I hate about universities". Boos and jeers as he complained about

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<sup>104</sup>*The Age*, 26 August 1969.

<sup>105</sup> As late as July 1969 an assessment of the political temperature at various Australian Universities classed La Trobe as "cold" (*Bulletin*, 5 July 1969). See also D. Watson, "Unsettled, Panicky, Astray" in W.J. Breen (ed.) and J.A. Salmond, *Building LaTrobe University. Reflections on the First Twenty Five Years 1964-1989*, (Melbourne: LaTrobe University Press, 1989), p 149.

<sup>106</sup> York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, pp 137-139; York, *Student Revolt! La Trobe University 1967-73*, (Campbell: Nicholas Press, 1989), p 61-64.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> York, *Student Revolt!...*, *op cit*, p 69.

<sup>109</sup> York, *ibid*, pp 70/71.

<sup>110</sup> York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, p 167.

the "new permissiveness" reduced the conservative Oxbridge gentleman to tears.<sup>111</sup> Later that month, following SDS petitions to the SRC to call a student general meeting, a large body of La Trobe students voted to declare the campus a sanctuary for conscientious objectors and non-compliers.<sup>112</sup> On August 18, seventeen La Trobe students including Labor and Communist Club and SDS members "invaded" their own University Council, demanding rights of observation. In response, some professors proposed that the seventeen should be excluded from the university, but the vice-chancellor, fearing a confrontation, instead delivered a severe reprimand, interpreted "as a sign of weakness by the Democratic Club and student Left alike".<sup>113</sup> Nonetheless, the action had been isolated, and confirmed to La Trobe activists the need to establish the legitimacy of their actions through student general meetings.<sup>114</sup> In September, student protest against the quality of food provided by the multinational catering company, Nationwide, resulted in the cancellation of their contract and the opportunity for students to "experience the direct exercise of their own collective power".<sup>115</sup>

The course of student protest followed similar patterns on other campuses, with the slogan of "student power" being taken up across the country. In Queensland, a series of forums on staff-student control of the university culminated in June 1969 in the occupation of the University Senate Room. Twenty-five students occupied the room before a Senate meeting in protest at the senate making "behind closed doors" decisions that affected students'

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<sup>111</sup> York comments: "The old man had not just attacked the student Left; but all those who were questioning, or estranged from, the customs of his generation. And that happened to be most La Trobe students who happened to be estranged not only in terms of age and attitude, but also in terms of social class...And, as university students, they were aware of the rather drastic lengths to which the State had been prepared to go in order to preserve the traditional attitudes" (York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, pp 162/163).

<sup>112</sup> York, *ibid*, p 166.

<sup>113</sup> York, *ibid*, p 127. York comments: "The Vice Chancellor, having visited university trouble-spots throughout Europe and America earlier in the year, knew that such an extreme penalty would rally the moderates behind the militants and would probably arouse some staff opposition as well...There can be no doubt" he argues, that Myers, in taking this action, "succeeded in defusing a potentially explosive situation" (pp 171/172).

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, p 170.

<sup>115</sup> The Labor Club promoted the campaign to draw attention to links between big business and the university and between the profit motive and the poor quality but expensive food provided by Nationwide (York, *ibid*, pp 159/160).

lives.<sup>116</sup> This action was the first of a succession of attacks on the university administration. In September the new Revolutionary Socialist Student Alliance (RSSA) campaigned for "discipline" to be decided by mass meetings of students;<sup>117</sup> and in the latter part of that year students formed action committees in university faculties, broadly modelled on the French example.<sup>118</sup> At the University of New South Wales a meeting in July 1968 of 2,000 staff and student members of the group, Action for Love and Freedom, voted for increased student/staff representation on University Council.<sup>119</sup> In September 1969, students voted to abolish the Student Union Council, after which the Kensington Libertarian group occupied its offices.<sup>120</sup> At Adelaide University, radicals in June 1968 demanded that students make up fifty percent of the membership of University Council and be represented on disciplinary, academic exclusion, finance, course selection and staff appointment committees.<sup>121</sup> In December the University Senate rejected three students for University Council,<sup>122</sup> and in October 1969, students and staff attended a council meeting to raise their concern about changes to the University Act.<sup>123</sup> In 1969, the Director of Union Services at Flinders University resisted student demands for a draft sanctuary in the Religious Centre; and in June students were permitted to attend the monthly board meeting of the School of Language and Literature

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<sup>116</sup> C. Rootes, *Australian Student Radicals: the Nature and Origin of Dissent*, BA Hons, Government Department, University of Queensland, 1969, p 62.

<sup>117</sup> RSSA wrote to the Vice-Chancellor requesting "in accordance with principles of self-management" the abolition of the Administration's disciplinary statutes and announced that the four students were to burn their summonses at a lunch-time forum (University of Queensland RSSA news-sheet, 1:11, 3 September 1969, reprints RSSA letter to acting Vice-Chancellor Professor Teakle. The letter was signed "Yours in Marx"; RSSA folder, box 1, Dan O'Neill collection)

<sup>118</sup> W. Osmond, "Student Revolutionary Left," *Arena*, no 19, 1969, p 23.

<sup>119</sup> *Tribune*, 3 July 1968, p 12; *Tribune*, 17 July 1968, p 3; "Pamphlet Power," *Bulletin*, 9 July 1968.

<sup>120</sup> The Student Union Council Executive were apparently not keen on the idea, continuing their activity from an off-campus hide-out (*National U*, 29 September 1969).

<sup>121</sup> *Grass Roots*, 19 June 1968; W.G.K. Duncan and R.A. Leonard, *The University of Adelaide, 1874-1974*, (Adelaide: Rigby, 1973), p 160.

<sup>122</sup> G. Hastings, *Ultra Brief Chronology of Events in the Australian Student Movement*, undated. See also *Tribune*, 14 May 1969, p 12, on this issue.

<sup>123</sup> *Tribune*, 15 October 1969, p 4.

as observers.<sup>124</sup> In 1969, radical philosophy lecturers at Flinders University introduced group assessment, where essays were read and assessed by members of whole tutorials. Despite complaints by other academic staff members, University Council eventually agreed to allow lecturers to assess classes as they saw fit.<sup>125</sup> In August 1969, the vice-chancellor of ANU announced at a press conference that the University Council had decided, subject to Government approval, to accept many elements of a recent SRC submission entitled *Student Participation in University Government*, which included student representation on Council.<sup>126</sup>

As at Monash and La Trobe, student radicalism took on its own flavour and its own specific campus-based concerns in different universities. In October 1968, Macquarie University students demonstrated successfully for traffic lights outside the campus,<sup>127</sup> and one year later organised a "tent town" in protest at the lack of housing facilities on campus<sup>128</sup>. Traffic problems also motivated students at the University of Western Australia who, in late March 1969, staged a sit-down in the street against delays in building a pedestrian tunnel at a point where two people had been killed.<sup>129</sup> At the University of New England, students protested in 1968 against attempts by resident tutors and fellows to police student parties;<sup>130</sup> and the SRC resolved to boycott exams at night, on Saturdays and public holidays.<sup>131</sup>

Around the country, student bodies were being mobilised in general student meetings and open forums and referenda, to debate issues, organise campaigns and formulate strategies on a variety of issues. In September 1968, Melbourne University students in September formally debated the proposition "that the use of violence can be justified in Australian politics"

<sup>124</sup> Hilliard, *op cit*, pp 55/56.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, p 58.

<sup>126</sup> *National U*, 4 August 1969, p 11.

<sup>127</sup> *Tribune*, 16 October 1968, p 4; 23 October 1968, p 1; 30 October 1968, p 3.

<sup>128</sup> *Tribune*, 15 October 1969, p 3.

<sup>129</sup> *Tribune*, 9 April 1969, p 12.

<sup>130</sup> C. Robertson, *Long Youth Long Pleasure. Adventures Behind the Scenes at the University of New England 1956-80*, (Armidale: Cherry Robertson/Lightning Press, 1982), p 158.

<sup>131</sup> *National U*, 24 June 1968, p 3.

and voted in its favour. That same month, La Trobe students voted in a tied referendum to decide whether the SRC should raise funds in support of those arrested on July 4,<sup>132</sup> an initiative which enabled the Labor Club to solidify its ranks and attract new members.<sup>133</sup> A further, successful referendum was held on July 23-25 to assess student attitudes to the establishment of a CMF unit on campus.<sup>134</sup> In September 1969, a general meeting of Flinders University students there demanded the immediate release of a student jailed as a result of his participation in a demonstration on May 7.<sup>135</sup> Teach-ins also continued to be held throughout this period, though they were less likely to be organised by the most radical student groups. In March 1969, 300 students attended a teach-in about the New Left organised by SDS at the University of Tasmania.<sup>136</sup> In July 1969, the group Liberation organised a teach-in about Vietnam and conscription.<sup>137</sup>

Student activists in different States were also involved in particular campaigns beyond the campuses. In South Australia and Queensland, students were prominent in opposition to the electoral gerrymander.<sup>138</sup> Queensland students continued to oppose laws restricting civil liberties, such as the banning of the distribution of pamphlets in the street without a permit.<sup>139</sup> Melbourne students were involved in support for jailed Tramways Union official Clarrie O'Shea in May 1969.<sup>140</sup> Melbourne

<sup>132</sup> York makes an important point about the referendum, suggesting that the pre-referendum debate, "solidifying Labor Club ranks," "attracting some new members" and "politicising the campus" were more important than the referendum's actual decision (York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, p 146).

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, p 146.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, p 168.

<sup>135</sup> They also demanded a state enquiry into the circumstances of his arrest (*National U*, 29 September 1969).

<sup>136</sup> *Tribune*, 9 April 1969, p 4.

<sup>137</sup> *Tribune*, 30 July 1969, p 12.

<sup>138</sup> Adelaide: *Tribune*, 13 March 1968, p 4, and 27 March, p 4. SDA organised the protests; "The Trouble with Students. An Australia-Wide Survey," *Bulletin*, 5 July 1969; Queensland: C. Rootes, *Australian Student Radicals...*, *op cit*, p 60.

<sup>139</sup> "The Trouble with Students..." *op cit*; P. Gray and J. Stanwell (compilers), *A Ten Years Retrospective of the Development of the "New Left" in Brisbane 1964-1974*, Research Project for a Film Proposal, November 1974, p 16.

<sup>140</sup> "Strikers Throw Down Gauntlet. 'Let O'Shea Go or We Stop Again'," *The Age*, May 1969, p 1.

students also joined marches against poverty.<sup>141</sup>

Aboriginal Land Rights was one issue, as well as the Vietnam War, to be taken up on a national scale at this time. In July 1968, Abschol, the section of NUAUS devoted to the needs of Aboriginal students, organised a very respectable march of 1,000 students in support of land rights and the Gurindji strikers in Melbourne; though the protest was reportedly boycotted by the older-style Aboriginal Advancement League because of fear of "anarchists".<sup>142</sup> In April 1969, Marcia Langton, an Aboriginal member of Abschol and SDA at the University of Queensland, staked out a 100-square foot land rights claim directly outside the Commonwealth Offices in Queens Park, highlighting a 24-hour land rights vigil. Police carried her off when she tried to use a megaphone.<sup>143</sup> By mid-1969 the new-found identity of the black movement, as it was described by participants, was manifested in the formation of the Tribal Council in Brisbane and the organisation of a major meeting attended by students and others on the issue in late-1969.<sup>144</sup>

This campaign was consistent with Australia-wide student concern about international issues. In June 1969, there were demonstrations in all capital cities except Hobart against the visit of a South African Government minister.<sup>145</sup> Students also demonstrated against the involvement of the Australian Government and Australian companies in Bougainville. In Brisbane in August 1969, for example, police responded with "unprecedented violence"<sup>146</sup> to a demonstration of students and trade unionists in protest against the treatment of the indigenous population there.<sup>147</sup> In Melbourne, home of a substantial Greek-Australian community, La Trobe students in November 1968 expressed support for

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<sup>141</sup> *Tribune*, 8 October 1969, p 1.

<sup>142</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 29; "Gurindji Land Sell-Out," *National U*, 22 July 1968, p 1.

<sup>143</sup> *National U*, 12 May 1969, p 4.

<sup>144</sup> Gray and Stanwell, *op cit*, p 63, based on interview with Lilla Watson.

<sup>145</sup> *Tribune*, 18 June; 25 June 1969.

<sup>146</sup> *Tribune*, 20 August 1969, p 12.

<sup>147</sup> The students first served notice on the Queensland office of Conzinc Rio Tinto (a major investor in New Guinea) that they would be resuming "all your land holdings in Australia" (Rootes, *Australian Student Radicals*, p 60).

Greek students during a coup in their country.<sup>148</sup> Student radicals also reacted angrily to the arrival in late-August 1968 of tanks to crush the Prague Spring movement in Czechoslovakia, holding demonstrations in Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra and Adelaide.<sup>149</sup> In Canberra, students chanted "U-S-S-R—who the hell do you think you are!" and, as there was no Russian consulate at which to assemble, they converged at the usual destination of anti-Vietnam protesters—outside the US Consulate.<sup>150</sup> Students at the University of Queensland organised a march in Brisbane, their slogans including "Dubcek Yes, Johnson No".<sup>151</sup>

Criticism of Australian Government policies extended to censorship and Cold War ideas about acceptable social and sexual behaviour. Interest in drugs, "free love" and the idea of building a counter-culture had been transmitted from overseas via the Australian student press.<sup>152</sup> Australian politicians shared and encouraged the belief that revolution and libertarianism were intrinsically linked. Queensland premier, Joh Bjelke Peterson, for example, announced in 1969 that he had obtained a copy of a university pamphlet entitled *Rules for Revolution*, which suggested that undermining sexual mores was a means of preparing the ground for revolution.<sup>153</sup> Following the 1967 branding of Sydney University's *Wednesday Commentary* as "filth," student publications were frequently the subject of similar attacks. In June 1969, for example, the editor of the La Trobe New Left Club's *Enrages* was charged with obscenity over an edition which reprinted an illustration of an erect penis from the banned manual *The ABZ of Love*.<sup>154</sup> The University of Western Australia's *Pelican* was also

<sup>148</sup> York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, p 154.

<sup>149</sup> "Students back Czechs," *National U*, 4:9, 2 September 1968, p 1; see report on Brisbane march in *Tribune*, 4 September 1968, p 2, where students chanted "Dubcek Yes, Johnson No".

<sup>150</sup> At the Canberra rally placards included: "The Ghost of Stalin Walks," "Czechoslovakia - Russia's Vietnam," "Land Rights for Czechs" (*National U*, *ibid*).

<sup>151</sup> *Tribune* noted that right-wingers also participated in the demonstration (*Tribune*, 4 September 1968, p 2). See also La Trobe's *Rabelais* opposing the invasion (9 September 1968).

<sup>152</sup> See for example, "Hippy Uproar on S.U. Campus!," *Hippy Soit* (special edition of *Honi Soit*), 3 August 1967; "The Myth of the Danger of Marijuana" and "Promiscuity and Monogamy," *National U*, 15 September 1969, p 4/5.

<sup>153</sup> *Tribune*, 18 June 1969, p 4.

<sup>154</sup> Labor Club members were impressed with student reaction: "For possibly the very first time some of the students on campus actually read a university publication and were actually driven to reaction, and driven to start consciously arguing" (*Enrages*, 19 June, quoted in York,

labelled obscene in 1969.<sup>155</sup> Students delighted in ridiculing these attacks. In July 1969, University of Queensland students advertised an "Erotica" display including erotic poetry, "obscene" plays, pornography, a public smoking of marijuana and the selling of alcohol to all students *except* those over 21. Students also filled in false registration forms "as an expression of moral repugnance at the obscenity of the National Service Act".<sup>156</sup> Four students were later summoned by the university over this event, but the charges were dropped.<sup>157</sup>

As early as 1967, aspirations for sexual liberation had been transforming the personal lives of some radical students.<sup>158</sup> Yet women students in particular began to feel the need for an idea of sexual liberation which went beyond premarital sex or free love. Though the sexism of student newspapers had not changed by 1968 and 1969<sup>159</sup>, women students were an important part of the movement,<sup>160</sup> and information about the women's liberation movement had begun to filter through to Australia.<sup>161</sup> In May 1969 around twenty women and one hundred male supporters sat in at the Hotel Civic in Canberra, protesting about discrimination against women in bars, including the absence of female toilets. The organiser of the protest, reportedly "Miss E. Pankhurst" was ejected from the hotel five hours after

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*Sources...*, *op cit*, p 164). Watts was convicted and fined in August ("Student Journal was Obscene," *The Age*, 21 August 1969, p 8).

<sup>155</sup> *Tribune*, 29 October 1969, p 12.

<sup>156</sup> *Paper Dart*, 1:4, undated, Dan O'Neill collection. A. Ashbolt, in *An Australian Experience: Words from the Vietnam Years*, (Sydney: Australasian Book Society Ltd, 1974), noted how a dramatic increase in censorship in mid-1969 was accompanied by punitive government action against anti-war activists.

<sup>157</sup> *National U*, 29 September 1969, p 1.

<sup>158</sup> Osmond and Nadel interviews.

<sup>159</sup> See for example Monash University's "Miss Freshette" for 1968, *National U*, 1 April 1968, p 3, "Bird in the Bush," *National U*, 3 May 1968, p 3 and other page threes at this time.

<sup>160</sup> See for example *National U*, 14 October 1968, p 3, which, alongside the usual "page three girl," reports the election of "female stirrer" Sue Boyd as President of the University of Western Australia Student Guild, a "crushing blow to anti-feminist and anti-political conservatives". Boyd was famed for her role in a "relentless campaign" for a Guild Peace March and defeated her main opponent Kim Beazley because she received preferences from "anti-political" candidates critical of Beazley's membership of the Labor Party.

<sup>161</sup> A.Curthoys, "Doing it for Themselves..." *op cit*, p 430.



the sit-in began.<sup>162</sup> In late-1969, groups of activists in Queensland met regularly to discuss:

...anti-human attitudes within the movement, especially in reaction to sexual exploitation masquerading as 'free love'. This gave rise to a call for the recognition of the need for total revolution (i.e. political and personal).<sup>163</sup>

In their argument that humanist attitudes "don't just develop out of some metaphysical sheep dip called struggle" these activists were voicing concerns that were important in the new women's movement.<sup>164</sup> According to Mansell, the issue of women's liberation was "incipient" at the Monash Labor Club's centre, the Bakery, in 1969. Towards the end of the year, women comrades associated with the Bakery began to hold informal discussions on this topic. A group called Women for Socialism was formed to support women's liberation whilst opposing the idea of an autonomous women's tendency in the movement, held as divisive.<sup>165</sup> In Sydney a group of women began meeting in East Balmain in the last few months of the year<sup>166</sup>, in December distributing a pamphlet entitled "Only the chains have changed," and marched under their own banner<sup>167</sup> at an anti-Vietnam march. The pamphlet concluded:

We, like the Vietnamese, can only be free of oppression when the profit mongers no longer have the power to determine our lives.<sup>168</sup>

Student politics in 1968 and 1969 was unified, not only by national issues and similar experiences which occurred in the course of campaigning around those issues, but by conscious co-ordination. Changes in student

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<sup>162</sup> *National U*, 12 May 1969, p 17.

<sup>163</sup> Gray and Stanwell, *op cit*, p 66.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> K. Mansell, *The Yeast is Red*, MA, Department of History, Melbourne University, 1994, p 89.

<sup>166</sup> Curthoys, "Doing it for Themselves..." *op cit*, p 430.

<sup>167</sup> Curthoys, "Mobilising Dissent..." *op cit*, p 153.

<sup>168</sup> A. Curthoys, "A Short History of Feminism, 1970-1984," *For and Against Feminism*. (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1988), p 81.

politics were reflected in changes to NUAUS. The National Union continued to engage in less confrontational activities, focusing on issues such as the education crisis<sup>169</sup> and law reform.<sup>170</sup> NUAUS was increasingly criticised for its moderate "services" orientation, despite its adoption of more radical policies.<sup>171</sup> There were pressures on some campuses to secede from the Union for this reason.<sup>172</sup> Yet York has argued that the NUAUS newspaper, *National U*, which had a circulation in 1968 of 50,000, more than any other single factor helped to achieve "a sense of national student movement," bringing to even the most isolated campuses news of the activities of student activists around the country and overseas.<sup>173</sup>

Revolutionary students, however, felt the need for their own national organisation. As Ken Mansell argues:

The events of 1968—which had culminated in savage attacks on student leaders both on and off campus—undermined any notion of students as politically self-sufficient. For Marxist-influenced students the idea of linking up with the broader masses was an urgent issue.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> For example, in October 1968, NUAUS campaigned with Teachers Unions and Parent Groups about the worsening education crisis (*National U*, 14 October 1968, p 11).

<sup>170</sup> NUAUS campaigned, for example, for the liberalisation of the Public Service Act after ex-student Hall Greenland was sacked from the Public Service over his involvement in radical politics (*Tribune*, 23 July 1969).

<sup>171</sup> Hastings, *op cit*. At NUAUS' 1969 August Council a motion put forward by Albert Langer for NUAUS to send aid to the NLF was "soundly defeated" but Council agreed to offer sanctuary to draft resisters and to send aid to the North Vietnamese Government to aid in rebuilding schools destroyed by US bombing. Council was also addressed by a Czechoslovakian student refugee ("August Council - a Political Orgy," *National U*, 15 September 1969, p 1). Council also refused to pay Langer's fine arising from a student protest (*The Age*, 25 August 1969).

<sup>172</sup> At UNSW conservative Engineering students tried to mobilise students to support secession from the union using free beer but were unable to get the numbers because they were "out-stacked" by overseas students supporting NUAUS affiliation. Opponents of affiliation argued that NUAUS "was structurally and administratively top-heavy, was not achieving anything, and should be replaced by a loose confederation of SRCs..". The President of the Student Union Council argued that it would be foolish to leave NUAUS when it was examining its structure to see what reforms could be made (*National U*, 15 September 1969).

<sup>173</sup> York, *Student Revolt!...*, *op cit*, p 71.

<sup>174</sup> Mansell, *op cit*, pp 24/25.

The anti-conscription movement sucked in new forces, energies, debates and issues, almost like a vortex. As it did so, the number of activists with little respect for the Government, the law and the police rapidly increased. This change served to focus the attention of a radical minority of students on the absence of some kind of national body for revolutionary socialist students; a body whose members had a common conception of the process of radical social change as a basis for common strategies. A number of brief initiatives were made in this period. In June 1968, the Socialist Students Alliance was formed, representing eleven or twelve radical student groups in all States except Western Australia and Tasmania.<sup>175</sup> These, the most militant student clubs, including the Monash and La Trobe Labor Clubs, now withdrew from the ASLF,<sup>176</sup> Brisbane SDA members playing a leading role in this move.<sup>177</sup> The SSA was soon replaced in February 1969, as a result of another organisational initiative. One hundred and twenty socialists from around Australia met in Sydney at the Student/Staff Power Conference to form the Revolutionary Socialist Alliance (RSA).<sup>178</sup> The annual ASLF conference the same month was a "complete flop".<sup>179</sup> Less than ten delegates attended, and the conference ended when six participants from Monash and Brisbane walked out following a bitter argument with Sydney members of the group Resistance over relations with the ALP.<sup>180</sup> In June/July, having dissolved SDA,<sup>181</sup> Brisbane activists now formed the

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<sup>175</sup> Peter O'Brien, interviewed in "Student Activism," *Australian Left Review*, August-September 1968, p 32.

<sup>176</sup> York, *Sources...*, p 131.

<sup>177</sup> Warren, "Bris. 66-9 Key Events," Dan O'Neill collection.

<sup>178</sup> Melbourne Revolutionary Marxists, *A Call for the Regroupment of the Australian Left*, September 1975, courtesy Ann Curthoys, p 7; "Revolutionary Socialist Conference," *Outlook*, April 1969, p 19. See also "Considerations on Founding the RSA," Discussion Bulletin of the RSA, nos 1-11 (26 November 1968 - 14 April 1969), "On the Communist Party of Australia," "Guidelines for Action on the ALP," "Why the RSA," "Perspectives for the Radical Youth and Student Movements," documents contained in folder 29, box 5, Guido Barrachi collection at the National Library of Australia.

<sup>179</sup> "The Outside Agitator," 23 February 1969, Interstate Bulletin of the Socialist Students Alliance - National Executive, Prahran; Jim Percy, *A Brief History of ASLF Conferences* (Discussion Bulletin, Sydney Section of the Socialist Students Alliance, Easter 1969) (Both documents in Communist Party records, Mitchell library, Box 62 (159). See also Melbourne Revolutionary Marxists, *A Call for the Regroupment of the Revolutionary Left...*, *op cit*.

<sup>180</sup> Percy, *ibid*.

<sup>181</sup> See R. Cahill, "The Dissolution of SDA," *Australian Left Review*, August-September 1969.

Revolutionary Socialist Student Alliance (RSSA),<sup>182</sup> Mitch Thompson writing:

Those people who feel the need to protest will do so, but the time has arrived, for many of us, to pass from a protest organisation to a radical or revolutionary movement. A movement to challenge the structures of this Society.<sup>183</sup>

The same month in Sydney, in an attempt to maintain its dominant position on the Left, the Communist Party organised the Conference for Left Action, a much larger affair attended by 790 delegates.<sup>184</sup> In August, radical student leaders again met, this time in Queensland.<sup>185</sup> The meeting was followed by a protest against the treatment of Bougainvilleans.<sup>186</sup> Brisbane was also a venue for a further conference in December.<sup>187</sup>

Like student radicals, university administrations were also feeling the pressure to respond to the rise of the student power movement in a co-ordinated and systematic fashion. Throughout 1968 and 1969 they were under increasingly intense pressure to control student protest. In April 1968, *National U* reported that US Consulate staff in Sydney and Adelaide had approached student councils, requesting a list of addresses of council members so that they could speak to them personally about Vietnam.<sup>188</sup> By

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<sup>182</sup> See leaflets in Dan O'Neill collection, for example, "All struggles at the University to be revolutionary, must be carried into the working class!"

<sup>183</sup> Rootes, *Australian Student Radicals...*, *op cit*, p 61; see also Gray and Stanwell, *op cit*, p 20.

<sup>184</sup> See A. Davidson, "Revival of Left," *National U*, 3 March 1969, p 3, explaining the purpose of the conference.

<sup>185</sup> The students, it was reported in the local newspaper, were meeting to "plan secret strategy for the overthrow of University administrations throughout Australia," with Trotskyists from Sydney bringing samples of plastic helmets used by rioting Japanese students, and free marihuana being provided as students enjoyed "lectures on karate and ways to combat police baton charges..." ("Radical Student Aim to Upset all Varsity Controls," *Courier Mail*, 11 August 1969).

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> The conference was sponsored by RSSA and SHAC. Speakers included Brian Laver, Dan O'Neill, Bob Gollan, Hall Greenland, Albert Langer, Denis Freney, Laurie Aarons ("U of Q campus action 1967-1970" folder, box 14, Dan O'Neill collection).

<sup>188</sup> *National U*, 22 April 1968, p 1.

May 1969, the Government was taking student protest very seriously. A demonstration of Sydney University students led Premier Askin to threaten: "The State Government remains firm that it will step in if the university fails to discipline its students".<sup>189</sup>

Conspiracy theories were common. Queensland premier, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, claimed students were being paid to demonstrate.<sup>190</sup> During the first full debate on student unrest in federal parliament in May 1969, one MLA reported that in October 1968 twenty-five students had attended a conference in the Jenolan Caves in New South Wales for the purpose of discussing communism and guerrilla warfare tactics.<sup>191</sup>

University administrations made concessions in the hope of forestalling opposition. In early 1969, for example, students at the University of Queensland were granted the right to have a representative in the administrative structure.<sup>192</sup> In September, charges against students were dropped and a committee established to review disciplinary statutes in an effort to encourage RSSA to "seek to work through the existing channels".<sup>193</sup> University administrations also attempted to educate themselves about student protest. In June 1968, Australian vice-chancellors attended the International vice-chancellor's Conference in Sydney, which discussed "techniques of participatory counterinsurgency" as a means of quelling campus disturbances.<sup>194</sup> In early July 1968, following the dissolution of the Monash SRC, the university administration appointed the first university information officer to assist with "the problem of

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<sup>189</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 5 May 1969.

<sup>190</sup> *Tribune*, 14 May 1969, p 12.

<sup>191</sup> McLeahy, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 1 May 1969, p 1580.

<sup>192</sup> But *National U* predicted that the reform "...is more likely to do the reverse. Once the levels of aspirations of the mob are raised the offer to join the select few who 'eat cake' is not going to assuage the quest for a real place in the hierarchy" (*National U*, 3 March 1969, pp 1/2).

<sup>193</sup> *National U*, 29 September 1969, p 1. In July 1970, University of Queensland student radicals and staff produced *Up the Right Channels*, a critique of the University which lampooned the idea of "proper channels" in a cartoon where complainants are sent up an endless network of tubing, finding themselves permanently lost.

<sup>194</sup> York, "Sources...", *op cit*, p 128.

communications".<sup>195</sup> In early 1969, the Melbourne University vice-chancellor walked into the boardroom and requested "everything they had" by radical student theoretician Marcuse.<sup>196</sup> In 1969, the vice-chancellor of La Trobe University visited university "trouble-spots" throughout Europe and America.<sup>197</sup> Ultimately however, it was punishment which was the option resorted to time and again by universities and governments. Australian political leaders did not understand the student power movement, but they were unanimous in their determination to quell it.

The years 1968 and 1969 represent the high point of student radicalism in Australia. Previous accounts have mainly shown the development of student movements on individual campuses. These kinds of studies are productive because student protest demonstrates a high degree of autonomy, with different mosaics of issues and varying patterns of political alliances and ideologies differentiating the protests on different campuses. What my account shows is the national character of student unrest in Australia. Student activists around the country were unified by similar aims and opponents, hopes and disappointments. These were reflected in their cooperation in national campaigns and in their attempts to establish national organisations.

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<sup>195</sup> "Students, sound and fury," *The Age*, 17 July 1968.

<sup>196</sup> As *National U* commented: "Apparently he wants to keep up with the Jones' and the Van Moorsts' and the Beams' and the Bentleys. And apparently he doesn't realise, they haven't read Marcuse either" (*National U*, 17 March 1969, p 2). Mike Jones, Harry van Moorst and Nick Beams were all SDS activists.

<sup>197</sup> York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, p 171. In late 1969, the Australian Universities Commission presented a report to Parliament which recommended reforms, in particular, a greater focus on "teaching responsibilities" as a means of minimizing unrest on Australian university campuses, one consequence of which was a gradual increase in funding for tertiary education, including greater assistance from the Commonwealth, though student fees were also increased (*Sunday Observer*, 21 September 1970; Drury, during reading of Appropriation Bill, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 24 September 1970, p 1642).

# The girl:



**N**OTHING has more symbolised the contempt of some students toward the administration than this picture.

A young woman, sprawled in the Chancellor's chair, with her shoes on a table.

This sort of behavior (which followed the students' disruption of the discipline committee meeting) would not be tolerated in any respectable home or any secondary school.

It should not be tolerated in a university, if for no other reason than that it was an appalling example to every child who saw that picture.

● **ALAN TRENGOVE** makes these comments in a searching examination of student discipline at Monash University. His article, **TRENGOVE ON SATURDAY**, is on Page 9.



Melbourne, 4 July, 1968/9, in P.Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), p 225.





Petty, in D. O'Neill *et al* (eds), *Up the Right Channels*, University of Queensland, July 1970, p 131.

**IF IT'S NEWS ON THE CAMPUS  
THEN IT'S IN PRINT.**

*PRINT IS PUBLISHED WEEKLY  
BY THE MONASH LABOR CLUB.*

**PRINT IS THE ONLY GENUINE  
MONASH NEWSPAPER.**

*LOTS WIFE IS A GOOD  
'VIEWSPAPER' — BUT IT CAN'T  
REALLY BE UP TO DATE.*

*PRINT'S LAYOUT IS BAD.  
PRINT'S GRAMMAR IS TERRIBLE.  
PRINT'S SPELLING IS SCHOCKING.*

**BUT PRINT HAS NEWS.  
AND PRINT MAKES NEWS.**

Chapter Six  
Petrol Bombs and a Thousand Flowers Blooming: 1970-1972.

*...don't let the bureaucracy get you down,  
manage your own festival and smash the bureaucracy.<sup>1</sup>*

*It is quite clear that the authorities are not going to stop these bombings and  
attempted murders...if the Nazi outrages are to be stopped  
we will have to do it ourselves.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> "Aquarius, a Personal Political Commentary on the Canberra Arts Festival," *Mejane*, July 1971, p 6.

<sup>2</sup> "Smash Nazi Conference This Weekend!," *Print*, 8 June 1972, p 2.

In 1970, radical student activists were able for the first time to enjoy the legitimacy and self-confidence that came from knowing that the anti-war movement now had mass support. They did not enjoy, however, the favour of government leaders and police. Attempts to control and derail student protest and the anti-war movement continued with a vengeance. New laws against demonstrators were passed and enforced. Police began more openly to abandon the finer points of law in their attempts to control demonstrations and those who organised them. Their efforts received the support of conservative politicians and the mass media, who launched a concerted legislative and ideological assault on the student movement, using new laws and criticism of radical "violence" as a cudgel with which to engender division and uncertainty.<sup>3</sup>

University administrations responded to this challenge by attempting to intimidate the most radical students through exclusions, suspensions and expulsions while offering concessions to student activists more amenable to conciliation. Minor concessions to student demands or simply offers to delay or negotiate disciplinary action were used as bargaining chips to achieve paralysing rifts in campus movements. In January, Monash Vice-Chancellor Matheson circulated to members of the university the report of a UK Select Committee, the result of visits by MPs to universities in Britain and France. Arguing that it was "facile" to attribute unrest "to a few troublemakers," they recommended that real concessions be made to the demands of student moderates.<sup>4</sup> It was a strategy which had mixed but mainly little success. As a consequence, by the second part of 1970 university administrations were under increasing pressure from "law and order" politicians to mete out punishments to match those of the police and the courts.

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<sup>3</sup> During O-week of 1970 for example, University of Queensland Vice-Chancellor Teakle warned new students that "violence" of the type seen in France and Germany would be a "nonsense" in Australia, where, he argued, the staff-student ratio was far better. "Violence," he told the students, meant destruction and the suppression of human rights, was a "childish and illogical way of overcoming frustration" and had "no place on a University campus" (*Australian*, 24 February 1970; *Courier Mail*, 25 February 1970).

<sup>4</sup> Concessions recommended included student representation on council, senate and other governing bodies, improvement of student union facilities and full student participation in the management of welfare services. The report recommended better training and opportunities to express their opinions through their union for university staff. Present laws requiring police to be invited onto campus, whilst "not wholly satisfactory" must nonetheless remain. "Empty" threats of withdrawal of grants should "in no circumstance" be used to discipline students (paper held in Student Unrest papers, Monash University, Rare Books).

By 1972, with the anti-war movement losing momentum, radical student politics on campus was to some extent sustained by the victimisation of student leaders by official university bodies. The movement was also simultaneously both nourished and challenged by the development of new political movements and forces outside the campus: constituencies which increasingly provided a new milieu for radical students as the wave of campus activism receded. Nonetheless, the decline of the student movement and the nature of the new movements outside the campus can be seen as reflecting the limits of influence of the revolutionary student Left at this time. Most revolutionary students were enthusiastic about the movements and played an important role in their growth. As a consequence, the Marxist argument that class divisions within capitalism were the basic and fundamental oppressions and the key to all other oppressions was widely accepted amongst radicals at this time, as was the strategy of "looking to the working class".<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, thousands of newly radicalised people had now chosen to adopt movements as their favoured organisational form, not in conjunction with but as an alternative to revolutionary parties devoted to working class revolution. Though they were riding the radical wave with the rest, by 1972 the militant students and their revolutionary parties were not leading it.

As in 1968 and 1969, the fortunes of the anti-war movement played a major role in the evolution of student radicalism in 1970-72. In January, ANU students and others in Canberra clashed with police as they jeered visiting US Vice-President Spiro Agnew,<sup>6</sup> and in Melbourne, four students were arrested at gunpoint near SDS headquarters.<sup>7</sup> At Monash O-week, the Labor Club overran the University Regiment CMF information stand, and Kerry Langer (married to Albert Langer) ran away with one of their weapons.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See also A. Curthoys, *Doing it for Themselves...*, *op cit*.

<sup>6</sup> *Tribune*, 21 January 1970, p 1. In late 1969 Agnew had blasted about "small cadres of professional protesters," "nattering nabobs of negativism" and the "effete corps of impudent snobs who characterise themselves as intellectuals". On 30 October 1969 he advocated "positive polarisation" to deal with student protest in the US, saying: "It is time to rip away the rhetoric and to divide on authentic lines" (T. Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, (New York: Bantam, 1993), pp 378/379).

<sup>7</sup> *Tribune*, 14 January 1970, p 1.

<sup>8</sup> P.F. Perry, *The Rise and Fall of Practically Everybody. An Account of Student Political Activity at Monash University 1965-72*, undated (held at Monash University library, Rare Books), p 49.

Opposition to the war provided the major focus of student activity in the early months of 1970, in particular, preparations for the May Moratorium against the war. Organisation of an Australian Moratorium had been inspired by the spectacular success of the first US Moratorium on 15 October 1969, a demonstration aimed at boycotting "business as usual" in protest at the war, mobilising as many as several million people.<sup>9</sup>

The efforts of the organisers were aided by a series of events in the weeks preceding the demonstration. In April both Nixon and Gorton announced further troop withdrawals.<sup>10</sup> The flush of victory turned to anger when, in early May, the US Government intervened militarily in Cambodia, which had been used as a base by the NLF.<sup>11</sup> As a consequence, the Melbourne May Day demonstration on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup>, usually a fairly staid procession, saw 415 marchers break away from the 3,000-strong group. Several arrests occurred; windows of the Honeywell Computing Centre were smashed and two red flags placed at ASIO headquarters as the marchers headed for the American Consulate to protest at the US invasion.<sup>12</sup> A similar demonstration occurred at the US Consulate in Sydney.<sup>13</sup> The following day, two Flinders students began a hunger strike to draw attention to the Moratorium, going without food for four or five days.<sup>14</sup> As large anti-war protests were held across the US, four students were shot dead by national guardsmen at Kent State University in Ohio.<sup>15</sup> Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Billy

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<sup>9</sup> For details see P. Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), pp 245-253.

<sup>10</sup> A. Curthoys, "Mobilising Dissent: the Later Stages of Protest," in G. Pemberton (ed.), *Vietnam Remembered*, (Sydney: Weldon, 1990), p 157.

<sup>11</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 53. A similar demonstration was held at the US consulate in Sydney (*Tribune*, 6 May 1970, p 1).

<sup>12</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 53. See also "Why Honeywell?", leaflet, which explained that Honeywell's US parent company, controlled by the Rockefeller group, made weaponry for Vietnam, including "anti-personnel" bombs, grenades, fragmentation bombs, etc (in Laurie Carmichael collection, Noel Butlin Archives).

<sup>13</sup> *Tribune*, 6 May 1970, p 1.

<sup>14</sup> M. Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement in Australia: 1969-1973*, PhD thesis, Flinders University, 1977, p 99. Saunders thesis examines the moratorium movement in detail.

<sup>15</sup> Typical of the news reports of this event in Australia was "Her classmate lies dead," *Courier Mail*, 5 May 1970, which reported the preliminary report of Brigadier General Canterbury which said the shootings had been a "spontaneous reaction of men in fear for their lives. If we had not fired there would have been fatalities amongst the Guardsmen". A

McMahon responded notoriously that the Kent killings were a "lesson" which "ought to be taken to heart by all those who are taking part in the Moratorium marches".<sup>16</sup>

These events, grim proof of just how high the stakes were for both sides, ensured the success of the Moratorium, christened by Monash students "Campus Murder Day".<sup>17</sup> The universities "provided the moratorium with its strongest and most reliable source of support,"<sup>18</sup> with many student bodies following NUAUS' call to support the day by voting to declare their universities closed for classes but open to the public on the day.<sup>19</sup> On May 8, the huge numbers mobilised, in defiance of near-hysterical condemnation by conservatives: 200,000 around Australia, with 70-100,000 in Melbourne alone, inspired moderates and radicals alike.<sup>20</sup>

In Sydney, the Moratorium also marked the public appearance of two social movements which would entirely change Australian politics thereafter. At Sydney University, students holding a front-lawn meeting before the Moratorium were shocked by a speech by student Kate Jennings, who accused male students of sexism and defiantly embraced stereotypes of womens' liberationists as castraters, bra-burners and lesbians.<sup>21</sup> After the Moratorium, at a night-time rally, the "mood of self-congratulation" was again shattered when Aboriginal student Paul Coe demanded to speak:

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Government investigation did not confirm this view. (S.L. Bills, *Kent State/May 4: Echoes Through a Decade*, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1988)).

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in B. York, "Police, Students and Dissent: Melbourne, 1966-1972," *Journal of Australian Studies*, 1984, p 62.

<sup>17</sup> *Tribune*, 13 May 1970, p 4.

<sup>18</sup> Saunders, *op cit*, 1977, p 97. This thesis describes student preparations for the moratorium in detail. See also J. Cairns, *Silence Kills. Events leading up to the Vietnam Moratorium on 8 May*, (Melbourne: Vietnam Moratorium Committee, 1970).

<sup>19</sup> Saunders, *ibid*.

<sup>20</sup> J. Murphy, *Harvest of Fear: a History of Australia's Vietnam War*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993), p 245, puts the figure at 70,000 to 100,000. See also Edwards, *op cit*, pp 267-275; "100,000: IT MEANS WE CAN STOP THE WAR!" *Tribune*, 13 May 1970, p 1.

<sup>21</sup> A. Curthoys, "Doing it for Themselves: the Women's Movement since 1970" in K. Saunders and R. Evans (eds) *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, (Sydney: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p 434.

You are our oppressors. You worry about Vietnam, about the Black struggle in the USA or South Africa. But what about us, here? You raped our women, you stole our land, you massacred our ancestors, you destroyed our culture, and now—when we refused to die out as you expected—you want to kill us with your hypocrisy.<sup>22</sup>

These new movements were arising just as the old had reached its peak. Despite the success of the May Moratorium, Murphy and Edwards both argue that after it was over, conflicts between militants and moderates saw the movement engaged in fractious dispute,<sup>23</sup> their coalition becoming increasingly tenuous.<sup>24</sup> Yet the anti-war movement was far from exhausted, and determined to resist the now concerted campaign by conservative forces to uphold "law and order".<sup>25</sup> For militant students, the Moratorium reinforced their argument that "getting the numbers" was not enough, since no immediate victory resulted from the demonstrations.<sup>26</sup> The July 1 demonstration was again marked by conflict with police.<sup>27</sup> In August 1970 a new Public Order Bill was introduced, allowing police to declare a gathering of twelve or more as an "unlawful assembly" in an attempt to end protests at or inside Commonwealth buildings, especially Department of Labor and National Service offices.<sup>28</sup> Its introduction only led to a widening of protest.<sup>29</sup> New procedures were also introduced for dealing with draft resisters, whereby non-compliers were automatically referred to the courts to determine their conscientious objection status, an attempt to reduce the number that the Government would have to jail.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> D. Freney, *A Map of Days. Life on the Left*, (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1991), p 267.

<sup>23</sup> Murphy, *op cit*, p 264.

<sup>24</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, p 275.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Maoists argued that "numbers were meaningless if the aim was off target". (B. York, *Sources of Student Unrest in Australia, with Particular Reference to La Trobe University 1967-73*, MA thesis, University of Sydney, 1983, pp 183/184).

<sup>27</sup> Willie, "The Lost Weekend," *Lot's Wife*, 10 July 1970.

<sup>28</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle, May-August 1970," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 16:3, December 1970, p 412.

<sup>29</sup> York, "Police, Students...", *op cit*, p 64.

<sup>30</sup> M.E. Hamel-Green, "The Resisters: a History of the Anti-Conscription Movement 1964-1972," in P. King (ed.), *Australia's Vietnam: Australia in the Second Indo-China War*,



The organisation of the second Moratorium reflected a shift to the left, calling for unconditional withdrawal of troops from Vietnam and the abolition of conscription in any form, as well as considering favourably an "occupation of city streets" based on the success of the May sit-down in Melbourne.<sup>31</sup> The September Moratorium, however, was smaller, with perhaps 100,000, half the May figure, marching throughout Australia. Despite the intense efforts of its moderate organisers, it was also more violent, with 200 arrests in Sydney, and "by far the worst" of clashes between South Australian demonstrators and police,<sup>32</sup> where 141 arrests led to a Royal Commission and the introduction of legislation placing responsibility for law and order in the hands of the Government rather than the Police Commissioner.<sup>33</sup> The Melbourne march was more peaceful, led by the ALP's Jim Cairns away from police barricades.<sup>34</sup> According to an ASIO report, "revolutionary students were actually out-manoeuvred and contained by other Moratorium participants, including CPA members".<sup>35</sup>

Criticism of police violence led to some decline in calls for "law and order" by State governments. The federal Government, though by 1971 set on a course for the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam, maintained its confrontational stance.<sup>36</sup> From the first, 1971 continued to be characterised by polarisation and confrontation. In January, the Soviet Embassy was bombed<sup>37</sup> and there were reports of twenty types of gas weapons and

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(Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983), p 120.

<sup>31</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, pp 281/282.

<sup>32</sup> W.G.K. Duncan and R.A. Leonard, *The University of Adelaide. 1874-1974*, (Adelaide: Rigby, 1973), p 159.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p 159/160. See *Tribune*, 10 March 1971, p 12, on the results of the Commission.

<sup>34</sup> Murphy, *op cit*, p 266. Langer later described the September Moratorium as a "sell-out" which had caused the leadership of the movement to become increasingly isolated and distrusted. (Langer, "Revolutionaries and the Moratorium," speech for February 1971 Anti-War Conference, p 4, Albert Langer collection). See also M.Saunders, "The ALP's Response to the Anti-Vietnam War Movement: 1965-73," *Labour History*, 44, May 1983, p 87; "Laura Norder," *Outlook*, 14:5, October 1970.

<sup>35</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, p 273.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, pp 288/289, 292.

<sup>37</sup> *Tribune*, 20 January 1971, p 2.

ammunition having been ordered for use on demonstrators at the end of 1970 by the Victorian Police Department.<sup>38</sup> In March 1971, thirty-five demonstrators in Melbourne, protesting the jailing of student and draft resister Geoff Mullen, barricaded themselves in the office of DLP Senator McManus;<sup>39</sup> and in April the jailing of five anti-war women under the new Summary Offences Act produced immediate and spontaneous demonstrations in their defence.<sup>40</sup>

The conservative government was by now racked by disunity and crisis. In March, Defence Minister Malcolm Fraser resigned, leading to Prime Minister Gorton's replacement by McMahon, and the announcement of the withdrawal of a further 1,000 troops from Vietnam.<sup>41</sup> Yet a malaise had also crept into the anti-war movement,<sup>42</sup> a product partly of divisions about the best way forward for the movement. February's anti-war conference<sup>43</sup> focused on tactical questions: "moderation vs. militancy," the value of big demonstrations and "local work" and the role and importance of "education".<sup>44</sup> Special emphasis was given to making links with trade unionists.<sup>45</sup> At the third Moratorium on June 30 four well-known draft

<sup>38</sup> "Police Prepare to Gas Demonstrators," *Tribune*, 27 January 1971.

<sup>39</sup> *Tribune*, 24 March 1971. The passing of the Act had been delayed after the Minister for Justice expressed concern in July 1970 that some of its provisions might undermine civil liberties ("Australian Political Chronicle May-August 1970," *op cit*, p 402.

<sup>40</sup> *Tribune*, 14 April 1971. The women were in SOS and the ALP.

<sup>41</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, pp 295-297. See also "Real Facts of Fraser Crisis," *Tribune*, 10 March 1971, p 12.

<sup>42</sup> This is evidenced by *Direct Action's* front cover, January 1971, which show photographs of anti-war demonstrators alongside pictures of Vietnamese people, with the headline "Tired of marching...what if they were?" See also "Is dissent in decline?," *The Australian*, 4 August 1970, in which Barry Robinson comments: "I think there is a tremendous fatigue and disillusionment among students that big demonstrations don't get them anywhere".

<sup>43</sup> Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement...*, *op cit*, Chapter Nine, describes the course of this conference in detail.

<sup>44</sup> See for example Sandra Zurbo, "Anti-war locality organising," speech for anti-war conference, Albert Langer collection. See also Albert Langer, "Revolutionaries and the Moratorium," criticising the turn to locality organising (p 2). See also Gregg Landy, "AntiWarism at a Uni: Suggestions for Change" who suggested that after September more research and education was needed before further demonstrations occurred. (p 4) See also Joe Harris "Mass Action - or Vanguard Action (Why Brisbane Did as it was Told)," from the same conference, in records of the Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union National Office, courtesy Laurie Carmichael, Files regarding Vietnam and AICD 1964-1974.

<sup>45</sup> The Conference decided that "in setting out to broaden its mass base, to give top priority to

resisters appeared on a platform in Melbourne, openly challenged police to arrest them and marched back to Melbourne University protected by 5000 demonstrators.<sup>46</sup> The Queensland Government, meanwhile, planned to ban sit-ins in public or private buildings and to reverse the onus of proof in such incidents.<sup>47</sup>

For six years, opposition to the Vietnam war had been the primary focus of protest in Australia. In 1971, with the anti-war movement having passed its peak, new issues were capturing the imagination of radicals. In 1969, for example, the Arbitration Court had granted the right of "equal pay for equal work," a partial victory for women workers.<sup>48</sup> The new, younger generation of women who took their place on the radical stage in 1970 were not grateful for these changes; they were angry. Their anger was frequently directed not only at governments and social structures, but at men in general. It was an anger that extended to the large proportion of radical activists who fought for "liberation" but often had little awareness of the extent of injustice based on sex.<sup>49</sup> The new women's liberationists were critical of defensive reactions to the suggestion that in their personal behaviour male activists might be helping to perpetuate women's oppression,<sup>50</sup> and the involvement of men in an International Women's Day march in 1972 was

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winning the Australian working class forces to political strike action against the US war of aggression". (*Tribune*, 24 February 1971, p 1)

<sup>46</sup> M.Hamel-Green, "The Resisters...", *op cit*, p 123; Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement...*, *op cit*, p 319.

<sup>47</sup> *National U*, 7 June 1971, p 2.

<sup>48</sup> J.A. Scutt, "Inequality Before the Law. Gender, Arbitration and Wages," in K. Saunders and R. Evans (eds), *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, (Sydney: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1992), pp 277-279.

<sup>49</sup> Sydney University activist and Trotskyist Hall Greenland had been involved in the publication of a pamphlet on women's liberation in 1965, but remembers the shock of Jennings front lawn speech, which most activists felt was "ultra-left" and alienating. Today he says "it's only when a movement occurs and it comes into your own personal relations (that you can really understand it)...I remember once using the phrase "weak sister"...and were we copping it from the young sisters! And our reaction was, you know, "they're right!" And about that time lots of blokes began to realise..." (Hall Greenland, personal interview).

<sup>50</sup> V. Burgmann, "The Development of the Contemporary Women's Movement," *Power and Protest. Movements for Change in Australian Society* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1993), pp 80-82; Biff McDougall, "Women and the Left," *Mejane*, 8, August 1972, p 4; letter in response, *Mejane*, 9, 1972, p 11; M. Matteson, "Men Must Fight and Women Must Weep. Like any group in this society the DRM has been as sexist as it has been allowed to be" (*Mejane*, 9, 1972, p 11).

the subject of debate, with men and women on both sides in the pages of *Mejane*.<sup>51</sup>

In particular, in 1970 and 1971 Womens Liberation groups were being formed and conferences held, their main base in Sydney.<sup>52</sup> In March 1971, the first issue of *Mejane* included reports from Womens Liberation groups at Sydney University, the University of New South Wales and Macquarie University, though the reports suggest that they initially had some difficulty attracting support.<sup>53</sup> These early groups did not exclude men and had a strong focus on the problems of working women, with the Macquarie University group being made up mainly of working mothers.<sup>54</sup> At Sydney University, Women's Liberation supported female non-academic staff in a campaign for equal pay.<sup>55</sup> Similar groups arose in other States.<sup>56</sup> In 1970 and 1971, women's liberation groups, including student members, became an important part of debate and demonstrations for abortion law reform throughout the country.<sup>57</sup>

Women activists also played a prominent role in what became the most conflictual political campaign of 1971. Early that year, the visit of the South African lifesaving team provided Sydney's Anti-Apartheid Movement with a "practice run" for the controversial tour of the South African Springboks

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<sup>51</sup> "A Man's View," p 11, and "Must Men March," p 13, *Mejane*, 7, April 1972; letters, *Mejane*, 8, August 1972, p 3.

<sup>52</sup> Curthoys, "Doing it for Themselves...", *op cit*, pp 430-434.

<sup>53</sup> *Mejane*, 1, March 1971, p 15.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> "Equal Pay in the Universities," *Mejane*, 4, September 1971, p 7.

<sup>56</sup> See for example, *Women Arise!*, the newsletter of La Trobe University Women's Liberation; S.Kinder, "Adelaide Women's Liberation: the First Five Years, 1969-1974" in M. Bevege *et al*, *Worth her Salt: Women at Work in Australia*, (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1982), pp 367-378. A Women's Rights Committee was established at the University of Queensland in June/July 1972, reflecting a breach between the "town" and "university" sections of the movement established in 1970 (P. Gray and J. Stanwell, (compilers), *A Ten Years Retrospective of the Development of the "New Left" in Brisbane 1964-1974*, Research Project for a Film Proposal, November 1974, p 31).

<sup>57</sup> Curthoys, "Doing it for Themselves...", *op cit*, pp 434/435. See also "The Latest on Abortion," *Mejane*, 1, March 1971, p 3; *Mejane*, 2, May, 1971, p 1; "Is there a case against Abortion?", *Mejane*, 4, September 1971, p 3; *Tribune*, 10 June 1970, p 1, reports an anti-abortion demonstration including a number of women students.

rugby team.<sup>58</sup> Apartheid, as described in Chapter Three, had been a focus of student protest as early as 1960. However, whilst that earlier protest had been motivated largely by "moral" concerns, for the student activists of this later generation ideas about the roots of apartheid were framed in the context of the Vietnam war. Capitalist competition for profit was seen as the root of both. The Vietnam war was seen as a product of US imperialism's need to militarily ensure economic domination of the globe. Apartheid was viewed as a system instituted and defended by a capitalist ruling class whose profits depended on cheap black labour maintained by the separation of home and workplace which was the basis of the Bantustan system. In May 1971, students came together in Canberra for the counter-cultural Aquarius Festival, itself reflecting the growth of a new wing of the student movement in this period. At the festival, a march to the South African Embassy, an anti-Vietnam sit-down and a confrontation outside police headquarters in protest at earlier arrests resulted in a total of 187 arrests for "failing to disperse" or "obstruction" under the new Public Order Act.<sup>59</sup>

In July the arrival of the Springboks team in Australia resulted in riotous scenes, with student activists and the Australian Union of Students (AUS), (the renamed NUAUS) at the heart of opposition to the tour.<sup>60</sup> The final day of June had seen 100 arrested at the Springboks match in South Australia.<sup>61</sup> On July 3, large numbers of Monash students for the first time

<sup>58</sup> *Tribune*, 3 March 1971, pp 1/12.

<sup>59</sup> "Lessons of the Canberra Events," *Direct Action*, June 1971, no 7, p 6; and see York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, p 64. *Tribune*, 26 May 1971, p 12, described how police attacked anti-Vietnam demonstrators at Garema Place leading several hundred bystanders to join the march. After the arrest of a draft resister, over fifty students were arrested after they sat down to prevent the exit of the police wagon holding him, and more were arrested as the march continued to Parliament House. After reading the Public Order Act outside the police station later that day, police arrested a further 75 "then chased the students back to campus, beating with batons students they caught". See also, "Aquarius, a Personal Political Commentary on the Canberra Arts Festival," *Mejane*, 3, July 1971, p 6; "National U Aquarius Arts Festival Supplement," *National U*, 3 May 1971.

<sup>60</sup> See *National U*, 28 June 1971. The changed character of AUS from previous years is evidenced by the following account. A journalist asked AUS President and convenor of HART (Halt All Racial Tours) Gregor McAulay, whether AUS liased with police. "Yes," McAulay replied, "We monitor their radio" (S.Harris, *Political Football - the Springboks Tour of Australia*, (Melbourne: Gold Star, 1972), p 79). McAulay was later charged with offensive behaviour for allegedly trying to get onto the field ("Two Weeks of Fun and Games across the Nation," *National U*, 14 July 1971, p 2/3). See also "Australian Political Chronicle May-August 1971," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 17:3, December 1971, p 419.

<sup>61</sup> Harris, *op cit*, p 71.

personally experienced a police attack. For three and a half hours "demonstrators were subjected to the most sustained and intense State violence ever known in Melbourne".<sup>62</sup> Premier Bolte congratulated the police:

The demonstrators are a rebellion against constituted authority. The demonstrators don't care about apartheid...It's still the same hard core of agitators...The issue doesn't count.<sup>63</sup>

At the annual July 4 demonstration the following day demonstrators surprised police by marching past the by-now traditional destination of the heavily guarded US Consulate and on to the unprotected South African Trade Commission.<sup>64</sup> In Sydney there were sixty arrests as four demonstrators jumped the fence and sat in the middle of the playing field.<sup>65</sup> The demonstrations were directed not only at the South African Government. Participants included Aboriginal activists, and protesters wielded placards with slogans like "Go home Springboks and take McMahon with you".<sup>66</sup> At the time of the Canberra match, members of Abschol protested outside the Queensland Government Tourist Bureau, condemning the Government's treatment of Aboriginal people and, in particular, delays in amending discriminatory legislation in line with federal initiatives.<sup>67</sup> Placards displayed when the Springboks arrived at their hotel in Brisbane included "Welcome home racists". Three hundred police,

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<sup>62</sup> M. Hyde *et al*, *It is Right to Rebel*, (Marrickville: The Diplomat, 1972), p 198. One witness described the scene as 650 police set upon protesters: "Senior police officers present made no apparent effort to stop policemen striking people unnecessarily...One youth was lying on the ground in front of a police van, sobbing 'Please, please, don't hit me any more. I can't stand it.' A police constable then jumped on him" (quoted in Harris, *op cit*, p 3/4).

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Harris, *op cit*, p 84. The Victorian DLP that month passed a motion that La Trobe and Monash University should be placed under the control of senior state public service administrators until a full enquiry into them could be held ("Australian Political Chronicle, May-August 1971," *op cit*, p 435).

<sup>64</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 103. See also "My Friend the Policeman," leaflet produced by Diamond Valley WSA, and "Things have changed. Boy..." leaflet, both in Albert Langer collection.

<sup>65</sup> Harris, *op cit*, pp 95/96. There were six hundred police and sixty arrests.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p 127; see also D. O'Neill, "The natives are restless or go pull yourself boss," *National U*, 6 September 1971, pp 6/7, on the Springboks tour and fighting racism in Australia.

fifty wearing crash helmets, clashed violently with an equal number of demonstrators; civil liberties were ignored under a State of Emergency proclaimed by the conservative Bjelke-Petersen Government and maintained for over two weeks. Police chased demonstrators into a park below the hotel, kicking and punching those they caught, with one women student saying afterwards: "And it's supposed to be student violence".<sup>68</sup>

Spectacular conflict also occurred on the University of Queensland campus. Students occupied their Student Union during examinations in conjunction with a state-wide strike in protest at the tour. In response, the vice-chancellor issued a public statement warning students that they were being "manipulated,"<sup>69</sup> and obtained injunctions against 133 named occupiers.<sup>70</sup> Before abandoning the occupation, the participants used the Union facilities to produce anti-apartheid material, and entered city shops and hotels to win support for their action. Political discussions involving Aboriginal speakers were organised during formal lectures. Students were advised to ask lecturers and class "politely" whether they could discuss racism and the State of Emergency. The request would be put to a vote and if the vote were lost, the opponents of the tour would stand in silent vigil at the front of the class.<sup>71</sup>

The Springboks' reception was no more friendly in other States. In August, Meredith Burgmann was gaoled with hard labour for "offensive behaviour" (running onto the field) during the Springboks match in Sydney.<sup>72</sup> In Western Australia, the ALP called for an inquiry into police brutality against

<sup>68</sup> Harris, *ibid*, p 129. See also "Austalian Political Chronicle May-August 1971," *op cit*, pp 441-442.

<sup>69</sup> The Vice-Chancellor said that Deputy Premier Sir Gordon Chalk had assured him that media reports that the government was to take serious action regarding the universities were untrue. Cowen had "had many contacts" with Police Commissioner Whitrod. He stressed that he was opposed to apartheid but that he would not march: "the cruel and humiliating and abusive treatment meted out *by University people above all* to this small group of players, I find shameful...I think that the strike is quite wrong, and in this respect I go further than some of my professional colleagues who simply oppose action against non-strikers...I believe...that this "strike" is being used by some as part of a plan to bring down this University" (Statement dated 29 September 1971, Dan O'Neill collection, box 1 (loose)).

<sup>70</sup> Harris, *op cit*, pp 190/191. See also Gray and Stanwell, *op cit*, pp 26-28.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, pp 197/198.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p 25. See also "Never Mind the Miniskirt," *HQ*, September/October 1994, pp 73-77, which outlines the leading role of Burgmann in the campaign.

demonstrators at a clash with rugby supporters in Perth<sup>73</sup>; and a Melbourne student received a four-month sentence for throwing a smoke bomb at the Melbourne match.<sup>74</sup> Though the protests led to the cancellation of a tour of the South African cricket team in August,<sup>75</sup> the following month students from the formerly quiet campus in Tasmania had their chance to protest against apartheid with the visit of the South African squash team. A vigil calling on motorists to "Toot against racism" led to a participant being booked for "inciting to commit a Traffic Offence," others for aiding and abetting this crime. Fifty motorists were also booked for "unnecessarily" sounding their horns at the scene of the protest.<sup>76</sup>

It was also in August that Prime Minister Gorton announced that all Australian troops would be home from Vietnam by Christmas.<sup>77</sup> Yet radical draft resistance continued to be a major focus of student activism. In the early hours of September 30, 1971, up to 150 police stormed the barricaded Union building at Melbourne University, looking for four draft resisters. The resisters had announced they would be operating a pirate radio station from the university and preparing for anti-war activities during the holidays, having been offered sanctuary by the students. The raid caused thousands of dollars of damage, but the four were not among the 200 occupiers, having received prior warning and escaped to Adelaide where they were offered sanctuary at both universities. In the following few days, eight other universities voted to declare their own campuses a refuge.<sup>78</sup>

In October, draft resister Michael Matteson captured headlines when he

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<sup>73</sup>"Australian Political Chronicle May-August 1971," *op cit*, p 449.

<sup>74</sup> Harris, *op cit*, p 23.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p 49. See also "Australian Political Chronicle September-December 1971," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 18:1, April 1972, p 95.

<sup>76</sup> *National U*, 4 October 1971, p 5. A couple of days later, ten at a similar vigil were arrested for "obstructing a police officer in the execution of his duty" by standing in front of him. Tasmanian students also put a "black ban" on and demonstrated outside their usual watering hole, Wrest Point, which was accommodating the squash team.

<sup>77</sup> Harris, *op cit*, p 49.

<sup>78</sup> "Police Raid Uni" and "Cops Bust Union," *National U*, 4 October 1971, pp 1/3; Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement...*, *op cit*, p 319; Hamel-Green, "The Resisters..." *op cit*, p 124.



addressed a crowd of students on the front lawn at Sydney University.<sup>79</sup> The following month, Matteson appeared live on the ABC's *This Day Tonight* in Sydney at the same time as Attorney-General Greenwood. Though police arrived at the station as he spoke, he was assisted in avoiding arrest by escaping through the back of the building.<sup>80</sup> In April 1972, Matteson again made headlines in what became known as "The Great Escape". Matteson and a supporter were driving past the university entrance when they were spotted and stopped by police, who entered the car on either side of Matteson and handcuffed themselves to him. But the driver defiantly drove his car straight onto the campus, where Matteson called out to students for assistance. Hundreds gathered and surrounded police while Matteson was freed with a pair of boltcutters. The students then "ushered the police off the campus" while Matteson escaped.<sup>81</sup> Student leader Lyn Regan was later assaulted by commonwealth police when they raided his home, arresting and then charging him with obstructing the police trying to arrest Matteson.<sup>82</sup> In July, 700 students signed a statement saying that they were involved in or supported Matteson's release, to draw attention to the arbitrary victimisation of student leaders.<sup>83</sup>

In May 1972, news of Nixon's blockade of North Vietnam, the heaviest retaliation yet seen, sparked a sudden, furious but short-lived revival in the anti-war movement. In Perth, demonstrators took over the public gallery of the Legislative Assembly.<sup>84</sup> In Queensland, students caused a furore when they tried to break into the university regiment arms depot; and later a small group walked into the Brisbane Stock Exchange and threw animal blood over the trading floor and employees.<sup>85</sup> At violent demonstrations in capital cities, stones, bottles, fireworks and flares were thrown at police,

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<sup>79</sup> Saunders, *ibid*, p 321.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, p 320. Commonwealth police also raided the home of Matteson's parents on Christmas Day, but he was elsewhere (*Tribune*, 11-17 January 1972).

<sup>81</sup> Saunders, *ibid*, p 322; "The Great Escape," *Tribune*, 25 April-1 May 1972, p 12, estimated the number of students involved as 700 to 1,000.

<sup>82</sup> *Tribune*, 9-15 May 1972, p 3.

<sup>83</sup> *National U*, 10 July 1972, p 1.

<sup>84</sup> Saunders, *op cit*, p 330.

<sup>85</sup> Gray and Stanwell, *op cit*, p 31.

while companies associated with the Vietnam war were the target of expensive window-smashing, firebombings and petrol bomb attacks.<sup>86</sup>

Perhaps the most far-reaching and remembered events of 1972, however, focused on the campaign for Aboriginal Land Rights. In 1967, the establishment of federal control over Aboriginal affairs through a referendum, the culmination of many years of campaigning by moderate organisations, was seen as a major victory for Aboriginal people;<sup>87</sup> but like young university women, the new activists were not grateful but angry. Since the late 1960s Aboriginal activists had been creating new organisations and demanding a greater role in existing ones.<sup>88</sup> The "growing anti-racist feelings of many whites" shown in the anti-Springboks campaign had also inspired more Aboriginal involvement,<sup>89</sup> and, at a lesser level, the activities of Abschol and the NUAUS in previous years.<sup>90</sup> On Australia Day in 1972, Aboriginal activists established a tent embassy outside Parliament House in Canberra, announcing a five-point plan for land rights after Prime Minister McMahon announced that Aborigines would not be granted ownership of their tribal lands.<sup>91</sup> In July a law was passed making camping in public places illegal and on three occasions the embassy was pulled down by police, and re-erected, attracting increasing numbers of supporters.<sup>92</sup> A

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<sup>86</sup> Saunders, *op cit*, p 330. See also *Direct Action*, 22 May 1972; *Tribune*, 16 May 1972. Early on the morning of May 12 a petrol bomb was thrown at the Du Pont building in Brisbane. The resulting fire caused \$20,000 damage to a neighbouring solicitors office. A violent demonstration also occurred in the city. A clash near the US consulate in Queen Street between about 800 demonstrators and the police Public Order Squad resulted in 23 arrests (*National U*, 10 July 1972).

<sup>87</sup> B. Attwood and A. Markus, in collaboration with D. Edwards and K. Schilling, *The 1967 Referendum, or When Aborigines Didn't Get the Vote*, (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1997), introduction.

<sup>88</sup> Burgmann, "The move to black autonomy," *op cit*, p 34. See also Gray and Stanwell, *op cit*, pp 23-32; J. Guyatt, and G. George, *Publications of Political Organisations in Queensland Held in University of Queensland Libraries*, (St Lucia: Fryer Memorial Library, University of Queensland Libraries, 1983), p 3.

<sup>89</sup> Lilla Watson, interviewed November 1974, Gray and Stanwell, *ibid*, p 63.

<sup>90</sup> See for example the campaign for the self-management of Palm Island Aboriginal Reserve ("Australian Political Chronicle January-April 1970," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 16:2, August 1970, pp 247/248). In April 1970 NUAUS boycotted the visit of Princess Anne in solidarity with Aboriginal activists in the year of the Cook bi-centenary (Ann Curthoys private collection).

<sup>91</sup> Burgmann, *op cit*, pp 36, 48/49.

<sup>92</sup> D. Fields, *Land Rights Now!*, International Socialist pamphlet, 1988, p 15-17; J.Coleman,

Stop Work and March in Sydney on July 14, to mark National Aborigines Day (also referred to as the Black Moratorium), saw clashes between Sydney University and ANU students and police, while 250 students and staff in Papua New Guinea marched in solidarity in Port Moresby.<sup>93</sup> On July 23, as 150 mainly Aboriginal demonstrators re-erected the tent embassy, over 300 police emerged from inside Parliament House and violently attacked those defending the tent.<sup>94</sup> A week later an even larger group of Aborigines and supporters including student militants from around Australia—over 2,000 in total—again defied police to re-erect the embassy.<sup>95</sup>

The desire for "liberation" was also taken up publicly in 1971 and 1972 by the gay community, sparking the formation of new organisations. Until legal reform in South Australia in 1972, homosexuality was illegal throughout Australia. The first organisation devoted specifically to this issue, the Homosexual Law Reform Society, had been established in the ACT in 1969. In 1970 it was joined by the short-lived Daughters of Bilitis in Melbourne, and in mid-1970 by the Campaign Against Moral Persecution in Sydney, which soon spread to other capitals.<sup>96</sup> At Sydney University O-week in 1970, Campus Camp was formed for gay men and women.<sup>97</sup> In October 1971, about 70 members of Campus Camp with the off-campus group, Camp Inc, and Womens Liberation demonstrated with helium-filled balloons and placards outside Liberal Party headquarters in Sydney.<sup>98</sup> In January 1972, the more radical group, Gay Lib, was launched at Sydney University; and later

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"The Aboriginal Embassy," *Direct Action*, 3 August 1972, p 5.

<sup>93</sup> *National U*, 10 July, 1972, p 8; *Tribune*, 18-24 July 1972, p 10; *Tribune*, 25-31 July 1972, p 12; *Tribune*, 8-14 August 1972, p 9; "Day of Shame!," *Peoples Voice*, no 3, July 1972, (Worker Student Alliance, Western Suburbs, Albert Langer collection).

<sup>94</sup> Aboriginal activist and law student Paul Coe was beaten unconscious. Eight were hospitalised in total including five police, two with "knuckle lacerations". Eighteen were arrested and a number were bashed by police in the cells (Coleman, *op cit*). Queensland University activist Mitch Thompson was also beaten in his cell (*Tribune*, 25-31 July 1972, p 1). See also *Tribune*, 1-7 August 1972, p 10.

<sup>95</sup> S. Paintin, "Aboriginal Embassy," *Direct Action*, 24 August 1972, p 5.

<sup>96</sup> Burgmann, *op cit*, pp 152-156; G. Willett, "Marxists and the Gay Movement," *Reconstruction*, Summer 1996-1997, p 26; Gray and Stanwell, *op cit*, p 26; See "Campus Camp: Queensland Campus Come Out!," Camp leaflet, Fryer library.

<sup>97</sup> "Societies for Homosexuals," *Mejane*, 1, March 1971, p 2.

<sup>98</sup> "Gay Lib Demonstrations," *Mejane*, 5, November 1971, p 3; *Mejane*, 7, April 1972, p 11.

Melbourne University students formed the Gay Liberation Front.<sup>99</sup> In August 1972, Gay Lib at the University of New South Wales organised a demonstration against an academic supporter of "aversion therapy" on campus.<sup>100</sup>

The commitment of student radicals to confrontational tactics and broad anti-capitalist politics in 1970-72 was, as in 1968-69, a commitment sustained in the face of concerted conservative opposition manifested both off and on the campuses. In forming the militant street-fighting Worker Student Alliance (modelled on the US organisation of the same name) in early 1970, Maoist students in Melbourne hoped that their past success could be the basis for making the campuses a geographical base for off-campus and, especially, worker militancy.<sup>101</sup> The staunch contempt of Maoist students and their allies for US imperialism, governments, the courts, police, the media and any within the movement inclined towards compromise with those forces assured that, though their numbers were small, they remained the leading force in student politics.

The Melbourne tabloid press portrayed Monash students and the movement generally as a thoughtless, cheering squad manipulated by a small number of charismatic but malevolent leaders. Outspoken Maoist Albert Langer, in particular, was demonised.<sup>102</sup> In 1970, having failed to

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<sup>99</sup> Burgmann, *op cit*, pp 154-159.

<sup>100</sup> Gay Lib argued that "aversion therapy...provides no real solution or free decision for the individual gay, as what has usually precipitated admission to hospital for referral for such treatment has been precisely their inability to cope with the demands placed on them by society". Gay Lib had also organised forums on campus and demonstrated against the ABC for preventing the screening of an interview with gay activist and Sydney University academic Denis Altman (N. Pike, "Gay Liberation Groups in Sydney," *Direct Action*, 24 August 1972, p 6).

<sup>101</sup> Melbourne Revolutionary Marxists, *A Call for the Revolutionary Regroupment of the Australian Left*, September 1975, courtesy Ann Curthoys, p 6.

<sup>102</sup> Some examples from Langer's personal collection of newspaper cuttings include: "In Court Again - and Again" and "Police Pin-up" (with photo of Langer with his tongue out: "Truth told Langer the cops at the mounted depot would like a pin-up picture to show their horses. Albert obligingly posed"), *Truth*, 20 September 1969; "Monash: why it is in revolt," *The Age*, 5 August 1969, states that until "moderate" students at Monash acted, "Albert Langer pulls the strings. Langer's extremists manipulate Monash students...Over the whole crisis looms the shadow of the rotund, bearded Albert Langer". A "moderate" student was quoted as saying "Without Albert on campus, the place would be quiet. He is a demagogue. He has the charisma of a leader"; a cartoon in the *Herald*, 14 May 1969, shows a well-dressed woman addressing another: "Alby's doing well at Monash - one more sit-in and he gets his dissident degree..."; See also "Many students oppose Langer," *Herald*, 8 August 1969; a cartoon in the

counteract the influence of the Labor Club, the Monash University administration set out to rid the university of its most prominent and controversial member. Despite his outstanding academic record, Langer was not permitted to enrol as a postgraduate Computer Science student after the Dean of Science overrode the approval given by the Computer Science Department.<sup>103</sup> The decision, widely seen as "political," sparked a major campaign in Langer's defence, resulting in the "invasion" of the office of the Department Head.<sup>104</sup> On March 4, 1970, Monash University staff also met to protest Langer's exclusion.<sup>105</sup> Yet on March 17, voting to decide whether to demand Langer's re-entry at an MAS meeting of 3,500 students was so close that a "rematch" was called the following week; Langer lost the vote 1100 to 900.<sup>106</sup>

The battle to defend Langer's right to continue his university career was not over, however. In May 1971 at Melbourne University (for several years considered the least radical of Victorian universities), student protest at the refusal to admit Albert Langer to the university on the grounds that he was not of "good name and character" culminated in a lock-in of students in the Administration Building.<sup>107</sup> In June, meetings of 400 and 600 students passed motions in protest at Langer's non-admission.<sup>108</sup> Langer continued in his attempts to be accepted as a student somewhere in Australia. His files from the period contain the resultant correspondence. Langer was asked by university officers to provide certificates or evidence of his "good standing"

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*Herald*, 19 July 1969 showed Monash Vice-Chancellor Matheson asking Langer "Mr Langer, how would you like to be the fourth man on the moon?"

<sup>103</sup> "The Langer Exclusion" in Hyde *et al*, *op cit*, pp 105-114.

<sup>104</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 50. See also *Tribune*, 18 March 1970, p 3, which reports the outcry at Langer's treatment.

<sup>105</sup> *Tribune*, 4 March 1970, p 2.

<sup>106</sup> *The Age*, 18 March 1970; Perry, *op cit*, pp 50-52.

<sup>107</sup> D. Flowers and J. McIlroy, "Melbourne University Lock-in," *Direct Action*, June 1971, no 7, p 4; *National U*, 16 March 1972, p 3.

<sup>108</sup> I. McIvor, "Melbourne University Action on Langer Case," June 1970, Albert Langer collection. McIvor commented: "It is clear that a decision was reached at some level not to admit Langer under any circumstances, but they probably underestimated student reaction, especially after the outcome at Monash. They are now trying to stall as much as possible in the hope we'll lose steam, while our actions are trying to keep the issue at confrontation level". See also *National U*, 6:7, 22 June 1970, p 3.

from Monash; or inquired as to why he was moving to their State; or it was explained that his application had been late or that there were less students from interstate being accepted. Despite prodigious letter writing by Langer, he and his partner Kerry were ignored, snubbed and eventually rejected by university administrations and departments around Australia.<sup>109</sup>

The Monash Labor Club continued its activities regardless. Late in June 1970, Monash students led by the Labor Club began a four-day occupation of the campus Careers and Administration office as a protest at the use of the university "to train people in the service of capitalism and the university's links with imperialism". They rejected a proposal by the vice-chancellor to establish an "academic merchant bank," an office of various industries and Government departments on campus, and demanded the reinstatement of Langer. Defying threats of disciplinary and legal action, the students used the office as a centre for organising an anti-imperialist demonstration, with twenty members of staff and approximately 200 students working in support of their aims outside.<sup>110</sup> Students produced a news sheet entitled *Occupation News*. When fifty to one hundred engineering students arrived with the aim of physically removing the occupiers, they were surprised when they were welcomed inside to debate the issues at stake. The effect of this tactic was to disarm and effectively demobilise the engineering students.<sup>111</sup>

In December 1970, proposals by Monash University's vice-chancellor to charge thirty-two students for participating in occupations in October created a new precedent and gave students a victory: a major student campaign that took place over the long vacation, resulting in hearings being discontinued

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<sup>109</sup> See expanding file in Albert Langer collection, Noel Butlin Archive.

<sup>110</sup> The Occupiers, "To Whom it May Concern," leaflet produced during the occupation (on Monash University notepaper), Albert Langer collection. See also Sue, "Occupational Therapy," *Lot's Wife*, 9 July 1970, p 4.

<sup>111</sup> T. Brooks, in a leaflet addressed to Engineering students defending the occupation noted that in discussions held by small groups outside the occupation, conservative student leaders "kept violently insisting that people should not listen to the arguments" (T. Brooks for Anti-Imperialist Centre (Late C & A), second side of leaflet written by D. Schoenberg (Civil Engineering III), "Engineers and Occupation"). The Vice Chancellor later wrote ruefully of this incident: "...in the light of subsequent events how much easier would life have been if the situation had been restored by students and not by the hated 'administration'" (L. Matheson, *Still Learning*, (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1980), pp 137/138).

in January.<sup>112</sup> In February 1971, members of the Monash and La Trobe Labor clubs noted that the increase in student activists "doing their own thing," while desirable, had resulted in a lack of a united focus. They decided to attempt to unify student protest around a campaign against university exclusions of student leaders.<sup>113</sup> In April, MAS voted to prevent University Council from meeting on campus until three excluded students (Hyde, Hadden and Kerry Langer) had been reinstated. They blockaded the administration building and prevented several council members from entering,<sup>114</sup> while at Melbourne University the same month a large meeting of students called on all student representatives on the Professorial Board and University Council Committees to resign.<sup>115</sup> Not all initiatives were successful: a planned moratorium at Monash, for example, did not occur when a MAS meeting collapsed because of lack of a quorum.<sup>116</sup>

At May Day in Melbourne, students listening to speeches noticed the chief of the Victorian Police Special Branch in plainclothes amongst the audience. Hostile chants were taken up and the officer was jostled by a large crowd to an area where uniformed police officers were standing. The uniformed police then attacked the crowd with batons, four riding on horseback. Injuries to protesters and police resulted from the incident. On the speaking platform later, Albert Langer, who had been waiting to speak throughout the incident, voiced his approval of the earlier action against the officer. One month later, Langer was charged with inciting the incident, and later sentenced to eighteen months jail.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> One student who had escaped being charged suggested that Matheson "obviously took fright at the possibility of the university community returning in first term before the hearings were completed. Both staff and students would then have been able to clearly express their opinion on the charges" (quoted in "Vacation Discipline" in Hyde *et al*, *op cit*, pp 153-158).

<sup>113</sup> See Monash Labor Club newsletter reproduced in full in Hyde *et al*, *ibid*, pp 160-162. See also Perry, *op cit*, p 97.

<sup>114</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 98.

<sup>115</sup> D. Flowers and J. McIlroy, "Melbourne University Lock-in," *Direct Action*, June 1971, p 4. See also "Freeing Melbourne from its Administration," *National U*, 3 May 1971, p 3.

<sup>116</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 99.

<sup>117</sup> "May Day 'Riot' Charge," *National U*, 28 June 1971, p 3. *U* stated: "Even if you disagree with Langer's politics he must be supported. These 'civil' charges are a political frame-up, pure and simple, and they represent one of the boldest steps yet taken by the state to crush political dissent in Australia". See also May Day Trial Transcripts, Albert Langer collection, Box 15. Langer was sentenced in October (York, "Police, Students...", *op cit*, p 76).

Also in May, direct action at Monash resulted in an important victory for the students. MAS had been in hostile negotiation with the administration over a new discipline statute, now in its seventeenth draft, and the conditions under which three expelled students might be readmitted. Thumbing their nose at the administration, MAS had appointed the three as their own "disciplinary committee" and provided them with funding. The failure of the vice-chancellor to quickly come to a decision in this matter provoked the threat of an occupation. The vice-chancellor responded by issuing a statement threatening to take the unprecedented action of calling police onto the campus. For the students, simply defying this threat would have been foolhardy. A poll taken shortly after the October occupations had revealed considerable support amongst staff and students for penalties, reflecting the polarisation over the issue of student protest in society more generally. Instead, the Labor Club convinced MAS to attempt to force the Administration's hand by urging the three to agree to the proposed undertakings in exchange for suspended sentences. At the same time, the club campaigned on and outside the campus against the threatened use of police. On May 4, as Council met to make its decision, a very large meeting of students marched to the administration building and surrounded it, MAS having voted for a "peaceful" blockade. Police were stationed nearby, waiting for any confrontation. After many hours it was announced that the expulsions had been suspended. The police were sent away and the expelled students carried back to the Student Union "in a manner normally reserved for VFL premiership winners".<sup>118</sup>

Students at other universities also faced disciplinary action over on-campus actions in 1970 and 1971. In March 1970, 600 Sydney University students broke open the doors of the administration building and briefly occupied its offices. They were protesting against the refusal of the university to allow a young woman, Victoria Lee, to enrol in a degree for which she had already completed subjects at Macquarie University. Lee became a symbol of objections to limitations on student numbers.<sup>119</sup> The following day, a second occupation took place, lasting twenty-three hours. The occupation

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<sup>118</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 101.

<sup>119</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle January-April 1970," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 16:2, August 1970, pp 238/239.



resulted in a media outcry about "violence"<sup>120</sup> and injunctions were placed immediately on three student leaders. Two of these students were later expelled,<sup>121</sup> and other students faced "suspended expulsions" and other charges.<sup>122</sup> Yet within a fortnight of the occupation the Senate was urging the Professorial Board to consider an alternative to matriculation as the only admission criterion.<sup>123</sup>

At the University of Queensland, students in 1970 were involved in campaigning for the use of the Great Court as a People's Park, seen as heralding the arrival of the counter-culture in Brisbane.<sup>124</sup> On September 2 around forty University of Queensland students occupied the campus CMF building, transforming it into an "anti-imperialist centre".<sup>125</sup> Two days later, what was described as a near-riot occurred when police, including Special Branch police, were called to protect a South Vietnamese consular official provocatively invited to speak at the University of Queensland.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Patrick Morgan, writing in *Current Affairs Bulletin* 46:8, 7 September 1970, noted Allen's comments quoted in *The Age* on March 26 that the occupation "only discredited a legitimate grievance...The occupiers are using the Lee case for their own ends to press quite separate issues". See also *Sydney Telegraph*, 25 March 1970.

<sup>121</sup> Greenland's notice, hand-delivered on May 14, read in part: "On the 24th March, 1970, you urged or encouraged others to disobey an instruction of the Registrar to leave the Administration building by saying 'I am moving a motion that the Registrar and his flunkies leave the building immediately', and also 'The motion is carried'" (*Old Mole*, 1 June 1970, p 1). In "Dirty Films at Uni: Changes Likely," *Sun*, 10 April 1970, a journalist for that newspaper claimed that "It is believed newspaper photos of the siege have helped in identifying some of the suspended students".

<sup>122</sup> *Old Mole, ibid*, alleged that: "Standing behind the Vice Chancellor and his decision to expel is the reactionary State Government. As the *Bulletin* reported, the Vice-Chancellor arranged what was hoped-to-be a secret meeting with his friends the Premier and his senior ministers during the occupation in order to secure their agreement that neither they nor their supporters would say anything or intervene in any way. The securing of such agreement from such men...must have entailed assurances that the university authorities would deal with the direct actionists with 'a firm hand'".

<sup>123</sup> York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, p 175. For details of divisions between ALP and radical students surrounding the sit-in, see Chapter Seven.

<sup>124</sup> See leaflets, Dan O'Neill collection, folder "UQ, '69-'70"; Gray and Stanwell, *op cit*, p 23.

<sup>125</sup> University of Queensland student Jim Prentice was charged for trespass, wilful damage to six Army booklets and wilfully resisting a police officer engaged in charge of his duties (*Telegraph*, 8 September 1970).

<sup>126</sup> "Fighting Flares on Campus," *The Australian*, 5 September 1970. Constable John O'Gorman received hospital treatment for suspected broken ribs and an abdominal injury (*Courier Mail*, 5 September 1970).

Two students were suspended by the University Disciplinary Committee as a result;<sup>127</sup> their suspensions provoked further dispute in 1971.<sup>128</sup> The incident was raised in the State and federal parliaments.<sup>129</sup> Premier Bjelke Petersen warned that a small group of anarchists owing allegiance to other ideologies and countries were threatening democratic institutions by "trying to force their views on freedom-loving men, women and children".<sup>130</sup>

By the middle of 1971, attacks on student radicals were in full swing. In May University of Queensland activist, Mitch Thompson, was deemed "detrimental to the welfare of the University" and forbidden to enter or remain on the university site.<sup>131</sup> The same month, Macquarie students were threatened with prosecution under the Summary Offences Act,<sup>132</sup> and at Sydney University, the Senate resolved not to re-admit Hall Greenland

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<sup>127</sup> *Tribune*, 20 January 1971, p 12. See leaflets and correspondence in Dan O'Neill collection, box 14, folder "U of Q Campus Action 1969-70," especially "Black Friday" leaflet which notes that a press statement by students released about the incident was "naturally never printed or read out by the media".

<sup>128</sup> In January 1971 suspended student Dick Shearman was threatened with legal action when he obtained work as a Builders Labourer at the University of Queensland (*Tribune*, 20 January 1971, p 12).

<sup>129</sup> *The Australian*, 10 September 1970; *The Australian*, 15 September 1970. The incident was raised in Federal Parliament on September 4. In the State Parliament, Liberal MP Porter called for university authorities to separate "the sheep from the goats," to stop avoiding confrontation with "a handful of political parasites" exploiting "causes for which other people felt deep concern...This situation had been brought about because too many people had hypnotised themselves with the notion that there was an inalienable right to dissent and that in the sacred name of dissent that they could break any law..." (*Telegraph*, 9 September 1970). See also "'Crisis Point' reached at Queensland University," *Courier Mail*, 10 September 1970; *The Australian*, 15 September 1970.

<sup>130</sup> "University stand by premier," *Telegraph*, 8 September 1970. The State Minister for Police, Mr Hodges, said that industry and commerce, who sponsored many students, were becoming concerned with the action of some students (*Australian*, 7 September 1970). See also "Hodges' threat to 'starch up' university senate," *Courier Mail*, 5 September 1970; "Minister attacks varsity chiefs after riot," *Australian*, 7 September 1970. The Police Union announced that in future Queensland police would "combat violence with violence" at student demonstrations (*Sunday Truth*, 6 September 1970, p 3). The President of the Police Union described demonstrators as "parasites posing as intellectuals".

<sup>131</sup> *National U*, 3 May 1971, p 12. Thompson was charged under Section 23A of Statute No 43. This clause is still part of the University of Queensland disciplinary statutes and was used against International Socialist member Ian Rintoul in 1991, who remains banned from the campus on grounds he is "detrimental to the University" following his involvement in occupations in defence of the on-campus radio station 4ZZZ (correspondence, Ian Rintoul private collection).

<sup>132</sup> *Tribune*, 19 May 1971; 26 May 1971.

on the grounds that he refused to abide by University By-laws, though Greenland had recently undertaken to do so.<sup>133</sup> In Victoria there were reports that the Victorian Cabinet planned to take State-funded scholarships away from students who had been disciplined by their universities.<sup>134</sup>

Disciplinary action against individual students was accompanied by a myriad of attacks on student publications under censorship laws, led by the conservative government of New South Wales. Enthusiastic use of question time by a group of Government backbenchers ensured that all three university papers in Sydney faced threats of prosecution over obscenity in early 1970.<sup>135</sup> In April 1970, Sydney University students faced police prosecution for organising an exhibition of pornographic slides in protest against censorship,<sup>136</sup> and prominent Trotskyist Denis Freney was summoned regarding information about drugs published in the Macquarie University student paper *Arena*.<sup>137</sup> The most spectacular case occurred when the three editors of the University of New South Wales student newspaper *Tharunka* were charged with publishing obscenities, in particular a poem entitled "Cunt is a Christian Word". Editor Wendy Bacon, "to send up the fact that the poem was about the sexual nature of repression,"<sup>138</sup> appeared outside the court wearing a nun's habit and a sign which said "I have been fucked by God's steel prick". As a consequence, she spent ten days in jail and was also fined for exhibiting an obscene publication.<sup>139</sup> Her gaol experiences were later crucial in the formation of

<sup>133</sup> *Tribune*, 19 May 1971; 26 May 1971. *Tribune*, 19 May 1971, p 10, and 26 May 1971, p 10. See also *Sydney University News*, 3/7, 16 June 1971 for the university view of the affair.

<sup>134</sup> R.J. Cahill, "Universities: Behind the Liberal Facade," *Tribune*, 26 May 1971, p 10.

<sup>135</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle, January-April, 1970," *op cit*, pp 238-239; see also "Australian Political Chronicle May-August 1970," *op cit*, p 401.

<sup>136</sup> "Dirty Films at Uni: Changes Likely," *Sun*, 10 April 1970. According to the *Sun*, 2,500 people attended the exhibition "including a large proportion of young girls".

<sup>137</sup> *Tribune*, 15 April 1970, p 12.

<sup>138</sup> Bacon, in A. Smart, "I was fucked by god's steel...", interview with Wendy Bacon, *Vertigo*, 30 March 1993, p 30.

<sup>139</sup> *Tribune*, 10 February 1971, p 1. In sentencing her, the Judge said Bacon had "gone beyond the limits beyond which you cannot go without sentence. You have vilified an order of the Christian faith, outraged the feelings of others and affronted the sense of decency of the ordinary average citizen". In her defence, Catholic priest Michael O'Halloran had argued that the sign was "a novel, if direct way of drawing attention to the Catholic conception of the nun as the 'bride of Christ' which had 'sexual connotations'" (*Tribune*, 17 February 1971, p 3).

the feminist group Women Behind Bars, campaigning on behalf of women prisoners.

Similar attacks were occurring around the country. In May 1970, Trotskyist Ernest Mandel was notable for his absence at the Sydney Socialist Scholars Conference. The event attracted some hundreds of participants, but the federal Government banned Mandel from coming to Australia to attend as a speaker.<sup>140</sup> In June, 300 Sydney University students voted unanimously to defend the staff of *Honi Soit* in any court action that might ensue after the student newspaper published a confidential Public Service file on Hall Greenland. The file showed Greenland had been refused employment on the basis of advice from ASIO in 1965.<sup>141</sup> The same month, the South Australian Cabinet supported prosecution of both university newspapers there.<sup>142</sup> In September, Brisbane SDA students Brian Laver and Mitch Thompson, proprietors of the radical Red and Black bookshop in Elizabeth Street, were fined for selling obscene prints.<sup>143</sup> Then in March the following year the ANU Student Association endorsed a policy of making contraceptives freely available at the university.<sup>144</sup> An advertisement for condoms in the ANU student paper *Woroni* provoked outrage from the Department of Health and led to police investigations.<sup>145</sup> In April, *Mejane*, itself charged with obscenity, reported that the Third World Bookshop stocked fifteen publications facing similar charges, including *Tharunka*.<sup>146</sup> In July *Honi Soit* editor Steve Cookson was charged with contempt when the paper referred to a student witness in the trial of Lyn Regan as a "student

<sup>140</sup> *Tribune*, 20 May 1970, p 12.

<sup>141</sup> *National U*, 6:7, 22 June 1970, p 4. Questions had been asked about the matter in the Federal Senate in 1967. Senator Henty, for Holt, had refused to answer on the basis that it was not the practice to disclose ASIO activities.

<sup>142</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle September-December 1971," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 18:1, April 1972, p 118.

<sup>143</sup> *Brisbane Telegraph*, 15 September 1970.

<sup>144</sup> *National U*, 9 June 1972, p 2.

<sup>145</sup> *National U*, 16 March 1972, p 1. The advertisement, reprinted on page 16 of this issue, was a photograph of a jar of condoms next to some bottles of milk, with the caption: "If milk was not advertised or freely available - would you drink it? There is a lot to suggest people don't use contraceptives when they should..."

<sup>146</sup> "Obscene with Literary Merit," *Mejane*, 7, April 1972, p 5.

piglet". This reference was judged as calculated to deter the witness from giving evidence.<sup>147</sup> Attacks on student publications provoked the active opposition of students and others. In particular, a Campaign for Action Against Censorship was formed in New South Wales.<sup>148</sup> In February 1970, for example, students and others demonstrated outside Sydney film theatres, with placards saying "Censorship is anti-art".<sup>149</sup>

A minority of radical academic and general university staff were also challenging traditional conceptions of their role in university life. Their involvement in the anti-war and radical student movements provoked retaliation by university administrations. At Flinders University, for example, Brian Medlin and three other lecturers "converted" to revolutionary socialism in 1970.<sup>150</sup> The following year, they introduced new topics to their courses, including Marxism-Leninism I and II and Applied Philosophy: Vietnam, Imperialism and the Nature of Man.<sup>151</sup> In April, Medlin informed the University's vice-chancellor that he would not be carrying out any academic duties between May 4 and May 8 as he would be helping organise the Moratorium.<sup>152</sup> His announcement provoked a wave of angry letters in *The Advertiser* and the subject of academic staff not working on May 8 was raised in the House of Assembly.<sup>153</sup>

The May Moratorium also evinced support from the UNSW Staff Association and 150 academics at Macquarie University.<sup>154</sup> Twenty-eight

<sup>147</sup> *National U*, 10 July 1972, p 1.

<sup>148</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle January-April 1970," *op cit*, p 241 ; Ann Curthoys private collection.

<sup>149</sup> The demonstrations were organised by the Campaign for Action Against Censorship. The group was organised by Ann Curthoys and John Docker, whose first meeting on February 12 was attended by the editor of the UNSW student paper *Tharunka* (Wendy Bacon) and Frank Moorhouse. CAAC was inspired by acts like the banning of the film *Easy Rider* the previous December (from leaflets and clippings in "Censorship" folder, New Left box, Ann Curthoys personal collection).

<sup>150</sup> D. Hilliard, *Flinders University. The First 25 Years 1966-1991*, (Adelaide: Flinders University of South Australia, 1991), p 57.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Empire Times*, 24 April 1970.

<sup>153</sup> *Advertiser*, 27/28/29/30 April, 1/2 May 1970; *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 28 April (from Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement...*, *op cit*, p 101).

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, p 99.

full-time members of staff at the University of Adelaide signed a letter indicating that they would strike on Moratorium Day.<sup>155</sup> In September 1970, University of Queensland English lecturer, Dan O'Neill, was reprimanded by the university administration. In State Parliament it had been claimed that he had exhorted students to use force if necessary, and had advocated continuous propaganda including disruption of individual lectures so that students could put forward issues facing the university.<sup>156</sup> In October 1971 amendments to the Flinders University Act were proposed to allow the university to dismiss any academic staff member who had been convicted of a crime or had advocated "the unlawful overthrow of the government" in the presence of students "of any university or educational institution".<sup>157</sup> The proposals were later withdrawn.<sup>158</sup>

More serious attacks on radicals were yet to come. Their primary focus was La Trobe University, whose reputation for radicalism soon came to rival that of Monash. In early September 1970, La Trobe students, led by Maoist activists, attempted to march along Waterdale Road to Ivanhoe to distribute literature advertising the second Moratorium. Instead, they were violently dispersed by police and chased back to campus, where some students threw stones at police cars. A second march organised in response led to an "even more brutal" unprovoked police attack, with many students being "simply beaten up".<sup>159</sup> The Waterdale demonstration became a *cause célèbre* for students throughout Australia, leading to unsuccessful calls in the Victorian Parliament for an inquiry, and causing a number of participants to take up more radical positions than previously.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, p 100.

<sup>156</sup> *Brisbane Telegraph*, 15 September 1970.

<sup>157</sup> Hilliard, *op cit*, p 57; "Australian Political Chronicle September-December 1971," *op cit*, pp 117-118.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>159</sup> One protester described the scene as students arrived back on campus: "...Armed policemen leapt out of cars and chased students, bashing any they could catch; some policemen unable to catch the students, drew their guns and threatened to shoot. At least one student was arrested at gunpoint...for the heinous crime of 'offensive behaviour'" (quoted in B. York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, p 198).

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, pp 199/200. A third march of 800 held just after the September 18 moratorium was unimpeded. Some saw this as a victory, but it was also seen as evidence for the theory that police violence in the preceding weeks had been designed to discourage participation in the moratorium.

In July the following year, police were called onto La Trobe campus when students blockaded a meeting of the University Council, following Council's continued refusal to meet demands put forward by students since April for the resignation of Chancellor Archibald Glenn and Council member Callinan<sup>161</sup> and an end to the University's exclusions policy. The students chained all exits to the council room then blockaded them with chairs and tables, leading to the intervention of 200 police in twenty-six police cars and four riot wagons.<sup>162</sup> As a result of the incident, disciplinary and police charges were laid against perceived leaders. Eight students were excluded for periods of up to three years. The Council's refusal to agree to open hearings and other principles of "natural justice" in relation to these students caused important moderate student leaders to become supportive of militant action in defence of the excluded students.<sup>163</sup> In August 1971, La Trobe University students formed a new organisation, the Committee Against Repression, to organise in the students' defence.<sup>164</sup>

In September, La Trobe students were angered when the Academic Board refused to accept a report it had itself commissioned. The report had recommended rescission of the exclusion clause as well as the acceptance of student conditions sought in relation to an appeal by the eight charged. On September 30, a student occupation in response to the Board's actions resulted in police being called and the arrest of SRC President Brian Pola.<sup>165</sup> It was the first occasion in Australian history where police had entered a university campus in order to disperse a student sit-in.<sup>166</sup> However, despite

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<sup>161</sup> Sir Archibald Glenn was the managing director of ICI (ANZ) which had a \$800,000 Defence Department Contract, as well as a director of ICI in London, condemned for involvement in South Africa's ammunition and explosives industry (York, "Sources of Student Dissent: La Trobe University 1967-1972," *Vestis*, 7:1, 1984, p 23).

<sup>162</sup> B. Pola, *Perspectives on the Australian Radical Left Student Movement 1966-1975*, (Phd, School of Education, La Trobe, 1988), p 87.

<sup>163</sup> York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, pp 256-263.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid*, p 270.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid*, p 272. During the occupation students found controversial documents in the Registrar's files, which, for example, revealed that the La Trobe authorities had been in contact with counterparts in Japan and the United States and that preparations had been made for the use of gas and other weapons against student protesters. The documents were published in *Rabelais*, provoking the Vice-Chancellor to issue a bulletin in reply (Pola, *op cit*, p 90).

a further meeting and occupation, York argues that the "enormous pressure" from the media against student militancy helped keep sympathetic students from actually joining in.<sup>167</sup> In October, the announcement that charges would be heard against students involved in occupations on September 30 and October 1 led to a further occupation of university offices. A farcical game followed, "with students leaping from the ground-floor windows whenever police approached, and re-occupying whenever they retreated".<sup>168</sup> As a consequence, heavy-gauge wire gratings were fitted on ground-floor windows, but the students were not deterred. A large group of students removed the gratings in broad daylight after voting to do so at a student meeting. In a characteristic manoeuvre, the exclusions clause was rescinded later that month as students sat for exams; but charges, including for five expulsions, were laid against twenty-three students involved in the recent occupations.<sup>169</sup>

One consequence of the rise of left-wing protest was increased mobilisation of the Far Right.<sup>170</sup> For example, in Queensland in 1970, Right to Life was formed in response to campaigns for the reform of abortion laws, later spreading to other States.<sup>171</sup> In early 1971, there were attacks on left-wing bookshops by a small fascist group.<sup>172</sup> Melbourne became the scene of clashes between fascists and radical protesters, the protesters supported by Jewish groups.<sup>173</sup> In November 1972, a known fascist was acquitted for the April bombing of the Brisbane Communist Party headquarters.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> York, *ibid*, p 273.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid*, p 276.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, p 281.

<sup>170</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, p 313.

<sup>171</sup> Guyatt and George, *op cit*.

<sup>172</sup> "New Nazi Violence calls for Action," *Tribune*, 24 March 1971, p 3, reports the smashing of windows in the Liberation bookshop in Manly on the commemoration of the South African Sharpeville massacre.

<sup>173</sup> "Police Trick Demonstrators. Shots Fired as Crowd Attack Nazi Offices," *Australian*, 1 February 1971; "Angry Crowd Besieges Nazis," "They were after 'Nazi' Blood. Police Step in to Stop Crowd," *The Age*, 1 February 1971; "Mob Goes on Rampage at Nazi House," *The Age*, 12 June 1972. In Brisbane fascist harassment of left activities in 1972 was ended as a result of a united campaign resulting from an approach by the Jewish organisation Mossad to radical activist Brian Laver (Laver, personal interview).

<sup>174</sup> Gray and Stanwell, *op cit*, pp 30/32.



The Right on campus was also becoming more organised. For several years, conservatives had encouraged so-called moderate students on campus to attend student general meetings to counter the radicals and to physically prevent student occupations. By 1972 this strategy had been largely a failure. Led by students involved in the National Civic Council, conservative forces on campus now turned to the courts. Following the expulsion of President Brian Pola in September, the La Trobe SRC had voted to continue to recognise him as President. La Trobe students were in a confident mood following the resignation of Glenn in December.<sup>175</sup> In response, two members of the SRC and of the anti-communist National Civic Council sought injunctions in the Supreme Court of Victoria, to restrain the SRC while Pola was present at its meetings and to challenge his right to remain President.<sup>176</sup> In February, the University Council sided with the National Civic Council, obtaining a Supreme Court injunction to freeze SRC funds. The following month, they joined the two SRC members as co-plaintiff and in response to a large three-day occupation in response to the freezing of funds, obtained injunctions prohibiting radical student leaders Pola, York and Robinson from entering the campus.<sup>177</sup>

The La Trobe actions were followed in March and April by legal challenges on other campuses in relation to the use of student funding for so-called non-student issues. Funding had been an issue since the May Moratorium in 1970. At that time, Monash Association of Students' rules restricted the use of MAS funds to activities related to "the purposes of the university". Radicals evaded this rule by establishing a Moratorium bail fund (to support arrested students) through a motion passed at a student general meeting. The motion described the fund (not inaccurately) as a means for students to continue their studies by means of emergency loans.<sup>178</sup> In addition to challenging this kind of use of student funds in the courts, conservative students and their supporters campaigned to encourage student bodies to vote to secede from the AUS, aware of the important national role it played

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<sup>175</sup> York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, pp 282/283.

<sup>176</sup> M. Stuart, "Student Unions Attacked," *Direct Action*, 1 May 1972, p 10.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 54.

in student radical politics.<sup>179</sup>

The obtaining of injunctions against student radicals at La Trobe University represented the most forceful of these challenges to student activism, and provoked a defiant response. Pola, York and Robinson defied the injunctions by entering the campus. As a consequence, Robinson was jailed without bail, trial, or right of appeal. In April 1972 his jailing provoked an immediate and angry unofficial general meeting of 1,000 students "with Pola brazenly in the chair".<sup>180</sup> Though the mood was "extremely militant and more determined than it had ever been," the vote for an occupation achieved only a slim majority, reflecting an increasing sense of desperation and polarisation about the limits of direct action.<sup>181</sup> The occupation ended after twenty-four hours, when occupiers voted to leave as an indication of their willingness to negotiate with the Council, who nonetheless remained intransigent.<sup>182</sup> On May 1, 1972, Brian Pola was arrested at his parent's farm, 190 miles from Melbourne, and jailed.<sup>183</sup>

La Trobe radicals now responded to these attacks by attempting to shift the focus away from confrontation. To re-establish their legitimacy they held a campus referendum on student discipline. The referendum registered a clear mandate for the Left, but the movement could not recover. By June the activists were on the defensive, demoralised and confused.<sup>184</sup> A march to the administration building resulted the following day in an address to students by the acting vice-chancellor. Yet even as he expressed regret about the jailings, saying that two councillors were to speak with those jailed

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<sup>179</sup> See for example *National U*, 10 April 1972, p 6 (regarding defeat of Wollongong secession motion). This was not the first time that the AUS faced secession motions. In June the previous year, La Trobe SRC had passed a motion to leave AUS subject to the approval of a student general meeting after the possibility of was raised that *National U* might be discontinued following large financial losses at the Aquarius festival (*National U*, 28 June 1971, p 4). In December the UQ Union Council had voted to secede from AUS. AUS supporters had left in an attempt to invalidate the motion but expelled ALP right-winger Col Bennett did not rule on a motion about the constitutionality of the meeting (*National U*, 10 April 1972).

<sup>180</sup> York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, p 317.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p 318.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p 324. See Pola, *op cit*, about his experience in jail.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p 326.

about a compromise, police prepared to capture York that same afternoon. His arrest briefly restored the militant mood on campus; but this mood did not last.<sup>185</sup> A mass strike held in protest at the jailing was a dismal failure. York writes:

Students had grown tired of both the issue and the never-ending preceding occupations. The ever important atmosphere/mood/spontaneity was just not there.<sup>186</sup>

Despite the crisis of student confidence at La Trobe, student protest still bubbled around the country and campus reforms continued to be won. One issue around which students campaigned was education reform. From 1970, students campaigned against quotas, which were seen as discriminating against those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and against fee increases.<sup>187</sup> By 1970, the federal Government, under pressure not only from University administrations but also from the business community, finally bent in the face of long-standing criticism about the "education crisis," and substantially increased funding.<sup>188</sup> Student unrest, though not mainly focused on student conditions, was seen, at least in part, as a consequence of the education crisis. But in October 1971, universities also announced substantial fee increases for 1972,<sup>189</sup> sparking AUS-sponsored student

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, p 327.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, p 328.

<sup>187</sup> "A fabulous crisis in education for the seventies," *Tribune*, 4 February 1970; "Queensland Students want Uni fees abolished," *Courier Mail*, 30 January 1970, reported that University of Queensland SRC members hoped to influence AUS to act on this issue. See also T. Roper, *The Myth of Equality*, Australian Union of Students, 1972.

<sup>188</sup> Drury, member for Ryan, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 24 September 1970, p 1642.

<sup>189</sup> "Fees to go up Everywhere," *National U*, 4 October 1971, which includes details of Western Australian student action against fee increases. One product of that campaign was education activist John Dawkins, described as a: "...perennial student, and now university Senate member, [who] runs a Faculty grouping unique to Western Australia to examine educational problems. His success in this and other moves, to create an educationally aware student population, has contributed to a dynamic education action team, which is encountered rarely on other university campuses" (*National U*, 27 March 1972, p 13). In 1987, as Federal Education Minister, Dawkins would be responsible for the introduction of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme, the first of a series of incursions into government-funded tertiary education.

opposition around the country.<sup>190</sup>

Compared with other campaigns at the time, this was a fairly "respectable" campaign.<sup>191</sup> Even Liberal students on campus supported the abolition of fees.<sup>192</sup> Students stood election candidates against both Liberal and Labor candidates.<sup>193</sup> In particular, they hoped to work with university vice-chancellors, who had been staunch critics of the lack of government financial support for tertiary education,<sup>194</sup> but who, as outlined above, were prepared to work with government ministers against student radicals. However, for more radical student activists, such an alliance was unthinkable. At Monash University, for example, the 1971 campaign against the class bias in education at all levels was seen by student radicals as a focus for joint student/community activism.<sup>195</sup> At a La Trobe general meeting, free education was raised as an extension of the concept of an "anti-exclusion" campaign.<sup>196</sup> Individual campuses also campaigned over

<sup>190</sup> K. Newcombe, "Fee rise action," *National U*, 18 October 1971. Newcombe warned: "If we don't stop fees or fee rises now, we will be subjected to them for ever after (except for a change of Government)". In April 1972 students at UNE marched into the Administration Building with the intention of breaking into a Council Meeting in opposition to fee increases (C. Robertson, *Long Youth Long Pleasure. Adventures Behind the Scenes at the University of New England 1956-80*, (Cherry Robertson/Lightning Press: Armidale, 1982), pp 217/218).

<sup>191</sup> AUS first action was "quiet and mundane": the circulation of 54 different petitions opposing the increases outside exam centres around the country (*ibid*).

<sup>192</sup> The Australian Universities Liberal Federation Conference in 1972 moved dissatisfaction with the Federal Government and support for the abolition of tertiary fees (*National U*, 10 July 1972).

<sup>193</sup> *National U*, 27 March 1972, p 7.

<sup>194</sup> K. Newcombe, (AUS Education V-P), "Student Financing - the Future" *National U*, 28 June 1971.; "Fee Rise Action," *ibid*. In March 1970 University of Queensland Vice-Chancellor Zelman Cowen spoke out against conditions on campus, saying that the University faced gross overcrowding, unsatisfactory function and obsolescence (*Courier Mail*, 25 March 1970). This attitude no doubt influenced the Student Union President's hopes that year of generating a "massive campaign of students, university administrators and the AVCC" ("Queensland Students want Uni fees abolished," *Courier Mail*, 30 January 1970).

<sup>195</sup> Hyde *et al*, *op cit*, pp 213-217. See also Perry, *op cit*, p 105, who reported that the campaign was opened in third term with an MAS meeting supporting the use of direct action and proposing "united action by students, staff and general staff in all universities, teachers and secondary school student organisations, parents organisations and trade unions". The onset of exams and divisions amongst the left on campus appear to have contributed to the cancellation of an occupation regarding quotas for the following year due to lack of a quorum at an MAS meeting.

<sup>196</sup> York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, p 267. The September meeting rejected the exclusion of working class, Aboriginal people, the handicapped, migrants, wards of the state and other marginalised groups under the quota system. It moved that the 1971 fee increase be redirected

particular funding-related issues, such as the campaign for cheap student housing at ANU,<sup>197</sup> and adequate library facilities at Bendigo Institute of Technology.<sup>198</sup>

Though student activism was sustained on a variety of issues, in 1972 the level of activism had also declined at both Melbourne and Monash universities, "some of it being redirected into new single-issue political movements".<sup>199</sup> The picture was similar around the country.<sup>200</sup> The politics associated with the movements reflected the conviction amongst a significant proportion of activists, both in Australia and overseas, that the working class alone would not be able to fundamentally challenge the system as the radicals suggested. Not all revolutionary students were enthusiastic about the rise of the movements. Maoist students viewed the movements ambivalently and, in the case of the women's and gay movements, suspiciously (see Chapter Nine). For their part, the participants in the movements tended to share the socialist politics and support for militant protest of radical students; but to varying degrees they also rejected and challenged those politics in significant ways. The most striking example of this was the women's movement: while hoping to "marry" Marxism and Feminism, it also tended to view sex, not class, as the oppression on which all others were modelled and based.<sup>201</sup> By 1972 there were sharp clashes between sections of the revolutionary Left and members of the Black Power movement, whose advocacy of autonomy or separatism for the Aboriginal

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to the SRC as a trust fund for scholarships for needy applicants and "that the portrait of Glenn in the Library be sold and the money used for the same purpose".

<sup>197</sup> ANU students campaigned for the use of "Reid House," a deserted Commonwealth hostel due for demolition, supported by building worker black bans (*National U*, 10 April 1972).

<sup>198</sup> At BIT students chanted "More books" and "We want a library" as part of an AUS effort to bring public attention to plight of libraries in CAEs. There were also sit-ins in the Queensland Institute of Technology library (*National U*, 8 June 1972).

<sup>199</sup> P. Mendes, *The New Left, the Jews and the Vietnam War 1965-72*, (Melbourne: Lazare Press, 1993), p 30.

<sup>200</sup> Hilliard, for example, says student unrest had "almost vanished" from Flinders and the University of Adelaide in 1971 (*op cit*, p 56). A leaflet produced by the Brisbane Self-Management Group in December 1972 refers to the "vacuum left by the disappearing movement" (Self-Management Group, "Solidarity with Thugs and Fascists," December 1972, Fryer library).

<sup>201</sup> Curthoys, *op cit*, p 433. See also Burgmann, *op cit*, pp 82-127; Biff McDougall, "Women and the Left," *Mejane*, 8, August 1972, p 4.

movement was criticised as the "politics of hatred".<sup>202</sup>

Similarly, the rise of community activism was associated with a belief in the importance of local rather than workplace identification.<sup>203</sup> In 1971 and 1972, environmental activism became a significant force; and opposition to pollution, the destruction of bushland and uranium mining became the focus for "green bans," resident action groups and new single issue campaigns.<sup>204</sup> Though these groups received major active support from trade unionists (see also Chapter Eleven), an important part of their support base was in middle class suburbs and the so-called new middle class. Calls for the abandonment of development projects on whom trade unionists relied for employment also demonstrated that some environmental demands could become the basis for conflict with some sections of the trade union movement.<sup>205</sup> Other elements of the movement had simply been channelled into new but non-activist social spaces and institutions. Many students were experimenting with drugs, free love and "dropping out"; trying to change society by creating a "counter-culture" whose "political" consequences were the subject of debate.<sup>206</sup> Others became involved with the establishment of new services such as legal centres for women and Aboriginal people,<sup>207</sup> a trend which would increase following the election of the Whitlam Government in December 1972.<sup>208</sup>

The nature of the decline (though not extinction) of student radicalism by the end of 1972 can be attributed in part to the nature of student protest itself. Student protest, as expressed in activist circles, "rises like a stick, but falls like a stone". It can arise very quickly, but fall away with even greater

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<sup>202</sup> Self-Management Group, "Solidarity with Thugs and Fascists," December 1972, Fryer Library; interviews with Brian Laver and Mitch Thompson. See also Burgmann, *op cit*, p 35.

<sup>203</sup> See for example, "Glebe Eviction Fight," 1971, advertising July 12 meeting to organise a tenant's union, courtesy Ann Curthoys, private collection.

<sup>204</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle September-December 1971," *op cit*, pp 103-107.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*; Burgmann, "The Labor Movement and the Environment," *op cit*, pp 216-251.

<sup>206</sup> For example, see letters from Peter Price to Warren Osmond about his adventures in the "scene" overseas, Warren Osmond collection, Sydney University; Gray and Stanwell, *op cit*, p 24.

<sup>207</sup> Burgmann, "Community Survival Projects," *op cit*, pp 38/39.

<sup>208</sup> Burgmann, "The Women's Movement and the State," *op cit*, pp 115-119.

speed. The student movement had an anarchic quality which facilitated radicalisation, which in turn provided the basis for new organisational and ideological unities. As one campus campaign was successful, or unsuccessful, or simply petered out, another was bursting into the media spotlight, taking the most recent challenges to the status quo as their new standard and then creating new ones. Campus movements would be overshadowed by national off-campus campaigns, only to spark up again unexpectedly over disciplinary or other issues. Yet for all the vibrancy and fluidity of the movement, by 1972 issues and formulae for action which had previously easily drawn new layers of students into activity were suddenly stale. Those aspects of the movement which had fuelled its momentum on the way up—its fragmentation, its spontaneity—now seemed to work the opposite way.

The student movement had helped change the face of Australian campuses and society forever, but without broadening its influence, it could not escape the fate which had already befallen student movements in the US and other countries. In particular, the decline of the movement reflected the perception that, despite limited victories, the international anti-war movement had not forced the US Government to abandon its role in Vietnam. In the United States itself that recognition had led the movement in a direction in which some radical activists were losing their lives in violent confrontations or even as a result of the premature explosion of bombs they were manufacturing themselves.<sup>209</sup> Was the same fate in store for the Australian radical movement?<sup>210</sup>

The election of the Whitlam Labor government in December 1972 and the growing power of the trade union movement meant that this was not the fate of the Australian movement. The Left in Australia never embraced with the same desperate enthusiasm the methods of armed struggle associated with a section of the American movement in this period. Instead, the trade union movement, social movements and the new ALP Government became a major focus of energies which revolutionaries had

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<sup>209</sup> See T. Gitlin, chapter 17, "The implosion," *op cit.*

<sup>210</sup> In relation to the impact of US events in Australia see for example, "Gimme Shelter: the filming of a mass bummer," *National U*, 7 June 1971, p 9, a review of a film about the killing of a young black fan at a Rolling Stones concert by Hell's Angels, described as "that grim day the Movement shit hit the fan".

previously harnessed. Prior to that time, though initiatives like the Victorian education campaign and the La Trobe referendum were intelligent attempts to break out of an agenda increasingly imposed by university authorities and the State, they could not make up for the inability of the student movement alone to force major social change. Radicals had hoped that the movement could be sustained by some kind of productive relationship with the vastly more powerful labour movement.<sup>211</sup> Indeed, many radicals who moved off-campus, most successfully and spectacularly in the campaign against the Springboks tour, did so with a perspective of encouraging and fostering working class action around social issues. However, as I will argue in Part Two, the achievement of working class support for radical aims was not a foregone conclusion, and was inhibited by a variety of factors. As a consequence, the student movement peaked and lost momentum well before the peak of labour movement activism, which was in part a response to it. The following chapters examine events and institutions in the union movement in order to establish the context for a retrospective assessment of the feasibility of the "worker student" project in this period.

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<sup>211</sup> Burgmann, *op cit*, p 271.

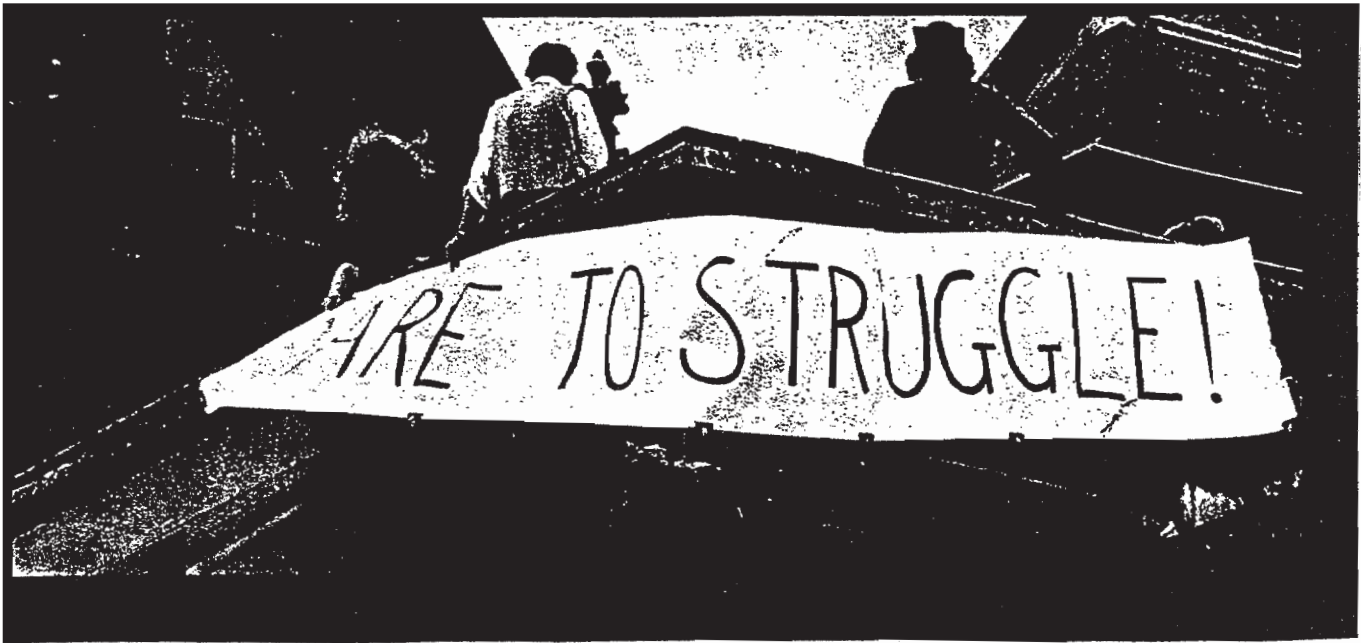




Reprinted in P. Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), p 252.



Mike Matteson's Great Escape, Sydney University. Reprinted in P. Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), p 310



In W.Osmond, "Notes on the Sydney Sit-in", *Lot's Wife*, 13 April, 1970.



**Victoria  
Lee**

# WHOSE LAWS ARE THE PEOPLE PROTESTING AGAINST RIGHT NOW?

Is it the workers' law that allows pensioners to live in poverty while fruit rots on trees; while wheat rots in silos; while crops are being dug into the ground, and there is even talk of dumping millions of eggs into the sea?

Is it our (the workers') law that allows people to be priced out of doctors, dentists and hospitals?

Is it our laws that allows big Yankee monopolies like G.M.H. and Fords and the local giant B.H.P. to make people unemployed just to make mammoth profits for shareholders who, if they never had another dollar would live in luxury for the rest of their lives?

Is it the workers' law that conscripts Australia's youth to fight overseas wars in the interests of such capitalist monopolies . . . as in Vietnam.

Is it the workers' law that de-registers unions, fines them and jails union leaders who dare to fight against the big monopoly interests and for improved conditions for the working people?

Is it our law that puts in scabs and protects them with armed police when workers go on strike?

Is it our law that allows big business to use our universities for cheap research and to produce technicians to run their industries and lawyers and diplomats and the like to administer their system?

Is it our law that allows big business to pollute the atmosphere, the seas and rivers . . . all in the name of profit?

**These laws—and many others—are all aimed against the working class people. People are resisting all these laws. They have relied on parliamentary politics to fix them up all their lives.**

**The working people have used all the machinery allowed by the law for protest, peaceful demonstrations, petitions, deputations, etc.—**

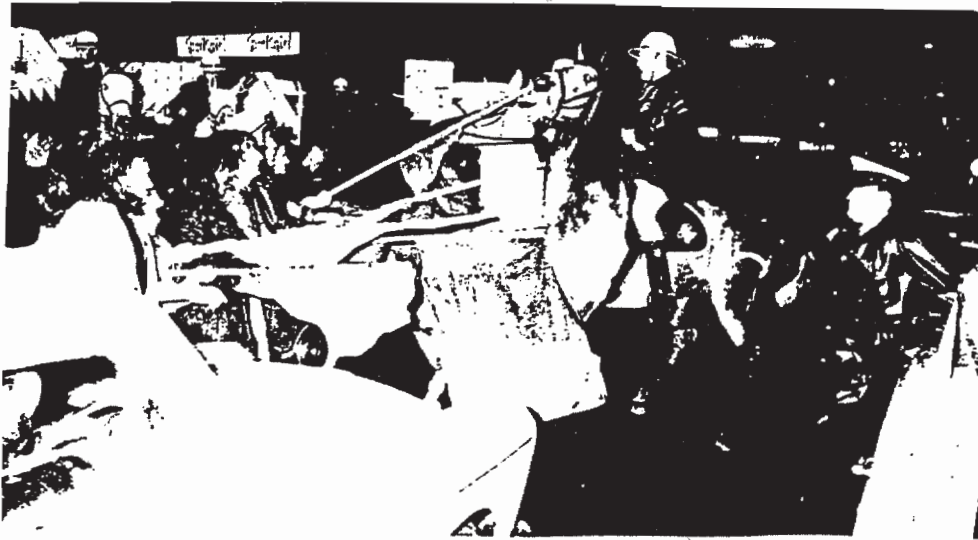
## **BUT THINGS HAVE ONLY GOT WORSE**

**The question we have to face up to is: DO WE CONTINUE ON WITH THIS USELESS, INEFFECTIVE STRUGGLE — or — DO WE SUPPORT AND TAKE PART IN EFFECTIVE STRUGGLE? Such struggle would have as its aim the SMASHING OF RULING CLASS LAW AND ORDER — and — its replacement with WORKING CLASS LAW AND ORDER.**

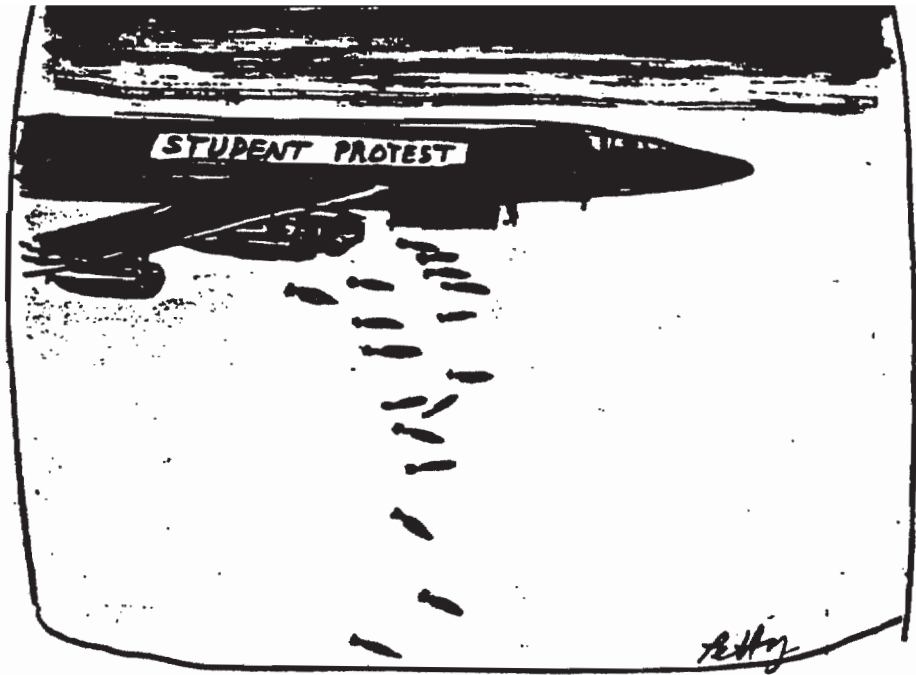
**Join in the struggle for your future. Demand and fight for the release of Robinson, Pola and York.**

**FREE FERGUS ROBINSON, BRIAN POLA AND BARRY YORK!**

Authorised by the Free Fergus Robinson and Brian Pola Committee.



Anti-war protesters clash with police, 1972. Reprinted in P. Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), p 314/5.



'Well, they finally got us to act like responsible citizens.'

TONS OF BOMBS	137,000,000
REFUGEES	2,100,000
INJURED	4,700,000
KILLED	970,000



"...UNDOUBTED POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE"



Chapter Seven  
Riders on the Storm:  
The ALP and Student Radicalism

*I am convinced that no demonstration helps to end conscription or to end the war. I am convinced they are counter-productive...I do not myself march.*

Gough Whitlam, 1969<sup>1</sup>

*I am not going to work within the limits imposed by my political enemies.*

Jim Cairns, 1970<sup>2</sup>

*...The whole life style of western society needs to be examined; it will have to go through radical changes to survive...These changes will not occur in some quarters by voluntary means. The controllers of society will not retire gracefully from the scene but will fight to hang on to their power...Mass support and action is essential....*

Victorian Socialist Left newspaper, 1970<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gough Whitlam, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 27 May 1969, pp 2247/2248.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Cairns, in lead-up to May 1970 Moratorium, P. Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), p 250.

<sup>3</sup> *Inside Labor*, 5, 24 October 1970, p 9.

In the early 1960s, ALP students played a major role in the re-invigoration of student and protest politics, especially through their role in Student Action in Melbourne and in the Sydney Freedom Ride. This activism reflected their disappointment with the ALP leadership; its failure to revise its politics in relation to racial issues; and its accommodation to Cold War fears. Yet the politics of these activists also shared much with those of the parent party. ALP students viewed their activities not as attempts to fundamentally change society or even to pressure politicians, but as a means of pricking consciences. They did not seek to mobilise the wider population, but to save it from its own conservatism. This same philosophy can be discerned in the response of ALP leaders and activists to the rise of radical student activism in opposition to the Vietnam war.

When Australia became involved in the Vietnam war, ALP students again had a high profile in the early opposition movement, helping, for example, to organise the first anti-conscription meeting at Sydney University.<sup>4</sup> Central to the nature and enthusiasm of their activism was the legitimacy they received as a result of Labor leader Arthur Calwell's long-standing and staunch opposition to conscription. Where Student Action had been alienated by Calwell's support for the White Australia Policy<sup>5</sup>, YCAC, established in late-1964, owed much to Calwell's determination to fight the 1966 federal election on the issues of conscription and the Vietnam war.

Calwell's opposition to conscription also created the basis for a mutually useful alliance between the Labor leader and a minority of ALP ministers who actively campaigned against the war. The most important of these were active in Victoria, prominent amongst them Jim Cairns, the "intellectual" face of the influential Victorian Left.<sup>6</sup> Monash activist Warren Osmond

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<sup>4</sup> M. Hamel-Green, "The Resisters. A History of the Anti-Conscription Movement 1964-1972," in P. King, (ed.), *Australia's Vietnam: Australia in the Second Indo-China War*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983), p 106. The meeting was held on November 11 1964, and organised by the Labor, Liberal and ALP Clubs.

<sup>5</sup> Evidence of Calwell's fundamentally conservative view of the world can be found in a chapter in his autobiography entitled "Permissiveness destroys society," in which Calwell rails against homosexuality, abortion and "the audacious challenge thrown down by a pleasure-surfeited, secularist minority..." (A. Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not*, (Hawthorn: Rigby, 1972), p 247).

<sup>6</sup> Dave Nadel, personal interview. See also J.F. Cairns, *Silence Kills. Events leading up to the Vietnam Moratorium on 8 May*, (Melbourne: Vietnam Moratorium Committee, 1970) and J.F. Cairns, "The ALP's Strategy in the Affluent Society," in H. Mayer, *Australian Politics. A Reader*, second edition, *op. cit*, pp 243-247.

remembers first meeting Cairns, whom he described as "a lovely guy," when he spoke about the Vietnam war at Osmond's high school Social Studies class in 1964.<sup>7</sup> Students at Monash University had "a lot of personal attachment to Cairns," who, unlike his rival Whitlam, had a "tremendous following".<sup>8</sup> Dave Nadel says "there were a whole group of us, women and men, in 1965, who really hero-worshipped Jim Cairns. He was really very, very impressive, a superb speaker, very charismatic".<sup>9</sup>

The politics of Calwell and Cairns' support for the anti-war movement must be seen in the context of the desire of the Labor Right and Centre for the ALP to be seen as a better friend for the US Government than the conservative parties could provide. Calwell, an anti-communist, hoped to see the United Nations save the US from embarrassment in Vietnam by bringing about the defeat of the NLF by non-military means. He saw working to improve the lives of the South Vietnamese people as a way to destroy the appeal of Ho Chi Minh's campaign.<sup>10</sup> Jim Cairns' position was not fundamentally different, though he advocated a foreign policy less reliant on relations with the US.<sup>11</sup> This stance was sufficient to make him a radical in the ALP. Enthusiasm for the US alliance within the Party was such that at the ALP Caucus in February 1965, in response to Cairns' motion to condemn the US bombing of North Vietnam, an amendment moved by Kim Beazley in *support* of the bombing won the vote with the support of both Calwell and the Right's Gough Whitlam.<sup>12</sup> In May 1965, following Menzies' announcement that troops would be sent for combat, Calwell said in parliament that, although the ALP opposed the Government's decision, it would never deny "aid and support" to Australian troops sent to

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<sup>7</sup> Warren Osmond, personal interview.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Dave Nadel, personal interview.

<sup>10</sup> R. Kuhn, "The Australian Left, Nationalism and the Vietnam War," *Labour History*, 72, May 1997, pp 165/166.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 167/168. See also Edwards, *op cit*, pp 32-36.

<sup>12</sup> Tom Uren, interviewed in G. Langley, *A Decade of Dissent. Vietnam and the conflict on the Australian home front*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), p 22. Again on March 29 in 1966 Beazley, in parliament "defended the purity of US motives in Vietnam against accusations of imperialist behaviour"(J. Cairns, *Silence Kills...., op cit*, p 9).



Vietnam.<sup>13</sup>

ALP support for the anti-war movement was compromised by the ALP's commitment to the US alliance, as well as by the hostility of the ALP Right towards the anti-war movement and the willingness of Calwell and the Left to allow the Right, both inside and outside the ALP, to determine the parameters of debate and acceptable action in relation to the war.<sup>14</sup> His fundamental support for US aims in Vietnam meant that Calwell had no truck with radical students sympathetic to Ho Chi Minh. At the ASLF conference in June 1965, Calwell and ALP member Fred Daly refused to speak as pre-arranged when a motion was passed declaring solidarity with the NLF. Their boycott aided ALP students in their successful demand for a new vote. A new motion expressing "conditional support" for the NLF ensured that the conference, "having redeemed itself, received the blessing of the ALP in the form of an address by Cyril Wyndham, Federal Secretary of the party, who conveyed Calwell's best wishes".<sup>15</sup>

Calwell's cautious position also provided justification for the Right in the Party and in the trade union movement to condemn extra-parliamentary opponents of the war. In the trade union movement, for example, the ACTU Executive decided in May 1965 not to support stoppages against the war because this would be to deny "aid and support" to Australian troops. In May 1966, the Federal Executive of the Seamen's Union referred to the Parliamentary Labor Party's opposition to the war in defence of their refusal to provide a crew for the *Boonaroo*. ALP member and secretary of the Marine Steward's Union, MacDonald, also appealed to ALP policy, and rather more successfully when, following Calwell's May 1965 statement, he condemned the ban, saying the Seamen's Union had left Australian troops for dead.<sup>16</sup> In relation to the student movement, the ALP Right was even

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<sup>13</sup> M.J. Saunders, "The Trade Unions in Australia and Opposition to Vietnam and Conscription," *Labour History*, no 43, November 1982, p 65.

<sup>14</sup> See especially Kuhn, *op cit*, on the politics of Labor's opposition to the war. See M. Saunders, "The ALP's Response to the Anti-Vietnam War Movement: 1965-73," *Labour History*, 44, May 1983, pp 75-91 and M. Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement in Australia: 1969-73*, PhD, Flinders University, 1977 on the Labor right's reaction to the movement.

<sup>15</sup> P. Scherer, "ASLF Conference," *Lot's Wife*, 14 June 1965, p 15.

<sup>16</sup> M. Saunders, "The Trade Unions...", *op cit*, pp 65/67.

more disapproving. In March 1966, it was reported that the right-wing NSW ALP branch had dissociated itself from the activities of the Sydney University ALP Club led by Trotskyist, Hall Greenland.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, Calwell's stance ensured that from the first the major focus of YCAC anti-conscription activities was electoral support for the ALP. The November 1964 Sydney Town Hall meeting which resulted in the launch of YCAC, aimed at opposing the war by organising support for the impending senate election campaign. As Hamel-Green notes:

No street demonstrations were called; the chief activity consisted of handing out leaflets condemning the government for its sudden turnabout on the conscription issue and urging that people vote for the ALP.<sup>18</sup>

In June 1965 the publication of an advertisement in *The Australian* which was signed by hundreds of young men aligned YCAC with ALP policy, emphasising opposition to conscription for *overseas* service and a negotiated settlement in Vietnam.<sup>19</sup>

The response of young men to the June advertisement furnished "active constituencies for YCAC branches in every state".<sup>20</sup> These young ALP activists were committed to opposing conscription and the war. As a consequence, they were willing to cooperate with individuals disapproved of by many in the mainstream of the party. ALP membership overlapped with other organisations in the ideologically fluid peace movement at this time. From July 1965, YCAC worked closely with the women's group Save Our Sons (SOS).<sup>21</sup> The Melbourne Vietnam Day Committee, established in

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<sup>17</sup> Letter, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 March 1966. Greenland says the ALP was "always" writing to the Club demanding that they not use the name (interview with Crispin Walker for his BA Hons thesis *The Protestors on Campus: Opposition to the Vietnam War and National Service Act in the Three Sydney Universities, 1968-1972*, Macquarie University, 1994, courtesy Crispin Walker).

<sup>18</sup> Hamel-Green, *op cit*, p 107.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p 108.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>21</sup> J. Murphy, *Harvest of Fear: a History of Australia's Vietnam War*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993), pp 143/144.

September 1965 and inspired by a group based at the University of California,<sup>22</sup> included representatives of YCAC.<sup>23</sup> Further, unlike the ALP student groups of the early 1960s, YCAC did not exclude communists, one author suggesting in 1968 that a large proportion of its members might also be members of the Communist Party youth group, the Eureka Youth League.<sup>24</sup> In 1965, full-time secretary of Sydney YCAC, Barry Robinson, was also the treasurer of the Trotskyist-inspired Vietnam Action Campaign;<sup>25</sup> and some activists even suspected that NSW YCAC was a "Trotskyist-front".<sup>26</sup>

In August 1965, at Robinson's instigation, Melbourne YCAC was established from a meeting of forty people.<sup>27</sup> It was organised by and drew its office bearers from the Labor Party youth wing, the Young Labor Association (YLA), which had branches across the country.<sup>28</sup> Like the youth groups of the conservative parties, the YLA groups existed to enable the Labor Party to mobilise youthful support for election campaigns and to provide a place where youth could promote their interests within the wider party, "whether this be for the purpose of gaining positions in the party hierarchy, winning pre-selection or affecting policy".<sup>29</sup> The character of ALP youth organisations varied from State to State, reflecting the composition of the parent Party. In Victoria, for example, the greater opposition to the war by members of the State branch was reflected in a greater proportion of radical activists in YLA in Victoria compared to other States.<sup>30</sup> In New South Wales, the Central Executive of the Party, allied with the Labor Right,

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<sup>22</sup> R.V. Summy, "A Reply to Fred Wells" in R. Forward and B. Reece, (eds) *Conscription in Australia*, (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1968), p 204.

<sup>23</sup> Murphy, *op cit*, p 145; Summy, *ibid*, pp 204-206.

<sup>24</sup> C. Guyatt, "The Anti-Conscription Movement, 1964-1966," in Forward and Reece, *op cit*, p 180.

<sup>25</sup> "New Look Peace Movement," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 April 1966.

<sup>26</sup> Dave Nadel, personal interview. NSW Trotskyists were also members of the Labor Party in this period (see Chapter Nine).

<sup>27</sup> Murphy, *op cit*, p 144.

<sup>28</sup> Summy, *op cit*, p 213.

<sup>29</sup> Altman, "Party Youth Groups in Australia" in H.Mayer, *Australian Politics: a Second Reader* (Melbourne: F.W.Cheshire, 1969), p 178.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p 184.

intervened in the State's Labor Youth Council to purge it of both left-wing and extreme right-wing elements.<sup>31</sup>

In late January 1966, an Australian National Youth Anti-Conscription Conference was held in Sydney. This conference voted to establish a national anti-conscription coordinating committee with delegates elected from NSW, Victoria and Queensland.<sup>32</sup> The Youth Campaign Against Conscription (YCAC), which resulted from that decision, was overwhelmingly led and its membership dominated by ALP members.<sup>33</sup> In 1966, YCAC branches were established at Monash and Melbourne universities. The Monash group had a membership of seventy and was headed by John Morehouse, who also served as assistant secretary of the parent group, the Melbourne University group being led by Pam Morgan.<sup>34</sup> The two universities provided "the bulk of support and ideas" for YCAC, while work for the city-wide campaign was conducted by non-students including President Bill Landeryou from the Storemen and Packer's Union and Secretary Trevor Ashton, "sandwiching in a job between years at university".<sup>35</sup>

YCAC drew on CND methods of civil disobedience, particularly burning registration papers and satirising government leaders.<sup>36</sup> Like Student Action, YCAC members used gimmicks to attract media attention to their protests. In March 1966 they staged a demonstration outside Harold Holt's home parodying the prime minister's love for spearfishing. The students wore snorkelling gear, carried a fish inscribed "Conscript" and wielded a placard saying "Stick to killing fish, Harold".<sup>37</sup> Later they let the air out of the prime minister's tyres and attempted to roll over his car.<sup>38</sup> These protests were facilitated by the location of the prime minister's house, at the

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<sup>31</sup> *Socialist Perspective*, 2, February 1967, p 24.

<sup>32</sup> Guyatt, *op cit*, p 180.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*; Hamel-Green, *op cit*, p 108.

<sup>34</sup> Summy, *op cit*, p 213.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>36</sup> Murphy, *op cit*, p 144.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>38</sup> Summy, *op cit*, p 214.

end of the same road as the Toorak home of Trevor Ashton, from which the Melbourne YCAC campaign was run. Students pasting posters against the war would always end their "run" at Holt's garage.<sup>39</sup>

As Murphy has argued, in 1966 groups like YCAC and SOS helped significantly to rupture the paralysis of public debate characteristic of the Cold War. They were involved in "a remarkable reactivation of the public sphere" in the form of "local activities, public meetings, small marches and demonstrations, group discussions, meetings in country towns, teach-ins, preach-ins and public rallies".<sup>40</sup> At the same time, YCAC mobilised a student constituency for the ALP.<sup>41</sup> ALP members consciously set out to turn anti-conscriptionists into Labor Party supporters. Caroline Fricke, for example, was a student at Melbourne University in 1966. After she wrote a letter opposing conscription to *The Age*, she received a letter from the local branch of the ALP congratulating her on her letter and inviting her to "join in the defeat of the Liberal Government by letter-boxing in Brighton". She, her sister and boyfriend later joined the ALP and her father became active in the Party's Socialist Left.<sup>42</sup>

YCAC's brief prominence was based, however, in the temporary concurrence of the ALP's electoral aims under Calwell and the aims of the anti-conscription and anti-war movements: a concurrence which was highly fragile. As Hamel-Green has noted, "militant or civil disobedience tactics were seen by the YCAC leadership as likely to endanger Labor's chances".<sup>43</sup> In May 1966, the ALP committed itself to the withdrawal of conscripts "without delay," while regular forces were to be withdrawn "as soon as practicable". This ambiguous policy reflected the tension between Calwell's support for the US alliance and his "increasing reliance on the left for support against Whitlam".<sup>44</sup> Student protest on the occasion of the Johnson visit highlighted, as Murphy has argued, the dilemmas within the ALP: "for

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<sup>39</sup> Dave Nadel, personal interview.

<sup>40</sup> Murphy, *op cit*, pp 145/146.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p 144.

<sup>42</sup> Interviewed in Langley, *op cit*, p 67.

<sup>43</sup> Hamel-Green, *op cit*, p 108.

<sup>44</sup> Murphy, *op cit*, p 149.

the right in particular, it was the combination of political forces they most dreaded, exposing the ALP to being depicted as anti-American, while the left of the party explicitly called for the demonstrations".<sup>45</sup>

The Party's dilemma was reflected in its approach to Labor youth organisations. At the end of 1966, the NSW Party established five ALP Youth Assemblies, with the aim of mobilising young supporters for the federal election; three of these emerged with "left of centre" leaderships. The Party also tolerated the emergence of a number of small regional youth groups.<sup>46</sup> The 1966 election campaign resulted in the establishment of an ALP youth organisation in Western Australia, its membership drawn primarily from youth active in the anti-war, anti-conscription movements.<sup>47</sup> In Queensland and South Australia, sizeable and vigorous YLA groups, while enthusiastic about electoral activities in support of the parent Party, were also influenced by the increasing radicalism of the anti-war movement. The Queensland group engaged in discussion about socialism, while in South Australia the dominance of supporters of "thoroughly Whitlamite types with a weather eye on parliamentary careers" were challenged in 1966 by the emergence of a sizeable left wing grouping.<sup>48</sup>

Labor's defeat in the November 1966 election had two major consequences. One was the capture of the Party leadership by the ALP Right under Gough Whitlam. The other was the invigorated enthusiasm of Calwell for the anti-war movement in light of his now doomed parliamentary position. As Murphy comments: "Calwell...threw himself into the demonstrations with the passion of one with nothing to lose".<sup>49</sup> In January 1967, the support and involvement of Calwell and the ALP in protest organising meetings in Melbourne ensured that demonstrations against Marshall Ky were better organised than the Johnson demonstrations in late-1966. Calwell "was a great help to us. He really made the protest meeting".<sup>50</sup> In Brisbane a

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p 156.

<sup>46</sup> *Socialist Perspective*, 2, February 1967, p 12.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p 24.

<sup>49</sup> Murphy, *op cit*, , p 212. See also Edwards, *op cit*, p 142.

<sup>50</sup> Dave Nadel, interviewed for "Protesting as a Way of Life," *The Bulletin*, 4 February 1967, p 22.

member of the Queensland ALP's Central Executive was severely beaten by police at the rally against Marshall Ky when he went to assist his wife whose foot was broken by police.<sup>51</sup> ALP leaders willing to support the campaign remained a minority, however: in Edwards' words, "many of Calwell's ALP colleagues were conspicuously absent from the protests he led".<sup>52</sup>

The anti-Ky protests also highlighted conflicts which would become a major feature of the movement. For radical students, unfavourable media coverage and police violence were increasingly seen as unavoidable aspects of any major demonstration. Those now moving towards a revolutionary position came to believe that confrontation did not impede, and perhaps even aided, the growing numbers at the demonstrations. This belief ensured discord with representatives of a Party which was concerned to maintain a respectable electoral image and under pressure from conservatives seeking to "smear" ALP shadow ministers on the basis of any association with law-breaking protesters. In Sydney the demonstration against Marshall Ky resulted in a bitter split over tactics between the ALP-led section of the peace movement and student radicals.<sup>53</sup> In January 1967 at the Anti-Vietnam War, Anti-Conscription Activists' Conference in Sydney, young radicals criticised the old peace groups for their tendency to retreat in the face of counter-pressures from society and for pursuing their "sterile strategy of electoralism".<sup>54</sup>

The federal election had sealed the fate of ALP leadership support for the anti-war movement. The election, the ALP's biggest loss ever, was a massive defeat for Calwell, but a victory for the ALP Right. Though others pointed to the ALP's lack of radical domestic policies or its failure to consistently defend its anti-Vietnam stance as reasons for the defeat, the

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<sup>51</sup> *National U*, 1 March 1967, p 7.

<sup>52</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, p 143.

<sup>53</sup> R. Gordon and W. Osmond, "An Overview of the Australian New Left," in R. Gordon, (ed.), *The Australian New Left. Critical Essays and Strategy*, (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1970), p 29.

<sup>54</sup> R. Summy, "Militancy and the Australian Peace Movement, 1960-1967," *Politics*, November 1970, p 159. The moderates at the conference contended that "the main role of the peace and anti-war movement was to form a public opinion which would either elect a Labor Government pledged to withdraw our troops or be so strong as to persuade any Government to bring the boys back".

popularity of Australian involvement in the Vietnam war was widely blamed.<sup>55</sup> For the ALP Right, led by Gough Whitlam, the election result represented the vindication of the push for the "modernisation" of the ALP. Today student radicals remember Whitlam as the prime minister who brought the troops back from Vietnam, introduced free education, and was dismissed by the governor-general for being "too left-wing".<sup>56</sup> But in 1967, Whitlam the vanquished radical reformer was a myth that did not yet exist. In Brisbane in January, as anti-war demonstrators confronted Marshall Ky, Whitlam was in Queensland lobbying for support for his challenge to the leadership.<sup>57</sup> When he succeeded, in February 1967, the Left and anti-war movement were plunged into bleak disillusionment.

In 1962 Whitlam had been described by *The Bulletin* as a "Gaitskellite" looking for an image: "...he won't stick his neck out unnecessarily. If he does the 'image' might become too blurred".<sup>58</sup> By the mid-1960s, Whitlam had found his image. He had come to represent those party members impressed by the modernisation of the British Labor Party under Harold Wilson and intent on reducing the weight of trade unions in the ALP. Whitlam believed that with the rise of the white-collar working class and professionals, Labor's traditional base in blue-collar unions had become an obstacle to its ability to be relevant to the modern electorate, as well as enabling "minority groups" like the DLP but especially the Communist Party to influence the ALP. He wanted to see more university graduates and professionals—"educated people"—playing a prominent role in the Party. Some of the arguments put forward by Whitlam's supporters, consistent with their Fabian politics, were openly elitist. One ex-Student Action member, for example, argued that Australian Labor "cannot be expected to

<sup>55</sup> Murphy, *op cit*, p 159; R. Mortimer, "Communists and the Australian Left," *New Left Review*, no 46, November-December 1967, pp 45/46. Calwell himself blamed an incident in November 1966 when Whitlam was quoted as saying that an Australian Labor Government might leave Australian troops in Vietnam, but they would be regulars not conscripts. Calwell says that though he issued a statement reiterating Labor's real policy "the damage was irreparable" (A. Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not*, (Hawthorn: Rigby, 1972), p 232).

<sup>56</sup> In 1992 when Whitlam spoke one lunch hour at the University of Queensland he attracted the biggest indoor crowd activists could remember seeing outside of formal university lectures. Many students, including me, were unable to get in or even to squeeze close enough to the door to hear his speech.

<sup>57</sup> "The ALP - the Party and the Leadership," *Socialist Perspective*, No 2, February 1967, p 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Bulletin*, 13 January 1962, pp 12-14.



have a particularly distinguished leadership" because it did not draw on the same (educated) population as the British Labour Party:

...it does not function in a way which appeals to the educated and intelligent very much, and many of its leaders are belligerently proletarian despite those chauffeur-driven cars with the Commonwealth number plates.<sup>59</sup>

Whitlam once confided to a colleague that "he would have been happier if the ALP bore more resemblance to the Democratic Party in the US".<sup>60</sup> A child of the NSW Right, he rejected the idea of citizens intervening in politics through the trade unions or through street demonstrations, arguing that parliament was the only place for political action. In the early seventies, Whitlam ridiculed the idea:

...that political pressure can be successfully exerted irrespective of parliamentary success or failure. The theory reached its zenith in protests on Vietnam and in the view that we have no responsibility for what happens there, or how many Australians are killed there, as long as we have made as shrill and voluble a protest as possible. The problem is not so easily solved...Those ends will be achieved by Governments prepared to take peace initiatives...I do not seek and do not want the leadership of Australia's largest pressure group.<sup>61</sup>

When student demonstrations were debated in parliament in 1969, Whitlam said: "I am convinced that no demonstration helps to end conscription or to end the war. I am convinced they are counter-productive...I do not myself march".<sup>62</sup> He considered that the ALP Left's insistence on political "purity" had constructed a "philosophy of failure":

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<sup>59</sup> J. Jupp, "Their Labour and Ours," in H. Mayer, (ed.), *Australian Politics. A Reader*, second edition, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1967), p 236. See also M. Dixon, "Intellectuals and the ALP: the Case for ALP Radicalism," in H. Mayer, *Australian Politics. A Second Reader*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1969), pp 374-379.

<sup>60</sup> L. Oakes and D. Solomon, *The Making of an Australian Prime Minister*, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1973), p 57.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in *ibid*, p 360.

<sup>62</sup> *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, May 27, 1969, pp 2247/2248.

There is nothing more disloyal to the traditions of Labor than the new heresy that power is not important, or that the attainment of political power is not fundamental to our purposes. The men who formed the Labor Party in the 1890s knew all about power. They were not ashamed to seek it and they were not embarrassed when they won it. They recognised the limitations of industrial action...<sup>63</sup>

These ideas made Whitlam a staunch opponent of the left-wing Victorian Central Executive (VCE) of the Labor Party, with its base in the Trade Union Defence Committee, in turn based on the Victorian "rebel unions". The trade union Left, described by one author as "essentially a CPA fellow-travelling pressure group within the ALP,"<sup>64</sup> rejected Whitlam's analysis of the implications for the ALP of trade unionism.<sup>65</sup> Whitlam chided the Victorian Left for compromising the ALP by collaborating with the Communist Party,<sup>66</sup> and later, for defying ALP and ACTU policy on the manning of ships to Vietnam. In 1967, addressing the Victorian ALP's annual conference, Whitlam attacked the VCE, saying "I will exercise my right to repudiate such men as I believe disloyal to the ALP, disruptive of its electoral prospects and destructive of all that the ALP stands for..."<sup>67</sup> The NSW Labor Right was even more critical of ALP members involved in the anti-war movement. The NSW ALP General Secretary Colbourne accused that "small section of ALP members" who protested against Johnson as providing "...the television and press with the type of propaganda they wanted to support their claim that the ALP was anti-American".<sup>68</sup> In March

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<sup>63</sup> E.G. Whitlam, "Organisational Reform and Political Power," in H. Mayer (ed.), *Australian Politics: A Second Reader, op cit*, pp 359/360 (extracts from a speech made to the Victorian branch of the ALP at their Annual Conference on 9 June 1967). This can be compared with Murphy's characterisation of Calwell: "Better to be right than to be Prime Minister," *op cit*, p 155.

<sup>64</sup> M. Burgmann, *A New Concept of Unionism: the New South Wales Builders' Laborers' Federation, 1970-1974*, PhD, Macquarie University, 1981, p 386.

<sup>65</sup> See "Talent not University Monopoly," in "A.L.P. Must Not Spurn its Union Base," *Scope*, 23 March 1967.

<sup>66</sup> E.G. Whitlam, "Trade Unionists and Politics," in H. Mayer, (ed.), *Australian Politics. A Reader, op cit*, pp 252-259 (a paper given at Newcastle Workers' Clubs, 22 June 1965). See also the Communist Party's response, pp 259-260; "Unity Ticket Row; Mr Whitlam Twice Walks Out," *The Age*, 31 July 1965, p 1.

<sup>67</sup> "Organisational Reform..." *op cit*, p 363.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Summy, *op cit*, p 157.

1967, the NSW Right attempted to outlaw the Association for International Co-operation and Disarmament (AICD) to its members, blaming the association of Labor members with communist demonstrators for the Party's election defeat; though the federal ALP intervened to have this policy reversed.<sup>69</sup>

Not surprisingly then, despite his enthusiasm for the university-educated, the relationship between Labor under Whitlam and radical students was frosty from the first. Young radicals at the organisational core of the student movement increasingly saw little or no value in the ALP's electoral success and were blasé about the movement's "public image". By 1967, Labor students had become marginal to the main activity taking place on the campuses; YCAC had been eclipsed by VAC and then by the radical DRU (though some YCAC members were involved in the establishment of DRU). Labor students had already opted out of ASLF conferences, which were now dominated by the student Left, and while Left ALP politicians like Cairns still drew a crowd, they were sponsored "either by Marxist oriented clubs or independent left non-ALP SRCs".<sup>70</sup>

Events in Queensland demonstrated the different approaches of radical and ALP students in the movement. With the formation in May 1967 of the Civil Liberties Coordinating Committee, a delicate cooperation had been created between radical students and the ALP members on and off campus. In June and July 1967, Student Union President and ALP member Frank Gardiner attempted to negotiate with the conservative government<sup>71</sup>, offering concessions on behalf of student protesters in order to obtain a permit to march legally, despite several votes at large student meetings which had recommended "don't talk to the National Party".<sup>72</sup> Five thousand students who gathered to march rejected the permit Gardiner had

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<sup>69</sup> For more detail see J.O. O'Callaghan, *Perspectives on Peace: Aspects of the Analyses, Policies and Practices of the Peace Movement in New South Wales c. 1950-1970*, BA Hons thesis, History Department, Sydney University, 1986, and Saunders, *op. cit.*

<sup>70</sup> J. Percy, "A Brief History of ASLF Conferences," Discussion Bulletin, Easter 1969, Sydney Section of the Socialist Students Alliance.

<sup>71</sup> P. Gray and J. Stanwell, (compilers), *A Ten Years Restrospective of the Development of the "New Left" in Brisbane 1964-1974*, Research Project for a Film Proposal, November 1974 (Fryer library, University of Queensland), p 13.

<sup>72</sup> Brian Laver, personal interview.

negotiated and his offer to return the permit to the premier, voting "Frank, stop fucking around, get ready to march, burn the permit". As ex-student radical Brian Laver describes: "students were booing and hissing... he was finished, finished".<sup>73</sup>

On August 31, 1967, after pulling the Labor Party to the right on Vietnam at its federal conference earlier that month, Whitlam spoke in support of the Government's Defence Forces Protection Bill and its aim of protecting "our troops who are fighting in or near Vietnam":

The Australian Labor Party deplores the collection of funds to help those fighting Australian troops. It also deplores the furore which the Government has created on this subject. A handful of anarchists and exhibitionists has secured the suspension of the Budget debate and the full majesty of an Act of the Parliament.<sup>74</sup>

Whitlam differentiated himself from the Government by expressing regret that the "totally unimportant actions" of the Monash Labor Club had been given so much publicity by the prime minister.<sup>75</sup> It was a stance which led to the "final breach" between the Monash Labor Club and the Party.<sup>76</sup> Increasingly, Labor's leaders attempted to maintain an approach which combined criticism of repressive Government legislation with side-swipes at militant students. In May 1968, for example, criticising the Government's decision to amend the National Service Act to enable it to force university administrations to provide information on students eligible for national service, Western Australian Labor parliamentarian Kim Beazley predicted the amendments would enable "a violent minority of a university... [to] get the whole student body on its side".<sup>77</sup>

On the campuses themselves, the NLF issue in particular sparked conflict

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* Gardiner later became a judge.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in P. Mendes, *The New Left, the Jews and the Vietnam War 1965-72*, (Melbourne: Lazare Press, 1993), p 27.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> A.M. Jordens, "Conscription and Dissent: the Genesis of Anti-War Protest," in G. Pemberton, (ed.), *Vietnam Remembered*, (Sydney: Weldon, 1990), p 80.

between ALP and radical students. In September 1967, the Melbourne University ALP Club was disaffiliated by the Left-dominated Union Council after they campaigned unsuccessfully for the removal by the vice-chancellor of *Farrago* editor Pete Steedman. The Club had been incensed by Steedman's support of the Aid for the NLF campaign, though, following the influential Labor Club, he did not support sending money for military purposes.<sup>78</sup> The ALP Club, still closely associated with Knopfelmacher, had come to be regarded by radical students "as a DLP Front".<sup>79</sup> In parliament it was claimed by a conservative minister that the VCE's Secretary Bill Hartley had encouraged the disaffiliation.<sup>80</sup> In O-week 1968, Whitlam was present as the disaffiliated ALP Club was prevented from setting up a bookstall with a sign saying "This Club has been banned because of its opposition to aid to the NLF". Labor Club members asked Student Union officials to remove Mr Whitlam and the ALP Club from the area, telling them they could "go out in some back alley where there were no people". An appeal by the ALP Club to Student Council against the disaffiliation was lost six votes to four.<sup>81</sup>

Some members of the Labor Left in Victoria were more sympathetic to radical students, though wary of having their sympathy made public. They also attempted to use their influence to moderate student militancy, because of their view that radical action must be an adjunct to successful parliamentary action, not an alternative. Bill Hartley denied links between university Labor clubs and the ALP only a few days after the clubs announced they were to raise money for the NLF,<sup>82</sup> though the VCE "refused to ban its members from speaking before the Labor Club for the reason that many of the members of the Labor Club also were members of the Labor Party".<sup>83</sup> Left Labor senators Cairns and Cohen called Melbourne

<sup>78</sup> *National U*, 29 September 1967, p 1.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, p 13.

<sup>80</sup> Sir Wilfrid Kent Hughes, federal member for Chisholm, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, vol 58, 1968, p 285.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*. The ALP club was reaffiliated in mid-1968 ("The Trouble with Students: an Australia-Wide survey," *The Bulletin*, 5 July 1969, p 25). In 1967 Whitlam had declined an invitation from the Labor Club to speak during O-week and again two months later, claiming parliamentary duties prevented him from doing so (telegrams received 18 February and 12 April 1967, Z458, box 14, Albert Langer collection).

<sup>82</sup> Duthie, ALP member for Wilmot, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 23 August 1967, p 367.

<sup>83</sup> Jess, member for La Trobe, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 31 August 1967, p

University Labor Club members Bernie Grinberg and Doug Kirsner to their offices when they heard about their campaign, warning the two "to be careful what we did in sending money to the NLF".<sup>84</sup>

The Tet Offensive in early 1968 was a turning point for the ALP. One US author suggests that the Offensive "breathed life into languishing American liberalism—just as it defeated Lyndon Johnson".<sup>85</sup> In Australia, the NLF's assault offered a similar opportunity to the Australian Labor Party. Returning from an overseas visit with the intention of attempting to reverse the Party's opposition to the war, Whitlam now changed his mind.<sup>86</sup> As Murphy has noted, the progress of the war now enabled Labor to present itself as aligned with an emergent American policy and Australian conservatives as "out of step, if not obstinately outdated".<sup>87</sup> However, the rise of radical opposition to the war fuelled by the 1966 election defeat and the shift of the centre of political gravity to outside the parliamentary system<sup>88</sup> posed a problem for the Party, in particular the "growing conviction on the left that an extra-parliamentary movement was a more effective means of changing government policy".<sup>89</sup>

The task of balancing between this vigorous Left and the Party Right was a delicate one. In April 1968, a number of left-leaning decisions by the ALP's Federal Executive provoked Whitlam to resign and recontest his position in an attempt to force the party to choose between him and the Left. At one meeting, right-wing delegate Brian Harradine had not been allowed to take his seat after claiming that "friends of communists" had been trying to silence him. Whitlam had also been reprimanded for publicly calling for reform of the Victorian ALP branch. Further, the Executive had supported Calwell's complaint after Whitlam accused him of "debauching" the

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681. The Monash Labor Club's 1967 membership list did include members of the ALP, notably Simon Crean (Albert Langer collection, Noel Butlin archives).

<sup>84</sup> Mendes, *op cit*, p 60.

<sup>85</sup> T. Gitlin, *The Sixties. Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, (New York: Bantam, 1993), p 300.

<sup>86</sup> E. Aarons, *What's Left?*, (Ringwood: Penguin, 1993), p 162, quoting the diaries of Clyde Cameron.

<sup>87</sup> Murphy, *op cit*, p 206.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, p 210.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, p 207.

Vietnam debate in 1966. Whitlam's challenge was successful and he used his new authority to centralise the Executive, giving it more power. However, the number of votes for challenger Jim Cairns led to predictions of a left-wing split in the ALP.<sup>90</sup>

Caucus responded to these pressures by allowing Whitlam and his deputy, Barnard, a "relatively free hand" in articulating public policy while the Left pursued its independent line: a strategy which worked to reduce some of the tension in the ALP.<sup>91</sup> The Labor Left made the most of this greater freedom, especially in Victoria. In October 1968, for example, the State ALP Conference adjourned to the walls of Pentridge Prison in protest at the jailing of draft resister John Zarb.<sup>92</sup> Cairns' increasing role as a figurehead in the anti-war movement was also facilitated, though Cairns remained wary of radical tactics which were not carefully controlled. In April 1968, following the national postal strike, he addressed a group of 400 at Post Office Place in Melbourne until asked to leave by Post Office officials; Cairns ended his address because he did not want to create a "sit-in".<sup>93</sup>

In Queensland, relations between the Labor Party and radical students were degenerating. In July 1968, State Labor Leader Houston "hurriedly disavowed any support whatever" for the controversial pamphlet *How Not to Join the Army*. The pamphlet was being handed out illegally by students in the lead-up to a march in defence of the right to distribute political pamphlets in the street without a permit.<sup>94</sup> Later that year Mitch Thompson, of SDA, lost his position as secretary to a Labor senator, and ties were "finally and irrevocably severed"<sup>95</sup> when "chaos broke out" at May

<sup>90</sup> See Oakes and Solomon, *op. cit.*, pp 16-17; R.W. Connell, "Whitlam vs Cairns," in H. Mayer (ed.), *A Third Reader, op. cit.*, pp 369-370, and H. Mayer, "If Labor Splits," *ibid.*, pp 371-373. R. Murray also says the intensity of this fight threatened a new split (Murray, *The Split: Australian Labor in the fifties*, (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1984), p 353). The Trotskyist newsheet *International* predicted that if Cairns won "the ALP would almost certainly split" (April-May 1968). See also G. Sheridan, "1968. Living in Two Camps," *The Australian Magazine*, 27-28 March 1993, p 16.

<sup>91</sup> Murphy, *op cit.*, p 207.

<sup>92</sup> Edwards, *op cit.*, p 220.

<sup>93</sup> *National U*, 22 April 1968, p 1.

<sup>94</sup> "Pamphlet Power," *The Bulletin*, 9 July 1968.

<sup>95</sup> C. Rootes, "Australian Student Radicals: The Nature and Origin of Dissent," BA Hons thesis, Government Department, University of Queensland, 1969, p 58.

Day 1969.<sup>96</sup> At the invitation of the BWIU, members of Foco, a radical youth group for students and workers including many SDA members (their numbers estimated variously from sixty to 300) took part in the march. They carried red and black flags, jostled Whitlam and sat down six or seven times, embarrassing the Labor Right with chants like "Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh" and "Socialism Yes! Whitlam No!".<sup>97</sup> The wife of the ALP member for Brisbane was particularly incensed:

...someone deliberately stuck a dirty grey hat under my nose and said they were collecting money to print more of those revolting pamphlets that they have been giving out to high school students. I gave that hat the biggest hit I could and sent coins scattering everywhere, and there they all were grovelling on the ground trying to pick them up. What outraged me most was that these people were cheering on the North Vietnamese and calling for victory for the Viet Cong.<sup>98</sup>

Radicals later complained that the Labour Day organising committee had denied representation to the Communist Party and other worker-student organisations proscribed by the ALP, and had denied political organisations other than the ALP and YLA the right to march under their own banners. They claimed that the organisers had collaborated directly with the Queensland Special Branch to oust "undesirable" elements from the march and that the incident had resulted in expulsions from the ALP as well as the attempted removal of Foco from Trades Hall.<sup>99</sup> The February 1969 conference of the ALP-dominated NUAUS reflected similar pressures, with two La Trobe delegates affiliated to the Democratic Club defending the role of NUAUS as a non-political, service-oriented body, and accusing students to the left of Labor of using NUAUS to exert pressure in national politics.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Donald Cameron, Member for Griffith, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 27 May 1969, p 2258.

<sup>97</sup> "ALP shuts out student group. 'Never again' in union marches," *Brisbane Telegraph*, 7 May 1969, and "The Trouble with Students....," *op. cit.*, p 28.

<sup>98</sup> *Sunday Mail*, 11 May 1969, quoted by Cameron in parliament, *op. cit.*, p 2260.

<sup>99</sup> RSA and SHAC, "May Day 1970. Labour Day or Labor Party Day?" S24.4, leaflet, folios, Fryer Library.

<sup>100</sup> B. Pola, *Perspectives on the Australian Radical Student Left Movement 1966-1975*, PhD, School of Education, La Trobe University, 1988, p 71.



Though Labor leaders condemned so-called extremists in the movement for provoking the police, some sections of the ALP also attempted to make political capital out of the increasingly popular issue of civil liberties. In May 1969, the South Australian ALP expressed concern about police violence against students on May 7.<sup>101</sup> The federal leadership was also slowly responding to the growth of the anti-war movement. In July 1969, the ALP finally hardened its position against the war following Nixon's announcement of the first withdrawal of US troops. Nonetheless, the decision to call for the withdrawal of troops was "...against Whitlam's position that the withdrawal of Australian forces should occur after a united Vietnam had taken responsibility for affairs in Phuoc Tuy Province".<sup>102</sup>

By August 1969, public opposition to the war was sufficiently strong to have registered as majority opinion in the polls. The electoral significance of the anti-war movement was plain; but recognition of the shift by ALP ministers was inhibited by the long hours they spent in the company of conservative politicians in parliament. Liberal ministers were convinced that student "violence" would prove a vote-winner for them in the upcoming federal election, and they did not cease to remind Labor politicians of this belief. In March 1969, as Labor Club students campaigned for the replacement of Whitlam by Barnard as candidate for federal parliament, *National U* reported that conservatives were "spreading the smear" that the clubs were "manipulating the ALP into nominating an unsigned member of the British Communist Party".<sup>103</sup> In September 1969, conservative MP Andrew Jones told listeners at Flinders University that militant students did considerable damage to the Labor Party image in the lead-up to the federal election; he said that he proposed to promote the stigma of student radicalism in order to win votes: "What I say about militant radicals is 'smash 'em down!'"<sup>104</sup> Increasing strike action by trade unionists was also used in an attempt to tarnish the Party. In October 1969, Prime Minister

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<sup>101</sup> *Tribune*, 21 May 1969, p 4.

<sup>102</sup> Kuhn, *op cit*, p 164.

<sup>103</sup> *U* commented "It seems that students are going to get in in the neck if they try to work through the system for change and get it in the back of the head if they try to change the system" (5:1, 3 March 1969, p 2).

<sup>104</sup> *National U*, 15 September 1969, p 3.

Gorton raised a favourite theme, control of the ALP by the Victorian Executive and federal conference; and he was backed by Victorian Premier Bolte, who warned that an ALP victory would lead to industrial anarchy.<sup>105</sup>

Labor members feared the election would be fought on whether Australian "wants to reach the stage at which long-haired, banner-carrying hooligans rule the streets,"<sup>106</sup> and argued that the childish behaviour of student protesters was a product of growing up under a government that "cares little or nothing for their education".<sup>107</sup> But Labor leaders did respond to the new anti-war mood. In his policy speech for the federal election in October 1969, Whitlam declared that under a Labor government there would be no Australian troops in Vietnam after June 1970.<sup>108</sup> At the same time, Party leaders continued to try to rein in their anti-war supporters and members. In late 1969, following two noisy meetings in Adelaide and Hobart where the prime minister had been heckled, Whitlam asked young people to stay away from Gorton's meetings. The Victorian State secretary repudiated Calwell after he called for more anti-war demonstrations and the return of all Australian troops by the end of the year, asking him not to take part in demonstrations and to conform to Party policy on Vietnam.<sup>109</sup> Though the ALP was defeated at the 1969 election, there was a massive swing of 7.1% in its favour, due "at least in part, to the loss of confidence in the government after the collapse of Australia's Vietnam policy during 1968-69".<sup>110</sup>

The attitude of the Opposition leader to those involved in the campaign against the war remained basically hostile. In December 1969, with the ALP's

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<sup>105</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle September-December 1969," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 16:1, April 1970, p 69.

<sup>106</sup>*Fact*, letter, 16 May 1969.

<sup>107</sup>*Fact*, 14 March 1969, p 4.

<sup>108</sup> In other respects ALP foreign policy remained surprisingly conservative. For example, an election brochure authorised by Bill Hartley for the 25 October 1969 federal election, whilst emphasising the party's opposition to the Vietnam war, also took the Government's decision to accept a Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean as an opportunity for the ALP to attempt some red-baiting of their own: "October 25 is the date to reject a Government which is a camp follower of great powers, and which is prepared to replace one brand of imperialism with another - Soviet military imperialism. Vote 1 ALP" (Brochure in Albert Langer collection).

<sup>109</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle September-December 1969," *op cit*, pp 69/70.

<sup>110</sup> Langley, *op cit*, p 111.

George Crawford in the chair,<sup>111</sup> the Victorian "rebel unions" issued an illegal call for mutiny by Australian troops in Vietnam. The Prime Minister called on Whitlam to condemn the call and dissociate himself from it, which he did, saying:

Members of the party should not give the false and damaging impression that under a Labor Government foreign policy would be determined at mass meetings or by public petitions. For this reason I concentrate my own actions in party and parliamentary channels.<sup>112</sup>

In early 1970, Whitlam also sought an injunction against the distribution of a how-to-vote ticket in a union election which featured a photograph of himself at a social occasion with a group of unionists, some of whom were communists.<sup>113</sup>

With the election over, however, and the Party's popularity plainly increasing despite attempted conservative smears, the ALP leadership began to believe that association with the anti-war movement might be electorally opportune. As Saunders has noted, most supporters of the anti-war movement from 1965 to 1973 were "either members or supporters of the ALP".<sup>114</sup> On February 26, 1970, the Party's Federal Executive declared its intention to organise a campaign against the Vietnam war. This marked the beginning of a greater involvement of ALP members with "peaceful" opposition to the war, especially the Moratoriums.<sup>115</sup> Throughout 1970 to 1972, "opposition to conscription and support for draft resisters expanded in the ALP and spread to new sections of the community".<sup>116</sup>

Yet that support was undermined by members of the Labor right, notably

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<sup>111</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, p 255.

<sup>112</sup> *Canberra Times*, 22 December 1969, quoted in "Australian Political Chronicle...", *op cit*, p 77. See also Edwards, *op cit*, p 246, 255/256, and M.Saunders, "The Trade Unions...", *op cit*, p 70, and Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement*, *op cit*.

<sup>113</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle January-April 1970," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 16:2, August 1970, p 232.

<sup>114</sup> Saunders, "The ALP's Response...", *op cit*, p 83.

<sup>115</sup> *The Australian*, 27 February 1970.

<sup>116</sup> Hamel-Green, *op cit*, p 125.

John Ducker, assistant secretary of the NSW Labor Council, who was "perhaps more influential than any other single person in minimising trade union support for the anti-war movement in NSW".<sup>117</sup> The ACTU Executive, including Ducker, became deadlocked when considering their attitude to the Moratorium, because most members were "chary of committing either the ALP or the ACTU to a close association with the anti-war movement".<sup>118</sup> Ducker's hostility to union movement participation in the first moratorium ensured a much lower turn-out in Sydney compared with Melbourne;<sup>119</sup> and only in Victoria was there whole-hearted support from the ALP for the Moratorium campaign. As a consequence, the Moratorium was largest in that State.<sup>120</sup> Nonetheless, despite the Victorian Executive's support for the march, State Labor members were notably absent from either the march itself or its organisation<sup>121</sup> and an alliance of the ALP Left and the Communist Party acted to limit the influence of revolutionaries.<sup>122</sup>

The ALP leadership continued to face pressure from its left as well as from its right. From the time of the May Moratorium, the Government continued to denounce the "trend towards violence in protests" and tried to link the ALP with that trend.<sup>123</sup> After the announcement that the anti-war movement would begin organising another Moratorium they "began a concerted campaign to uphold 'law and order'".<sup>124</sup> The Victorian Left, however, was pushing the other way. In June 1970, the Victorian ALP Conference called for defiance of the National Service Act.<sup>125</sup> In response, the Federal President of the Liberal Party accused them of breaching the

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<sup>117</sup> Saunders, "The Trade Unions...", *op cit*, p 71.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> A. Picot, "Vietnam: How we Won Last Time," *Socialist Review*, Winter 1991, issue 4, p 121.

<sup>120</sup> Kuhn, *op cit*, p 168.

<sup>121</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle January-April 1970," *op cit*, p 254.

<sup>122</sup> Murphy, *op cit*, p 245.

<sup>123</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, p 275.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *National U*, 22 June 1970, p 2.

Crimes Act as part of "what might appear to be a deliberate policy of destroying law and order".<sup>126</sup> The attorney-general and officials in the Labour and National Service Department later decided there was not a sufficient case against them.<sup>127</sup>

The ALP's sensitivity about accusations of violence had already become a feature of campus politics. In 1968 and 1969, the University of Sydney's SRC President, ALP student Jim Spigelman "strongly opposed the confrontational tactics advocated by student radicals," presenting himself as "the 'voice of reason' between the so-called 'crazy lefties' and the university administration".<sup>128</sup> At the time of the Victoria Lee sit-in at the university in 1970, the SRC, still dominated by ALP students, was under pressure, both from conservative DLP-Liberal students within its ranks and from radical students. Following the sit-in, media accusations of violence in relation to the forcing of doors were used by the SRC leaders in an attempt to isolate the radical leaders. Student radicals claimed that, though SRC members had been involved in the initial forcing of the doors, they quickly backed away, putting forward motions at two student meetings deploring the "violence" of the occupation while supporting Lee and opposing the victimisation of radical leaders. Their tactic backfired when, surprising even the radicals, students at a general meeting accused the SRC of "arrogance" and of a "sell-out," crying out for the resignation of the SRC President.<sup>129</sup> A reporter for the *Union Recorder* commented:

...the balmy days when Spigelman only had to appear and every radical was transformed into an administration-fearing moderate, are over. Percy Allen and the executive of the council thought that...by going a bit each way, they could stay safely in the middle. Instead they were pulled to pieces. Percy sounded a feeble echo of Spigelman's evil genius when he tried to swing the meeting with the plea *that a vote against this motion is a vote for violence...*<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, p 276.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, p 280.

<sup>128</sup> Mendes, *op cit*, p 145.

<sup>129</sup> W. Osmond, 'Notes on the Sydney Sit-in', *Lot's Wife*, 13 April 1970, p 3.

<sup>130</sup> "The great sit-in fiasco," *Union Recorder*, 50:5, 8 April 1970, p 4.

Outside the campuses, the federal ALP was also looking for ways to prevent radicals from tarnishing its electoral image. The Victorian Left in particular, was seen as an obstacle to victory in 1972. In August 1970, as a result of the intervention of the federal ALP, the Victorian branch of the ALP was abolished. Education was the issue that provided the opportunity. During a State election campaign, the VCE had publicly called for the phasing out of government aid to private schools. They then suspended Victorian Opposition leader Clyde Holding who supported government aid. Holding appealed to the Federal Executive, which, through Industrial Relations Minister Clyde Cameron (himself previously from the Left) laid charges on the State Executive, including the charge that the branch was controlled by the Trade Union Defence Committee (TUDC). The Executive elected to close down the Victorian branch.<sup>131</sup> The NSW Left was also accused of being complicit in the consolidation of Whitlam's power against the Victorian Left. They had tolerated the attack on the Victorians on the basis that it would be followed by federal intervention against the Right in NSW.<sup>132</sup>

In early August, the Federal Executive, "perhaps a little ashamed" of its earlier equivocation in relation to the May Moratorium, had expressed support in principle for a second Moratorium in September, on the proviso that the demonstrations were peaceful. Cairns and Whitlam had clashed over Whitlam's disapproval of a decision to invite representatives of the NLF and the Hanoi Government to speak.<sup>133</sup> Following the abolition of the VCE, however, and under pressure from the Government's "law and order" campaign against the movement, the Party outside Victoria distanced itself from the September Moratorium.<sup>134</sup> South Australian Labor Premier Dunstan, for example, withdrew ALP support, saying that "the Labor Party

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<sup>131</sup> See Oakes and Solomon, *op. cit.*, pp 22-26.

<sup>132</sup> See B.A. Santamaria, *The Australian Labor Movement (1966-71): the Issue of Control*, (Melbourne: Hawthorne Press, 1971) who argued that federal intervention reflected the strength of the *left*, since it facilitated the "real" intervention into the NSW branch, a move which allowed what Santamaria called "pro-Communist forces" to break into the NSW machine. Santamaria predicted that if Whitlam lost the 1972 election he would cease to be the leader and the next leader "will be the nominee of the extreme Left. If by any chance Mr Whitlam wins the election, the pro-Communist forces will at once put him to the test..."(pp 21/22).

<sup>133</sup> Edwards, *op cit.*, p 282.

<sup>134</sup> See Saunders "The ALPs Response..." *op cit.*, pp 86/87; Hamel-Green, *op cit.*, p 125.

could not continue to support a demonstration where it could not guarantee the form of the demonstration or the outcome". He expressed concern about what he described as a "small majority" of people opposed to US imperialism in the VMC.<sup>135</sup> Jim Cairns, though also concerned to prevent confrontation at the demonstration, agreed to speak at Monash University on their September 14 lecture boycott, as part of the campaign against expulsions of student leaders. Cairns spoke to a rally of 4,000 students about the Moratorium, thereby linking the two issues.<sup>136</sup>

Radical students later claimed that it was the ALP's abandonment of the September Moratorium that ensured the event would be a disaster for the movement. The Adelaide march of only 6,000 resulted in 130 arrests, leading the Government to call a Royal Commission into the source of the violence.<sup>137</sup> The radical Worker Student Alliance claimed that ALP leader Dunstan had warned the police that there were a "lot of young hot-heads who were determined to bring about a confrontation with the police".<sup>138</sup> ALP branches in several States were embarrassed by similar conflicts between radical moratorium supporters and police.<sup>139</sup>

Some ALP ministers sought to assuage their embarrassment by "out-red-baiting" the conservatives. In the Queensland parliament the same month, the Labor member for South Brisbane, Mr Bennett, attacked radical University lecturer Dan O'Neill for calling on students to use force if necessary and to disrupt lectures to make propoganda about political issues. Bennett asked Education Minister Fletcher:

Will investigations be made to decide whether certain students follow Mr O'Neill in his anti-social activities for the sole purpose of obtaining passes in examinations, which they could not obtain on their own merits?...Can Mr O'Neill be told that parents, who are paying high fees, and taxpayers, who are subsidising the university

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<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> M. Hyde et al, *It is Right to Rebel*, (Marrickville: The Diplomat, 1972), p 128.

<sup>137</sup> Saunders, *op cit.*

<sup>138</sup> Leaflet, Albert Langer collection, Noel Butlin archives.

<sup>139</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, p 282.

heavily, resent their money being paid to incompetent lecturers whose main ambition is to indoctrinate students in foreign ideologies? <sup>140</sup>

Others further to the left of the ALP were also becoming increasingly hostile towards the revolutionaries. At Melbourne University in early 1971, Jim Cairns expressed the view that anti-capitalist student slogans only served to alienate people: "If the CIA was paying them it could not get better value".<sup>141</sup> In May 1971, at the time of the invasion of a Monash University Council meeting over the expulsion of Monash students, ALP student Deane Wells, as a member of a MAS delegation to the Council, pleaded for the re-admission of the students on the grounds that "they needed all the education they could get".<sup>142</sup>

Nonetheless, the ALP continued to update itself, at least in terms of what it would do if elected. In June 1971, the ALP Federal Conference brought party policy up-to-date, attempting to remove racially discriminatory policies from their immigration program, for example. Not all the changes were welcomed. At the instigation of ACTU leader Bob Hawke and Clyde Cameron, the new Party policy also included a controversial system of contracts between unions and employers with a maximum \$500 fine for those in breach of the contract. Despite its obvious inspiration from the British Wilson Labour Government's very modern "social contract," the proposal was rejected because of the opposition of left-wing unionists who were dismayed to see the ALP proposing its own version of the penal powers only two years after industrial action had made the existing penalties unenforceable.<sup>143</sup>

Changes in the ALP were also reflected in divisions within the left at the NSW ALP State Congress the same month. In May, at a mass meeting called by the Left Steering Committee (a small group which had sought to

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<sup>140</sup> *Brisbane Telegraph*, 15 September 1970.

<sup>141</sup> *Tribune*, 31 March 1971.

<sup>142</sup> P.F. Perry, *The Rise and Fall of Practically Everybody. An Account of Student Political Activity at Monash University 1965-72*, undated (held at Monash University library, Rare Books), p 101.

<sup>143</sup> Oakes and Solomon, *op cit*, p 22.



coordinate the left for many years) serious discontent was revealed over plans to boycott ALP reconstruction. As a consequence, a loose group predominantly of young white-collar workers and students attacked the "political dinosaurs" in what they saw as "Her Majesty's Official Left". This group adopted the new Victorian Left label "Socialist Left," and published the journal *Keep Left*. They charged the Steering Committee with discouraging participation, with making deals against the interests of the Victorian Left and with performing "an annual undignified scramble to prostrate themselves before the right-wing rulers of the party in order to get their leaders on the officers' ticket at the June Conference".<sup>144</sup>

The new face of the ALP was on display during the tour of the South African Springboks team. The Left involved themselves enthusiastically in the campaign. In March 1971, the house of leading NSW left activist, Senator-elect and President of the Sutherland Shire Council, Arthur Gietzelt, was bombed after the Council gained Australia-wide attention for banning the South African life-saving team on Sutherland beaches, which provoked the Australian Nazi Party to graffiti there: "Australian Nazi Party welcomes South African Sportsmen in 1971".<sup>145</sup> In June, the prime minister offered to use RAAF planes to fly the team around Australia, in the face of widespread union bans. In response, Whitlam said it was the most damaging thing the Australian Government had ever done: "Every country in Australia's region will be convinced that the McMahon government backs South Africa's racism".<sup>146</sup>

But Labor leaders were still trying to rein in the radicals. In South Australia, Labor Premier Don Dunstan says he was "put in the position of saying those

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<sup>144</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle May-August 1971," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 17:3, December 1971, p 429. This split reflected the split in the Communist Party around the same time (see Chapter Eight).

<sup>145</sup> "Who Bombed Sydney Senator?," *Tribune*, 10 March 1971, p 1. Arthur had also angered the trade union right when he helped his brother Ray, an official in the MWU, resist a right-wing campaign to seize control of that union and supported federal intervention against the right in NSW. Also on Australian Nazi Parties in this period see "The Nazis Behind Apartheid," *National U*, 28 June 1971, p 12/13; K. Richmond, "Minor Parties in Australia" in G.Starr, K. Richmond and G. Maddox, *Political Parties in Australia*, (Richmond: Heinemann, 1978), pp 369-370.

<sup>146</sup> Quoted in S. Harris, *Political Football - the Springbok Tour of Australia, 1971*, (Melbourne: Gold Star, 1972), p 63. On March 24, 1971, *Tribune* reported Whitlam had attacked sporting bodies who "let an afternoon's entertainment blind them to a lifetime's repression for another nation"(p 2).

people who want to go and see [the Springboks] have their rights just like everybody else...It was an important if rather unpopular view to hold".<sup>147</sup> In Queensland, the TLC under President Jack Egerton campaigned against the tour;<sup>148</sup> but Tom Burns, Federal President of the ALP, called on the party to dissociate itself from "extremist students". Burns said:

Reject these pro-violence dissentients. Throw them out of your movement. Cast them aside from your protests...If they are intent on brutality, let them suffer their bashings alone...They had no anti-apartheid movement of their own, these revolutionaries. Their tactic is infiltration and attempts to take over ours. It is this view that the Bjelke-Petersens use to invite brutality and states of emergency.<sup>149</sup>

Other Labor leaders took their message to the demonstrators personally. On July 24, 1971, Bill Hayden, a member of the House of Representatives, spoke from the back of a truck in Brisbane on an anti-apartheid platform with speakers including the "extreme left":

Hayden warned the crowd away from folly, telling them not to march on the Rugby Club at Ballymore and ridiculing the idea that Brisbane was ready for the "barricades," as the extreme radicals had argued. "You will be cleaned up," he said. "A lot of innocent people will get hurt. Remember the workers are not behind you". Hayden argued...that if the students wanted to get the workers behind them against apartheid and racism, they must get into the factories and educate and persuade trade unionists.<sup>150</sup>

Having advised student radicals to arouse rank-and-file workers in their support, a strategy supported by very few in the Labor Party and certainly not by Hayden,<sup>151</sup> the Minister (whose warning was not heeded) did not join

<sup>147</sup> D. Dunstan in P. O'Donnell and L. Simons (eds), *Australians Against Racism. Testimonies from the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Australia*, (Annandale: Pluto Press, 1995), p 150.

<sup>148</sup> J. Halfpenny in *ibid* , p 33.

<sup>149</sup> Quoted in Harris, *op. cit*, p 224. It was also claimed that the Queensland branch of the ALP, of which Burns was secretary, had "refused to allow its office girls time off to attend the May Moratorium" (*Inside Labor* , 24 October 1970).

<sup>150</sup> Harris, *ibid*, p 137.

<sup>151</sup> In the anti-war movement, for example, as Barry York has noted, there was "...never any effort by the Labor Party leadership to arouse rank-and-file unionists to take action" (B.

the march. Hayden walked on the pavement: "...keeping up with the march but not taking part. Having made his stand, he was now being circumspect".<sup>152</sup> Labor Senator George Georges, however, was one of the leaders of the march.<sup>153</sup> University of Queensland Vice-Chancellor Zelman Cowen in his 1971 statement about the university strike against the Springboks tour, criticised the role played by Georges on the campus. "This university," he said, "is held in low esteem because it is seen to harbour persons who have no respect for the institution on which the community...has spent great resource".<sup>154</sup>

At Sydney University, a week before the end of the Springboks tour, NSW Labor MP Barry Cohen warned students that the number of demonstrations should be cut down as these were "tending to alienate public opinion and so help the return of the government".<sup>155</sup> Cohen was furious when some radicals "said they weren't interested," confirming "the general feeling amongst the great majority of Labor MPs that it would be dangerous and unwise for them to become too closely involved with the anti-apartheid movement".<sup>156</sup> Indeed, according to Harris, the Labor Party "refused to get right into the anti-apartheid movement" judging that the popularity of the movement "was too slight for a party desperately wanting power..."<sup>157</sup> The strike against the Springboks and the role played by university students were later held responsible for the loss of two by-elections by most of the State Parliamentary Labor Party in Queensland, whose lack of sympathy for radical causes was a source of conflict with unions affiliated to the Queensland TLC.<sup>158</sup>

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York, "Power to the Young," in V. Burgmann and J. Lee (eds), *Staining the Wattle: a People's History of Australia since 1788*, (Fitzroy: McPhee Gribble Publishers Pty Ltd, 1988), p 240).

<sup>152</sup> Harris, *op cit*, p 138.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Vice-Chancellor's statement, 29 September 1971, Dan O'Neill collection, box 1 (loose).

<sup>155</sup> Harris, *op cit*, p 224.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*, p 223.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle May-August 1971," *op cit*, p 442.

In Victoria however, federal intervention had resulted, unintentionally, in firmer links between the Victorian Left and radical students. The recently deposed State Secretary of the VCE, Bill Hartley, enrolled in 1971 as a part-time politics student at the University of La Trobe. During that year the La Trobe SRC leadership established firm links with the new Socialist Left, and individual SRC members including Ian MacDonald and Brian Pola joined the ALP. Hartley, in the words of La Trobe student leader Brian Pola, became "heavily involved" in student politics "and was valuable in providing support from the ALP machine and unions". He became an elected student member of University Council and participated in student occupations.<sup>159</sup> In July, he was arrested with other La Trobe radicals at a Springbok demonstration.<sup>160</sup>

Hartley's support for the La Trobe struggle brought him into conflict with ALP Opposition Leader Clyde Holding. Late in July, he publicly claimed that the University Council was to blame for the blockade of their meeting at La Trobe.<sup>161</sup> Holding responded by condemning the students, for which he was praised by Premier Bolte and the Melbourne *Herald*; and in September he was invited to address students on campus under the sponsorship of the DLP-aligned Moderate Student Alliance.<sup>162</sup> The conflict between Hartley and Holding reflected internal differences between the ALP Victorian Parliamentary Caucus (dominated by the Centre Unity faction) and the ALP State Council.<sup>163</sup> In September 1960, Holding had criticised the role of police in the La Trobe Waterdale Road incident;<sup>164</sup> and in 1971 he angrily condemned the proposed Victorian Summary Offences (Trespass) Bill as "an erosion of the 'traditional rights of the citizen to assemble, to demonstrate and to picket'".<sup>165</sup> Nonetheless, Centre Unity took the view that direct

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<sup>159</sup> B. Pola, *Perspectives on the Australian Radical Student Left Movement 1966-1975*, PhD, School of Education, La Trobe University, 1988, pp 98/99.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, p 88.

<sup>161</sup> B. York, *Sources of Student Unrest in Australia with Particular Reference to La Trobe University, 1967-73*, MA, University of Sydney, 1983, pp 243-245.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>163</sup> Pola, *op cit*, p 99.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>165</sup> York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, p 203.

action was "always legitimately liable to police intervention".<sup>166</sup> Hartley's support for the student blockade, on the other hand, was based on the Victorian ALP's August Council which expressed opposition to the mobilisation of police on campus and support for student direct action.<sup>167</sup> In a letter written to all Australian universities and CAEs in October 1971, the La Trobe SRC Executive urged the ALP to assist La Trobe students "where flat refusals by the Vice-Chancellor to negotiate on re-instatement of expelled students had led to a non-negotiable situation for students, where direct action was the only recourse".<sup>168</sup>

Their appeal brought mixed reactions. Following a raid on Radical Action Movement headquarters in Melbourne in pursuit of draft resisters, State President of the Victorian ALP, George Crawford, promised that trade unionists would protect students harassed by the police; and State Council issued a statement expressing concern at police repression of students.<sup>169</sup> As a consequence, in October a move was made to dismiss Crawford as ALP branch chairman, and he was rebuked by the administrative committee for his statement.<sup>170</sup> These conflicts occurred in the context of sharp arguments about the June decision to include penal provisions in ALP industrial policy. Cameron, who had been appearing alongside Whitlam at press conferences, told a stormy meeting at Melbourne Trades Hall that "unionists ought to face the facts of life about the declining proportion of the work-force in unions and their lack of funds to fight long strikes".<sup>171</sup> In December the ALP Executive voted to remove all penalties but to allow voluntary agreements which provided for penalties. The motion, put forward by Queensland TLC leader Jack Egerton, was seconded by Cameron. A motion put forward by Hartley for unequivocal repudiation of penal provisions was lost. At the same meeting it was resolved that a Labor

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<sup>166</sup> Pola, *op cit*, p 100.

<sup>167</sup> York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, p 244.

<sup>168</sup> Pola, *op cit*, p 100.

<sup>169</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle September-December 1971," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 18:1, April 1972, p 100. See also *Tribune*, 6 October 1971.

<sup>170</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle September-December 1971," *ibid*, p 111.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, p 101.

Government would abolish university fees.<sup>172</sup>

The ALP's approach to the anti-war movement remained equivocal. From August 1971 (the month the Springboks left Australia) until the federal election, Saunders notes that "ALP parliamentarians and officials were conspicuous by their absence from anti-war meetings and demonstrations".<sup>173</sup> In 1972, the Party evoked the wrath of the Minister for Education and Science, Malcolm Fraser, when it endorsed "draft dodger" Barry Johnston as a candidate for the seat of Hotan in the federal election. Johnston's candidature was to become a "running sore" for the party.<sup>174</sup> In February a warrant was issued for his arrest and the attorney-general, Senator Greenwood, called on Whitlam and the Victorian State president to declare their attitudes and repudiate Johnston. The ALP, he challenged, "should unambiguously show whether it encourages lawlessness. It should immediately cancel Mr Johnston's endorsement and condemn those of its members who support any unlawful activities of the DRU".<sup>175</sup> In the House of Representatives in April, Malcom Fraser suggested that the ALP's endorsement of Johnston and Whitlam's statement that draft dodging was not a crime implicated the party in the "Matteson incident" at Sydney University, where students had released draft resister Mike Matteson from police custody using bolt-cutters.<sup>176</sup>

That same month, the Victorian ALP raised a storm of opposition when it passed a motion expressing satisfaction at the recent progress of the NLF in extending the "liberated" areas of South Vietnam and recorded its support for the NLF's aim of self-determination for the Vietnamese people.<sup>177</sup> It was condemned by the federal Government and attacked by the federal ALP for its stance.<sup>178</sup> Whitlam said, "Any demand for a military victory for either

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<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> M. Saunders, "The ALP's Response...", *op cit*, p 87.

<sup>174</sup> Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement...*, *op cit*, p 341.

<sup>175</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle January-April 1972," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 18:2, August 1972, p 268.

<sup>176</sup> *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 27 April 1972, p 2062.

<sup>177</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle January-April 1972," *op cit*, p 269.

<sup>178</sup> Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement...*, *op cit*, p 326.

side is not our policy" and the federal executive announced its rejection of "any decision which would encourage any participant in the Vietnam conflict to escalate the fighting".<sup>179</sup>

In March, La Trobe students met at a general meeting and resolved to defy 'judges' orders to release SRC funds; to continue to recognise expelled student Brian Pola as president of the SRC; to pay the fines of students; and to take direct action to secure the University's acceptance of these actions. The motion had been formulated by Bill Hartley.<sup>180</sup> As a consequence, Hartley's ALP membership was raised in parliament by a Liberal senator, who drew the senate's attention to reports that:

...this discarded official of the ALP now occupies the role of pseudo student, and that in the interests of a subversive minority group he is now carrying on the left-wing Labor policy of preventing...the great body of purposeful students from getting the instruction to which they are entitled...<sup>181</sup>

Hartley defeated the NCC's Jan Sullivan for the presidency of the La Trobe SRC election in 1972 in a campaign that "laid the blame for the troubles at La Trobe squarely with the University Council".<sup>182</sup> One week after his victory, La Trobe students marched to Pentridge Prison, where they were addressed by George Crawford who criticised the indefinite sentences of the students as students kicked and hammered on the steel gates which, at one point, threatened to give way.<sup>183</sup> Division between the Left and Right of the Party was also reflected at the Labor Youth Conference in Hobart in June. A clash occurred between the left-wing delegates, who dominated the Executive, and right-wing supporters, some of whom left the conference to set up a rival meeting.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle January-April 1972," *op cit*, p 269.

<sup>180</sup> Pola, *op cit*, p 110.

<sup>181</sup> *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, vol 51, Senate, 1972, p 1214, quoted in Pola, *ibid*, p 118.

<sup>182</sup> Pola, *ibid*, p 125.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>184</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle May-August 1972," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 18:3, December 1972, p 436.

Some ALP anti-war activists, however, had completely lost sympathy for the radicals. Confronted by increasingly violent clashes between militants and police in the lead-up to the 1972 federal election, Jim Cairns sharply criticised the militants. He blamed them for causing violence at a demonstration in Melbourne on May 9, 1972 and threatened to pull out of the movement. He attacked the radicals as "two to three hundred young and inexperienced people" who had betrayed the peace movement and the people of Vietnam:

...the spirit of May 1970 has been lost. I saw it coming early in 1971. The number of people taking part had fallen by half and there was evidence of desperation and frustration that the war was not over... If violent demonstrations are going to continue then I have no alternative but to withdraw.<sup>185</sup>

Though Cairns was persuaded by the VMC to lead a march on May 19, he warned, "I am not going to give it another chance. If it doesn't work out peacefully this time, I will not take part in it again".<sup>186</sup> As part of his attempts to keep the marches peaceful, Cairns also sent a telegram on this day to the Victorian branch of the ALP urging their support for the march. According to Saunders "Cairns hoped that stronger support from the ALP would attract more people which would in turn reduce the likelihood of violence". Yet Cairns now considered that the public image of the anti-war movement was irreparably damaged. He suggested there would probably be fewer marches from now on: "There is still a place for marches, but we need to use other tactics as well".<sup>187</sup>

As Saunders notes, during the next few months "the peace movement stayed in the meeting halls and remained off the streets".<sup>188</sup> At Queensland University as radical students prepared to participate in a Labour Party march, Brian Laver received a phone call from TLC President Jack Egerton.

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<sup>185</sup> Quoted in M. Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement ...*, *op cit*, p 335.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, p 336.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, p 337.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*.



Egerton offered Laver preselection in safe Labor seats for three radical students if he would use his influence to prevent the students from participating in the march. Laver claims Egerton said: "I'll give you anything...Gough's our man, it's time, you just call the students off...you don't have to become ALP members, just call them off...you name your price, boy".<sup>189</sup> Though Laver did not agree to this, nationwide the ALP's electoral focus did influence the movement. A Victorian Police Department report notes, "in the latter months of 1972 the frequency of street demonstrations was reduced".<sup>190</sup>

Author Ian Birchall describes social democratic parties in Western Europe in this period as "riders on the storm".<sup>191</sup> The Australian Labor Party certainly fits this description. Its leadership eschewed association with "extra-parliamentary" action as electorally dangerous; and it was slow to update its policies in response to the change in public opinion which was engendered by that movement. Those Left Labor leaders who involved themselves in the movement were a minority under constant attack from the rest of the party and were divided between those willing to defend the militant wing of the movement and those who were not. Yet the ALP's electoral prospects were not harmed by the movements. In fact, the reverse appears to be true.<sup>192</sup> Not only did Labor win the federal election in December 1972, but from early 1967, when the federal election defeat had left branches dispirited, one side-effect of the movements appears to have been a growth in the numbers in the Party. A Trotskyist journal noted, for example, that in New South Wales there was "a tendency for leftward moving people, activated by conscription and Vietnam, to drift into the party. This process mainly involves young people, and is taking place much against the wishes of the NSW party leadership..."<sup>193</sup> In November 1972, ALP supporters organised a meeting for Bob Hawke at the University of New South Wales, which was

<sup>189</sup> Brian Laver, personal interview.

<sup>190</sup> Victorian Police Department Annual Report for 1972, p 7, quoted in York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, p 336.

<sup>191</sup> I. Birchall, *Bailing out the System. Reformist Socialism in Western Europe: 1944-1985*, (London: Bookmarks, 1986), chapter eleven.

<sup>192</sup> See also Saunders comments in "'Law and Order' and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement: 1965-72," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 28:3, 1982.

<sup>193</sup> *Socialist Perspective*, no 2, February 1967, p 2. Oakes and Solomon, *op cit*, p 46, refer to an influx of "middle-class radicals" that came with the 1969 federal election.

one of the largest ever held on that campus: "The enthusiasm of the students for the ALP programme, particularly the abolition of university fees left no doubt about where their sympathies lay".<sup>194</sup> In the 1972 federal election "thousands of radicalised youth, many of them students, flocked to ALP rallies...It was the student youth who most enthusiastically supported Labor".<sup>195</sup> As Barry York has commented:

Many of the La Trobe students who had marched in the Moratoriums or along Waterdale Road, who had occupied their administration offices or voted against exclusions and Glenn, were lured by the attractive Labor campaign and the 'It's Time' slogan. Whether it was a desire for a Labor Government with 'socialist policies' or simply a desire to do away with conscription, the Left and its supporters were basically united behind Labor.<sup>196</sup>

Though the student Left expected little of a Labor Government<sup>197</sup>, the election of Whitlam offered the hope of limited reform at a time when the confidence of student radicals in the ability of their own movement to achieve the great changes they had hoped for was beginning to wane.

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<sup>194</sup> *Direct Action*, 31, 23 November 1972, p 7.

<sup>195</sup> P. Conrick, *A Socialist Strategy for the Campuses*, (Socialist Youth Alliance, 1973), p 12.

<sup>196</sup> York, *op cit*, p 336.

<sup>197</sup> A. Curthoys, in Langley, *op cit*, p 200; Meredith Burgmann, personal interview.



YCAC protest, March 1966. Reprinted in J. Murphy, *Harvest of Fear: A History of Australia's Vietnam War*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993), p 145.



Cairns speaking at the September 1970 Moratorium. Reprinted in P. Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), p 287.



Whitlam during his 1972 election campaign with Little Pattie. Reprinted in P. Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), p 316.

Chapter Eight.  
Multiple Personalities:  
Coat-and-Tie Communists meet Che Guevara

*Our great fight in the anti-war movement was with Sam Goldbloom...We had to be respectable, you should wear suits to demonstrations, write petitions and assemble peacefully...At one July 4th demonstration, Sam called out from the megaphone: "1,2,3,4: Stop the war, 5,6,7,8: Stop the bombs, negotiate" and Albert Langer yelled out: "10,12,14,16: Smash the US Consul's windscreen", which indicated the difference in approach...What all of us Maoists, Trotskyists and Anarchists had in common was a difference with the CPA (including the younger people such as the Tafts, Counihans and Aarons) who all followed the CPA line of being respectable.<sup>1</sup>*

*Laurie Aarons...appeared to have lost all sense of perspective. He became totally distrustful, not only of the Soviet leadership but of all the Western communist parties, including the reform parties...He went from one extreme to the other,...Recently, Aarons had come under the influence of the extremist trends of the student movement, and he now tried to emulate their attitudes and lifestyle. He had even turned up to a plenary session in the students' 'uniform' of denim jeans and jacket, when everyone else was wearing a suit. <sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Darce Cassidy interviewed by P. Mendes, *The New Left, the Jews and the Vietnam War 1965-1972*, (Melbourne: Lazare Press, 1993), p 33.

<sup>2</sup> B. Taft, *Crossing the Party Line: Memoirs of Bernie Taft*, (Newham, Victoria: Scribe, 1994), p 239.

As the major leftwing grouping in the labour movement outside the ALP, and with its history of and reputation for radicalism, the Communist Party of Australia was better-placed than any other group to influence the nature and outcomes of the sixties upsurge, and in particular, to encourage cooperation between radical students and workers. As Beverley Symons has noted, this period of the CPA's activities has not been as well documented as earlier episodes.<sup>3</sup> The most important references are memoirs by former leaders of the Party, of which a number cover this period<sup>4</sup> and general histories of the Party.<sup>5</sup> Assessment of the role of the Party in the student upsurge is complicated by the existence at this time of contradictory ideas and practices across the Party, over the course of the 1960s and early 1970s and within the thinking of individual members of the party. The Communist Party's changing relationship with the international communist movement also becomes more complex in this period and the internal disputes engendered as a consequence can be understood only in the context of the particular development of the Party in Australia and the circumstances in which it attempted to operate.<sup>6</sup>

Stuart Macintyre has recently written approvingly of a history of Australian communism which is concerned with personal experience. Such a history, he argues, "dissolves the hard, impersonal shell of the older historiography with the frailties of individual subjectivity," but is also "a shared experience of a generation and an epoch, of circumstances and hopes now irretrievably lost."<sup>7</sup> Macintyre criticises features of earlier literature including an emphasis on doctrine, where dissidents identify the "errors of the Party in

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<sup>3</sup> B. Symons, "Forthcoming: Bibliography on Australian Communism," *Labour History*, no 66, May 1994, p 129.

<sup>4</sup> Taft, *op cit*; E. Aarons, *What's Left?*, (Ringwood: Penguin, 1993); J. Sedy, *Comrades Come Rally. Recollections of an Australian Communist*, (West Melbourne: Thomas Nelson (Australia), 1978).

<sup>5</sup> A. Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia. A Short History*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University, 1969); T. O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream. The Decline of Australian Communism*, (Sydney: Stained Wattle Press, 1985); W.J. Brown, *The Communism Movement in Australia. An Historical Outline - 1890s to 1980s*, (Haymarket: Australian Labor Movement Historical Publications, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> J. Docker makes a similar point in "Culture, Society and the Communist Party," in A. Curthoys and J. Merritt, *Australia's First Cold War: 1945-1959*, vol 1, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986), p 184.

<sup>7</sup> See S. Macintyre, "Dealing with Moscow: the Comintern and the Early History of the Communist Party of Australia," *Labour History*, no 67, November 1994, pp 128/9.

its departure from a proper application of that theory."<sup>8</sup> Being unconvinced about the irretrievability of communist hopes in general (though conceding the passing of the specific hopes of CPA members in the 1960s), in writing this chapter I have attempted to meet Macintyre's call for empathy and historicity whilst retaining an emphasis on doctrine. Faced with the radical student upsurge of the 1960s, the Communist Party found itself behind—way behind, as one radical student broadsheet put it.<sup>9</sup> The problems faced by the Party in responding to the student upsurge resulted from a variety of factors: the erosion of their membership and bureaucratisation of the leadership during the Cold War, the rise of New Left groups, internal splits and so on. These problems, together producing what was perhaps the Party's final major crisis, were material; yet they were also doctrinal, and, moreover, consciously experienced as doctrinal. For indeed, what could be more personal than "doctrine" when our historical subjects are political activists? The crisis of the Party was experienced as a crisis of Marxism. One aspect of understanding that crisis, therefore, must involve the historicisation of the Party's particular brand of "Marxism," a project which by its nature also implies and demands critique.

The Communist Party response to the student revolt in this period was contradictory and inconsistent. The Party leadership swung widely from "mass party" activism to a position characterised by some within its ranks as "ultra-left". What was consistent, despite the diversity of activity and opinion exhibited under its banner, was the inability of the Party to overcome its marginalisation by the radical wing of the movement.

These tendencies can be understood as having been underpinned by ideological/doctrinal factors and by structural factors. The ideological factors were both long-standing (with their roots in undemocratic Stalinist traditions dating as far back as the late-1920s) and more recent. Changes had recently occurred in the Party in response to the ongoing crisis of the communist movement internationally, coinciding with a mood in Australia that the old theories would no longer find a resonance in Australian society. Structurally, the ability of the Party to play a radical role was inhibited by its reliance on some key bureaucratically-inclined trade

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *The Communist Party is Behind This Movement - Way Behind*, broadsheet, 1970, Albert Langer collection.

union officials and a similar layer of functionaries in the peace movement. For both groups, "practice" in the form of years of working in what they described as "united fronts" with ALP members while under attack from the Right was an important factor in the response of Party members to debates about "theory" within and outside the Party, and in particular, to the challenge posed by student radicalism.

As described in Chapter Three, student activists in the early 1960s were wary of being associated with the Communist Party, and came into conflict with communist leaders in the peace movement. This pattern continued into the late 1960s, notwithstanding the conspiratorial fantasies expressed at the time by conservative intellectuals, politicians and groups like the RSL.<sup>10</sup> Student radicals were repelled by the party's relationship with Eastern-bloc regimes; but the more important reason for the Communist Party's isolation from the students was its dominance in the "respectable" wing of the peace movement through its prominence particularly in the AICD in New South Wales and the CICD in Victoria. Individuals like Bernie Taft in Melbourne, Annette Aarons in Perth and Mavis and Alec Robertson in Sydney<sup>11</sup>, as well as trade union officials like Laurie Carmichael in Victoria, though not usually important in theoretical debates in the Party, had major profiles in the movement against the Vietnam war. Because student activists were the motor of the anti-war movement's radical wing, Communist Party members, described by Curthoys as "present, and important, but not in control"<sup>12</sup> in the peace movement, were marginal on university campuses themselves. As late as May 1969, one commentator could claim that the total number of Communist Party members on all Australian campuses was under fifty.<sup>13</sup>

It is probable that this number was less, not more, than it had been when

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<sup>10</sup> See for example, P.T. Findlay, *Protest Politics and Psychological Warfare. The Communist Role in the Anti-Vietnam War and Anti-Conscription Movement in Australia*, (Melbourne: Hawthorn Press, 1968), who claimed that the call for opposition to the Vietnam war originated in Moscow (p 7).

<sup>11</sup> Sendy, *op cit*, p 179.

<sup>12</sup> A. Curthoys, "The anti-war movements," in J. Grey and J. Doyle (eds), *Vietnam: war, myth and memory. Comparative Perspectives on Australia's War in Vietnam*, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1992), p 102.

<sup>13</sup> "Campus Striptease. The Convergence of Right and Left in the Universities," *Nation*, 17 May 1969, p 10.



Australia became involved in the Vietnam war. The Communist Party youth group, the Eureka Youth League, predated (notwithstanding name changes) the Second World War.<sup>14</sup> Many EYL members in the 1960s were the children of communist parents, or "red diaper babies", as they were labelled in the United States.<sup>15</sup> EYL members played prominent roles in University Labor clubs. Janey Stone and Doug Kirsner, both red diaper babies who were openly communist though not members of the Party, were officials in the Melbourne University Labor Club in the mid-1960s.<sup>16</sup> The Sydney University Labor Club was also made up largely of red diaper babies, including Ann Curthoys, President of the Club in 1964/65, who noted that by 1965 debates within the club began to be affected by the emergence of a non-communist Left.<sup>17</sup> As early as the bombing of North Vietnam in February 1965, EYL was ahead of the Communist Party and, in the words of ex-EYL member Cathy Bloch, "trying to drag the Party into activities around the war."<sup>18</sup> EYL members, including red diaper babies Brian Aarons, Patricia Healy and Ann Curthoys, also participated in the 1965 Freedom Ride, consistent with the parent Party's support for the Aboriginal land rights campaign in the early 1960s.<sup>19</sup> In 1966, Aboriginal student Charles Perkins said that the number of young Aboriginal members of the Communist Party had tripled in recent years as the party tried to "get a foothold" in the movement.<sup>20</sup> However, Curthoys remembers feeling that the Party was not doing enough in relation to Aborigines, and she raised the issue at a party

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<sup>14</sup> Davidson, *op cit*, p 104. For an account of EYL activities to c.1952, see A.Blake, "The Eureka Youth League: a Participant's Report," *Labour History*, 42, May 1982. An account of an even earlier period is provided in R. Sutton, *Labor Movement Youth Organisation and Policy in Eastern Australia, c.1918-c.1939*, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1990.

<sup>15</sup> S. Evans, *Personal Politics. The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left*, (New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 1979), p 119.

<sup>16</sup> Janey Stone, Doug Kirsner, personal interviews.

<sup>17</sup> Hall Greenland and Ann Curthoys, interviewed by C. Walker for his thesis *The Protesters on Campus: Opposition to the Vietnam War and National Service 1968-1972*, BA Hons, Macquarie University, 1994.

<sup>18</sup> Cathy Bloch, interviewed by Inara Walden for A. Curthoys, "Women in the Anti-War Movement," project, transcript courtesy A.Curthoys.

<sup>19</sup> "Aborigines and the Communist Party," November 1962, (ASIO report), A6122/43 1416, Australian Archives; FCAATSI Annual Conference Report, 1965.

<sup>20</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February, 1966. See also *Tribune*, 2 March 1966, 20 June 1966, 29 June 1966.

function.<sup>21</sup>

Very soon, however, it was the radical student movement which recruited communist students, rather than vice versa, with communist youth organisations being quickly overtaken by new, more radical forces. In 1965, a significant proportion of activists associated with the Labor Party youth organisation YCAC were also EYL members.<sup>22</sup> As the movement accelerated, most student children of communists quickly came to reject the "respectable" Marxism of their parents. Ann Curthoys, for example, had dropped out of EYL by the end of 1965, and became involved with the Vietnam Action Campaign whose leaders were contemptuous of the communist-dominated AICD.<sup>23</sup> Though children of communist parents were over-represented amongst student radicals, very few prominent student radicals were themselves members of the Communist Party, especially as the anti-war movement gained influence. One exception to this pattern was Elfrida Morcom, a Communist Party member who was elected the first secretary of the Macquarie University SRC in 1967 when she was fifty-six years old. She was later voted president. Morcom says that the political training and affiliations that came with Communist Party membership enabled her to be a leader amongst the students, though she notes that very few radical students were members of the Party.<sup>24</sup>

The problems of communication between communist members and radical students reflected differences in politics which were embodied in different lifestyles and values. Many radical students were growing their hair, experimenting with drugs and "free love," and ridiculing censorship laws. As early as the 1930s, however, Communist Party populism had seen its members celebrating a national "folk"/"proletarian" culture seen as embracing what would now be described as "family values". In the 1950s this defence of what they saw as indigenous working class values saw Communist Party members aligning themselves with forces like the

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<sup>21</sup> Ann Curthoys, personal interview.

<sup>22</sup> C. Guyatt, "The Anti-Conscription Movement, 1964-1966," in R. Forward and B. Reece, (eds) *Conscription in Australia*, (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1968), p 180.

<sup>23</sup> A. Curthoys, interviewed in G. Langley, *A Decade of Dissent: Vietnam and the Conflict on the Australian Home Front*, (North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), p 62.

<sup>24</sup> Elfrida Morcom, interviewed by C. Walker, *op cit*. See also *National U*, 14 April 1969, which reports her election as chairman of the Student Council in 1969.

Catholic Church in their opposition to foreign, especially US, "pornography, sex, sadism, brutality and illiteracy" in books and comics.<sup>25</sup> The decline of the Party during the Cold War had also meant that the average age of its membership had steadily increased, as evidenced in the early 1960s by the description of newly emerging Party leader Laurie Aarons, a member since the 1930s, as representing "younger cadres" in the Party.<sup>26</sup>

Nonetheless, despite their marginality in the student movement itself, Communist Party members played an important role in student politics. In the anti-war movement, CPA leaders and students were in constant contact. With communist-led trade unions, notably on the waterfront, being amongst the first to take action against the war,<sup>27</sup> it was inevitable that revolutionary socialist students interested in a student/worker alliance could not ignore the Communist Party. Moreover, the Party leadership was forced to adapt to the student movement, which it did with some limited success, enabling it to wield minor but significant influence on the movement as early as 1969.

To understand the nature and dynamic of the CPA relationship with student radicals, it is necessary to consider the way in which the Party leadership and the different sections of its membership responded theoretically and in practice to the challenges thrown up by the new circumstances of the late 1960s. The Cold War had left the Communist Party's membership seriously depleted and demoralised. From 23,000 members at the end of the Second World War, numbers had declined to 4,500 in 1963, though an intense building effort raised them to 5,300 in 1965.<sup>28</sup> The harsh climate for communist ideas in Australia was made worse by an international crisis of communism, which began with the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956, creating a climate in which perhaps every aspect of Party orthodoxy was coming under fire.

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<sup>25</sup> J. Docker, "Culture, Society and the Communist Party," in A. Curthoys and J. Merritt, *Australia's First Cold War: 1945-1959*, vol 1, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986), p 201. See also C. Ferrier (ed.), *Point of Departure: the Autobiography of Jean Devanney*, (St Lucia, New York:University of Queensland Press, 1986).

<sup>26</sup> Davidson, *op cit*, p 165.

<sup>27</sup> M. Saunders, "The Trade Unions..." *Labour History*, no 43, November 1982, p 65.

<sup>28</sup> Davidson, *op cit*, p 93; Brown, *op cit*, p 276.

Internationally, the USSR-Communist Party link was breaking, and it was in this context in Australia that debates about fundamental issues associated with the departure of supporters of Mao in 1962/3 contributed to the influence in the parent Party of "revisionists". Party members like Rex Mortimer, whose conception of an "Australian road to socialism" was influenced by the Italian Communist Party and Western Marxism, emphasised the decline of the industrial working class and the need for new alliances.<sup>29</sup> Mortimer argued that the post-war boom had delivered benefits to workers which had enabled them to make peace with capitalism, so that communist involvement in wages struggles had worked, ironically, to insulate workers from revolutionary ideas.<sup>30</sup> These "revisionists" helped ex-communists of 1956 vintage to produce the New Left journal *Arena* from 1963. In 1966 the CPA's new *Australian Left Review* was established to facilitate the relationship between the Party and this intellectual milieu around the ALP Left.<sup>31</sup>

An article written by Doug White for *Australian Left Review* following the 1966 election defeat of the Labor Party illustrates the kinds of issues and ideas discussed by this group of Left intellectuals. White argued that the failure of the Communist Party's strategy for the election lay in its stress on the need to unite the labor movement behind a clear political challenge to the Liberals, since the election had seen a swing away from Labor in factories and on building sites, the swing a product partly of the decline of important seats of industrial militancy. Consequently, White argued, the "old" working class might still play a part in the struggle for socialism, but rising votes against the Government among "universities, schools and among the intelligentsia generally" pointed to the rise of a *new* anti-capitalist class. That class, in White's view, was vitalised especially by the theme of individual responsibility, expressed in support for anti-conscriptionist and school teacher Bill White. In a society in which knowledge (rather than capital) was increasingly the basis for power, this class of "highly and flexibly skilled" university-trained workers were railing against a system where

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<sup>29</sup> R. Mortimer, "Dilemmas of Australian Communism," in H. Mayer and H. Nelson (eds), *Australian Politics: a Third Reader*, (Melbourne: F.W.Cheshire, 1973), p 386; E. Aarons, *op cit*, p 117; W. Higgins, "Reconstructing Australian Communism," *Socialist Register*, 1974, p 159; O'Lincoln, *op cit*, p 107.

<sup>30</sup> Mortimer, *ibid*, p 388.

<sup>31</sup> Taft, *op cit*, p 151; Aarons, *op cit*, p 156.

decisions continued to be made on the basis of authority. This new militancy, while anti-capitalist, did not obviously and logically lead to socialism, bearing similarities to the first anarchist movements. The difference, according to White, was that the new radicalism was based in a class not doomed by history, as were the landed aristocracies who first embraced anarchism. The organisational implication of this analysis was the abandonment of what had been understood as the Leninist conception of the leading role of the Communist Party.<sup>32</sup>

Similar ideas to these, bearing a striking similarity to those adopted by "post-Marxists" such as Alain Touraine (see Chapter One), were also expressed in the Eureka Youth League. In December 1966, seventy-five supporters of EYL in Melbourne listened to a platform of speakers discussing "Have Socialist Ideas a Future with Young Australians?". Speakers included Monash University lecturer Ian Turner; EYL founding secretary Audrey Blake; Paul Marriott, co-editor of *Lot's Wife*; John Halfpenny, a leading CP member in the AEU; the EYL's influential national secretary Mavis Robertson; and Doug Kirsner of the Melbourne University SRC. The speakers agreed that "to be successful Australian socialists have to remould their thinking and attitudes to conform with the realities of contemporary life."<sup>33</sup> Two subjects were raised at the event and listed for further discussion amongst the Left:

1. Economic and material problems for the great mass of people in the "western" world have largely been solved, and these factors would no longer provide motive forces for the development of the socialist movement; on the contrary, spiritual and moral issues of liberty, equality and fraternity, man's alienation from control over the power levers which determine things in our society, would form the basis of winning adherents for social revolution.

2. With the advent of the new technological revolution the industrial working class is disappearing or dissolving and hence will not be the main social force for social transformation; on the contrary, that force

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<sup>32</sup> D. White, "Socialism: the New Base," *Australian Left Review*, February-March 1967, p 47-51. See also replies: N. Docker, "Workers and Intellectuals," *Australian Left Review*, April-May 1967, pp 22-26; and letters in same issue, pp 36-8; White's reply to Docker, "Ideology of Intellectuals," *Australian Left Review*, June-July 1967, pp 26-7.

<sup>33</sup> J. Sedy, "EYL Anniversary," *Australian Left Review*, February-March 1967, p 22.

would be the highly skilled and educated technicians, intellectuals and students.<sup>34</sup>

The 1967 Communist Party Congress spelt out the implications of the rise of such ideas within the Party. The Congress represented the consolidation of theoretical shifts associated with the rise of Laurie Aarons, sympathetic to the revisionists, in the Party leadership. At the Congress, the Party belatedly acknowledged realities like the post-war boom, the rise of the white-collar working class and the rapid growth in demand for university-educated personnel in production and services. While revisionists argued that these changes meant that the "radical focus" of the party must shift to the "intellectually-trained," the Congress refused to "privilege" one class, arguing that all "anti-capitalist" groupings "are in different ways indispensable".<sup>35</sup> As a consequence the establishment of a political basis for the Party's approach to the radical new student movement occurred in the context of a decline in emphasis on the working class as the agent for socialism: a change which held implications for all aspects of Party policy.

The most important concept to come out of the Congress, the "Coalition of the Left," was the strategic outcome of these discussions. The historical context of this concept is important. Essentially, the Coalition of the Left represented a reformulation of the "People's Front" strategy recommended by the Communist International in 1935, a strategy by which communist organisations would submerge their distinctive political stance in electoral alliances with social democrats, but also with more conservative political parties like Christian Democrats. It was a strategy aimed at aiding the newly consolidated bureaucracy in the USSR in its attempts to seek alliances with Western governments against Hitler. Under that policy, "People's Front" governments suppressed anti-fascist mobilisations which were not to the liking of their conservative allies, for example, with the murders of members of the radical Worker's Party of Marxist Unity (POUM) in Spain. It

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p 22/3. Sendy addressed these questions in his report, arguing that while economic and material questions loomed large, "no Chinese wall separates economic and moral issues" and "the conception of an intellectual elite leading the way to socialism with a passive unenlightened mob trailing behind is just as ludicrous as that of the industrial working class making the endeavour without intellectuals, technicians and students".

<sup>35</sup> Mortimer, "Dilemmas...", *op cit*, p 390. See also regarding the Congress W. Osmond, "Australia's Communists Look for a Niche in History," *Lot's Wife*, 13 June 1967, p 4; *Australian Left Review*, August-September 1967, p 6/7.

was in the 1930s that communists learnt to be tough on "ultra-lefts" and "Trotskyites".<sup>36</sup> The CPA, like other Communist Parties, had taken these policies further following the entry of the Soviet Union into the Second World War, by the 1950s enthusiastically embracing what they saw as a radical populist tradition in Australia.<sup>37</sup>

However, as O'Lincoln argues, the Coalition was not simply a restatement of old orthodoxies.<sup>38</sup> Importantly, the Left Coalition was seen as an alliance which would be required even in the event of fundamental social change: working class Parties were seen as the centre of an alliance of different Parties representing other classes which would share the leadership of the new society. As O'Lincoln comments:

These were policies designed to allow the CPA to blend into the political mainstream by blurring both its distinctive policies—indeed its claim to have any special vision at all—and also its stance as an independent organisational force competing for influence.<sup>39</sup>

It is consistent that the 1967 Congress also elaborated a less critical stance in relation to the ALP, with whom Communist Party trade union officials had cooperated during the Cold War. The Congress accepted the futility of efforts to win ALP members to the ranks of the CP and:

...decided virtually to accept the ALP as it is and to rely upon a general social momentum towards socialism to bring Labor into the coalition of the left.<sup>40</sup>

At least one speaker at the Congress argued that the Communist Party should stop trying to be an independent party of the working class and put its energies into developing the ALP: the "natural" mass Party of Australian

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<sup>36</sup> D. Hallas, *The Comintern*, (London: Bookmarks, 1985), p 141/2; R. Gibson, *My Years in the Communist Party*, (Melbourne: International Bookshop, 1966), pp 53-55.

<sup>37</sup> J. Docker, *op cit*.

<sup>38</sup> O'Lincoln, *op cit*, p 109.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p 110.

<sup>40</sup> Mortimer, "Dilemmas...", *op cit*, p 391.

labour,<sup>41</sup> a view supported, not surprisingly, by others outside the Party. Indeed, the existence of the Communist Party as a separate Party was under attack, even within the Party itself.<sup>42</sup>

Despite some attempts at this time to remedy a long tradition of top-down leadership and the stifling of genuine debate in the Party,<sup>43</sup> discussion was still inhibited by a lack of confidence and an anti-intellectualism, the product of those undemocratic traditions.<sup>44</sup> This unfavourable atmosphere for genuine debate may have contributed to the tendency for those who most stridently disagreed with the leadership's emphasis on student and middle class radicalism to do so from the rigid vantage point of an orthodoxy whose palpable inadequacy was precisely the basis of the Party's crisis. A number of important trade union officials in the Party rejected the move away from workers as well as the recognition given to "ultra-left" student and intellectual issues. These policies led, they felt, to the adoption of political demands "in advance" of the workers and destructive of friendly relations with the ALP.<sup>45</sup> The importance of trade union officials for Party influence is reflected in the Party newspaper, *Tribune*, which retained a strong focus on the trade unions and on the "economic" struggles of workers throughout this period, its enthusiasm for wages struggles seeming oddly incongruous when placed against these intellectual shifts being formulated by Party leaders.

In 1967 EYL found itself in turmoil as a result of the impact of the increasing radicalism of youth inside and outside its ranks. EYL members were frustrated by the heavy-handed involvement of older Communist Party members in the group's functioning.<sup>46</sup> Mavis Robertson wrote in

<sup>41</sup> Osmond, "Australia's Communists...", *op cit*, p 4.

<sup>42</sup> See Osmond, "CPA...Disband!" in "Australia's Communists...", *op cit*, p 5, and J. Grey, "Which Party for Marxists?" *Arena*, no 12, 1967, p 47-51, which argues that the Communist Party should dissolve itself and join the ALP.

<sup>43</sup> J. Hagan, *The History of the ACTU*, (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1981), p 278.

<sup>44</sup> Higgins, *op cit*, p 162; Mortimer, "Dilemmas...", *op cit*, p 389; O'Lincoln, *op cit*, p 79-82.

<sup>45</sup> Brown, *op cit*; Higgins, *op cit*, p 162.

<sup>46</sup> See "On the Present Crisis of the League - where do we go from here," pp 11-13; and "The immediate tasks facing young socialists - a Trotskyist view," both in *Socialist Perspective*, no 2, February 1967, pp 22/3 (the Socialist Perspective group participated in and prepared a document for the 1967 EYL Conference).



response:

In the labour movement, in all its organisations, age and experience seem to dominate...While the left, in all its forms, is a critic of society it appears as somewhat irrelevant to many of the radical youth because it often ignores the views and demands of these young people and does not give responsibility to them.<sup>47</sup>

As part of far-reaching changes in the parent Party in 1967, the League was disbanded and replaced by the Young Socialist League, whose broader programme enabled it to attract some non-Communist Party members.<sup>48</sup> On the basis of interviews carried out in early 1968, YSL numbers nationally were estimated at 600, comprising groups in Victoria, Queensland, South and Western Australia, the largest branch, of 300, operating in New South Wales.<sup>49</sup> Yet "broadness" created its own problems, as the YSL would later discover.

Importantly, the context for these debates in the party, about "democracy" for example, were criticisms of the USSR and its satellites. Traditionally, communists had argued that democracy was a "class question". That is, the expansion of democracy under communism would not lie in the imposition of formal rules but in the overthrow of the capitalist class and the establishment of rule by workers, through democratic organisations created by them based in the workplace. The long-overdue and tentative admission of "undemocratic" aspects of the "socialist" or at least "socialist-based" USSR caused a dilemma for Australian and other Communist Parties. The meaning of Marxism was in question as never before. As Aarons describes: "...different interpretations of Marxism multiplied like rabbits".<sup>50</sup> Party members, for example, now wondered whether the rule of the working class necessitated permitting alternative political parties to operate.<sup>51</sup> The "Coalition of the Left" was consistent with this reasoning,

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<sup>47</sup> M. Robertson, "Report on Youth," (For EYL Conference), Meeting of CP Central Committee, February 1967, courtesy Ann Curthoys, p 1/2.

<sup>48</sup> D. Altman, "Party Youth Groups in Australia" in H. Mayer and H. Nelson, (eds), *Australian Politics: A Third Reader*, (Melbourne: F.WCheshire, 1973), p 181/2.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p 186.

<sup>50</sup> Aarons, *op cit*, p 160/1.

<sup>51</sup> Discussing democracy in the USSR in 1967, D. Davies, referring to the treatment of Boris

and was widely seen as a more open, more democratic approach to working with other groups, compared with the competitive and manipulative approach of the Party previously. It was lauded as the basis for unity with a broad spectrum of political forces including students, white-collar workers, new social movements, professionals, church groups and the ALP.<sup>52</sup> That unity, however, would prove to be precarious.

In the anti-war movement, the Communist Party strove to find the political slogans and conduct which would position them, along with their ALP allies, in the mainstream of anti-war feeling. Consequently, though they defended the right of students to support the NLF and attacked the introduction of the Defence Forces Protection Act,<sup>53</sup> they supported the slogan "Stop the Bombing—Negotiate" until the political climate shifted dramatically to the left in 1968. Although they opposed the US Alliance, they also tended to play this down as an issue for the movement itself.<sup>54</sup> In Sydney at a demonstration against Marshall Ky in 1967, the Party opposed those calling for the first time for victory to the NLF, and attempted to ban NLF flags from demonstrations.<sup>55</sup>

Both the contradictions embodied in the concept of the "Coalition of the Left" and also the international nature of the Communist Party crisis were reflected in the dilemma posed for the Communist Party by the role played by their French comrades in events in France in May 1968. On May 13, street battles between students and police had sparked a "spontaneous" general

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Pasternak after he wrote *Doctor Zhivago*, comments: "References to the class basis of democracy are scarcely adequate in explaining this anomaly, as classes hostile to socialism have long been absent as an internal factor in Soviet politics". He refers also to arguments about the possibility of the need for a second political party in the USSR (D. Davies, "Democracy has not kept Pace," *Tribune*, December 20, 1967, p 11. See also in same, A. Watt, "Democracy is Unique in USSR," and "Churchward Replies"). Also controversial at this time were discussions about the recognition of anti-semitism in the USSR (Taft, *op cit*, p 147-9).

<sup>52</sup> See Mortimer, "Dilemmas...", *op cit*, p 390, and J. Murphy, *Harvest of Fear. A History of Australia's Vietnam War*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993), who sees the Coalition of the Left as one step towards "...acceptance for the first time of the legitimacy of other leftist, radical movements, which were also entitled to shape the future" (p 231).

<sup>53</sup> *Australian Left Review*, October-November 1967, pp 5/6.

<sup>54</sup> R. Kuhn, "The Australian Left, Nationalism and the Vietnam War," *Labour History*, 72, May 1997, p 169.

<sup>55</sup> Hyde *et al*, *It is Right to Rebel*, (Canberra: The Diplomat, 1972), p 21.

strike (granted official legitimacy some hours after it had already broken out), and a wave of industrial unrest.<sup>56</sup> Unity of students and workers, however, was undermined by the conservatism of the official and communist-dominated trade union bureaucracy. For the sake of "left unity" (that is, unity with those on their right) the French Communist Party quickly backed away from initial willingness to head marches alongside student leaders, and instead, attacked student radicalism as "provocative". They sought actively to undermine radical student/worker unity which they saw as jeopardising their ability to negotiate over economic issues. Communist trade union officials wrested red flags from student radicals and, later, their supporters physically forced workers to abandon picket lines. This stance was consciously fostered by the Government, which encouraged trade union leaders to believe they would be rewarded for reining in radical students and workers. Officials and rank and file members of the Communist Party resigned over its attitude to the students; and fifty Communist Party intellectuals petitioned the Party, saying it had cut itself off from a great force of socialist renewal.<sup>57</sup>

The initial response of the Communist Party of Australia to the French upsurge was enthusiastic, with Malcolm Salmon being sent to Paris to cover events for *Tribune*.<sup>58</sup> This enthusiasm, however, was soon checked; an interview with the editor of the French Communist Party newspaper warned of the danger of armed intervention and those "who play at revolution". A member of the French Communist Party who had been employed as a lecturer at Monash University warned darkly of the "irresponsibility" and "isolation" of "ultra-left" groups in France.<sup>59</sup> The Trotskyist journal *International* suggested that the French revolt had had serious repercussions for the CPA:

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<sup>56</sup> I. Birchall, "France 1968, 'All Power to the Imagination!'" in C. Barker (ed.), *Revolutionary Rehearsals* (Bookmarks: London, 1987), p 30/1; see also, "French C.P. tells Students to Stay in Their Place," *Socialist Perspective*, 5, June-July 1968, p 46.

<sup>57</sup> Based on accounts in J. Gretton, *Students and Workers. An Analytical Account of Dissent in France May-June 1968*, (London: Macdonald, 1969); Birchall, *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> See *Tribune*, 22 May, 29 May, 26 June, 1968, and see also Salmon in *Tribune*, 29 May 1968, p 9, and 11 September 1968, p 9 on the European student movement.

<sup>59</sup> D. Hudson, "Provocateur or Detonator?", *Arena*, no 17, 1968, pp 15-19. See also *Tribune*, 28 August 1968, p 10.

Many members are disconcerted by the role of the French CP in the revolt and openly express their discontent. Instead of answering the widespread curiosity aroused among Australian workers by the French general strike, the CP leaders appeared (with perhaps a few exceptions) to be mainly concerned with giving a "square-off" for the French CP.<sup>60</sup>

The French events formed part of the context in which the CPA by 1968 was being "outflanked" on all sides.<sup>61</sup> The established peace groups were consistently criticised as "too heavily reliant on electoral strategies" and challenged by strategies "based on the rupturing of consensus rather than the building of broad support".<sup>62</sup> Belatedly realising that they were being overtaken, the Communist Party leadership began in 1968 to make increasingly serious efforts to appeal to radical youth, at the same time playing a larger role in the movements generally.

On campus, the Communist Party formed a relationship with New Left students, opposing confrontationist strategies and arguing for a "counter-hegemonic" approach to winning over the mass of students. This concept of social change was consistent with a version of Gramsci's ideas increasingly popular within the Party.<sup>63</sup> The Party's accommodation to student radicalism from this time is evident in the space and analysis devoted to student unrest and student power in *Tribune*,<sup>64</sup> including, increasingly,

<sup>60</sup> *International*, June-July 1968, p 10. See also "The French Revolution, 1968," *Socialist Perspective*, no 5, June-July 1968; and especially "French C.P. Tells Students to Stay in their Place," which comments on the similarities in the approach of the Australian CP and ALP Left to the French CP.

<sup>61</sup> O'Lincon, *op cit*, p 143.

<sup>62</sup> Murphy, *op cit*, p 227.

<sup>63</sup> Higgins, *op cit*, p 162; *Tribune*, 29 January, 1969, p 7, on Gramsci.

<sup>64</sup> See particularly L. Aarons, 3 July 1968, p 3; articles on history of police violence against students, p 5, and "Student Power," p 7; "120 Years of Revolt on the Campus," 31 July, p 6/7; T. Irving, "Why Students Lack Power," 25 September 1968, p 6; S. Foley, "Looking at Student Power - 2," 2 October 1968, p 6; R. Cahill, "Looking at Student Power - 3: Face to Face with the Establishment," 9 October 1968, p 7; M. Salmon, "68: the Year in Review," 18 December 1968, p 9; "Capitalists on the Campus" and "Worldwide Burst of Student Action," 29 January 1969, p 6/9; "Student Action Looming," 26 February 1969, p 2; "Student Power?," "The Campus in '69" and "The Student Challenge," 5 March 1969, p 2/3/5; "Student Power: in Case you Didn't Know, Fred and His Boys Really LOVE Students," 12 March 1969, p 3; D. Kirsner, "Why Monash NOT Melbourne?," *ibid*, p 5; "Sydney Students Solid Behind Jones and Sime," 19 March 1969, p 3; "Youth and Students Add Color, Life to May Day Marches," 7 May 1969, p 12; "SA Students May Get a Look-See at University Council," 14 May 1969, p 4; "Understanding

articles by non-Party members who were leading New Left student figures.<sup>65</sup> Mark Taft, son of Communist Party leader Bernie, was in 1968 a member of the New Left Club (described by Mendes as "CPA-linked", with Doug Kirsner its chairman<sup>66</sup>) and also of the Monash Labor Club, "as an oppositionalist to its Maoist core". He joined the Communist Party in 1969 and was elected to its National Committee in 1970.<sup>67</sup> In 1970 he was jailed briefly after refusing to register for National Service and after leaving jail went into hiding until Whitlam's election in December 1972.<sup>68</sup> Communist Party student Brian Aarons, the son of Laurie, had earlier been a key figure in the Sydney University Labor Club and involved in the Freedom Ride.<sup>69</sup> He was later involved in UNSW's Action for Love and Freedom, and in 1969 appeared in court as a conscientious objector and was involved in the Revolutionary Socialist Alliance.<sup>70</sup> Despite their parentage, Communist Party members on campus did not see their role as being ambassadors for the working class. Interviewed in 1968, Aarons' statement about trade unions could have been made by any student liberal at that time:

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the Students," *Tribune*, 21 May 1969, p 12; letter "I dig the youngsters," *Tribune*, 28 May 1969, p 11; "Education or Indoctrination," 25 June 1969, p 7; "The Regiment and the University," 2 July 1969, p 7; "Our New Left Still Needs Analysis," 9 July 1969, p 6/7; "New Monash Statute Unfair; Open to Abuse, Say Students," 23 July 1969, p 12; "The Anti-Student Campaign," 30 July 1969, p 2; "Campus Win Shows How Militancy Pays," 1 April 1970, p 12; D. Freney, "Occupation and the Challenge to the Elite University," 15 April 1970, p 4 and reply, 29 April 1970, p 11; D. Freney, "Malaise in Student Left at Sydney University Campus," 5 August 1970, p 8; "How Universities Serve the Boss," 17 March 1971, pp 5-8; M. Aarons and P. Vicary, "The Capitalist University," *ibid*, p 5; G. Banksia, "Students in the Capitalist University," 14-20 March 1972, p 5.

<sup>65</sup> In *Tribune*, for example, see: B. Laver *et al*, 26 June 1968, p 11; M. Hyde (letter), 2 July 1968, p 11 and replies 17 July, p 11, 31 July, p 11; P. O'Brien (Adelaide SDA), "The Socialist Alternative," 5 March 1969, p 5; D. O'Neill, "Worker-Student Alliance?," *ibid*, p 6; Laver, Cahill, Kirsner, Hamel-Green and Bacon, "Protest and Student Power," 12 March 1969, p 1; M. Hamel-Green (SDS), "Theory and Practice of the Student New-Left," *ibid*, p 5; B.Laver, "Challenging the Power Structure," *ibid*, p 6; 9 April 1969, p 3/4; D. Freney, B. Laver, O'Neill, Aarons on Left Action Conference, 16 April 1969, p 6/7; M.Jones, 23 April 1969, p 8; D. O'Neill re May Day, 30 April 1969; and replies "Destructive Cynicism," 4 June 1969, p 11, 18 June 1969, p 11.

<sup>66</sup> Mendes, *op cit*, p 27. Kirsner was never a member of the Communist Party, however, remaining unaligned (Doug Kirsner, personal interview).

<sup>67</sup> Mendes, *ibid*, p 87.

<sup>68</sup> Taft, *op cit*, p 245.

<sup>69</sup> Hall Greenland, interviewed by Crispin Walker, *op cit*.

<sup>70</sup> *Tribune*, 19 March 1969, p 12; B. Gould, "Honeymoon Over. The Decline and Fall of the Left Coalition," *Old Mole*, 3, 29 June 1970, p 8-10; *Tribune*, 3 June 1970, p 1.

... in general I support the concept of trade unionism and many of the activities which Australian trade unions engage in. I would like to see less bureaucracy and conservatism and more involvement in social issues but these, of course, are matters for the union members themselves.<sup>71</sup>

Aarons' comment, however, was consistent with changing conceptions about democracy, epitomised in the publication of the Party's Draft Charter of Democratic Rights, which presented communist democracy as "simply an extension and completion of the existing bourgeois democracy of modern Australia".<sup>72</sup> Hal Alexander, a former Party functionary sacked from his position in 1967, says Aarons was "notorious" amongst radicals: "whenever there'd be a militant demo' fucking Brian would run along the sidewalk, looking, looking, looking at all these comrades getting hit by the coppers and getting knocked down".<sup>73</sup>

The same kinds of contradictions, most of all a failure to base debates about strategy in a consistent class analysis, underlay the problems caused for the Party by events in Czechoslovakia. As O'Lincoln has argued, the CPA:

... which had been groping toward some kind of democratic socialist concept with no obvious example to point to, was absolutely enraptured by the "Prague Spring".<sup>74</sup>

The crushing by Soviet army tanks of this movement for "socialist renewal" led to an "angry and agonized" response by the CPA.<sup>75</sup> Meredith Burgmann attended the impromptu demonstration which took place in Sydney:

I was included in a delegation which was sent to C.P.A. Headquarters to ascertain their reaction. The place was in turmoil. Laurie Aarons

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<sup>71</sup> B. Aarons, interviewed with others in "Student Activism," *Australian Left Review*, August-September 1968, p 45.

<sup>72</sup> O'Lincoln, *op cit*, p 111.

<sup>73</sup> Hal Alexander, personal interview.

<sup>74</sup> O'Lincoln, *op cit*, p 112.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p 113.

asked us to wait for half an hour. Eventually, after many phone calls, he informed us that the C.P.A. opposed the invasion and C.P.A. members accompanied us back to the demonstration.<sup>76</sup>

Condemnation of the invasion was backed up by a series of actions and public meetings, in which the Young Socialist League played a part<sup>77</sup>. Mark Taft, though not yet a party member at this time, was a strong supporter of Czech reformist Dubcek and "clashed heavily" with Maoist Albert Langer over the invasion.<sup>78</sup>

For many student socialists, the events in Czechoslovakia confirmed that the rulers in the Soviet Union were "anti-communist" and should not be defended. The radical paper *Brisbane Line* asked:

Why were the French workers betrayed by the French Communist Party? Why was Czechoslovakia invaded? These questions can only be explained in terms of the nature of socialism in the Soviet Union...A privileged elite used their managerial and party positions to their own advantage within the Soviet Union. They used the international communist movement as a vehicle for protecting Socialism in One Country.<sup>79</sup>

The Communist Party was clearly influenced by and sympathetic to these conclusions. In *Tribune* the invasion was interpreted as evidence that the leadership of the USSR had "debased marxism into a justification for its own rule" resulting in the banning of *Tribune* in the Soviet Union.<sup>80</sup> Writing in *Outlook*, BLF Secretary and CP member Jack Munday rejected accusations that the Party's response to the invasion was motivated by a

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<sup>76</sup> M. Burgmann, *A New Concept of Unionism. The New South Wales Builders' Federation, 1970-1974.*, PhD Thesis, Macquarie University, Sydney, 1981, p 387; see also Taft, *op cit*, p 179.

<sup>77</sup> See photographs of demonstration against the invasion which show placards saying "Young Socialists Say Hands Off Czechoslovakia" (in "The Trouble with Students: An Australia-Wide Survey," *The Bulletin*, 5 July 1969, p 27).

<sup>78</sup> Mendes, *op cit*, p 87.

<sup>79</sup> "Where is Joe?," *The Brisbane Line*, 5 September 1968. See also special issue on Czechoslovakia, 29 August 1968, including "The Red Army v. The People".

<sup>80</sup> Higgins, *op cit*, p 163.

desire to gain credibility, arguing that "in more than a few ways" the policies adopted at the 1967 Congress were similar to those in the Czech Action programme:

The whole spirit of the 21st Congress was one of striving for more democracy, of facing up to effects of technological change, for a coalition of left forces and for an extension of peace activity in the Australia of today.<sup>81</sup>

But the response of the leadership led to a "severe polarization" in the Party.<sup>82</sup> Despite playing, alongside the ALP, a moderating role in the peace movement, the Party's abandonment of many tenets previously considered basic to the Party, perhaps especially the centrality of the working class, was unpopular with a section of the Party membership. The Party leadership had proved increasingly willing to accommodate to radicalism on occasion and, at least publicly, to tolerate and even encourage a variety of non-communist activities and ideas. This trend led to the hardening of a block of Party members whose reaction to these events was to cling ever more fiercely to Party orthodoxy as they had known it. On the waterfront, Sydney Branch Secretary Tom Nelson and four other federal councillors did not support a cable sent by the WWF Federal Council protesting about the 1968 invasion, and Nelson even personally cabled the Soviet Union to dissociate himself from the message.<sup>83</sup> In the building industry, the invasion caused simmering industrial differences within the Party to "burst into the open".<sup>84</sup> These differences centred particularly on the timidity of communist trade union officials in the face of growing rank and file militancy and a shift in CP policy towards a concentration on rank and file

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<sup>81</sup> J.B. Munday, *Outlook*, December 1968, p 17. See also letter from the Communist Party's Mavis Robertson to Dan O'Neill (radical lecturer at Queensland University) dated October 30, 1970, which invites him to add his name to a statement opposing "persecution, harrassment and reprisals taken against those who acted for democratic renewal both before and after August 1968" and maintaining that "the first condition for socialist renewal in Czechoslovakia is the withdrawal of the occupation forces" (Dan O'Neill collection, Box 14, folder "University of Queensland Campus Action 1969-70").

<sup>82</sup> O'Lincoln, *op cit*, p 113.

<sup>83</sup> M. Beasley, *The Wharfies. A History of the Waterside Workers Federation of Australia*, (Rushcutters Bay, NSW: Halstead Press in association with the Australian National Maritime Museum, 1996), p 215.

<sup>84</sup> Burgmann, *op cit*, p 387.



organisation as opposed to the previous policy of "capturing leadership" in trade unions.<sup>85</sup> Those officials, many of whom would soon leave the Party, accused the party leadership of "left adventurism" and of preoccupation with "middle class issues" like conservation. Yet simultaneously the effect of the crisis over Czechoslovakia was to increase the potential for some Communist BLF officials, notably Sydney's Jack Munday, to be responsive to new ideas and practices.<sup>86</sup>

In November 1968, concerned at its marginalisation, the Communist Party National Committee decided it was time to enter the "hurly-burly of the left" and proposed a Left Action Conference. Attended in Sydney over Easter 1969 by nearly 800 students and workers, the conference was a "major breakthrough" for the Party, adopting policies the leadership considered extreme but re-legitimising the Party in the eyes of radical youth.<sup>87</sup> Trotskyist Bob Gould was struck by:

...the extraordinary lengths to which the Aarons faction of the Communist Party was prepared to go to curry favour with the student radicals. In particular they were enraptured over silver-tongued, charismatic Brian Laver, Brisbane student leader, whose rousing speeches for "occupation of the factories" "action committees as instruments of dual power", and the like, were greeted with thunderous applause.<sup>88</sup>

Indeed, the conference, including the Aarons faction, overwhelmingly endorsed Brian Laver's motion for supporting the military victory of the NLF and adopting this policy in the anti-war movement, rejecting Gould's motion that the central proposition be the withdrawal of troops, which was in fact the CP's official position in the movement.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, in early 1969,

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p 389.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, pp 410/411.

<sup>87</sup> O'Lincoln, *op cit*, p 143.

<sup>88</sup> Gould, "Honeymoon Over...", *op cit*. "Action committees" were an idea taken from the French student movement. In the May events these groups, organised on campus, acted as an organising point for rank and file students and also workers dissatisfied with the Communist Party's leadership (Birchall, *op cit*, p 18).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*.

Doug White noted that, nine months after supporting the French Communist Party (whose secretary described militant students as advocates of "reckless and anarchist violence" whose actions would "isolate the vanguard" and work in favour of the Government) *Tribune* now gave "unprecedented space" to members of the student movements, but "scarcely mentions and does not defend" the statements of members of the French CP about students there.<sup>90</sup>

In Queensland, as part of the "turn" towards the students, the CPA had formed links with the tiny and short-lived Revolutionary Socialist Students Alliance, formed in June after the May demise of SDA. The Party allowed RSSA to use party premises which were christened the Socialist Humanist Action Centre. Rootes suggests that the alliance was seen by the Party as a way to revitalise the tiny Queensland branch at a time when it had lost "several of its remaining intellectuals and much of its influence in the Brisbane Trades Hall".<sup>91</sup> The friendship was unprecedented, because RSA, the off-campus parent of RSSA, was stridently critical of the historical role played by the Communist Party. Leading RSA member and Trotskyist Denis Freney, who alone in the group argued that the Communist Party could be reformed from within, nonetheless did so from a standpoint which condemned most of the Party's history.<sup>92</sup>

Yet the Party leadership were determined to bring RSA under their mantle. Not long after the Left Action Conference, a smaller conference was held at Minto in New South Wales with "selected Left intellectuals".<sup>93</sup> Brian Laver, one of those invited, describes an all-night session in which Communist Party leaders attempted to persuade Laver and other revolutionary students

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<sup>90</sup> Doug White, "Shadows in the Long Reaches of Bureaucracies?," *Arena*, no 18, 1969, p 4. See also D. Freney, *A Map of Days. Life on the Left*, (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1991), p 226.

<sup>91</sup> C. Rootes, *Australian Student Radicals: The Nature and Origin of Dissent*, BA Hons, Government Department, University of Queensland, 1969, p 63.

<sup>92</sup> RSA, "On the Communist Party of Australia," *Notes for the Founding Conference*, undated; D. Freney and D. Taylor, "On the Communist Party of Australia: Its History and Nature," *Discussion Bulletin for a Revolutionary Socialist Alliance*, no 1, 26 November 1968, pp 7-12; D. Taylor, "Some Thoughts on the CPA," *Discussion Bulletin for RSA*, no 2, 4 December 1968, pp 1-3; D. Freney, "What position should the RSA have on CPA?," *Discussion Bulletin for RSA*, no 4, 30 December 1968, pp 2-4 (Guido Barrachi collection, National Library of Australia).

<sup>93</sup> Rootes, *op cit*, p 181.

to join the Party. At breakfast-time, the Party leaders, having made no headway, offered Laver, Humphrey McQueen and other prominent radical Left figures half of the positions on the Communist Party's Central Executive and half control of *Tribune* as a further inducement. In the end, according to Laver, only Trotskyist Denis Freney was convinced to cross the floor, his departure dooming RSA.<sup>94</sup> Freney was to become a leading figure in the Communist Party; his influence on leadership policy and employment as a worker on *Tribune* was an issue in the departure of those who formed the SPA in 1971.<sup>95</sup>

Other far-left critics argue that the Left Action Conference represented "...perhaps the most decisive turning point in the development and fragmentation of the far left."<sup>96</sup> For New Leftists, the failure of the Conference lay in what they saw as the Party's dishonest approach to the Conference, marketed as a "non-Party" affair when it was clear that a major purpose of the Party was to pull new radical forces into the Party's ranks.<sup>97</sup> For supporters of women's liberation, the conference proved the movement needed to clean up its act:

There was seriousness and humour in the early pointed discussion about inadequate recognition of women (men out-numbered them two to one) and consideration of their potential role in social change. There was criticism particularly of failure to include a woman as a main speaker, and this was only partly compensated for by the appointment of Mrs Norma Chalmers (an initiating sponsor) and Mrs Mavis Robertson (a co-ordinating committee member) to preside over particular sessions of conference.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Brian Laver, personal interview. Freney himself makes no reference to this episode in his autobiography *A Map of Days. Life on the Left*, (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1991).

<sup>95</sup> Brown, *op cit*, pp 271-273; Freney, *ibid*, p 274.

<sup>96</sup> Melbourne Revolutionary Marxists, "The Left Action Conference - a Storm in a Tea Cup that Drenched the Left," *A Call for the Revolutionary Regroupment of the Australian Left*, September 1975, courtesy Ann Curthoys, pp 7-8.

<sup>97</sup> See for example Doug White, "Shadows in the Long Reaches of Bureaucracies?," *op cit*. White's major criticism of the conference was the transparency of Communist Party attempts to create the impression that their agenda for the Conference did not include the aim of building the Communist Party.

<sup>98</sup> A.Robertson, "The best conference I've been to," *Tribune*, 16 April 1969, p 5.

The Left Action Conference represented a time when the Communist Party hope that perhaps it might almost be able to catch up with the movement, or, better yet, to represent the major force within it, was at its most promising. But at a deeper level, the conference highlighted the contradictions in the Party's strategy: did it want to lead the movement, or not? If so, on what basis? In his autobiography, Eric Aarons indicates that for some party leaders, openness to these new forces was not seen as flowing from theory itself, but rather represented a recognition of a fatal paradigmatic crisis and the hope that by introducing new elements a new paradigm might slowly become apparent.<sup>99</sup> This strategy, however, in practice easily became a vacuous liberalism, in which anything seen as different and new was uncritically lauded. Looking to "spontaneity" and expecting the movement itself to come up with the answers only threw the question back again. The "spontaneous" momentum of the movement was on the one hand towards the forming and/or building of Parties which could play the revolutionary role the Communist Party was widely seen as having abandoned, and on the other, towards (at least in theory) rejecting Parties entirely. Moreover, the Communist Party was "spontaneously" divided within itself, undermining its ability to present a clear policy. That division cannot be adequately characterised as a left/right division. It was Pat Clancy, for example, a BWIU official who later left the Party in the pro-Soviet split, who spoke to radical students about "militant trade unionism" at the conference, reflecting the prestige held by old-style communist trade union officials.<sup>100</sup>

In 1969, in the context of a growing strike wave, these problems became sharper. Discussing student/worker cooperation and the Left Action Conference, Geoff Sharp wrote:

It was as if in mockery of the great Sydney talk that—scarcely before the delegates were home—practice itself responded by synthesizing student and worker styles in one wave of protest against the O'Shea gaoling.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Aarons, *op cit*, p 190.

<sup>100</sup> Robertson, *op cit*.

<sup>101</sup> G. Sharp, "Notes on the Gaoling of Clarrie O'Shea," *Arena*, no 19, 1969, pp 94/5.

The tramways dispute of May 1969 and subsequent upsurge of working class activity seemed to mock the Communist Party organisers of the conference in their attempts to open the Party up to the influence of the new radicalism. The wave of militancy in the latter part of 1969 exacerbated already-existing tensions within the Party and contributed to a sharp intensification in party theoretical debates in the months before the Congress of March 1970.<sup>102</sup> Aarons himself noted that the February call by the Party's National Committee for a challenge to the penal clauses had fallen "largely on deaf ears amongst communist union officials".<sup>103</sup> It was industrial policies, including the Moratorium slogan "Stop Work to Stop the War," which drew the most fire from the minority group in the Party.<sup>104</sup> Defiance of the penal powers was seen as a political question "too advanced" for workers. As Higgins wrote:

The National Committee's encouragement of grass-roots activism and workers' control initiatives were seen as "left-sectarian" since they were offensive to right-wing union officials whom some communist officials saw as useful allies.<sup>105</sup>

Communist Party trade union officials, most notably Laurie Carmichael, played a prominent role in the May dispute, working together with O'Shea, a member of the Maoist Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist), despite their political differences.<sup>106</sup> The increasing involvement of the Party in social movements in 1969 also came under attack from the pro-Soviet faction.<sup>107</sup> *Tribune* headlines like "It's May Day, Mán!"<sup>108</sup> epitomised what was seen by this group as the embracing of middle class

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<sup>102</sup> Higgins, *op cit*, p 165.

<sup>103</sup> L. Aarons, "As I Saw the Sixties," *Australian Left Review*, October-November 1970.

<sup>104</sup> See "Nasty Swipe at Moratorium," *Tribune*, 26 August 1970, p 2, which details attacks by the pro-Soviet group on the "Stop Work to Stop the War" slogan.

<sup>105</sup> Higgins, *op cit*, p 165.

<sup>106</sup> J. Hutson, *Penal Colony to Penal Powers*, (Surrey Hills, NSW: Amalgamated Metals Foundry and Shipwrights' Union (Australia), 1983), p 275.

<sup>107</sup> Higgins, *op cit*, p 164.

<sup>108</sup> *Tribune*, 30 May 1969.

bohemianism and accommodation to anti-union attitudes, expressed in uncritical enthusiasm for the apparently classless "young".<sup>109</sup> Yet the Party leadership's accommodation to the radicals was only beginning. In the anti-war movement in mid-1969, the AICD, having, along with the VAC, been temporarily eclipsed by SDS at the University of Sydney, had again brought the activities of SDS within its ambit as it "began to assume a more militant position and return to the visible forefront of peace movement activity in New South Wales."<sup>110</sup>

Yet even here, the limited nature of the accommodation taking place must be stressed. Margo Moore, who enrolled at Newcastle University in 1969, has described the Party's role there:

...Newcastle had been the bastion of Trades Hall and C.P. and they had very good relations with the police. And never had trouble at demos and in fact didn't have demos at all but had sort of marches down the main street...

The Communist Party, she says, was:

...still very authoritarian...They used to send a representative to the campus meetings who was basically there to make sure we toed the party line, which was very strange because he wasn't a student and he was twenty years older than the rest of us. And he'd sort of sit in these meetings and try and control them.<sup>111</sup>

In late November, officials of the WWF were defied by their own rank and file who refused to unload the *Jeparit*, bound for Vietnam, at a time when WWF policy, in line with the ACTU, was against such action.<sup>112</sup> At the same time, radicals were rallying against attempts by the AICD to exclude

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<sup>109</sup> Brown, *op cit*, pp 267/268.

<sup>110</sup> J.O. O'Callaghan, *Perspectives on Peace: Aspects of the Analyses, Policies and Practices of the Peace Movement in New South Wales c.1950 - c.1970*, BA Hons, History Department, Sydney University, 1986, p 57.

<sup>111</sup> Margo Moore, interviewed by Inara Walden for A. Curthoys "Women in the Anti-War Movement" project, transcript courtesy A.Curthoys.

<sup>112</sup> Saunders, "The Trade Unions...", *op cit*, p 69.

militants from the Moratorium Committee.<sup>113</sup>

In Sydney in particular, the Party's inconsistency caused problems for the Trotskyist group, Resistance, who advocated that "withdrawal" be the central slogan of the movement. In December 1969 their proposal for a "December Mobilisation Against the War in Vietnam" under that slogan led to their being attacked by Denis Freney and the Aarons faction of the CP for not making the central slogan "Support for the NLF".<sup>114</sup> But by early 1970, preparations for the Moratorium were underway, vitalised by the new-found enthusiasm of the ALP for involvement in the movement now that the December 1969 federal election was past. The Party's twenty-second congress in March was the first since the events of 1968, and very much under their influence, as Taft has noted.<sup>115</sup> Early that month, *Tribune* had published "1,000 words," an appeal to the Communist Party to stay relevant to youth; it was signed by 100 young people, including many students.<sup>116</sup> The Congress was conducted in a mood of elation, but characterised by critics as adopting ideas "which were an eclectic mish-mash of just about every 'new idea' floating around the radical world".<sup>117</sup> Despite being open to non-members, a reflection of the influence of the student movement, the Congress also saw the removal of prominent national committee members who were trade union leaders associated with the pro-Soviet group in the Party.<sup>118</sup> In this context, the Communist Party's stance in the movement changed back to support for the slogan of withdrawal of troops from Vietnam, a somersault which perplexed those radical student groups whom the Party had ardently wooed over the previous twelve months.<sup>119</sup>

Trotskyist and member of Resistance Jim Percy, writing in 1971, concluded

<sup>113</sup> *Struggle*, 1:2, late 1969 (Albert Langer collection, Noel Butlin Archives).

<sup>114</sup> Gould, "Honeymoon Over...", *op cit*, p 9.

<sup>115</sup> Taft, *op cit*, p 248. For a more positive view of the Congress, see E. Aarons, "The Congress and After," *Australian Left Review*, June-July 1970, pp 45-55.

<sup>116</sup> *Tribune*, 4 March 1970, p 8. See also D. Freney report on the Congress, *Tribune*, 8 April, 1970, p 8. He describes the Congress as a "historic break with Stalinism" (and see also Freney, *A Map of Days*, *op cit*, p 259).

<sup>117</sup> Gould, "Honeymoon Over...", *op cit*, p 9.

<sup>118</sup> Taft, *op cit*, p 248.

<sup>119</sup> B. Gould, "Honeymoon Over...", *op cit*, p 9.

that the Communist Party played a dual role in the anti-war movement. Their official support for the NLF led them to sometimes advocate demonstrations called specifically around "anti-imperialist" slogans, the stance favoured by Maoists and the Far Left:

...the CP chooses to "support the NLF" when organizations besides their own attempt to organise mass antiwar actions. At other times their policy is kept very much in mothballs. In the broad organizations where communist party members work, specifically in the Sydney AICD and in Melbourne CICD and so on, a line is pushed which is little different from that of the liberals and pacifists.<sup>120</sup>

The Party's position in relation to the moderation/militancy debate, however, was more consistent. Sendy claims that the Party in Victoria argued against conservatism in the movement:

On the eve of the first moratorium a panic-stricken ALP personality sought a discussion with Bernie Taft and me: he pleaded with us to use our connections to torpedo the plans for a sit-down in Bourke Street. We politely refused.<sup>121</sup>

Taft explained that "any attempt to prevent this strong action would be counter-productive, and would play into the hands of the Maoists".<sup>122</sup> In Melbourne, the idea of "occupying the streets" was supported by a section of the Labor Party; indeed, Jim Cairns was its most public proponent. Taft, vice-chairman of VMC, a group formed to organise the May Moratorium, worked closely with some Labor leaders. But Victorian CP members were critical of Labor Left leaders. Taft warned the Left's Bill Hartley that the way he was leading the Labor Party was harmful, and Hartley, favourably disposed to the Sydney Aarons leadership in Sydney, in turn attacked Victorian CP leaders as "soft".<sup>123</sup> As members of the VMC, Communist

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<sup>120</sup> J. Percy, "Mass Action and Movement Strategy," talk given at National Anti-War Conference, 17-21 February, 1971 (Laurie Carmichael collection, Noel Butlin Archives).

<sup>121</sup> Sendy, *op cit*, p 179.

<sup>122</sup> Taft, *op cit*, p 247. See also R. Mortimer, Student Action - Out of Nihilism," *Australian Left Review*, April-May 1970, p 75, in which he warns of the "overweening arrogance and vicious intolerance of "Benditism" in France.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, p 249.



Party leaders kept a tight rein on organising for the Moratorium, to reduce the influence of the radicals. As Taft says: "in cooperation with others, the Communist Party managed to contribute enough numbers to keep the Maoist students in check."<sup>124</sup>

Where the Labor Party was less sympathetic to a sit-down for the Moratorium, the Communist Party took a more conservative stance, as was graphically illustrated in what became known as the "Laver Incident" at the Moratorium in Brisbane. A photograph of the incident shows radical student leader Brian Laver being physically restrained by rank and file members of the Communist Party and ALP trade union officials as he attempts to wrest the microphone from one of the formal speakers. Concerned to prevent a motion for a Queen Street forum to be held during the march being put to the assembled crowd, CP and ALP trade union leaders told radicals that Laver would be permitted to speak, and then withdrew that permission at the last possible moment.<sup>125</sup> In *Tribune*, Queensland state secretary of the Party Charlie, Gifford wrote:

The "forum" meant the indefinite occupation of Queen Street, the main city street, and almost certainly would have led to senseless violence.

But perhaps the popularity of the sit-down in Bourke Street was the reason Gifford also wrote in the same (retrospective) article:

With the benefit of hindsight, one could agree that the demonstration would have been strengthened by a short-term occupation or sit-down in Queen Street. But the whole issue of more militant action became obscured and prejudiced by the super-militant, bustling tactics of some RSSA leaders.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, p 247. See also Murphy, *op cit*, p 256, on the role of Party as "broker" in the anti-war coalition at this time.

<sup>125</sup> "Applying the Moratorium Gag," *Courier Mail*, 9 May 1970.

<sup>126</sup> C. Gifford, "The facts about the 'Laver incident'," *Tribune*, 24 June 1970, p 4. Two later examples of the Communist Party's moderating influence in Queensland are the September moratorium (see J.Harris "....or Why Brisbane Did as It Was Told," (paper at anti-war conference, 1971, Albert Langer collection); and the anti-Springboks demonstration in July 1971 which was distinctive in Australia for *not* disrupting the match (S. Harris, *Political Football*, *op cit*).

At the Left Action Conference, the Communist Party had courted Laver;<sup>127</sup> now, having been unable to bring him within their ambit, they attempted to silence him. The incident highlighted the Party's hostility towards radical action and radical actionists in the peace movement. It also suggested a deep cynicism regarding the ability of participants in the rally to accurately judge for themselves, on the basis of reasoned argument from both sides, what actions were in their interests. Laver and other radical students reproduced the photograph on a widely-circulated broadsheet with the caption "The Communist Party is Behind this Movement—Way Behind". The real victors in the moratorium, Laver argued, were the ALP Left, who, aided by Communist Party "Stalinists and centrists" had successfully convinced participants that the Vietnam war was the result "of a mistake of an otherwise workable system of democracy in a capitalist Australia" which could be solved by the election of an ALP government.<sup>128</sup> Despite the actions of Party leaders, Laver says "the best CPA militants" marched with the radical students, and a number later left the Party over this incident.<sup>129</sup>

Other events that year show that the tensions between the radical Left and the Communist Party were not confined to Brisbane. In Sydney in July, the "pro-Aarons" leadership of the Young Socialist League came into conflict with activists over the termination of the party's lease of Barricades, a radical meeting-place. Under pressure from the Church of England, shortly to become the target of a mass anti-eviction movement in the area, the leadership surrendered the lease, giving resident activists (mostly YSL members) four days to leave; this provoked a "deep factional dispute".<sup>130</sup> In response to criticisms over these episodes, Denis Freney suggested in *Tribune* that these criticisms amounted to "red-baiting" as an attempt to find a scapegoat for the malaise in the student left.<sup>131</sup> In Melbourne,

<sup>127</sup> Indeed, according to Freney, *op cit*, p 234, at the end of 1968 Charlie Gifford and Laver had been "getting on famously".

<sup>128</sup> B. Laver, "Towards the Spring Offensive" *Old Mole*, 29 June 1970, p 10. See also W. Osmond, "The Brian Laver Incident"; B.Gould, "Honeymoon Over. The Decline and Fall of the Left Coalition" in same, pp 8-10.

<sup>129</sup> Brian Laver, personal interviews.

<sup>130</sup> P. Burnett, "The Lease at Barricades," *Old Mole*, 4, July 1970.

<sup>131</sup> D. Freney, "Malaise in Student Left at Sydney University Campus," *Tribune*, 5 August 1970, p 8. See also W. Osmond's reply to Freney, "Some notes on radicalism in Sydney: Warren Osmond," *Old Mole*, 5, 31 August 1970, p 10.

divisions between the Party and Maoist students were symbolised by the organisation of two separate "July 4" demonstrations, one held on July 3.<sup>132</sup> Yet at the same time, the Party's accommodation to student radicalism had opened a space within the Party for rank and file members to embrace more radical strategies. Some members of the Party appeared almost to be trying to "out-student" the students. In Sydney, Freney, Alec Robertson, other Party members and other activists including Meredith Burgmann, celebrated July 4 with a Maoist-style raid of the Sydney Stock Exchange. As Freney and others sprayed "Victory to the NLF" over the walls of the Stock Exchange, Robertson harangued amazed Exchange workers. The activists then threw leaflets into the air and dispersed.<sup>133</sup>

Nonetheless, party strategy remained highly sensitive to the strategies followed by the ALP. Despite wooing student radicals of all hues from 1968, in 1970 *Tribune* articles began to show signs of their strained relationship with the radicals,<sup>134</sup> as well as giving greater space to the "counter-culture".<sup>135</sup> In the months following the first Moratorium, as ALP enthusiasm for the September Moratorium began to wane, several attacks on "ultra-lefts" were published.<sup>136</sup> In June 1971, *Tribune* published an article criticising those in the movement who regarded increased violent action by police as desirable, saying:

...one effect of artificially provoked fights with police is to hamper the development of liason between trade unionists and young people, particularly students. Existing conservative and backward ideas about students based on long-standing prejudices and reinforced by the mass media are further strengthened. Deliberate provocation of the police is often the result of childishness, or frustrations at the

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<sup>132</sup> B. York, *Sources of Student Unrest in Australia with Particular Reference to La Trobe University, 1967-73*, MA, University of Sydney, 1983, p 193.

<sup>133</sup> Freney, *op cit*, p 271. Media reports claimed they had knocked down staff and thrown acid in the raid.

<sup>134</sup> See for example, "Victory over Violence," 27 May 1970, p 6.

<sup>135</sup> D. Freney on Jerry Rubin's *Do it!*, 22 July 1970, p 6; and letters criticising, 5 August 1970, p 11; "Counter-Culture: The Foco Story and the Surfie Communes," 2 September 1970, p 6/7; "The Youth Culture," 18 November 1970, p 7; review of Abbie Hoffman's *Revolution for the Hell of it*, 3 March 1971, p 7.

<sup>136</sup> *Tribune*, 19 August, 1970, p 4; 26 August 1970, p 2;

difficulties of the anti-war and socialist movements. The deliberate planting of paid provocateurs cannot be entirely ruled out...<sup>137</sup>

The conflicts over moderation and militancy in 1970 took their toll on the Party. By early 1971, relations with the pro-Soviet minority in the Party were at their lowest and the *Australian Socialist* group was expelled for publishing a rival paper. Some 800 of the 2,500 Communist Party members later became part of the Socialist Party of Australia, formed in December 1971.<sup>138</sup> Hoping to fare better with their internal differences suddenly annulled, the majority threw themselves into the Springboks campaign and the movements.<sup>139</sup> Despite their significant efforts, however, the Party itself did not prosper, and the mood of the Party Congress held in April 1972 was "despondent".<sup>140</sup> Divisions continued to trouble the Party.<sup>141</sup> The Victorian "revisionist" leaders were critical of the treatment of the pro-Soviet group. Taft saw the split with the SPA as indicating fundamental differences in the Party between those who believed in a gradualist approach in cooperation with the progressive forces in the Labor Party and those around Aarons who looked to "small Trotskyist groups, militants in the trade union movement and extremists in the womens' and students' movement," and believed in forming a small revolutionary vanguard to lead the working class to power.<sup>142</sup>

Nonetheless, the renewed emphasis on the "ideological offensive" within the student movement had one positive outcome for the party: as the movement lost momentum, the popularity of Communist Party-influenced ideas on campus grew. Perry noted the increased influence at this time of

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<sup>137</sup> "Meet the Political Phrenologists," *Tribune*, 2 June 1971, p 11.

<sup>138</sup> Brown, *op cit*, pp 281, 277.

<sup>139</sup> Freney, *op cit*.

<sup>140</sup> Higgins, *op cit*, p 172.

<sup>141</sup> One example of this was the Party's response to debates about Palestine and Israel. Though the 1971 split enabled a new "uncompromisingly anti-Israel" position to challenge the long-held pro-Israeli position, when pro-Palestinian motions were passed at the 1974 AUS January Annual Council, whilst the Party sided with the Palestinian resistance, Communist Party students and the Party itself remained divided over the issue (C. Johnston, "The Communist Party of Australia and the Palestinian Revolution 1967-1976," *Labour History*, 37, November 1979, pp 86-100). See also Mendes, *op cit*, on this issue.

<sup>142</sup> Taft, *op cit*, p 253.

radicals who argued that "theoretically the movement is not yet capable of much positive action until more intellectual work, research, etc, has been carried out."<sup>143</sup> One indication of this influence was the election of Philip Hetherington and Mark Taft as editors of *Lot's Wife*.<sup>144</sup> Alongside this increased emphasis on "counter-hegemony" was an increased involvement in radical movements. The Party was enthusiastically supporting radical initiatives in the labour movement, notably the BLF, from whom they recruited a number of members, largely on the basis of the high profile of Communist Party officials like Jack Munday and Joe Owens.<sup>145</sup> The party played an important role in the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, and communist women workers became an important part of the women's movement. At the Party's 1972 Congress, Denis Freney supported a gay rights motion, later coming out himself in conversation with the mover of the motion; other gay members of the Party also began to go public.<sup>146</sup> At the same time, the Party continued to play a restraining role in the anti-war movement. In 1972, for example, wharfies and seamen supporters of the Communist Party blocked radical students from reaching the US Consulate during an anti-war march.<sup>147</sup>

Though the commitment of the party leadership to radical action was inconsistent, their flirtation with the radicals was also taken to heart by a minority of members. Hal Alexander, in 1965 the party organiser in Adelaide but dismissed from that position in 1967, was involved in the spectacular burning of a model of My Lai village, the scene of an infamous massacre by US troops in Vietnam in 1968. Alexander appeared in court and was sentenced to fifteen days for contempt of court when he told the judge to "get fucked" after being prevented from asking questions about Vietnam of the police who were testifying against him. In protest at his sentence, Alexander began a hunger strike, winning the admiration of Adelaide

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<sup>143</sup> Warren Osmond, quoted in P.F. Perry, *The Rise and Fall of Practically Everybody. An Account of Student Political Activity at Monash University 1965-72*, undated, p 106.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* See also B. Aarons, "Australian left: theory, strategy, practice," *Australian Left Review*, May 1972, p 5, as a good example of these arguments.

<sup>145</sup> M. Burgmann, *op cit.*

<sup>146</sup> Freney, *op cit.*, p 330.

<sup>147</sup> M. Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement in Australia: 1969-73*, unpublished PhD thesis, Flinders University, 1977, p 325.

radicals:

All the young people I knew, students and young workers, used to come up and say "Why isn't the rest of the Communist Party doing *that*?"<sup>148</sup>

In 1972, Alexander played an influential role in the decision of a section of the small radical student group, the Adelaide Revolutionary Movement, to join the Adelaide branch of the Communist Party. Some members of this group were later associated with the "Left Tendency," a group "made up mainly of students and ex-students who after 1972 sought to reform the CPA" and who were loosely connected with the publication of the journal *Intervention*.<sup>149</sup>

Calls for student/worker unity were common features of Communist Party literature and thinking, especially from 1969 on.<sup>150</sup> From 1968, as will be shown in Chapter Eleven, some Communist Party officials played a leading role in the movement in support of "political" unionism; and they made sincere efforts to convince rank and file workers of the need to actively support political campaigns. Some communists were champions of the concept of "workers control". But the ability of the Communist Party to actually build such an alliance in practice was limited, not only by the Party's troubled relationship with radical students, but by the nature of its relationship with rank and file workers.

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<sup>148</sup> Hal Alexander, personal interview. See also *Tribune*, 1 April 1970, p 1.

<sup>149</sup> O'Lincoln, "The Left Tendency," in *op cit*, pp 153-156.

<sup>150</sup> *Tribune*, 28 August 1968, p 4; "Unions and Universities in the Search for Modern Unionism," *Tribune*, 26 February 1969, p 6/7; R. Brown (Research Officer, BWIU, Qld), "It's Not to Late to Get Together," *Tribune*, 5 March 1969, p 6; E.A. Bacon (Qld State Sec of CPA), "Students and Workers' Mutual Need," *Tribune*, 12 March 1969, p 7; "Trade Unionists Seek Student Help on Sackings," *Tribune*, 9 April 1969, p 10; "Sydney Anti-Draft Demo Marks New Stage in Student-Worker Link-Up," *Tribune*, 30 April 1969, p 5; "Booting Workers, Students," *Tribune*, 7 May 1969, p 2; *Tribune*, 4 June 1969, p 12; Union-Uni Week, 2 July 1969, p 10; "When Unions and University Meet," *Tribune*, 20 August 1969, p 3; reports on Workers Control Conference, *Tribune*, 27 August 1969, p 4 and 3 September 1969, p 6; "1969: Year of Challenge," *Tribune*, 17 December 1969, p 2; L. Carmichael, "Why workers and students need a worker-and-student alliance," *Tribune*, 4 March 1970, p 5; letter, 18 March 1970, p 8; Lenin on workers and students, 22 April 1970, p 7; "May Day and the 1970s," 13 May 1970, p 4; "New Campus Interest in Worker Links," *Tribune*, 30 September 1970, p 4; "Worker-Student Action Plans," 27 June - 3 July 1972, p 8. See also Chapter Twelve.

Though the Party's trade union base was perhaps its most important remaining area of influence after the Cold War, its influence had waned and tended to be "top-down".<sup>151</sup> The following description of the Party's declining fortunes on the Sydney waterfront gives some idea of the decline:

Once there were six party branches of waterside workers and one of seamen. Falling membership reduced the number of waterside workers' branches to four, though on meeting nights each branch could still easily muster an average attendance of thirty. But the erosion continued and in 1965 the five branches were merged into one, known as the Maritime Branch. As of now [May 1968] an average attendance at the branch meeting is thirty and party leaders are in despair at the situation. This situation is not confined to the waterfront and the party has been forced to regroup its branches on an electorate [sic] basis.<sup>152</sup>

The Party's conception of its role in the working class in this period was inconsistent, to say the least; "revisionists" argued that the industrial working class could no longer play a "privileged" role in the struggle for socialism at the same time as the leadership promoted radical ideas like workers control and self-management and raised the anger of ALP leaders by arguing about the need for "politics" in the trade union movement.<sup>153</sup>

As O'Lincoln has noted, the Party's impressionistic and eclectic adaptation to the radical left saw toleration of the anti-working-class prejudices of some in the New Left; *Tribune* cited (in a report on the counter-culture in Nimbin) a young man who said that communists and the working class, "bogged down in their booze-oriented suburban life," were not in touch with the revolution.<sup>154</sup> Significantly also, the Communist Party's approach to radical "adventurist" trends in the student and labour movements was restricted in an important sense. Whilst it was conceded—at times—that

<sup>151</sup> F. Wells, "The Communist Party of Australia," in Mayer and Nelson, *op cit*, p 400.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.* See also Davidson, *op cit*, p 157, on the Party's set-backs in the ACTU and generally in the union movement in the early 1960s.

<sup>153</sup> See for example M. Salmon, "New York Vietnam demonstration that should never have been," *Tribune*, 3 June 1970, p 9, and "Trade Unions. Politics/Conscription," AEU Newsletter, no 11, October 9 1969 (a rough draft of this article in the Laurie Carmichael collection at the Noel Butlin archives suggests that he is the author).

<sup>154</sup> O'Lincoln, *op cit*, p 146.

"ultraleftism" could play a positive, provocative role in challenging the hegemony, it was assumed that such "adventurism" would be carried out only by a minority and would not and could not be made general. This belief resonated with the wide belief in the Party that the Australian working class was no longer potentially revolutionary.

A number of episodes illustrate this point. For example, in 1966 WWF official (and later SPA member) E.V. Elliott explained to students at a meeting organised by the University of Sydney Socialist Club that it would have been "ultraleft" for the Seamen's Union to maintain its stance of refusing to man the *Boonaroo* in defiance of most workers.<sup>155</sup> This concern not to "run ahead of the class" was not confined to the pro-Soviet wing of the Party. The same approach is illustrated by Denis Freney's description of the role he played in a Teachers' Federation dispute sparked by his transfer during a wages campaign. With teachers threatening to strike and students campaigning in his support, Freney was accused in parliament of organising high school students for "revolution". Rather than seeing this attack as an opportunity to introduce the issue of the Vietnam war into the Teacher's campaign, Freney denied the accusation. In doing so he was following a long tradition established by Federation president and Communist Party member Sam Lewis, who throughout the Cold War had refused to confirm or deny his membership of the Party in order to prevent industrial campaigns being undermined by the "Communist" smear. As Federation official Cathy Bloch says, having been "thrown out" of the leadership of the Federation in the early 1960s as a consequence of their involvement in the peace movement, Left leaders were very wary about committing the union to non-educational campaigns.<sup>156</sup> By 1970, however, high school students, the Federation and Freney himself were heavily and unapologetically involved in direct action against the war.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Saunders, "The Trade Unions...", *op cit*, p 67.

<sup>156</sup> Cathy Bloch, *op cit*.

<sup>157</sup> See M. Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement in Australia: 1969-73*, PhD, Flinders University, 1977, for details on high school student mobilisations for the Moratorium; Freney, *op cit*, p 247. It should be noted also that for deciding, on the eve of a strike, to attend an inquiry about his transfer which he had said he would boycott, Freney was accused by fellow communist teacher and militant Doris Jobling of "selling out" his fellow workers. Jobling, Freney says also, "had no time for the other communists in the Federation leadership" who she considered were 'piss weak'"(p 222).



Finally, in February 1972 militant shop stewards at the La Trobe Valley Power Station struck in an attempt to win back an extra week's leave. The strike resulted in widespread blackouts and massive stand-downs; and employers and both federal and State governments were determined to send a message to trade unionists that workers who defied arbitration would not win. In what was seen by many workers as a "sell-out," John Halfpenny, Communist Party leader and secretary of the powerful, new Metal Worker's Union supported ACTU President Hawke when he recommended to the workers that they return to work; they argued that to continue was to play into the hands of the State and federal governments.<sup>158</sup> Similarly, despite their enthusiasm for the "political" unionism of the BLF, Communist Party leaders saw BLF radicalism as an example which would probably *not* be followed by the rest of the trade union movement (Meredith Burgmann's doctorate is an example of this analysis).<sup>159</sup> Therefore, they encouraged builders' labourers' radicalism but also did little to counter the union's isolation in the workers movement; that isolation ultimately led to the BLF's defeat.<sup>160</sup>

As O'Lincoln has argued, the Party's enthusiasm for "workers control" was inconsistent, the issue of whether rank and file organisations were to be formed for gradualist or for revolutionary aims never being clarified.<sup>161</sup> This inconsistency was exemplified by the "work-in" tactic, essentially a defensive response to unemployment, which saw participants in the Harco work-in, for example, working for free in an attempt to save their jobs.<sup>162</sup> In 1969, the Party's main object in the mining and waterside unions had been,

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<sup>158</sup> *Labour Press*, 24 February 1972, p 1. The paper of the Trotskyist Socialist Labor League commented (characteristically): "The recommendation of these reformists is a sign...that in times of international economic crisis, the reformists are more frightened of the strength of the working class than they are of the McMahon or Bolte Governments".

<sup>159</sup> M. Burgmann, *A New Concept of Unionism: the New South Wales Builders' Laborers' Federation, 1970-1974*, PhD, Macquarie University, 1981.

<sup>160</sup> On the destruction of the New South Wales branch, see B. Boyd, *Inside the BLF* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1991).

<sup>161</sup> O'Lincoln, *op cit*, p 146-150.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, p 147. Similar criticisms of this trend in Britain were made in "Sit-ins: the Experience," *International Socialism*, 53, October-December 1972, pp 8-11; "Work-ins, Sit-ins and Redundancy," *International Socialism*, 50, January-March 1972, pp 17-23; S. Jefferys, "Striking into the 1980s - Modern British Trade Unionism, it's Limits and Potential," *International Socialism*, 5, Summer, 1979, p 25.

in Davidson's words, to "ease the men into new employment" before too many became unemployed.<sup>163</sup> Whilst party members wrote approvingly about radical organs of workers democracy, such as the Soviets of 1917, these were seen as only one aspect of a kind of cross-class extension of democracy envisaged by the Party.<sup>164</sup> When radical workers and students went beyond the rest of the class, or, more broadly, the "people," Communist Party officials felt justified in standing alongside ALP comrades to bring the renegades back in line with the mainstream of the movement. As student radical Brian Laver said, explaining his refusal to join the Party in 1969:

...the Communist Party took up self-management...and they made it point 62A—not a central point of power, you know, which it is. It's a question of either something is run from the top down, from the middle out, or from the bottom up. <sup>165</sup>

In his 1993 autobiography, party leader Eric Aarons recalls that for him, half of 1971 and most of 1972 were spent in contemplation, trying to understand the reasons for the Party's decline. His recollections themselves reveal the fatalism of the version of Marxism to which party members turned in their attempts to understand the events taking place at this time. Despite acknowledging that there are other passages in Marx which elaborate, qualify or "even seem to contradict" his interpretation of Marx, Aarons summarises the thrust of Marxism by reference to phrases which reflect the influence of Stalinism in the Australian Party and represent Marx at his most determinist. Aarons refers to the "law of revolution" and the "law of motion of capitalist society," which work, he quotes, "with iron necessity towards inevitable results". Aarons says:

The more conscious sections of the working class, and others who understood the underlying processes and organised themselves in a political party, were an essential element; but the underlying process still went on independent of them. Marx summed all this up by declaring: 'Capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law

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<sup>163</sup> Davidson, *op cit*, p 157.

<sup>164</sup> See for example J. Sedy, *Socialism*, (Sydney: Red Pen, 1971); Brian Laver, personal interview.

<sup>165</sup> Brian Laver, personal interview.

of nature, its own negation'.<sup>166</sup>

Aarons notes that he had increasing doubts at this time about these propositions, yet also felt that the situation might change rapidly, validating these laws:

After all, the unprecedented boom, which the CPA had so badly miscalculated—and we did not blame Marx for that—would not last forever. When it did bust, might not things get back on track, rapidly improving socialist prospects?<sup>167</sup>

In practice, the Party did not sit and wait for "class forces" to create socialism while they watched and waited, as this statement would suggest. Rather, their intervention amounted to an attempt to contain the movement within the range of possibility as they had conceptualised it, even as this assessment changed to adapt to a movement and a social mood whose radicalism defied Party expectations.<sup>168</sup>

In conclusion, in the early 1970s Communist Party influence grew in response to a recognised need for theoretical clarification and argument in a movement which had waned on a diet of fairly apolitical confrontationism. The Communist Party's emphasis on the "battle for ideas," on hegemony, on differences within the ruling class in an era of neo-capitalism, as well as on the diversity of anti-capitalist forces, gave a radical look to a view of the world which remained fundamentally at peace with Australian capitalism. This increased influence, however, represented a minor pause in an otherwise steady decline, Party numbers continuing to fall from 1965 onwards.<sup>169</sup> The Communist Party's subsequent history certainly supports this interpretation, marking it as a leftish example of the social democratisation of Communist Parties occurring across industrialised capitalist countries in the 1970s.<sup>170</sup> The Communist Party was on its way

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<sup>166</sup> Aarons, *op cit*, p 185.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> See E. Aarons, *Philosophy for an Exploding World: Today's Values Revolution*, (Sydney: Brolga Books, 1972), the result of this contemplation.

<sup>169</sup> Brown, *op cit*, p 276.

<sup>170</sup> See O'Lincoln, *op cit*, and P. Spencer, "The 'left' face of Eurocommunism," *International Socialism*, 2:5, Summer 1979, pp 92-105, and T. Potter, "The death of Eurocommunism,"

"into the mainstream".<sup>171</sup> In the early 1990s, its few remaining members would finally dissolve the Party. Its contribution to student/worker unity in this period, while significant, was inconsistent. Despite their accommodation to the new radical mood, the Party leadership was heading in a very different direction from that of student revolutionaries inspired by the French revolt.

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*International Socialism*, 2:13, Summer 1981, pp 105-128.

<sup>171</sup> O'Lincoln, *op cit*.



Brian Laver prevented from speaking by Communist Party supporters at May 1970 Moratorium. Reprinted in P.Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), p 272.

# the french revolution, 1968



## Chapter Nine

### Looking to Paris: China-liners and Trotskyists on the Campuses

*We believe that the orientation of the youth movement should be towards arousing the masses of working people for revolutionary class struggle against US Imperialism and its Australian lackeys and for socialism, and that the significance of the student movement lies in 1) providing a pool of activists for the youth movement 2) waging struggle against important ideological and cultural bastions of capitalism and Imperialism/(the Universities) and 3)"preparing public opinion" for proletarian revolution and perhaps detonating mass upheavals. In short the youth and student movements should be regarded as a sort of "shock force" against the class enemy and should be led by the proletariat and its party, the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) in accordance with the principle of building fighting worker-student unity in real struggles.<sup>1</sup>*

*The French planters had deserted their farms along the coast which had formed the modern sector of Algeria's agriculture...Observers had predicted famine would greet the first year of independence. With no effective government for many months as the various factions of the FLN fought for power, the workers had organised production themselves...They had brought in a good harvest, and the people had not starved...If self-management grew into a conscious movement of the whole people, then hopefully Algeria could become something of an example to the rest of the world.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> WSA (no author ), "More on the Orientation of the Youth Movement," 25 May 1971, Z458, box A4, Albert Langer collection.

<sup>2</sup> Sydney Trotskyist Denis Freney, describing a conversation with Michel Pablo on arriving in Algeria in 1963 (D. Freney, *A Map of Days. Life on the Left*, (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1991), pp 167/168).

Since it began, capitalism has created people who dream of ending it. Inequality, war and poverty and the anarchic workings of the market have ensured the ongoing popularity of Marx's arguments for capitalism to be replaced by a society as different as capitalism itself was from the feudal social order that preceded it. Workers' revolution, the overthrow of rule by the few by the rule of the many, was an idea that also captured the imaginations of the most influential student groups of this time.

The groups which fell within this description are often described as "Old" Left as compared to "New," but the distinction is a problematic one. An obvious point for demarcation is the Leninist tradition, since the New Left consciously distinguished themselves as "post-Leninist". Yet this characterisation is complicated, not only because of the variety of political groups claiming to represent the "real" Leninist tradition, but because, like all "new" ideas, many of the ideas of the "New Left" can be shown to be reworked versions of old ideas. SDA, for example, borrowed heavily from the Marxist tradition, and its members later became involved in organisational alliances with the "Old" student Left, notably the Revolutionary Socialist Alliance. For the purposes of understanding, however, I have begun my discussion of revolutionaries in the student Left with those whose historical roots can be related directly to the point at which they broke from the traditions of the Communist Party. This chapter investigates the activities and politics of Australian student Maoists (mainly based in Melbourne) and Trotskyists (mainly in Sydney, though later further afield) and the short-lived national Revolutionary Socialist Alliance, which included participants from both these currents, as well as those more New Left in orientation. These groups provided a more dynamic and radical alternative to the Communist Party, but in important ways they also tended to share some of its political problems.

Sympathetic accounts of far Left organisations in Australia during the 1960s are rare, usually written by the participants themselves, and often unpublished.<sup>3</sup> The lack of sympathy for these groups is reflected in the

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<sup>3</sup> See for example, Melbourne Revolutionary Marxists, *A Call for the Revolutionary Regroupment of the Australian Left*, September 1975, courtesy Ann Curthoys; K. Mansell, *The Fragmentation of the Australian Left: A History of a Development*, (unpublished, undated); G. Hastings, *Ultra Brief Chronology of Events in the Australian Student Movement*, undated; R. Cahill, *Notes on the New Left in Australia*, (Sydney: Australian Marxist Research Foundation, 1969).



description most commonly used to describe them in accounts of this period. The use of the term "ultraleft" to refer to Maoists in particular was most vociferously used in the 1960s by the pro-Soviet wing of the Communist Party, and has been taken up in historical accounts of the period.<sup>4</sup> It is a derogatory term, because these followers of Mao and Trotsky considered themselves Leninists (regardless of how problematic these self-categorisations might be) and "ultra-leftism" was a tendency in the socialist movement harshly criticised by Lenin himself.<sup>5</sup>

### *China-liners*

The most controversial and influential student members of what I will therefore describe as the Far or Revolutionary Left, were members of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist). The CPA (M-L) was formed in 1963 as a pro-China split from the Communist Party of Australia in response to divisions between the ruling Parties of China and the USSR. Like other Maoist organisations around the world, it chose the addendum "Marxist-Leninist" for its name on the basis of a rejection of what was seen as "revisionism" associated with Krushchev, Stalin's successor.<sup>6</sup> The CPA (M-L)'s membership was overwhelmingly based in Melbourne. The Party's most prized human resource at its formation was a small number of trade union officials in Victoria,<sup>7</sup> including prominent personalities like Norm Gallagher, a leading official in the Builders Labourers Federation, and Clarrie O'Shea, the Tramways Union official whose jailing in 1969 sparked a national strike wave.<sup>8</sup> At mid-1964 its numbers were estimated at 200.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> J. Murphy, *Harvest of Fear: A History of Australia's Vietnam War*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993); P. Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> V.I. Lenin, *Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1950).

<sup>6</sup> T. O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream. The Decline of Australian Communism*, (Sydney: Stained Wattle Press, 1985), pp 100 - 106; A. Davidson, "The Sino-Soviet Split and the CPA," *The Communist Party of Australia. A Short History*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University, 1969), pp 147-162; W.J. Brown, *The Communism Movement in Australia. An Historical Outline - 1890s to 1980s*, (Haymarket: Australian Labor Movement Historical Publications, 1986), pp 261-4. See also B. Taft, "Maoism in Australia," *Australian Left Review*, May 1972, pp 8-11.

<sup>7</sup> Davidson, *ibid*; *Labour Press*, 24 February 1972, p 8.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, *op cit*, p 264; see Clarrie O'Shea, interviewed by John Merritt, 1982, National Library Oral History collection, in which O'Shea expresses his opposition to Krushchev's 1956 speech criticising Stalin (tape 5/2, p 2 of transcript).

According to one ex-member, the largely "middle-aged (or older)" veterans of the CPA (M-L) were at first suspicious of student radicalism.<sup>10</sup> Despite this wariness, after the 1966 federal election defeat, the Party became a pole of attraction for a small group of militant student leaders in the Monash University Labor Club, who were looking for a more radical alternative to the Communist Party. With their decision to send aid for military purposes to the NLF in 1967, Maoism burst onto the public arena, with Albert Langer its most recognised figure.<sup>11</sup> The ruling hegemony, Maoist students believed, could not be whittled away, but had to be burst open.

Until May 1968, the CPA(M-L) had tended to reject student radicalism as "petit-bourgeois" and "adventurist," ideas which reflected the influence of the Cultural Revolution in China. Ted Hill, the one Party leader who had been willing to champion the students, was now given added weight by the increasing enthusiasm of the Chinese press for Western student struggles, exemplified by the events in France. Hill and other leaders began to speak at university gatherings and student demonstrations; and the CPA (M-L) press began to carry articles about the student rebellion, especially praising Albert Langer.<sup>12</sup> The militant demonstration outside the US consulate in Melbourne on July 4, 1968 proved a turning-point for Maoism in Australia. In the following weeks, the Labor Club also established a sub committee (later called the Student Worker Coordinating Committee) to encourage worker-student liason, offering support to all Victorian trade unions and holding discussions with job delegates of the WWF.<sup>13</sup>

In January 1970, Maoist students formed their own revolutionary student

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<sup>9</sup> Davidson, *op cit*, p 155.

<sup>10</sup> J. Herouvim, "Politics of the Revolving Door: the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist)," *Melbourne Journal of Politics*, 15, 1983-4, p 57.

<sup>11</sup> See especially M. Hyde *et al*, *It is Right to Rebel*, (Marrickville: The Diplomat, 1972). Though Dave Nadel, one of the major contributors to this book, was not a Maoist, the other contributors were (Dave Nadel, personal interview), and the book is essentially a defence of the role played by Maoists at Monash University. The book's title is taken from Mao's slogan: "It is right to rebel against reactionaries!" (Herouvim, *op cit*, p 55).

<sup>12</sup> Herouvim, *op cit*.

<sup>13</sup> K. Mansell, *The Fragmentation of the Australian Left: A History of a Development*, (unpublished, undated).

group, the Worker-Student Alliance (WSA).<sup>14</sup> Though based mainly in Melbourne, at Monash and La Trobe universities, WSA groups were also established at Adelaide University and Flinders University in South Australia.<sup>15</sup> WSA was modelled on the US group of the same name, originally not a group but an "all-encompassing plan".<sup>16</sup> Proposed in 1968 by the Maoist Progressive Labor Party for adoption by the US SDS, the American WSA aimed at fostering a working class revolution by sending students to work in factories to radicalise workers while also attempting to educate students in the universities about working class exploitation.<sup>17</sup> The Australian WSA's organisational origins lay in the Young Communist League, the youth wing of the CPA (M-L), which continued to exist alongside WSA and tended to see itself as WSA's "real core" and "principal leading body". The different structures of these two bodies illustrate the essential similarity between CPA and Maoist ideas about internal democracy and "democratic" centralism held by the party. YCL was described as a "closed (secret, or bolshevik) organisation" where WSA, following Popular Front models, was established as an "open, 'mass' organisation". It soon developed a rival and more vigorous centre of leadership.<sup>18</sup>

At first, WSA was organised as one large unit mainly active in the Moratorium Campaign. WSA members were well-known for their enthusiasm for physical confrontation with police. They believed that these clashes revealed the real, repressive function of the capitalist state<sup>19</sup> and

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<sup>14</sup> Melbourne Revolutionary Marxists, *A Call for the Revolutionary Regroupment of the Australian Left*, September 1975, (courtesy Ann Curthoys), p 6; and Mansell, *ibid.* See also P. Mendes, *The New Left, the Jews and the Vietnam War*, (Melbourne: Lazare Press, 1993), p 27.

<sup>15</sup> "Terror Group Led By ABC Man," *Melbourne Observer*, 10 August, 1971. Albert Langer's collection also includes a leaflet (undated) produced by "WSA from Hsinhua and New Zealand Peoples Voice" (undated), Z457, box 13, Albert Langer collection, Noel Butlin Archive.

<sup>16</sup> P.B. Levy, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), p 109. PL was later expelled from SDS in June 1969, but its members were involved in important examples of student/worker cooperation, such as the General Electric dispute which began in October 1969.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Self-Criticism by the Leading Bodies of WSA*, April 1973, p 1, Z458, box A14, Langer collection.

<sup>19</sup> A. Langer, "Universities and Student Rebels," *Analysis*, July 1968, p 3, Z458, box 14, Langer collection: see also "The Courts are Capitalist Concerns." *Vanguard*. 26 June 1969.

therefore, would radicalise those exposed to them. They were scornful of pacifism<sup>20</sup> but also stridently rejected characterisations of themselves as "violent" asserted by individuals in the media, government and "moderate" wing of the anti-war movement. They contrasted their support for militant protest against the real violence of the Vietnam war and the poverty and discrimination caused by capitalism, and charged government leaders who cried "so loudly against the 'violence' of anti-war protesters" with hypocrisy.<sup>21</sup> In 1972 the CPA (M-L) organised clandestine demonstration groups to coordinate and train Maoists who battled police and on occasion attacked buildings with rocks. As Herouvim comments:

The CPA (M-L) leadership and its youth wing spurred each other on, generating an inexorably leftward momentum. Armed struggle for the overthrow of capitalism was envisaged as growing out of the steady escalation of the level of violence at street demonstrations.<sup>22</sup>

WSA members on campus, following Maoists in the United States, saw Australian universities as part of the US military-industrial complex and vice-chancellors as representatives of capitalism. It was argued that Australian universities were one site of the US domination of Australia, where war research was carried out under the auspices of the US military while academics backed up "politicians, industrialists, military men and the media" in supporting and justifying the US presence.<sup>23</sup> WSA publications highlighted the business interests of members of university councils and the ways in which those interests implicated council members in human rights abuses of indigenous peoples in South Africa, Bougainville and Australia, and domestic injustices, such as the demolition of working class housing.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See "Theory of 'Non-Violence' suits Capitalist Class," *Vanguard*, 13 February 1969. Referring to Gandhi, the article stated: "We want none of his 'non-violence' rubbish here".

<sup>21</sup> See for example, the arguments made in *People's Voice*, 20 July 1972, produced for the Aboriginal Tent Embassy Campaign, Z457, box 13; Melbourne University WSA, "The Struggle - Melb. Uni," *Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win*, April 1972, Z458, box A4, Langer collection.

<sup>22</sup> Herouvim, *op cit*, p 57. See also *Self-Criticism by the Leading Bodies of WSA*, April 1973, Z458, box A14, p 1, Langer collection.

<sup>23</sup> WSA South Australia, *The Worker-Student Alliance (For a Free and Independent Australia)*, (leaflet produced for distribution at University of Adelaide, Institute of Technology and ACAE), 1974, p 2, Z457, box 13; A.Langer, "Universities and Student Rebels," *Analysis*, July 1968, p 1, Z458, box 14, Langer collection.

<sup>24</sup> See for example Melbourne University WSA, "What is the University," *Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win*, April 1972, pp 7/8, Z458, box A4.

On the basis of this analysis, the movement for staff/student control of the universities was seen as diversionary. The important task for campus militants was to build a mass movement of students aimed at making the university serve students rather than imperialism by linking up with struggles against "foreign domination" in Australian society generally.<sup>25</sup> WSA explicitly compared their university activism with the Chinese Cultural Revolution, seeing it as "preparing public opinion" for revolutionary struggles.<sup>26</sup> Consistent with their admiration for the leadership styles of Mao and Stalin, WSA members also heroised Albert Langer. One leaflet, for example, reprinted a speech made by Langer at his trial in 1969, with the advice: "We recommend its study and thought".<sup>27</sup>

Though WSA began as a single unit, its members soon began to organise area branches, mainly in Melbourne, which campaigned around community and local working class issues, mobilising high school and university students and others. When their newspaper *Struggle* began publication in November 1971, WSA claimed fourteen branches in Melbourne. By February 1972, twenty-five branches were listed.<sup>28</sup> A 1971 internal document estimated that there were 1,000 to 2,000 young revolutionary socialist students, workers and teachers in Melbourne who participated in demonstrations called essentially by WSA.<sup>29</sup> WSA also produced an extensive literature of leaflets, local newspapers and analysis.<sup>30</sup> The leaflets produced during its existence provide a glimpse of a vibrant

<sup>25</sup> YCL leaflet, Z457, box 13.

<sup>26</sup> "More on the Orientation of the Youth Movement," *op cit*, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Melbourne Workers Committee in cooperation with militant students, *Worker-Student Voice*, October 1969, Z457, box 13, Langer collection.

<sup>28</sup> *Struggle*, 1, 1 November 1971; *Struggle* 8, 23 February 1972, Z457, box A17. *Struggle* was discontinued after the 4 June 1973 issue (see "An Explanation to all 'Struggle' Readers," Z458, box A14).

<sup>29</sup> "A Proposal for Strengthening WSA," apparently 1971 but undated, Z457, box 13, Langer collection.

<sup>30</sup> See for example *Western Suburbs People's Voice* (edited WSA Sunshine Branch); box 13 of Langer's collection includes WSA Newsletters from over sixteen locations, on a great variety of issues, for example "Support Resisters - Resist Police," "Free all Political Prisoners," "Three Students in Gaol Indefinitely," "State Power and the Demonstrator," "Welcome Burchett," "What Does Billy Graham Stand For?," "May Day and Our Tasks," "Laos," "US Steps Up Aggression in Indochina," "Defeat Latest Fascist Attack," "Racism in South Africa," "Help the Pensioners," "Oppose Fare Increase," "Cut off the Bosses 'Penal Powers'," Z457, box 13, Langer collection.

movement in the early 1970s in which they clearly played an important role but which also had a momentum of its own. In Carlton, for example, WSA members were involved in a campaign to prevent the building of a warehouse on a site seen as a potential park for the local community. The campaign resulted in the jailing for fourteen days of CPA (M-L) Builders Labourer official, Norm Gallagher, for picketing in support of a BLF black-ban on the site. Eventually victorious, local residents, inspired by a similar campaign in the United States, began clearing the site themselves and planting eucalypts.<sup>31</sup> The same branch campaigned against dispossessions of Housing Commission residents to make way for high-rise flats, and in so doing, they doubled the membership of their branch, working alongside the local "Carlton Association," "the most successful of the groups formed in Melbourne to preserve the character of the inner suburbs".<sup>32</sup>

Other branches ran leaflet campaigns, for example, against supermarket monopolies. The Springvale-Dandenong branch was involved in campaigning against pollution from a chemical factory in a residential area.<sup>33</sup> Diamond Valley branch members handed out leaflets exposing a member of a fascist organisation who lived in the area, and campaigned with members of the Socialist Left of the ALP and the Diamond Valley Moratorium Group against a proposed by-law to curtail demonstrations in the area, as well as planning a photographic display of evidence of "police repression". The local council was forced to reverse a decision to fill in a dam used as a swimming pool after local residents and WSA members successfully campaigned for a referendum on the issue.<sup>34</sup> On another occasion, Carlton Northern Suburbs WSA campaigned against the Melbourne City Council's offer to sell Victoria Market to a US business concern.<sup>35</sup> In 1971, in the context of a new recession and the polarisation surrounding the Springboks tour, Melbourne WSA became involved in

<sup>31</sup> "Build People's Park," Carlton Northern Suburbs branch leaflet, undated, Z457, box 13, Langer collection. See also T.Gitlin, "The Fragile Paradise of People's Park," *The Sixties. Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), p 353.

<sup>32</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, January-April 1972, p 275.

<sup>33</sup> Branch report, undated, Z457, box 13, Langer collection.

<sup>34</sup> Undated leaflet, Z457, box 13, and branch reports, undated, Z457, box 13, Langer collection.

<sup>35</sup> "Sell-out" leaflet advertising the "Keep the Victoria Market Association," undated; see also "Save Prahran Market," Z457, box 13.

community campaigns against small groups of Australian fascists who were attempting to hold public meetings and marches and were calling for a White Australia. Violent confrontations took place.<sup>36</sup> WSA members saw these mobilisations as one aspect of a "creeping fascism" in Australian society fostered by Government support for law and order legislation and policies.<sup>37</sup>

On the campuses, as in these local campaigns, connecting student and worker radicalism was a central concern of Maoist students. The kinds of initiatives taken included attacking campus representatives of major employers. In June 1971, for example, a representative of the company ACI attempted to conduct recruitment interviews at Flinders University. WSA members challenged the recruiter about the poor safety record of ACI Kilkenny and escorted him off campus.<sup>38</sup> WSA students also collected money for strike funds. In 1971 strikers at Uniroyal wrote and thanked Melbourne WSA members after they collected \$170 from universities and workplaces and published a pamphlet in support of the workers.<sup>39</sup> WSA branches also produced leaflets containing detailed arguments urging solidarity and support for strikes, though mainly written not as participants, but as helpful (and admiring) onlookers.<sup>40</sup> One branch, for example, worked with secondary school students against the war, and produced leaflets in support of a local teachers strike, sparking discussion in the branch over questions like "What line should we take?" and "How can we best get across to the parents?".<sup>41</sup> In 1972, a WSA leaflet addressed to Maintenance Workers at Port Stanvac involved in the oil workers strike called on workers to invite support from rank and file members of other unions, and

<sup>36</sup> See for example, *The Australian*, 1 February 1971; "Mob goes on rampage at Nazi Party house" and "Angry crowd besieges Nazis," *The Age*, 12 June 1972; *The Sun*, 12 June 1972; WSA leaflet, "Anti Nazis Arrested," Z457, box 13, Langer collection.

<sup>37</sup> See for example, Redfern WSA, "Smash the Fascist Summary Offences Act" leaflet, undated, Z457, box 13. See also, *People's Voice*, July 1972, which referred to the police attack on the Aboriginal Tent Embassy as evidence that "a McMahon government is little better than a Hitler government" (Z457, box 13, Albert Langer collection).

<sup>38</sup> *The Worker*, June 1971, Z113, box 13, Langer collection.

<sup>39</sup> *The Worker*, 1:1, Z113, box 13, Langer collection.

<sup>40</sup> For example, see WSA Prahran branch, leaflet calling for solidarity with hospital workers on strike over public holiday pay, Z457, box 13, Langer collection.

<sup>41</sup> Undated leaflet (probably 1971 or later), Z457, box 13, and "Branch reports," undated, 1971 or later, Z457, box 13, Langer collection.

students and "workers all over Adelaide": "We don't make idle promises but the choice, initiative and leadership is yours."<sup>42</sup>

WSA branch reports show that the group had some success in its local "mass work," reflected not only in the growth of WSA branches, but in their tendency to suffer ideological "contamination". Branch leaders were forced to wage an ongoing battle against social-democratic, Trotskyist, anarchist, liberal and "revisionist" individuals and ideas within WSA branches, as well as comrades with a "bad attitude towards security".<sup>43</sup> WSA had to grapple with other ideological currents as well. Despite their enthusiasm for coalitions of the "common folk,"<sup>44</sup> the response of Maoists to the increasing activity of "new" social movements was ambivalent, grudging and often hostile. In October 1971, *Vanguard*, accusing "revisionists" of "exploiting sex" to build a mass base, ridicules those:

...publishing stories about homosexuality and like matters even to the extent of talking of homosexuals as a force in the revolution. They and the women's liberation movement approach the matter from a non-class point of view (and therefore a capitalist point of view)...All this rubbish published about sex and women's liberation without the overthrow of capitalism is simply to preserve capitalism.<sup>45</sup>

Conservative ideas about women were very much a part of Maoist doctrine and had already been a source of resentment for women in the Communist Party in the 1950s.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the background of the Maoist aversion to the gay movement lay in the puritanical attitudes associated with the moral

<sup>42</sup> "Support the Oil Workers! - Make the Rich Pay!," WSA leaflet, Z113, box 13; see also WSA Internal Council, Central Executive, Co-ordinating Committee Newsletter, 25 July 1972, Z457, box 13; "Keep up the Fight", leaflet, box 13; see also "Toss the oil barons!," WSA Prahran, 1972, Z457, box 13, calling for support for the oil workers strike, listing the oil companies and the profits they were making. It argued that workers who defied arbitration could still win, and referred to the example of five British dock workers released from jail as a result of trade union solidarity.

<sup>43</sup> Z457, box 13; "Branch Reports," undated, 1971 or later, Z457, box 13, Langer collection.

<sup>44</sup> E.F. Hill, *The Great Cause of Australian Independence*, Melbourne, November 1977, p 115.

<sup>45</sup> *Vanguard*, 28 October, 1971.

<sup>46</sup> A. Inglis, *The Hammer & Sickle and the Washing Up: Memoirs of an Australian Woman Communist*, (South Melbourne: Hyland House, 1995), pp 147-9.



cleansing of Mao's Cultural Revolution.<sup>47</sup> That puritanism was reflected in WSA internal literature which associated drug use with "middle class ideas"<sup>48</sup> and a later CPA (M-L) pamphlet which makes reference to the literature and art of the "traitor class" in Australia as "full of filth, of degenerate and diversionary rubbish."<sup>49</sup> Maoist students also shared the sexism of much of the student Left more generally. One Monash Labor Club newsletter, for example, invited members to a party at which they were advised to "Bring your own birds and bottles".<sup>50</sup>

The relationship between the Party and the women's movement in particular was complicated, however, by the overlapping of personnel, as evidenced by a reader's letter to WSA's *Struggle*, which said: "A wharfie comrade has suggested to me that WSA should send a couple of young ladies to the wharfies compound to sell *Struggle*".<sup>51</sup> Demands for a recognition of women's issues, expressed through the medium of young female students and workers in WSA branches, could not be easily dismissed. Some WSA members, for example, protested against the idea of Women's Liberation being viewed as a diversion from the class struggle.<sup>52</sup> Women in WSA were divided about whether to organise separately within the group. An all-women group, Women for Socialism, existed briefly before being abandoned because it was felt that it was not needed. It was argued that women's issues should be the concern of WSA as a whole, not just of its women members.<sup>53</sup> WSA members also participated in a separate

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<sup>47</sup> J. Kwong, *Cultural Revolution in China's Schools May 1966-April 1969*, (Stanford, California: Hoover Institute, Stanford University, 1988), p 36-7.

<sup>48</sup> According to this document, the abuse of alcohol was "likely to reduce self-discipline and lead to loose talk," and excessive use of cigarettes should be discouraged as harmful to a members health, Z113, box 13, Langer collection.

<sup>49</sup> Hill, *op cit*, p 116.

<sup>50</sup> Newsletter, Monash Labor Club internal notes, Z457, box 13, Langer collection.

<sup>51</sup> Undated letter, WSA Internal: *Struggle* folder, Z457, box 13.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* See also a letter from "a Carlton WSA member" (undated) to the *Struggle* editors, in response to a recent dossier on "The Oppression of Women Workers" described by the author as a "justification for the current growth of the Womens' Liberation Movement." The Carlton WSA member asked "Since when do we have to *justify* important mass movements?...we must be careful in dealing with the Women's question, that we don't allow our male-chauvinist attitudes to take over (whether they be held by men *or* women)," Z457, box 13.

<sup>53</sup> "Women's Liberation and WSA," undated, Z457, box 13.

group for revolutionary women at the May 1970 Women's Liberation Conference. Ann Curthoys remembers that WSA members were very hostile towards others at the conference, with male members telling WSA women not to participate.<sup>54</sup>

Yet at the same time, WSA attempted to tackle sexism within its ranks. One aspect of WSA's internal regime involved earnest consciousness-raising, or "self-criticism," a practice from Mao's Cultural Revolution which epitomised Maoist voluntarism: the conception that through introspection and hard work, failings and weaknesses could be overcome.<sup>55</sup> Male and female members were encouraged to struggle against the "large degree" of "male chauvinism" within WSA. As well as supporting "Women's Lib," male WSA members were asked to:

...avoid falling into the socially-determined pattern of male dominance, by attempting to tell a women's group what they should do and how they should run this struggle as in the past there has been a tendency to do this.<sup>56</sup>

In turn, student Maoism also influenced the women's movement itself; this was reflected in the militancy of the movement at this time and its adoption, via the United States, of Maoist consciousness-raising.

WSA was certainly opposed to racism, stressing its use by capitalists as a means of dividing the working class. It published *Moratorium* and other leaflets in Italian and Greek and established a Greek Workers Branch.<sup>57</sup> It supported a campaign for independence for Bougainville and was a strident supporter of Aboriginal struggles such as the establishment of the Tent Embassy in Canberra,<sup>58</sup> and was especially enthusiastic about campaigns

<sup>54</sup> Ann Curthoys, personal communication.

<sup>55</sup> See for example, leaflet, "Self-Criticism by the Leading Bodies of WSA," April 1973, Z458, box A14; Kwong, *op cit*, p 5.

<sup>56</sup> "Women's Liberation and WSA," *op cit*.

<sup>57</sup> See leaflet "Smash the Greek Fascist Military Junta," WSA Greek Workers Branch, Z113, box 13, and other leaflets in Z457, box 13.

<sup>58</sup> Leaflet, Z457, box 13; *People's Voice*, 20 July 1972, reporting on the Day of Shame, the attack on the Aboriginal Tent Embassy at Parliament House; *A Section by Section Analysis of the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders Affairs Act of 1965*, 8 October 1972, both in Z457, box 13.

involving Aboriginal people in the workforce.<sup>59</sup> Yet Maoist support for the Land Rights movement rested on an over-simplified characterisation of the demographics of the Aboriginal community ("Aboriginals, like us, are ordinary working people"<sup>60</sup>) which avoided more complex issues such as land rights. This over-simplification was necessary to enable WSA to maintain a crude reductionist understanding of the relationship of racial issues to class society as a whole. Class was not simply seen as having primacy, but was counterposed to race as an explanatory concept, epitomised in a leaflet headed "A question of class not race".<sup>61</sup> It was a stance which, together with the Maoist approach to the women's and gay movements, proved injurious, not only to a useful and respectful involvement with Aboriginal peoples' struggles, but to the reputation of Marxism as a theoretical tool in later years. WSA's distrust of "middle class" elements within the movements was also strangely inconsistent with its cross-class "Peoples Front" politics. For example, WSA's anti-racism was problematised by their willingness to associate themselves with anti-Japanese sentiment in Australia, to the extent of organising their own "Long March," a tour of the Victorian countryside to discuss the "rural crisis" and the threat of Japanese militarism with small farmers.<sup>62</sup>

In relation to the labour movement itself, CPA (M-L) and WSA support for rank and file activism and recognition of the conservatising pressures within the union movement were compromised by an abstentionist and moralistic approach to workers' "actually existing" organisations. Party members were sharply critical of the ALP and trade union leaders, but their critique was classically "ultra-left," providing no basis even for critical cooperation with the mass of workers.<sup>63</sup> Maoist literature portrays the ALP

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<sup>59</sup> Leaflet in defence of Lionel Brockman, an unemployed Aboriginal mechanic who was the target of a large and expensive police manhunt when he escaped from prison during a three month jail term he incurred by stealing bread, "A question of class not race," Z457, box 13, Langer collection.

<sup>60</sup> *People's Voice*, 20 July 1972, Z457, box 13, Langer collection.

<sup>61</sup> Z457, box 13, Langer collection.

<sup>62</sup> WSA leaflet, "Long March," Z113, box 13. It should be noted however that some WSA literature illustrates an awareness of class differences within Japan and support for Japanese workers (for example, see *Struggle*, No 8, 23 February 1972, p 7, Z457, box 13, Langer collection).

<sup>63</sup> Lenin, *op cit.*

as a Party of traitors beholden to foreign monopoly capital, that is, basically the same as the conservative parties.<sup>64</sup> The Left of the Labor Party were considered to be no better, and perhaps more dangerous to workers: "The role of Dr. Cairns is to confuse".<sup>65</sup> Perhaps partly because of their own meagre representation in trade union bureaucracies, CPA (M-L) members offered important criticism of trade union officials, characterising them as unrepresentative of and unresponsive to rank and file workers, but always in stridently nationalist terms. ACTU leader Bob Hawke, in particular, was identified as a "Greasy Ambitious Traitor," condemned for his repudiation, along with Whitlam, of the rebel unions' "mutiny" call in late-1969, and for his "fireman's" role in other disputes.<sup>66</sup> Left ALP officials and members of the Communist Party were criticised on the same grounds.<sup>67</sup> But any consistent and convincing critique of trade union bureaucracy was undermined by the lionising of those few CPA (M-L) members who did hold official positions themselves, as shown in an edition of WSA's *The Worker*, which said:

Clarrie O'Shea...went to jail rather than bow down to the bosses in the struggle against the old penal powers. He kept the struggle going until victory. He is a great leader—does Hawke compare? No! With leaders like Hawke, who needs bosses.<sup>68</sup>

Maoist literature, despite its appearance of championing the rank and file, in actuality offered only two courses of action for trade unionists who shared these concerns about the official wing of the labour movement. They could

<sup>64</sup> "ALP, Liberal Policies Basically the Same," *Vanguard*, 30 October, 1969; Z457/13/157, Z457/13/160.

<sup>65</sup> *Vanguard*, 31 July, 1969.

<sup>66</sup> "Bob Hawke Greasy Ambitious Traitor," leaflet, Z113, box 13, which says "Even the labour party - which claims to represent the workers - has people who are working hand in hand with the bosses to repress workers," referring to Hawke's recent "sell-out" of SEC workers; *Struggle*, 1:2, end 1969, Z113, box 13.

<sup>67</sup> For example, untitled leaflet, Z113, box 13, also refers to the failure of THC secretary Ken Stone to black-ban Esso and BHP, companies involved in the construction of the Port Philip Bay pipeline. In relation to the Communist Party, WSA condemned the "face-saving" deal between officials and the Government for wharfies to unload the *Jeparit* on the proviso that the ship no longer be used for the Vietnam war (*Struggle* (NSW), December 1969, (sub-heading "Student-Worker Alliance"), published T. Clark, Erskineville, Ann Curthoys personal collection).

<sup>68</sup> "A Great Working-Class Leader," *The Worker*, Z457, box 13.

vote in a CPA (M-L) official or they could withdraw from the movement and start a new rank-and-file trade union. The CPA (M-L) newspaper, *Vanguard*, advocated "smashing" the trade union bureaucracy, and called for a struggle "irrespective of the trade unions *and even against them*".<sup>69</sup>

This ultra-leftism was reinforced by WSA's class analysis of Australia, which was based in their strident opposition to the United States, in line with Chinese foreign policy at the time. A distinction was made between "patriotic" and "traitor" capitalists (that is, those associated with foreign capital):

Our policy towards the petty-bourgeoisie [sic] is to unite with them in the struggle against Imperialism and its Australian lackeys, the monopoly capitalist traitor class and in the struggle for socialism...we are even prepared to unite with sections of the national bourgeoisie and internationally with other imperialists to form a united front of 90% of the world's people to defeat US Imperialism.<sup>70</sup>

*Vanguard's* headline in June 1969, "Penal Powers are Incidental to Revolution," reflects not only a failure to embrace enthusiastically the short-term aspirations of workers but also a political analysis which emphasised the United States Government and employers, not their counterparts in Australia, as the "real enemy".<sup>71</sup>

WSA sectarianism towards the existing trade union movement was also related to their mechanical and fatalistic ideas about the process of workers' revolution. Deterministic phraseology and an over-estimation of the prospects for revolution appear frequently in the pages of *Vanguard*. It was argued that it was "inevitable" that workers would break from "the scab

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<sup>69</sup> (My italics). "Smash Trade Union Bureaucracy," *Vanguard*, 4 July 1969; *Vanguard*, 6 February 1969, reporting on NSW railworkers' decision to reject the advice of their officials. See also *Vanguard*, 15 May 1969: "Trade unionism, parliamentarism, labor partyism, are all of the one pernicious family. The sacred cow of trade unionism is perhaps the most deeply entrenched," *Vanguard*, 20 February, 1969: "The revolt against capitalism involves revolting against these leaders and their organisations". See also *Vanguard*, 24 April 1969.

<sup>70</sup> "More on the Orientation...", *op cit*, p 10. See also Melbourne University WSA, "Countries want independence...", *Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win*, April 1972, Z458, box A4.

<sup>71</sup> *Vanguard*, 12 June 1969: "The struggle against the penal powers was and is undoubtedly important. Nonetheless in the overall revolutionary struggle it is but a part."

trade union bureaucracy".<sup>72</sup> In February 1969, *Vanguard* responded to a rapid decline in the currency by proclaiming in a headline: "Australian Capitalism is Certain to Collapse".<sup>73</sup> By July "Days of Parliament are Running Out" was the prognosis<sup>74</sup> and in August: "Capitalism Nearing its End".<sup>75</sup>

Finally, workers were portrayed in Maoist literature as a passive and undifferentiated mass usually kept ignorant of their exploitation by the capitalist media.<sup>76</sup> Worsening economic crisis, however, had created the conditions, according to *Vanguard*, where workers in Australia and internationally could be won, suddenly and in large numbers, to revolution, through the intervention of a provocative minority. The role of the student vanguard, in particular, was to provide the "single spark"<sup>77</sup> which would reveal to workers the reality of class society: a vision very much modelled on events in France in May 1968.

John Murphy argues that Maoists in Australia ignored issues of "hegemony," instead, in his words, "trusting to the socialist instincts of the masses".<sup>78</sup> Yet some intellectuals influenced by Maoism did speak in terms of hegemony. Humphrey McQueen, for example, argued that protest action within the consensus would only serve to strengthen its grip on political life:

...Only actions which drive people out of their traditional modes of thought can produce an awakening to the realities of imperialism. Only illegal acts can expose the injustice of the law.<sup>79</sup>

Meiksins Wood identifies Maoism in the sixties as one example of the

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<sup>72</sup> *Vanguard*, 23 January 1969.

<sup>73</sup> *Vanguard*, 27 February 1969.

<sup>74</sup> *Vanguard*, 24 July 1969.

<sup>75</sup> *Vanguard*, 14 August 1969.

<sup>76</sup> See for example, *The Worker*, undated, pre-1972, Z457, box 13.

<sup>77</sup> H. McQueen, "A Single Spark," *Arena*, 16, 1968, pp 50-56.

<sup>78</sup> Murphy, *op cit*, pp 226 and 255.

<sup>79</sup> McQueen, "A Single Spark," *op cit*, p 56.

emphasis put on the autonomy of ideological struggle and the leading role of intellectuals, in default of the working class. This emphasis was consistent with a "third worldism" that also tended to promote students and intellectuals to the vanguard of history.<sup>80</sup> Humphrey McQueen expressed this "cultural" and elitist aspect of Maoism, writing in 1969:

The idea that classes and work should be abolished cannot occur to the workers from within their own experience. Such a total negation of all the malignant imperialist social formations requires a new intelligentsia to advance it, and to vanquish the fallacies of bourgeois culture in every area of life, experience and inquiry.<sup>81</sup>

Nonetheless, the Maoist emphasis on the role of revolutionaries, especially students, in providing inspiration and example to workers, highlights their lack of constructive involvement with the everyday struggles of the working class people of whom they spoke so enthusiastically. It has been argued in relation to the United States radical movement that the radical Black Panthers, with their emphasis on Afro-Americans as the vanguard of the revolution, "in a sense...let...some white radicals off the hook from what SNCC had challenged them to do about three years earlier," that is, "to organise the white community".<sup>82</sup> It might be argued that in a similar way Maoist vanguardism acted as a substitute for the hard work required to convince working class people of the need for radical politics.

There were however, more immediate factors undermining the possibility of Maoist students playing this role. Like their American counterparts, the CPA (M-L) were extraordinarily secretive. Even in the early 1980s, an article written by a former member refers to some members interviewed as "member B" and "member D".<sup>83</sup> According to Herouvim, the extraordinary emphasis, under Hill's leadership, on undemocratic, conspiratorial methods of organisation had serious implications for the Party's work in the trade

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<sup>80</sup> E. Meiksins Wood, "A Chronology of the New Left and its Successors, or: Who's Old-Fashioned Now?", *Why Not Capitalism. Socialist Register*, 1995, p 30.

<sup>81</sup> H. McQueen, "Three Tactics for Student Power," *Arena*, 18, 1969, pp 20/21.

<sup>82</sup> M. Kitchell *et al*, *Berkeley in the Sixties*, US: Kitchell films in association with P.O.V. Theatrical Films, 1990, (videorecording).

<sup>83</sup> Herouvim, *op cit*, pp 67/68.

unions. It resulted in the abandonment of co-ordinated Party work in trade unions and other organisations, the discouragement of public anti-war activity, and even a ban on marching on May Day. As a consequence, "party members went so far underground that even the wombats couldn't find them".<sup>84</sup>

As Isaac Deutscher has pointed out, the Chinese Communist Party's leadership of the 1949 "socialist" revolution in which the working class played no part confronts us "on a gigantic scale, with the phenomenon of 'substitutionism,' i.e. the action of a Party or a group of leaders which represents, or stands in the stead of, an absent, or inactive, social class".<sup>85</sup> Herein lies the secret of Maoism's voluntarism, and its appeal in Europe, especially Italy, and the United States in the 1960s, as well as in Australia. Confined to a mainly student milieu, the movement of 1968 could not bring immediate revolutionary change, but many new young revolutionaries were impatient:

... if they had been able to see the need for revolution, why could not millions of other people? For some of these, the Maoists and their slogans seemed to offer an easy way forward.<sup>86</sup>

Modelled as it was on a temporary phase of radical rhetoric by the leaders of the Chinese Government, the popularity of this form of politics inevitably had an inherently limited lifespan. From July 1971, loyalty to China and especially to Chinese foreign policy created more serious problems for the CPA (M-L). Heroic attempts to explain away the new cooperation between the United States and China of that year could not negate this blow to the Maoist view of the world;<sup>87</sup> it was a blow which resulted in the shattering of

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<sup>84</sup> Herouvim, *op cit*, p 58.

<sup>85</sup> I. Deutscher, "Maoism - Its Origins, Background and Outlook," *The Socialist Register*, 1964, p 25. As an example see *Joseph Stalin. 'An Introduction to Combat Bourgeois Slanders*, undated, WSA folder, Langer collection.

<sup>86</sup> C. Harman, (a socialist at the London School of Economics in 1968), *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After*, (London: Bookmarks, 1988), p 159.

<sup>87</sup> See for example "China's Firm Stand on Taiwan, Vietnam: Nixon's Trip Admission of Failure," *Struggle*, 8, 23 February 1972, pp 1/2, which says "In combatting the counter-revolutionary tactics of the imperialists, sometimes not having negotiations is waging struggle blow for blow against the enemy. Other times, agreeing to talks is waging struggle blow for blow against the enemy."



CPA (M-L) unity and a plethora of splits and accusations of "revisionism" throughout the 1970s.<sup>88</sup>

### *Trotskyist Groups*

In Sydney the most important revolutionary socialist students were associated with a political current in the labour movement dating back to the 1930s. What little has been written about Trotskyism in Australia refers to the period before the 1960s.<sup>89</sup> Yet from 1964 onwards, members of Trotskyist organisations and their off-shoots played an important role in the anti-war movement. Even the Communist Party's unsympathetic William Brown wrote in 1986:

From a position of having virtually disappeared in the post-war years as an active influence in the Australian labour movement, Trotskyism underwent a remarkable resurgence in the sixties. It became one of the most persistent and successful of the anti-Marxist influences which permeated the communist movement in Australia from the mid-sixties into the eighties.<sup>90</sup>

The influence of organised Trotskyism, at least until 1971, was confined mainly to Sydney and to Sydney University. Even there, the Trotskyists were not a large group; leading student Trotskyist Hall Greenland estimated their influence as never extending beyond 1,000.<sup>91</sup> Greenland was their most prominent activist of this period at Sydney University, becoming

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<sup>88</sup> See *Labour Press*, 24 February, 1972; I.H. Birchall, "The Revolutionary Left in Europe," *International Socialism*, (1) 86, February 1976, p 13, on the impact of the talks. See *The Way Forward* - 1:1, 15 September, 1978, Z457, box 13, for accusations of revisionism. For a more sympathetic view of the Party's demise, which also criticises the accounts of Herouvim and York, see F. Robinson, "Marxism-Leninism: Another View," *Arena*, 68, 1984, pp 144-149.

<sup>89</sup> A. Barcan, *The Socialist Left in Australia, 1949-1959* (Sydney: Occasional Monographs 2, 1960); S. Short, *Laurie Short: A Political Life*, (North Sydney: Allen and Unwin in association with Lloyd Ross Forum, 1992); A. Davidson, "A Note on Trotskyism," *The Communist Party of Australia. A Short History*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University, 1969), pp 185-189. One exception is Denis Freney's autobiography, *op cit*. Hall Greenland is currently preparing a book on Nick Origlass, Australia's most prominent Trotskyist.

<sup>90</sup> Brown, *op cit*, p 271.

<sup>91</sup> Greenland, interviewed by Crispin Walker, 1994, for his BA Hons thesis, *The Protestors on Campus: Opposition to the Vietnam War and National Service Act in the Three Sydney Universities, 1968-1972*, Macquarie University, 1994, p 49.

something of a "cult hero".<sup>92</sup> Other important Trotskyist figures included Denis Freney, Bob Gould, co-ordinator of VAC, and Jim and John Percy, who with Gould formed the radical youth group Resistance, later establishing the Socialist Youth Alliance.

By 1961, following a period of student apathy and conservatism apparently engendered by the invasion of Hungary, socialists at the University of Sydney were beginning to reorganise their student clubs.<sup>93</sup> Having joined the Labor Party at seventeen, Greenland, for example, joined the ALP Club on entering university in 1963, only to find it a stronghold of "libertarians and Trotskyists".<sup>94</sup> These Trotskyist students were associated with a small group which produced the off-campus journal *International*, with whom Greenland soon became involved. By 1964, however, the group had split, leading to the establishment of a rival journal, *Socialist Perspective*.

The political differences between the *International* and *Socialist Perspective* groups had their basis in the international Trotskyist movement, whose propensity for splintering in the post-war period was a result of contradictions in the Trotskyist critique of the USSR. Trotsky's analysis that the Russian revolution had "degenerated" still recognised Russia as a "workers state" with a socialist economy, despite his argument about the need for major reform to reinstate workers' political power. When, following the Second World War, the USSR forcibly "exported" its model to Eastern Europe, Trotsky's insistence that a "workers state" could only be established through the self-activity of the workers was compromised. Following his analysis, if the overthrow of Russian capitalism and establishment of nationalised property in the USSR was equated with socialism or "workers' power" (albeit displaced by the Soviet bureaucracy), then these new states must also be workers' states of some kind; albeit with various qualifications. The attempts to formalise these qualifications were at the heart of intense and ongoing conflict within the tiny, marginalised Fourth International in the Cold War period. The challenge by the leaders of Yugoslavia to the USSR's right to dictate how "communism" would be built in its satellites sparked the first episode in a series of splits over issues of

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<sup>92</sup> Meredith Burgmann, interview with Crispin Walker, 1994, *op cit*.

<sup>93</sup> Cahill, *op cit*, p 6.

<sup>94</sup> Greenland, interviewed by Crispin Walker, *op cit*.

loyalty to different versions of "Communism".<sup>95</sup>

Strategically, in the late 1960s, there were two important consequences for Trotskyists of these complicated disputes. The first, mirroring the problem of different "Communisms," was the existence of widely differing assessments of the correct relationship to be established with communist movements and Parties. Historically, the relationship between Trotskyists and Communists had been hostile, but in the post-war period many Trotskyist groups began to hold hope for some kind of productive alliance with the Communist Parties. The most prominent example of this trend in Australia was Denis Freney, a member of the *International* group who, following his involvement overseas with Trotskyists sympathetic to nationalist movements such as the South African ANC and Algerian FLN, returned to Australia in 1968 with a more conciliatory attitude to the Communist Party than his older mentors in Australia. Impressed by the efforts of the Communist Party to distance itself from its past, he later joined it and became a leading personality in the Party's more radical wing.<sup>96</sup>

Differences amongst Trotskyists over relations with the Communist Party echoed those occurring within the Communist Party itself over relations with the ALP. Not surprisingly then, Trotskyists were also very divided about how to relate to the ALP; groups at one extreme favoured long-term "entrism" into those parties and on the other, eschewed any kind of cooperation whatsoever. The second commonality was the emergence in many of these groups—and the establishment of so many separate groups, indeed, was a reflection of it—of serious doctrinal rigidity, which, like the orthodoxy of the pro-Soviet wing of the Communist Party, was a response to an analysis in chronic crisis.<sup>97</sup>

The Australian *International* group, with whom Greenland became involved, claimed continuous existence, and allegiance to the world

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<sup>95</sup> Based on A. Callinicos, *Trotskyism*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1990).

<sup>96</sup> D. Freney, *A Map of Days*, *op cit.*

<sup>97</sup> I have used the word "analysis" rather than "theory" because I consider that a convincing case can be made that Trotsky's confusion about the USSR did not flow inevitably from his theoretical interpretation of Marxism in general, and can be shown to be inconsistent with it (see Callinicos, *op cit.*).

Trotskyist movement, the Fourth International, from as early as 1933.<sup>98</sup> In the 1950s and early 1960s this tiny group supported Michel Pablo, one of the principal figures in the Fourth International after the war. Pablo encouraged a policy of "entrism," where revolutionaries would join social democratic organisations to encourage the development of more radical currents and individuals within their ranks. His belief that the road to socialism would be a long one, involving the establishment of regimes sharing features of both socialist and communist societies, distinguished him from more "orthodox" wings of the movement which considered this analysis a concession to Stalinism. *International* members in the Australian Left were distinctive on the Left for their keen interest in international political debates and criticism both of the West and (but to a lesser extent) the USSR.

During the 1961 Cuban missile crisis, Sydney University ALP Club students who were associated with *International* demonstrated against the threat of world war and produced a handbill defending Cuba's right to use nuclear force as a deterrent against a US invasion.<sup>99</sup> Soviet action in Cuba, it was argued, could not be condemned since the US had violated international law to force the withdrawal of Soviet bases from Cuba, despite the presence of American bases on Soviet borders. Nonetheless, the USSR had played a negative role in the crisis, because of a "bankrupt" defence policy based purely on military means, rather than defending sympathetic working class action and the spread of socialism in the capitalist world. Soviet leader Krushchev, they argued, was under pressure from the enthusiasm of Soviet youth for the Cuban revolution, a pressure which was also producing strains in the world's Communist Parties.<sup>100</sup>

In 1962 the Trotskyists in the Sydney University ALP Club argued that the overcrowding of Australian universities showed the need for a planned economy, and criticised treatment of former members of the Budapest Central Workers' Council, still imprisoned six years after the suppression of

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<sup>98</sup> Anonymous author, quoted in A. Barcan, *The Socialist Left in Australia, 1949-1959*, Australian Political Studies Association, Occasional Monograph No 2, (University of Sydney, 1960), p 32. Freney also describes them as "composed of the oldest Trotskyist cadres in Australia" (in "Trotskyist Trends," *Australian Left Review*, May 1972, p 16).

<sup>99</sup> "The Revolution in Cuba," *Rebel*, 3:1, 1963, pp 11-25.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

the Hungarian workers' uprising.<sup>101</sup> They supported demonstrations against the deportation of Portugese seamen, the Tait Hanging and a visit of the Thai Royal couple, and they campaigned against the White Australia policy.<sup>102</sup> They also participated in Sydney Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) protests, hopeful that, as Greenland wrote, CND "could well become the focal point for radical thought and action in this University".<sup>103</sup>

By 1963, however, the Fourth International faced a further split. Michel Pablo was expelled from the International following a dispute with Ernest Mandel, another leading figure, over what was seen as Pablo's over-enthusiasm for the Algerian revolution.<sup>104</sup> These arguments found an echo in Australia. In 1964, the *International* group split; Hall Greenland supported older cadres, including leading member Nick Origlass, in following Pablo; whilst a number of younger members including Bob Gould and the Percy brothers followed Mandel and the Fourth International, who had also reunited with the US Socialist Workers Party.<sup>105</sup> Gould's group, the International Marxist League, which was associated with the Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International, produced *Socialist Perspective*. They followed the American Socialist Workers' Party line at this time, calling for withdrawal of American troops rather than "victory to the NLF" or "peace".<sup>106</sup>

Despite the split, members of both Trotskyist groups continued to work together and were prominent in campus politics at Sydney University in the 1960s. In 1964 the ALP club organised the "Commem Day" rally in support of US civil rights, which led to the formation of Student Action For Aborigines (SAFA).<sup>107</sup> Trotskyists spearheaded the success of the Left at the

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<sup>101</sup> "The Oriented and the Disoriented" and "Hungary-Seven Years After," *Rebel*, 3:1, 1963.

<sup>102</sup> *Rebel*, 3:1, 1963.

<sup>103</sup> H. Greenland, "Notes on Sunday C.N.D.," *ibid*, pp 9/10.

<sup>104</sup> Callinicos, *op cit*, pp 33-38.

<sup>105</sup> Gould, personal interview. See D. Freney, *A Map of Days. Life on the Left*, (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1991), p 197, about events at the conference where the Pabloites won the majority of votes.

<sup>106</sup> Gould interview, *ibid*.

<sup>107</sup> See Chapter Three; Rootes, "The Development of Radical Student Movements and their

1964 ASLF conference in Canberra,<sup>108</sup> and were involved in the 1965 Freedom Ride and in the "sit-down" against the Vietnam war at the 1965 ASLF conference in Canberra. By 1966 the Labor Club, previously dominated by communist students,<sup>109</sup> had also been appropriated by Trotskyists; John Percy edited its journal, *Left Forum*. In 1966 the Labor Club proposed sending medical aid to the NLF, and the Club's broadsheet *Wednesday Commentary*, edited by leading Club member Darce Cassidy, was branded "filthy" by the NSW premier. The following year, Cassidy moved to Melbourne where he became a leading member of the Monash Labor Club, later editing the Worker-Student Alliance newspaper *Struggle*. The editor of the university newspaper *Honi Soit* in 1966 was Hall Greenland. The final edition of that year created a furore with its representation of President Johnson with a garland of photographs of war atrocities around his neck, and the word "Welcome".<sup>110</sup>

In 1967, Greenland was involved in the marriage of the Labor and ALP Clubs; the latter at that time was "a rather unorthodox loose-cannon kind of mix".<sup>111</sup> Supporters of both *Socialist Perspective* and *International* were involved in the new Labor Club.<sup>112</sup> That same year, the Sydney University Labor Club with the Monash Labor Club dominated the Australian Student Labor Federation, and also collected financial aid for the NLF. Greenland's prominent role in the Humphreys Affair of 1967 and the Victoria Lee occupation of 1970 maintained the profile of Trotskyists at Sydney University. The activities in Balmain of long-term *International* members Nick Origlass and Issy Wyner also provided the group with some connections with the official labour movement. Origlass and Wyner were members of the Balmain ALP branch and were elected as members of the local council in 1967, though they and other members of the group resigned from the ALP as a group the same year after the two were expelled.

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Sequelae," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 3:2, 1988, p 174; Greenland, personal interview, and interview with C.Walker, *op cit*.

<sup>108</sup> Bob Gould, personal interview.

<sup>109</sup> Ann Curthoys was the President of the Labor Club in 1964 (personal communication).

<sup>110</sup> *Honi Soit*, final edition, 1966.

<sup>111</sup> Greenland, interviewed by Crispin Walker.

<sup>112</sup> Walker, *op cit*, p 24.

The *International* group also had long-standing contacts in trade unions, such as the Balmain Ship Painters and Dockers Union.<sup>113</sup> Jack Sponberg, a semi-retired organiser for the Boilermakers Union, provided them with information about rank and file activity for their journal. In 1965 they flew the Mt Isa miner's strike leader Pat Mackie to address a mass meeting at Sydney University.<sup>114</sup> The Pabloites were also supporters of the idea of workers self-management, an idea towards which other Trotskyists in Australia were very hostile, seeing it as an anarchist and "liquidationist" idea inconsistent with their ideas about the role that should be played by socialists in the leadership of the trade union movement.<sup>115</sup> Nonetheless, asked whether students in the group did joint work with trade unionists or went to speak at their meetings, Greenland said:

No, no, we didn't do very much of that at all. I mean, we talked about the worker-student alliance, but it was very much [the case that] the workers would do their thing and we'd do our thing and it'd be on the same thing; they'd want to take over management of the factories and we'd want to do the same at universities and schools.<sup>116</sup>

Despite the high profile of Greenland, the group was losing members and momentum. Its leaders did not emphasise Party-building, preferring to work through the Labor Party<sup>117</sup> and its journal, mainly produced by Origlass, which continued to consist mainly of somewhat turgid translations of material from the Fourth International, and made little attempt to address concrete questions facing the Australian movement.

### *Vietnam Action Campaign*

The influence of Trotskyism on campus was greatly enhanced by the

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<sup>113</sup> McNab, interviewed by Crispin Walker, 1994, *op cit.* Wyner wrote a book about the early years of the union: I. Wyner, *With Banner Unfurled. The Early Years of the Ship Painters and Dockers Union*, (Marrickville: Hale and Iremonger, 1983).

<sup>114</sup> Hall Greenland, personal interview.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

formation in 1965 of the off-campus Vietnam Action Campaign, which became the most prominent organisation associated with Trotskyism in this period. Very much the child of Bob Gould, VAC was distinguished by its propensity for militant action, a characteristic which fitted the new mood, and for its non-sectarian approach to ALP members and organisations, notably the YCAC, despite Gould's very hostile attitudes to the Communist Party. In the early 1960s, as a member of the *International* group, Gould had been involved with other members of the group in the ALP Youth Council and in CND, in which they acted as a kind of Left opposition to its CP leadership.<sup>118</sup> Greenland remembers Gould as being the "main conduit" for information about events in the United States. In late 1965 his knowledge of the US anti-war movement, acquired through the Trotskyist movement, inspired Gould to begin to organise the new movement, whose propensity for radical action quickly enabled it to take the wings from CND.<sup>119</sup>

According to O'Callaghan, the main difference between AICD and VAC before the 1966 federal election was in the type of activity undertaken: where AICD was concerned with mass mobilisations and moderate action, VAC:

...engaged selectively in street demonstrations and civil disobedience, arguing that "broad was all very well, but...you needed a peace movement with a cutting edge."<sup>120</sup>

VAC strongly supported Calwell in the federal election campaign<sup>121</sup> as part of maintaining good relations with YCAC. After Labor's defeat, however, student activists, especially in Victoria, adopted more militant politics and tactics. The right of the ALP reacted sharply; in NSW it proscribed membership of the AICD for ALP members, and in so doing created conflict between AICD and VAC.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Gould, personal interview. See also Freney, *A Map of Days...*, *op cit*, p 194, which describes Freney's return to Australia in 1965 partly to prevent Gould laying claim to the Australian group.

<sup>119</sup> J.O. O'Callaghan, *Perspectives in Peace: Aspects of the Analyses, Policies and Practices of the Peace Movement in New South Wales c.1950-c.1970*, BA Hons, Sydney University History Department, 1986, p 39.

<sup>120</sup> O'Callaghan, *ibid*, p 42.

<sup>121</sup> "Labor to Win?", *Socialist Perspective*, No 1, October, 1966, p 1.

<sup>122</sup> For more details, see O'Callaghan, *op cit*.



VAC members "were eager to maintain some distance between their stance and that of the Maoists". They adopted a position only a little more radical than that of the Communist Party, arguing in defence of collections of money for the NLF and for the right to carry NLF flags at mass demonstrations, but stressing that solidarity with the NLF, whilst potentially relevant to a minority, was not a slogan which could build a mass movement. "Immediate withdrawal" was the preferred slogan. VAC was also circumspect about the Maoist enthusiasm for what O'Callaghan calls "the posture of clashing with the State in order to de-mystify the State and expose its repressive character". They supported civil disobedience "but primarily as a tactic to be used selectively to gain publicity, not as a 'thing in itself'". They also differed from the Maoists in their attitude to working within the ALP.<sup>123</sup>

Though there were trade unionists in VAC, the bulk of its membership were young students, who had free time to print leaflets and "were free and confident and out to change the world".<sup>124</sup> VAC also did not have the same institutional support as AICD, "particularly the financial support of unions".<sup>125</sup> By 1968, however, VAC itself was beginning to be eclipsed, first by SDS at Sydney University and then, in 1969, by the new militant "defiance" actions of the Committee in Defiance of the National Service Act. In this context, VAC "virtually collapsed".<sup>126</sup>

#### *Socialist Youth Alliance/ Socialist Workers League*

However, the success of VAC had facilitated in turn the high profile of the youth group Resistance, formed in 1968 from a brash, militant group of anarchists and socialists entitled SCREW (Socialists Creating Revolution Everywhere). In 1967, SCREW members had provoked NSW Premier Askin's famous call to "Run over the bastards" when they lay in front of President Johnson's car.<sup>127</sup> Early in 1968, Gould opened the Third World

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, pp 52/53.

<sup>124</sup> Hall Greenland, interviewed by Crispin Walker, 1994, *op cit*.

<sup>125</sup> O'Callaghan, *op cit*, p 42.

<sup>126</sup> O'Callaghan, *op cit*, p 57; Freney, "Ructions at Resistance," *Tribune*, June 17, 1970, p 8.

<sup>127</sup> G. Hastings, *Ultra Brief Chronology of Events in the Australian Student Movement*,

Bookshop in Goulburn Street; and he and Jim and John Percy, two young members of the *Socialist Perspective* group and Sydney University activists, formed Resistance. Goulburn Street and Resistance became the "effective centre of radical youth in Sydney,"<sup>128</sup> mobilising radical high school and university students.

But by the late 1960s, Trotskyist groups experienced further internal conflict. Mandel and the US Socialist Workers Party (SWP) were in disagreement once again on the issue of differing assessments of the socialist or otherwise nature of various regimes and movements, this time especially in the "Third World".<sup>129</sup> The SWP was distinguishable in these debates for its willingness to embrace as socialist virtually any regime which claimed the title, as well as some who didn't but had earned it by virtue of being in conflict with the United States.<sup>130</sup> A dispute between Gould and Jim and John Percy about the structure of Resistance and the Third World Bookshop occurred in this context. In early 1970, attempts by the Percys to formalise the formerly de facto leadership by election and to argue for the group to become exclusively socialist were opposed by Gould. He preferred the heterogenous mix of socialists, anarchists, hippies and other radicals in the group, and accused the Percy's of holding a "Bolshevik, proletarian vanguard" philosophy.<sup>131</sup> The dispute became the basis for a split with Gould and the establishment by the Percy brothers of a new organisation allied with the US SWP, the Socialist Youth Alliance (SYA), which produced the newspaper *Direct Action*. In 1972, SYA adopted the name Socialist Worker's League (SWL), with some members leaving to form the rival Mandelite Communist League.<sup>132</sup> *Direct Action* is notable as the first Trotskyist newspaper in Australia to embrace enthusiastically the gay and women's liberation movements.

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undated.

<sup>128</sup> Freney, *ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Callinicos, *op cit*, p 38.

<sup>130</sup> Alexander, *op cit.*

<sup>131</sup> "Quo Vadis Resistance?" (based on interviews with the participants), *Tharunka*, 3 March, 1970, p 5.

<sup>132</sup> Hastings, *op cit*; see also Melbourne Revolutionary Marxists, *op cit*, p 12, on the Communist League.

SYA activists on Australian campuses differentiated themselves from two main currents. Firstly, there were "moderate" student activists, who tended to focus purely on "student power" issues. They included some student bureaucrats who had a tendency to defuse mass actions and to focus on "culturist" strategies to the detriment of building the student movement. Secondly, there were the Maoists, who attempted to bypass "student power" issues entirely and whose sectarianism, SYA argued, had been an obstacle to building successful campaigns, even in their own 1972 La Trobe "defence" campaign, where their refusal to work alongside the Australian Union of Students was seen by SYA as contributing to their isolation. SYA held in 1973 that the "breaking of the ultra-left hold" was still a major task, and accused the CPA of capitulating to the "backward anarchist-spontaneist" current on the campuses.<sup>133</sup>

However, SWL's efforts to distinguish themselves from the Maoists at times led to accusations of conservatism. In 1971, they opposed holding anti-Springboks protests inside the grounds, advocating only marches to the gates. Following the enormously popular Sydney demonstration, they published a document which "deplored the violence and disruption," and called for "peaceful" protest. They spoke of the "futility of flare throwing" and argued that mass arrests had had "disastrous consequences".<sup>134</sup> SWL rejected Gould's policies of "entrism," but their approach to finding ways of working alongside ALP organisations as part of winning support for Trotskyism retained similarities. In 1972, for example, *Direct Action* responded to the upcoming federal election by adopting slogans associated with the programmatic traditions of orthodox Trotskyism:

Why Socialists Should Support the Labor Party. What's Wrong with the Election Policy of the Communist Party? Labor to Power! Fight for Socialist Policies!<sup>135</sup>

SWL then responded to Whitlam's election with a front page which announced: "*Direct Action* salutes Labor's tremendous victory".<sup>136</sup> SWL

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<sup>133</sup> Conrick, *op cit*, p 5-10.

<sup>134</sup> Freney, *A Map Of Days...*, *op cit*, p 306.

<sup>135</sup> *Direct Action*, 28, 13 October 1972, p 16.

<sup>136</sup> *Direct Action*, 32, 7 December 1972, p 1.

later adopted the name Socialist Workers Party; still later they broke with Trotskyism, then adopting the name Democratic Socialist Party, which they retain today, to show their support for the Gorbachev reforms in the Soviet Union.<sup>137</sup>

### *Socialist Students Alliance*

The Socialist Students Alliance (SSA), was a short-lived national body which was formed in June 1968 in recognition of the failure of the ASLF to represent radical students nationwide and on the basis that the student movement had "long ago passed the social democrat reformist stage and was concerned with organising revolutionary action".<sup>138</sup> Disputes within SSA reflected the political differences between major left groups at this time. While opposing "entrism," SSA stressed that the participation of ALP Clubs and SDS would be welcome at an SSA conference. But at the tiny February 1969 conference (see also Chapter Five), divisions between Resistance and SSA supporters, (mainly members of WSA and SDA from Monash and Brisbane) provoked a sharp conflict over the host city for the next ASLF conference. Resistance suggested Melbourne University as the venue for the conference, with the aim, they claimed, of involving more conservative, and especially ALP, students in its organisation. Resistance members accused SSA of wanting to abolish the ASLF rather than working within it to win over non-revolutionaries. The outnumbered SSA delegates lost the vote to hold the conference at Monash, and accused Resistance of playing a "numbers game" and of demanding that other groups adopt its policies.<sup>139</sup> SSA was soon defunct.

### *Revolutionary Socialist Alliance*

Even as SSA foundered, efforts were being made to establish a new national alliance. In late 1968, Denis Freney initiated attempts to organise a coherent

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<sup>137</sup> R.J. Alexander, *International Trotskyism: 1929-1985. A Documented Analysis of the Movement*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991), pp 72/73.

<sup>138</sup> Unidentified author, "The Outside Agitator," Interstate Bulletin of the Socialist Students Alliance, National Executive, Prahran, 23 February, 1969. See also Cahill, *op cit*, p 13.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, and J. Percy, "A Brief History of ASLF Conferences," Discussion Bulletin for Sydney Section of SSA, Easter 1969.

national organisation of revolutionaries, the Revolutionary Socialist Alliance. It was not a Party, though some of its participants were members of parties. Especially prominent were ex-members of the Brisbane New Left group SDA.<sup>140</sup>

Brian Laver attributed RSA's rapid demise, less than a year after its formation, to Denis Freney's decision to join the Communist Party.<sup>141</sup> Freney blamed Gould's decision to buy a property which RSA had hoped to use as its headquarters.<sup>142</sup> These incidents, however, could only have the impact they did because of the small numbers involved—the largest number to vote at RSA's founding conference was seventy-two<sup>143</sup>—and the entrenched differences between the participants. These arguments were reflected in different ideas about the function of RSA itself, whose participants included anarchists, Trotskyists and members of the Communist Party youth wing, the YSL.<sup>144</sup> Literature produced in the careful discussions preceding the January 1969 establishment of RSA reflect the heavy influence of Pabloite Denis Freney, the editor of the group's *Discussion Bulletin* and a major contributor. They called for work within the Communist and Labor Parties to encourage the development of radical wings in both Parties, for the adoption of "demands transitional to socialism;" and for an "audaciously democratic programme, even going beyond the Bolshevik example of the time of Lenin and Trotsky":

...we must progress through successive regroupments to—in a very flexible, very democratic, very open way—avoid formation of parties which alone claim exclusive revolutionary leadership in their own narrow organisational framework. The problem is not to proclaim the urgent need for a 'party', that is, a revolutionary mass leadership,

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<sup>140</sup> See Melbourne Revolutionary Marxists, *op cit*, p 7.

<sup>141</sup> Brian Laver, personal interview.

<sup>142</sup> Freney, *op cit*, pp 240-241.

<sup>143</sup> "Resolutions Adopted by Founding Conference of the RSA January 1969," *Discussion Bulletin of Revolutionary Socialist Alliance*, 7, 4 February 1969, pp 2-4. According to Cahill, *op cit*, p 13, 120 attended the conference. See also Audrey Blake and Ian Morrison, "Revolutionary Socialist Conference," *Outlook*, April 1969, p 19.

<sup>144</sup> T. Haynes, President YSL, Western Australia, in "Contributions to Discussion of Conference: Document," *Discussion Bulletin for a Revolutionary Socialist Alliance*, 6, 20 January 1969, p 2.

but to work efficiently to this end.<sup>145</sup>

These discussions represented a valiant attempt to provide the organisational and programmatic basis for a non-Stalinist Communist Party. Yet in retrospect, despite beginning to develop an historical critique of Stalinism, RSA remained trapped within a frame of discourse similar to that occurring within the Communist Party itself. One participant noted "democratic centralism may sound alright on paper, but in practice it turns into bureaucratic centralism".<sup>146</sup> The President of YSL in Western Australia suggested in one bulletin that "maybe we should be aiming for a fifth international".<sup>147</sup> But the historical critiques of the Communist Party submitted for discussion by RSA do not include a systematic description of the internal operation of the Bolshevik Party in 1917, the circumstances of its degeneration in the civil war which followed the Russian revolution, nor of Stalinist and ALP models of Party organisation. As a consequence, discussion about party organisation and the relationship of a revolutionary party to the working class were limited to somewhat vague calls for more democracy. As a consequence, like the Communist Party itself, RSA was unclear about its aims. Should RSA be a movement, or should it be a Party? How could it ensure a consistent intellectual approach whilst also drawing in participants less radical than its members? How could it usefully work with other groups yet also maintain a separate identity? What should its members do about the minority status of revolutionaries in the movement?<sup>148</sup>

Despite its ideological disarray, the larger Communist Party was very quickly able to take the wind from the sails of the much smaller RSA. The success of the Left Action Conference in particular, hastened RSA's demise:

By October, 1969, RSSA barely survived as an organisation. It was in the throes of attempting to rid itself of the influence of its older

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<sup>145</sup> "Considerations on Founding of Revolutionary Socialist Alliance," Submitted for Discussion, p 2, Guido Barrachi collection. See also *Discussion Bulletins* 1-8.

<sup>146</sup> D. Taylor, "Some Thoughts on the CPA," *Discussion Bulletin for a Revolutionary Socialist Alliance*, 2, 4 December 1968, p 2.

<sup>147</sup> Haynes, *op cit*.

<sup>148</sup> See *Discussion Bulletins*, 1-8, Barrachi collection.

members while at the same time clinging to a revolutionary rhetoric. At the very time when one of its leaflets announced that RSSA members "reject the reformist and anti-revolutionary nature of the 'united front'," other members were talking of the need to build a new non-ideological mass movement.<sup>149</sup>

### *Other Trotskyist Groups*

The socialist organisations which endured beyond the 1970s, outliving the Communist Party, were those which consciously set out to "build" a Party; in every case they were sustained by a relationship with an international political tendency. This was true of the SYA/SWL in this period (though later, as the SWP, it severed its links with the US organisation of the same name<sup>150</sup>) and of two other small groups established in the early 1970s: the Socialist Labor League and Socialist Workers Action Group (later International Socialists), which still exist today.

### *Socialist Labor League*

Following the dissolution of RSA, some of its former members established the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP). In 1971 RSP split. The majority of its members became associated with SWL, but a minority joined with groups in Melbourne and Sydney in December 1971 to form the Socialist Labor League (SLL). Those from Sydney had been members of Workers Action, a group formed in late 1969 by ex-Resistance members. One leading member had previously been a leader in Sydney YSL.<sup>151</sup> Those from Melbourne had been associated with the "Tocsin" group associated with the Victorian Labor College, which in turn was heavily influenced by Trotskyist Ted Tripp. Based in Trades Hall, the Labor College throughout the 1960s had provided trade unionists, particularly shop stewards, with trade union skills and Marxist politics. Tripp had been expelled from the Communist Party in the 1930s, but unlike members of the *International* group was closer in his politics to Mandel than to Pablo. A number of left-wing trade union officials in Victoria, including militants like Ken Carr of the Furnishing Trades

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<sup>149</sup> Rootes, *op cit*, p 62.

<sup>150</sup> Alexander, *op cit*, pp 72/73.

<sup>151</sup> Freney, *op cit*, p 240.

Union, had been heavily influenced by Tripp.<sup>152</sup> In its early years, SLL numbers were estimated at 300; its main leaders were Nick Beame and Jim Mulgrew.<sup>153</sup>

The SLL took its name from the British group of the same name, which was associated with Gerry Healy. Healy had split from the Fourth International prior to its 1963 reunification, essentially over its rejection of the International's tolerance of groups which had shifted away from orthodox Trotskyist analysis by accepting that revolutionary movements in countries like Algeria and Cuba were communist.<sup>154</sup> The SLL was criticised by others on the Left for an ultimatum approach towards the labour and social movements, and accused of physical violence towards others on the Revolutionary Left.<sup>155</sup> This approach reflected a conception of the process of social change which was perhaps the most mechanical in the history of the socialist movement. SLL members believed that working class revolution was inevitable, but would be defeated if not led by the only group with the correct program, their own. To win the leadership of the working class they placed an emphasis on carefully formulated slogans, which they believed workers, in the course of struggle, would inevitably recognise as expressing their real interests.<sup>156</sup>

### *Socialist Workers Action Group*

Though arriving late on the scene, the Socialist Workers Action Group (SWAG) can be seen as representing the fusion of several currents within the revolutionary student movement in this period. In late 1972, "red diaper baby" Janey Stone returned from travels overseas with US socialist Tom O'Lincoln. In the US, Stone and O'Lincoln had been part of the fledgling International Socialists, which was allied with the group of the same name in Great Britain. The IS (GB) played, along with Maoist students, a leading

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<sup>152</sup> Dave Nadel, personal interview. See also P. Beilharz, "Trotskyism in Australia - Notes from a Talk with Ted Tripp (1976)," *Labour History*, 62, May 1992, pp 133-137.

<sup>153</sup> Alexander, *op cit*, p 78.

<sup>154</sup> Callinicos, *op cit*, p 35.

<sup>155</sup> B. Aarons, "Australian Left: Theory, Strategy and Practice," *Australian Left Review*, May, 1972, p 5; SMG letter to *Direct Action*, undated, Fryer library.

<sup>156</sup> Callinicos, *op cit*.



role in the student movement there and had helped establish the influential Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation. The International Socialists had begun their existence as the *Socialist Review* group formed by Tony Cliff and supporters after their expulsion from the Fourth International in 1950. A leader of the British Revolutionary Communist Party, Cliff had been expelled when, after setting to resolve the crisis of post-war Trotskyism by embarking on a detailed defence of the "degenerated workers state" analysis, he had instead drawn the conclusion that the USSR and Eastern European regimes should best be understood as "state capitalist". The IS were identifiable by their slogan "Neither Washington nor Moscow but International Socialism".<sup>157</sup>

In Melbourne, Stone and O'Lincoln befriended members of the Marxist Workers Group (MWG), an amorphous grouping formed by remaining members of the left wing of the Tocsin group and including some leaning towards anarchism. Stone was involved in an early challenge to the group's "openness" when she criticised their tolerance of individuals who had expressed racist and sexist views. The voluntary departure of those individuals marked the beginning of a change in the MWG. Stone and O'Lincoln soon helped to form a Leninist faction within it, which became the basis for the Socialist Workers Action Group (SWAG) formed in 1972. SWAG members, including Dave Nadel, produced *The Battler* and were involved in radical student politics and as militants in white-collar unions. In 1975, they became allied with the British IS, later in the 1970s recruiting members from a split in the Brisbane Self-Management Group (see Chapter Ten).<sup>158</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In 1965 the Far Left in Australia, if it is accepted that the Communist Party could be excluded from that category, was miniscule. Most of the revolutionaries who staffed the myriad of small groups formed in this period had developed their revolutionary commitment in the midst of the

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<sup>157</sup> Callinicos, *op cit*, p 74. The British IS adopted the name Socialist Workers Party in 1977 but were not allied with the US organisation of the same name. See also I. Birchall, "History of the International Socialists," part 1, *International Socialism*, 1 (76), March 1975, pp 16-24, and part 2, 1 (77), April 1975, pp 22-28.

<sup>158</sup> Janey Stone, Dave Nadel personal interviews; Alexander, *op cit*, p 75.

anti-Vietnam war movement. They attempted to form organisations that embodied their new goals in a climate where the Far Left internationally was in a process of ferment and reformation: a response to new challenges, theoretical and practical, following years of isolation. Not surprisingly, coming from such small and uncertain beginnings, and still establishing their identities into the Whitlam years, the potential for any of these groups to attract a large following and to build any kind of influence amongst working class people was limited.

However, the organisations discussed in this chapter brought important strengths to the radical movement, which individuals and looser formations could not provide. The CPA (M-L) and the WSA were weakened by rigid organisational structures, a fascination with street-fighting; and a sectarianism towards the labour movement which inhibited any wider role for Maoist students. Nonetheless, these groups fostered a group culture which facilitated the ability of their members to maintain a courageous and provocative stance in the face of sometimes hysterical criticism, and they played an important role in promoting the idea of radical student/worker cooperation. A lack of coherence and clarity about work with official labour also undermined the influence of the main Trotskyist groups in this period. These groups were also still mainly beholden in various ways to Stalinist politics and modes of operating, reflected, for example, in the rejection of workers self-management as "anarchism". Nonetheless, the efforts of Trotskyists to grapple with the issue of cooperation with the labour movement were not entirely unsuccessful, and Trotskyists brought to the movement, in Sydney in particular, a strong critique of capitalism and a radical alternative to Stalinism. They were significant in providing an early, comparatively coherent and radical stance in relation to the war, going beyond the demand for Australian withdrawal in their propaganda, if not always as a slogan for the movement.

The course of the development of the student movement demonstrates that before an unpopular idea becomes popular, it is proclaimed by a radical minority willing to weather unpopularity and labour away regardless. Above all, it is for this that the Far Left in Australia in the 1960s must be remembered. They were too small to influence much at all and, in most cases, their political approach ensured they stayed small. But the provocative flags they waved must be recognised as playing a crucial role in the shattering of the conservative consensus.

# FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM



Join **WORKER STUDENT ALLIANCE**

Latrobe

Loose leaflet, Albert Langer collection



**POLICE**

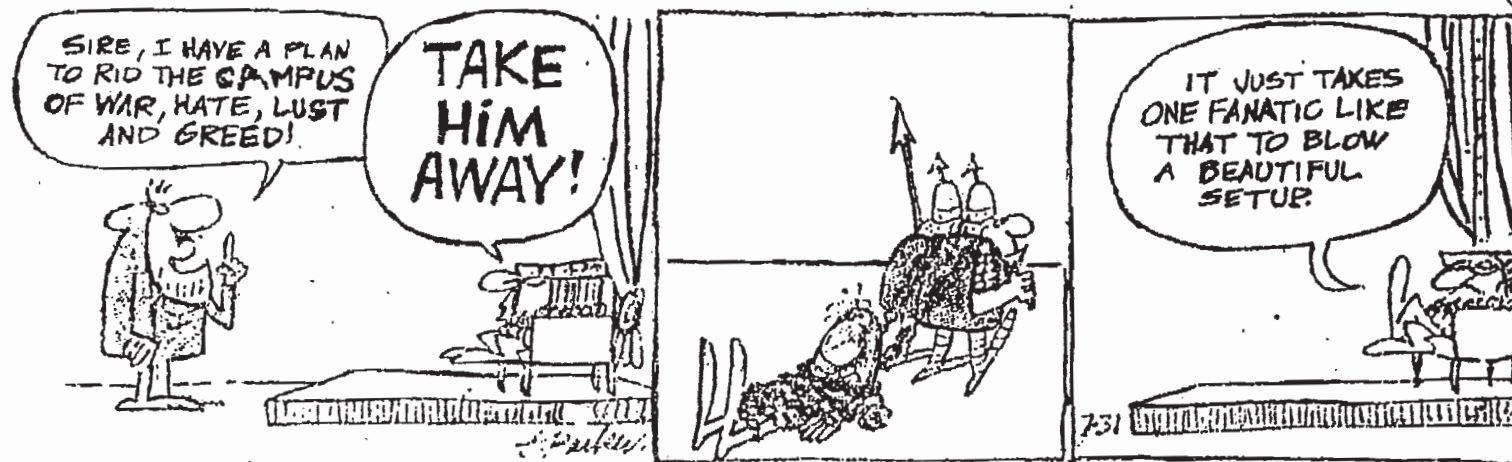
**PUBLISHED  
BY  
WSA**

**VIOLENCE**



Albert Langer, from "The Trouble with Students. An Australia-Wide Survey," *Bulletin*, 5 July 1969, p 28.

From "Join the SYA", February, 1972, Albert Langer collection.



## Chapter Ten

### Humanism, Self-Management and the Student "New Left"

*The goal of man and society should be human independence: a concern not with image [or] popularity but with finding a meaning in life that is personally authentic.<sup>1</sup>*

*...while it is true that one must think before one acts, it is also true that if one has no chance to act, the thinking becomes impoverished; in other words, if one cannot act effectively—one cannot think productively either.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Port Huron Statement, SDS (US), 1962, in T. Gitlin, *The Sixties. Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, (New York: Bantam, 1993), p 108.

<sup>2</sup> Erich Fromm, in *The Sane Society*, quoted in *Student Guerilla*, SDA weekly newsletter, 19 June, 1968, p 1, in G. Mallory (compiler), *A Left Compilation. A Selection of Political Material from S.D.A., the Labor Club and FOCO between 1967-1969*, August/September, 1992, courtesy Mitch Thompson.

Both internationally and in Australia the student unrest of the 1960s brought into sharp focus the crisis in the Old Left which had been brewing since 1956, if not before. In the United States movement, which heavily influenced the student movement in Australia, this crisis was made more serious by the relative quiescence of the working class in the face of the new unrest. Activists sought new radical theories and new radical forces, and their ideas influenced the Left in Australia. Organisations like Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Students for Democratic Action (SDA) were perhaps the most public face of those associated with the Australian "New Left". Individual intellectuals like Warren Osmond, Dan O'Neill and Dennis Altman also played a prominent role in publicising New Left ideas. Finally, the rise of "new" social movements, especially the women's movement, was associated with challenges to the Old Left's view of social change. This chapter provides a critical overview of the activities and ideas of those groups, suggesting that attempts to formulate new and more sophisticated theories often relied on political ideas which were not new at all. Changes in society which were taken to be fundamental and far-reaching were more superficial than they appeared to New Left thinkers at that time.

In the student movement, questions about the validity of Marxism, about agency, democracy, ideology and the class nature of the Russian Revolution became the subject of intense debate. Members of the different organisations of the Left, each representing a different strand of thought and consequent political practice, tried to gain support for their interpretation of things. From the point of view of some student activists, the relevance of these often long-winded debates to the immediate problems of the movement was not always clear. Moreover, the existence of different groups could appear as an obstacle to the task of building a united movement. Members of SDS groups were militant activists in the student movement who, finding that "politics" seemed to interfere with the organisation of radical action, declared themselves "apolitical," eschewing many of the debates with which the Old Left were concerned. They prided themselves on being a group in which individuals could "...come along and retain their own personal views but still work together towards some common end".<sup>3</sup>

The high profile of SDS might be said to have been partly borrowed from

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<sup>3</sup> Chris O'Connell, interviewed on *Protest*, Seven Days, 12 February, 1967, National Film and Sound Archive.

the extremely prominent US group from whom they took their name, though the SDS groups formed in Australian capital cities from the end of 1968 were less unified and less "ideological" than their American counterpart.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps partly because of their organisational fluidity, little has been written about the Australian SDS groups, despite the resonance of their name and reputation.<sup>5</sup> High-profile members included in Sydney Mike Jones<sup>6</sup> and Chris O'Connell<sup>7</sup>, and in Melbourne Michael Hamel-Green<sup>8</sup> and Harry van Moorst.<sup>9</sup>

The name SDS was first adopted by student groups at Sydney University and Melbourne University. In Sydney a group of activists in the ALP Club split away to form Students for a Labor Victory (SLV) to campaign around the upcoming 1966 federal election. Following Labor's defeat, SDS emerged from SLV in early 1967, a reflection of the nation-wide disillusion with strategies focused on parliamentary elections.<sup>10</sup> At Melbourne University, SDS was established by ex-Labor Club members, whose new-found support for direct action brought them into conflict with the Marxist discussion

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<sup>4</sup> In July 1969 a Flinders University SDS spokesman told the *Bulletin* that SDS at Flinders was not "issue-oriented" like SDS interstate, but concerned with "implementing socialism and democracy in Australia" ("The Trouble with Students: an Australia-wide Survey", *The Bulletin*, 5 July, 1969, p 29).

<sup>5</sup> The Official History contains four references to SDS, as does Murphy's book: P. Edwards, *A Nation at War. Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975. The Official History of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-1975*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1997); J. Murphy, *Harvest of Fear. A History of Australia's Vietnam War*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993). Some more detailed information can be found in P. Mendes, *The New Left, the Jews and the Vietnam War*, (North Caulfield: Lazare Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Profile, *The Australian*, 15 May, 1969. Interviewed, *Woroni*, July 2, 1969. See also *Tribune*, 5 February, 1969, p 8, which describes his arrest outside the Melbourne GPO under the Crimes Act; M. Jones, "The Radical 200", *Quadrant*, 12:4, July-August 1968, pp 22-4; M. Jones and C. O'Connell, "One View of the New Left", *Honi Soit*, 5 April, 1968.

<sup>7</sup> O'Connell, "What's it all about Alfie", *National U*, 14 April, 1969, p 12/3.

<sup>8</sup> See M. Hamel-Green, "Vietnam: Beyond Pity", *Dissent*, Winter, 1970, pp 30-6; "The Resisters. A History of the Anti-Conscription Movement 1964-1972", in P. King (ed.), *Australia's Vietnam: Australian in the Second Indo-China War* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983), pp 100-128.

<sup>9</sup> P. Mendes, *The New Left, the Jews and the Vietnam War 1965-1972*, (Melbourne: Lazare Press, 1993), p 29.

<sup>10</sup> C. Rootes, "The Development of Radical Student Movements and Their Sequelae", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 3:2, 1988, p 174.



group mode of operating which was favoured by the Labor Club there.<sup>11</sup> In early 1969, an SDS group was founded at Monash University,<sup>12</sup> and by mid-1969 there were SDS groups at the University of Tasmania and Flinders University in South Australia also.<sup>13</sup>

Most of all, SDS were leaders in civil disobedience against the Vietnam war. In 1968 and 1969, SDS in Sydney and Melbourne, continuing the tradition of the short-lived Draft Resistance Movement, were at the forefront of radical and mounting resistance to conscription: sit-ins, raids on government offices and illegal calls for students not to register.<sup>14</sup> Sydney SDS' most successful initiative for 1968 was the Don't Register campaign supported by academic staff.<sup>15</sup> In May 1969 the controversial demonstration against NSW Governor Roden Cutler was organised by Sydney SDS.<sup>16</sup>

Despite their dismissive attitude towards "ideology," SDS did have a distinctive political stance. Their formation represented both a reaction against capitalism and parliamentarism and the search for a new humanist socialism. SDS members were prominent in demonstrations against the invasion of Czechoslovakia,<sup>17</sup> sharing the enthusiasm of New Left intellectuals for the "Prague Spring".<sup>18</sup> Sydney SDS members referred to themselves early in their existence as "democratic socialists," thereby aligning themselves with Left or liberal opposition movements in the Eastern bloc. They rejected Leninist conceptions of Party organisation, advocating "participatory democracy."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Mendes, *op cit*, p 29.

<sup>12</sup> Osmond, *Arena*, 19, 1969, p 24.

<sup>13</sup> "The Trouble with Students...", *op cit*.

<sup>14</sup> M.E. Hamel-Green, "The Resisters. A History of the Anti-Conscription Movement 1964-1972", in King, *op cit*, p 113. For more details see *Resist*.

<sup>15</sup> "The Trouble with Students...", *op cit*.

<sup>16</sup> See "Who Really are the Ratbags?", *Tharunka*, 6 May, 1969, p 1,7 (which includes references to ten articles about the protest in the print media).

<sup>17</sup> Mendes, *op cit*, p 29/30.

<sup>18</sup> See for example "Two views on the 'Czechoslovak spring'" (Len Fox and Bruce McFarlane), *Outlook*, June 1968, p 24.

<sup>19</sup> Mike Jones, interviewed on *Protest, Seven Days*, 12 February, 1967, National Film and Sound Archive: "We're sort of halfway between democratic capitalism and totalitarian

In the United States, SDS' criticism of the communist movement was tempered by recognition of the importance for all radicals of being "anti-anti-communist" in a context where McCarthyism had been used more successfully than in Australia to neutralise any protest or industrial activity.<sup>20</sup> For the Australian SDS, however, the need for unity in the face of those who labelled all opposition to the Government as "communist" was apparently felt less strongly. Where SDS US supported the NLF,<sup>21</sup> the Australia SDS in early 1967 voted to withdraw their commitment to collecting money for medical aid at Sydney University, disavowing even critical support. Participants in the debate argued that to send aid was to say that "the NLF is right" whereas SDS should be "more sophisticated," taking the line that "the NLF is both right *and* wrong, that the allies in there are both right *and* wrong." To continue to support the NLF would be to allow the anti-war movement to fall foul of a "shallow propaganda trick" by the Government.<sup>22</sup>

The ideology of the Australian SDS has been well-characterised as a "politics of action based on conscience."<sup>23</sup> It was on this basis that SDS members attempted to influence the community, including workers, to oppose the war.<sup>24</sup> In this, SDS politics shared some similiarity with those of Student Action, who campaigned against the White Australia policy in the early 1960s. They saw themselves as working for change, not only in structures, but also in people:

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socialism".

<sup>20</sup> T. Gitlin, "The Importance of Being Anti-Anti-Communist", *Years of Hope...*, *op cit.*, pp 109-126. For a comparison of the anti-war movements in Australia and the US, see A. Curthoys, "The anti-war movements" in J. Grey,, and J. Doyle, (eds), *Vietnam: War, Myth and Memory. Comparative Perspectives on Australia's War in Vietnam*, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1992), pp 81-107.

<sup>21</sup> Gitlin, *op cit.*, p 185: "If, like myself, we knew that Ho Chi Minh had massacred the Vietnamese Trotskyists, we buried the information in parentheses".

<sup>22</sup> *Protest*, *op cit.* For other later New Left criticisms of the NLF see W.B. and D.W., "To Hell with the NLF!", *Tharunka*, 5 March, 1970, p 17.

<sup>23</sup> Mendes, *op cit.*, p 29/30.

<sup>24</sup> In March 1969, for example, SDS student Brian Glover spoke to Sydney waterside workers about the Vietnam war (*Tribune*, 26 March, 1969, p 10).

Believing that excessive effort has been directed at perfecting democratic institutions and procedures, SDS is concerned to develop the Democratic Citizen.<sup>25</sup>

SDS were also influenced by the US SDS' search for new oppressed groups who could replace the working class as the revolutionary agent, and their experiences whilst they were imprisoned for their anti-draft activities, for example, helped to foster sympathy for "marginalised" social groups like prisoners.<sup>26</sup>

There was rivalry at Sydney University between the Trotskyists and SDS. As Greenland put it, where SDS saw the Labor Club as "dinosaurs", the Labor Club saw SDS as "right-wingers," also accusing them of "left adventurism". Trotskyists like Greenland shared Communist Party ideas about the dangers of "ultraleftism," unlike SDS, who, according to Greenland "did stupid, adventurous things, calling police "pigs," sitting in offices, putting "fuck" in leaflets...". The differences were even reflected in the way the different groups dressed.<sup>27</sup>

Though SDS was known for its support for militant and illegal tactics, its members were contemptuous of Maoist confrontationism.<sup>28</sup> There were occasions when SDS publicly distanced themselves from conflicts between radicals and police. For example, following violent clashes in Melbourne on 4 July, 1967, Mike Jones dissociated Sydney SDS from the demonstration.<sup>29</sup> Having been accosted with fruit at Sydney University in May 1969, Roden

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<sup>25</sup> Statement in Orientation Week handbook 1969 published by University of Sydney SRC, quoted in R. Cahill, *Notes on the New Left in Australia*, (Sydney: Australian Marxist Research Foundation, 1969), p 12.

<sup>26</sup> *Tribune*, 23 April, 1969, p 8.

<sup>27</sup> Greenland interview, *op cit*.

<sup>28</sup> See for example, Jones interviewed on *Protest*, *op cit*, who characterised the Labor Club as believing "in permanent revolution, permanent stirring, get arrested for the sake of being arrested...they mouth these slogans, but whether in actual fact they are just angry young men is another matter".

<sup>29</sup> "Violence must End", *The Australian*, 6 July, 1967, Box 21, Albert Langer collection. See also Jones, "The Radical 200", *Quadrant*, 12:4, July-August, 1968, p 24: "It was a great shame that the students in Melbourne had to go beserk and start throwing stones and breaking windows, because this gave Mr. Gorton and his Government a chance to call us violent and destructive...Non-violent sit-ins is where student-power counts".

Cutler must have been surprised by the reception he received in June from SDS at Tasmania University, where he was presented with a handful of tomatoes: "a symbol of the respect in which your office is held".<sup>30</sup>

The SDS moment in Australia was a brief one. Matheson suggests that SDS' emphasis on civil disobedience in 1969 in both Sydney and Melbourne created a spiral of ever-escalating demands from the organisation's leadership until the number of "burnt-out" members outnumbered new recruits, ending in SDS' collapse in both States.<sup>31</sup> In March 1969, a writer for *National U* claimed SDS was becoming "part of the conservative protest establishment;"<sup>32</sup> others argued that following the campaign against Melbourne City by-laws, SDS' main concern had shifted to student government.<sup>33</sup> In Melbourne, SDS became involved in establishing the "Free Uni"<sup>34</sup> while leader Harry van Moorst became a prominent figure in the Moratorium campaigns.

Also short-lived was the Brisbane group, Students for Democratic Action (SDA). Very little has been written about SDA. Peter Edwards' one reference describes them as a "similar group" to SDS.<sup>35</sup> SDA considered themselves, and were considered, to be part of the New Left. Their critique of "actually existing socialism" as "state capitalism" marks them as part of the "post-communist" left. Yet "newness" is always a relative concept, as illustrated by the example of the Communist Party in this period. SDA's interest in the early Marx, advocacy of support for working class revolution and personnel leakage into the Revolutionary Socialist Alliance meant they shared many similarities with those groups considered to be part of the "Old Left". Their enthusiasm for the concept of "self-management" also aligns them with some Trotskyist currents and/or anarchism.

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<sup>30</sup> "The Trouble...", *op cit*, p 30.

<sup>31</sup> S. Matheson, *Radical Dissent in Australia in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A Case Study of a Social Movement*, BA Hons, Government, University of Sydney, 1988, p 36.

<sup>32</sup> *National U*, 5:1, 3 March, 1969.

<sup>33</sup> K. Rowley and T. Counihan (Melbourne University Marxists), "Radical Student Politics", *National U*, 5:1, 3 March, 1969, p 6/7.

<sup>34</sup> Mendes, *op cit*, p 29/30.

<sup>35</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, p 168.

Like SDS, SDA was formed not as a political Party but for a limited, short-term practical purpose: to organise radical students against the Vietnam War.<sup>36</sup> "Students for Democratic Action" was the name chosen in August 1966 when two groups of young radicals in Brisbane decided to merge. The first group consisted of a coalition of two forces. Students at the University of Queensland, responding to the new initiatives in the Church following Vatican II, formed "a sort of left opposition" in the Newman Society. In late 1966, these students began to work with a number of younger staff who were critical of the university. Students and staff began to come together to organise protests, forums and a petition after alleged discrimination by the University Administration against an off-campus Peace group sponsoring a conference on South East Asia. The other group involved in SDA was associated with Brisbane's off-campus Vietnam Action Committee. SDA was formed in recognition of the need for an independent campus-based group to organise protest against the war. The new organisation was impressed by the US SDS and chose its name as a combination of VAC and SDS.<sup>37</sup>

The formation of SDA whilst other student activists were focused primarily on the 1966 election reflected the sharp conflicts that had occurred in Queensland; but it has also been attributed to the fact that Queensland had "no tradition of a student-left" compared with Sydney, for example, where the student-left was divided into small groups.<sup>38</sup> It also reflected the lack of sympathy for and interest in the ALP amongst SDA members.<sup>39</sup> SDA was widely praised for its ability to mobilise a relatively large proportion of the University of Queensland campus population. This success was seen as resulting partly from SDA's fluid, liberal and humanist views, which seemed to encapsulate the spirit of opposition to the Vietnam war at this time. Writing in 1969, O'Neill noted that SDA, when compared with other groups, was often regarded as:

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<sup>36</sup> Mitch Thompson, personal interview.

<sup>37</sup> D. O'Neill, "The Growth of the Radical Movement", *Semper Floreat*, 17 March, 1969, p 9. On the impact of changes in the Catholic church at this time see also D. Cusack, "Melbourne University, Catholic Liberals and the *Catholic Worker*", *Melbourne Journal of Politics*, Vol 13, 1981, pp 55-70.

<sup>38</sup> Rowan Cahill, interviewed in "Student Activism", *Australian Left Review*, August-September, 1968, p 31.

<sup>39</sup> Mitch Thompson, personal interview.

...more serious, capable of embracing more viewpoints without ideological factionalism, more organised and more advanced in respect of its links with the working class movement."<sup>40</sup>

Jim Cairns was impressed by SDA, and travelled in late January 1969 to address the group, defending parliament as an avenue for social change. Despite a confrontation over this issue, Cairns ended by saying "that he regarded the Queensland movement as more continuous both in theory and in practice than any other in Australia."<sup>41</sup>

By 1968, SDA produced a weekly newsletter, *Student Guerilla*,<sup>42</sup> and in August 1968 were responsible for initiating, at a Socialist Students Alliance meeting in Sydney, *Brisbane Line*, a national paper "not merely for Brisbane-ites and...not merely for students".<sup>43</sup> Though *Brisbane Line*, edited by Melbourne activist Dave Nadel, ceased publication because of lack of resources after just three issues,<sup>44</sup> it was distinctive in the student literature of that time for its relatively concrete proposals for student-worker unity and its staunch condemnation of the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. Nadel, as a member of the Monash Labor Club, had been involved in previous attempts to foster student-worker unity.<sup>45</sup> Brian Laver, the activist most publicly associated with SDA, was himself in Czechoslovakia during the invasion. SDAers, based in their office in Roma Street, Brisbane, which became known as the Cellar, believed that Russia was a state capitalist

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* Chapter Twelve details SDA's role in fostering student/ worker cooperation in Queensland.

<sup>41</sup> O'Neill, "The Growth...", *op cit.*

<sup>42</sup> Copies of *Student Guerilla* exist in Dan O'Neill's collection, Fryer library, and are reproduced in G. Mallory (compiler), *A Left Compilation. A Selection of Political Material from SDA, the Labor Club and FOCO between 1967-1969*, August/September 1992, courtesy Mitch Thompson.

<sup>43</sup> "We are Drawing a Line", *Brisbane line*, August 22, 1968, p 1.

<sup>44</sup> Dan O'Neill, "The Growth...", *Semper Floreat*, 17 March, 1969, p 12.

<sup>45</sup> In September 1966 Monash broadsheet *Left Hook* expressed its support for strikers at SEC "in a display of what was hoped would become Worker-Student solidarity". *Left Hook* was modelled on *Wednesday Commentary*, edited by Robin Blackwell, typed by Di Davies and roneoed by Dave Nadel (P.F. Perry, *The Rise and Fall of Practically Everybody. An Account of Student Political Activity at Monash University 1965-72*, undated (held at Monash University library, Rare Books), p 14).

society and characterised both Eastern and Western blocs as equally totalitarian. They were critical of both Maoist and SDS students, Laver today commenting that the Maoists "just seemed to be playing games" while SDS members were people who he felt "really wanted to be in the Labor Party".<sup>46</sup> For funding, SDA relied on Mitch Thompson's ability to play the stock market.<sup>47</sup>

On campus, members of SDA became vocal supporters of the idea of "self-management," a phrase popular with the Pabloite Trotskyists with whom Denis Freney was associated, but also consistent with anarchist ideas. The group's members were also enthusiastic proponents of the idea of student control of courses and of the university itself. Foco, a meeting-place for radical young students and workers, was an SDA initiative, involving collaboration with the Communist Party's Young Socialist League. SDA stressed the importance of Foco as more than just a meeting place. On their opening night, for example, Laver insisted, in the face of YSL reluctance, that a political bookstall be set up at the entrance to the event.<sup>48</sup> SDA also experimented with "guerilla theatre," providing dramatic social satire for audiences at the university, on the streets of Brisbane, and at stop-work meetings.<sup>49</sup>

Also involved with *Brisbane Line* was an Adelaide group established in 1968, also called Students for Democratic Action, which produced the news sheet *Grass Roots*. Though not formally linked with Brisbane SDA,<sup>50</sup> Adelaide SDA's development and politics were similar. Formed initially for the limited purpose of campaigning around electoral reform in Adelaide, SDA later extended its platform to encompass anti-war aims, evolving to a socialist position influenced by Perry Anderson, Andre Gorz, Gramsci and the journal *New Left Review*. In early 1968, Adelaide SDA played a prominent role in the establishment of the Student-Worker Coordinating Committee; its news sheet *New Approach* was distributed in

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<sup>46</sup> Brian Laver, personal interview.

<sup>47</sup> Mitch Thompson, personal interview.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Cahill, *op cit*, p 13.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p 11.

factories and universities with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of students and workers through mutual co-ordination and planning of activities.<sup>51</sup>

Where Maoist students tended to speak in terms of student-worker links arising "spontaneously" and by implication, necessarily, from the crisis of capitalism itself, the literature of SDA in both Adelaide and Brisbane, as seen in *Brisbane Line*, places more emphasis on the need for argument to win over students and workers to the side of radicals. Yet their commitment to student-worker unity was essentially morally based. Adelaide SDA, for example, rejected discussion about the relative merit of students and workers as agents of change, arguing that:

The aim of SDA and SWCC is to create revolutionaries, people who are able to perceive society from without...It is merely an appreciation of the differences in understanding the various contexts and the limits of their resources which leads each group to work principally (sic) one field or another. <sup>52</sup>

As Rootes has noted, Brisbane SDA's theoretical language "was that of the early Marx, of Marcuse and of Erich Fromm rather than that of Guevara or Mao."<sup>53</sup> Bakunin and C. Wright Mills were other theoreticians whose names recur in Brisbane SDA literature. Closer to home, Brisbane SDA was influenced by radical English lecturer, Dan O'Neill, and philosophy lecturer Peter Wertheim, both radical Catholics.

These rationalist, humanist influences explain a political practice which placed a premium on personal choice and courage, and on rational argument, but tended to assign a privileged role in social change to university-educated people. A major theme in Marcuse's thought at this time was the way in which human needs are constructed by power elites, with "affluence" ensuring compliance to the system. Speaking of the mobilisations of youth in the United States, Marcuse spoke warmly of their

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> "Adelaide. The Origins and Aims of SWCC", *Brisbane Line*, 5 September, 1968, p 6.

<sup>53</sup> C. Rootes, "Australian Student Radicals: the Nature and Origin of Dissent", BA Hons Thesis, Government Department, University of Queensland, 1969, p 60.



"deep distrust of all ideology (including socialist ideology)," their refusal to cooperate, to follow society's rules, and of their disgust at the affluent society and the "cruelty and stupidity" contributing to its reproduction:

These young people no longer share the repressive need for the blessings and security of domination—in them perhaps a new consciousness is appearing, a new type of person with another instinct for reality, life and happiness...<sup>54</sup>

In 1968, however, leading SDA members in Brisbane found a gulf opening up between them and the mostly liberal students they had mobilised previously. Brian Laver's nomination as President of the New Student Movement at the University of Queensland was controversial because SDA was by now seen as an "off-campus" movement, portrayed by student opponents as a communist front.<sup>55</sup> At the end of 1968, when leading members graduated or found employment, the group's inability to attract new leaders was fatal. By April 1969, SDA had been dissolved.

This dissolution was praised by some as a move in the spirit of the stress on openness to ideas and initiatives outside its ranks, which had made the early SDA so popular.<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, ex-SDA activists in Brisbane soon found themselves searching for new organisational forms which would facilitate their activism. Following the dissolution, a number of SDA members became involved in RSA, which, although also short-lived, appears to have strengthened (perhaps through Denis Freney) the commitment of Brisbane activists to the idea of self-management. By the 1970s, ex-SDA members had become members of a number of small organisations. In particular, some Queensland members joined the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP). When RSP splintered in turn, most of its members joined Trotskyist groups; the remaining members, including Brian Laver, established the Self-Management Group (SMG). SMG was

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<sup>54</sup> Herbert Marcuse, interviewed by Gunther Busch, in A. Cockburn and R. Blackburn (eds), *Student Power*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p 371/2.

<sup>55</sup> O'Neill, "The Growth...", *op cit*, p 10.

<sup>56</sup> R.J. Cahill, "The Dissolution of SDA", *Australian Left Review*, August-September 1969, pp 31-33. See also M. Thompson, "SDA dissolves" leaflet, 28 April, 1969, calling for the formation of Action Committees at workplaces, universities and amongst the underprivileged (Fryer library).

influenced by Laver's support for anarchism, but with its focus on workers, bore similarities to anarcho-syndicalist groups. As Guyatt and George explain, SMG was:

...unified around the essential demand for workers councils as the basis of a real democracy. In these councils people will have equal decision-making and be paid an equal wage. The Group did not see itself as yet another leadership, merely as people in socialist struggle where they live and work.<sup>57</sup>

With its emphasis on rank and file democracy, SMG had some success in recruiting industrial workers in the early 1970s,<sup>58</sup> and produced leaflets addressed to rank and file workers in support of their industrial struggles and arguing against the lines taken by the official trade union leadership.<sup>59</sup>

Elsewhere in Australia, other anarchist-influenced groups also arose, which shared to varying degrees the New Left enthusiasm for the counter-culture and a concern for mobilising workers. They included the group Solidarity in Melbourne, whose article "Notes on Fucking the System" sparked a police raid on their premises.<sup>60</sup> Sydney, with a tradition of anarchism and libertarianism from the 1930s, also produced a variety of these groups. As early as 1967, a small group which affiliated to the ASLF went by the name of the "Wobblies", following the World War One revolutionary syndicalist organisation the Industrial Workers of the World.<sup>61</sup> In 1970, anarchist-influenced groups around Sydney included the Surrealist Group, the Rebel

<sup>57</sup> J. Guyatt and G. George, *Publications of Political Organisations in Queensland Held in University of Queensland Libraries*, (St Lucia: Fryer Memorial Library, University of Queensland Libraries, 1983), p 245.

<sup>58</sup> Brian Laver, personal interview.

<sup>59</sup> An extended collection of these is held at the Fryer library. Those produced in 1972 include "The Situation for Human Beings...", "Workers Self-management for E.D.'s Shipyard", "SMG answers Knevitt", "The Moment of Decision", "Marches in the Present Situation...", "No More Jockeys", "Let's Steal Their Six Guns", "Latent Fascism", "Education at QIT", "We Move the Treadmill", "On White Collar Sickies", "Censorship and Self-Management", "Love, Sex and Liberation", "Exam Time Cobbers", "A Bureaucrat By Any Other Name", "Authoritarian Education", "The Education System - Who Is It For?", "E.D.Solidarity - What a Shambles", "How to Avoid Going Insane".

<sup>60</sup> "Cops Move in on Melbourne Anarchists", *Tharunka*, 23 June, 1970, p 3.

<sup>61</sup> Paddy Dawson, "Student Labor Conference. Wobblies make presence felt", *Honi Soit*, 8 June, 1967, p 2.

Worker Group, Anarchist Horde<sup>62</sup> and a small anarcho-syndicalist group at Sydney University called Kronstadt.<sup>63</sup>

Groups like SDS, SDA and these later groups who were openly supportive of anarchism shared a distrust of the internal organisational traditions of the Communist Party. They also championed a more confrontational style of activism. There were other student radicals, however, for whom militant action itself was also highly problematic. These students and their mentors formed the less activist wing of the New Left, whose supporters were distinctive for the importance they placed on theoretical clarification and the establishment of a "counter-hegemony" for the movement. The New Left was the child of the Old, and their concerns and conceptualisation of problems and ideas owe much to, and are still in many ways a part of the ideological framework of the Old Left. Hence, following mentors such as the ex-Communist intellectuals around the British *New Left Review*, they grappled seriously with issues such as false consciousness and hegemony.<sup>64</sup> Yet at the same time, they attempted to go beyond the bounds of what they understood to be Marxist orthodoxy. By 1970, the New Left and new social movements involved a broader constituency, of which students were only one part, particularly, for example, within the women's liberation movement.

Where primary source written material relating to the SDS and SDA groups mainly consists of reports written by others about their activities, material relating to New Left intellectuals influential in the Australian student movement at this time, because of the priority given to theory, is more extensive; it is written by the individuals themselves, and outlines their ideas in detail. The most important products of this milieu include the edited volume *The Australian New Left: Critical Essays and Strategy*,<sup>65</sup> and the journals *Arena* and *Dissent*.<sup>66</sup> New Left writers prominent in the

<sup>62</sup> "The Forecast is Hot", *Tharunka*, 5 March, 1970, p 28.

<sup>63</sup> *Tribune*, 5 August, 1970.

<sup>64</sup> See for example D. O'Neill, "Abstract and Real Worlds: Intellectuals and Radical Social Change" in R. Gordon (ed.), *The Australian New Left. Critical Essays and Strategy*, (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1970).

<sup>65</sup> Gordon, *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> A. Curthoys, "Mobilising Dissent: the Later Stages of Protest", in G. Pemberton (ed.), *Vietnam Remembered*, (Sydney: Weldon, 1990), p 151.

student movement include Warren Osmond,<sup>67</sup> Dan O'Neill, Peter Wertheim, and later, Dennis Altman. Osmond was particularly prolific, and oft-quoted within the student movement; and for this reason his ideas receive particular attention in this chapter.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the New Left's enthusiasm for the idea of the individual, New Left Groups were also formed, though they were more organisationally differentiated and dispersed than Old Left student groups. Melbourne University had a New Left Group, "gradually revived" in 1969.<sup>69</sup> Most prominent, however, was the Monash New Left Club/Group, of which Warren Osmond was a member. It initiated a variety of projects, for example, sending speakers to several church groups. Several members of the Group played a significant role in the election of a Prahran socialist to a local council, with members distributing policy translations to the members of the Prahran migrant community.<sup>70</sup> The group was also responsible for initiating the Campaign for University Freedom<sup>71</sup> and in 1972 it ran a VHF radio network to warn of approaching police after the Draft Resister's Union (DRU) established a symbolic fortress for resisters in the Union Building. An indication of the enmity between the New Left and Maoist students at Monash was the Labor Club's establishment of their own network on the same frequency.<sup>72</sup>

Members of the New Left Groups were highly critical of Maoist involvement in the radical movement. Osmond was a supporter of revolution and socialism,<sup>73</sup> but rejected what he called "confrontation

<sup>67</sup> See for example "Monash. Battling the Machine", in H. Mayer (ed.), *Australian Politics: a Second Reader*, (Melbourne: F.W.Cheshire, 1969), p 3; "Student Revolutionary Left", *Arena*, 19, 1969, pp 22-7; "Workers' Control - Student Power", *Australian Left Review*, October-November 1969, pp 54-58; "Notes on the Sydney Sit-In", *Lot's Wife*, 13 April, 1970; in "The State of Student Protest", *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 46:8, 7 September, 1970, pp 114-128; *The Dilemma of an Australian Sociology*, Monograph Series No 2 (Melbourne: Arena, 1972).

<sup>68</sup> D. Altman, "Students in the Electric Age" in Gordon, *op cit*, p 134/5.

<sup>69</sup> Osmond, *Arena*, 19, 1969, p 24.

<sup>70</sup> Perry, *op cit*, p 108.

<sup>71</sup> H. Boyne-Anderson, "The New Left - Vita Nuova?", *Arena*, 17, 1968, p 13.

<sup>72</sup> Perry, *op cit*.

<sup>73</sup> Osmond, "Universities: the Critical Weakness", *Analysis*, No 2, 1968, Z458, box 14, Albert Langer collection.

politics". This approach, he argued in 1969, "cuts the radicals off from the mass of students",<sup>74</sup> representing an acute danger to the student movement.<sup>75</sup> For example, the support enjoyed by radicals following the NLF Aid Campaign, he argued, was superficial. Faced with their failure to genuinely spread their ideas, radicals had become enmeshed in "the politics of display". Negative media attention reinforced a tendency amongst activists to posture as "the most radical radicals" so that increasingly, labels and group ideology became a substitute for creative argument. Organisational freezing was accompanied by theoretical rigidity, a process which had occurred not only in the Monash Labor Club but also in Brisbane SDA and UNSW's Action for Love and Freedom.<sup>76</sup> The result of this pattern was that radical groups became "corporative, rather than subversive". In 1971, Osmond portrayed anti-war conferences, for example, as "an attempt to organisationally institutionalise genuine radical impulses," accusing the more articulate student leaders of using their high profiles, their "troops" and their ability to shout their line most crudely to dominate debates.<sup>77</sup>

Given the prevalence amongst the student Left of very mechanical ideas about how consciousness is changed, these criticisms undoubtedly contained an element of truth. However, criticising the "politics of display" was one matter, establishing a genuinely radical alternative practice quite another. A not dissimilar critique of the Left, for example, was extolled by supporters of UNSW's "Wizard", "Gandalf" Ian Channel. Traditional public meetings and demonstrations, they argued, had become standardised: "people aren't interested in Cops and Students brawling any more".<sup>78</sup> Channel, on the other hand, was an advocate of the "fun" or "apolitical" approach to the revolution. This approach was seen as a way of breaking down inhibitions to discussion by challenging people's formal roles, which would be achieved by making symbolic challenges to the existing value system. The New Left at UNSW prided themselves on their refusal to be manipulated by the

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<sup>74</sup> Osmond, *Australian Left Review*, December 1969.

<sup>75</sup> Osmond, "Student Revolutionary Left", *Arena*, 19, 1969, p 24.

<sup>76</sup> Osmond, *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> W. Osmond, "The Anti-War Movement in Disintegration", *Tharunka*, 9 March, 1971, p 7.

<sup>78</sup> J. Mackenzie, "Channelling the Revolution", *Tharunka*, 13 May, 1969, p 7.

"serious revolutionaries" with their "posturing and tortured arguments."<sup>79</sup>

The Wizard's apoliticism, however, was transparent. Channel's banner "Love Police, Love Students," shown in a photograph of a student demonstration, illustrates that the "new" values he supported amounted to nothing more than old-fashioned liberalism.<sup>80</sup> In the context, this liberalism meant a defence of the status quo. In 1970, for example, Channel opposed the publication by *Tharunka* of the obscene poem "Eskimo Nell" on the grounds that it would cause a backlash.<sup>81</sup> The university administration apparently shared this assessment of Channel's influence, and decided to pay him, along with the Student Union, a full-time wage to bring "fun" to the UNSW campus.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, despite his popularity on that campus, student radicals elsewhere were scornful of Channel. At NUAUS' August Council meeting in 1969, a plan to have him appointed as "Australian Wizard" was ridiculed, students outside UNSW accusing him of "working to keep the university quiet" and blaming him for the low level of student political activity at UNSW.<sup>83</sup>

Central to the New Left's search for a new radical vision and practice was an assessment that society had fundamentally changed in ways the Old Left did not understand and with implications far greater than the Old Left would or could acknowledge. Above all, the New Left project was rooted in deep concern about the conservatism of the Australian working class, reflecting more generalised beliefs in society about the impact of the Cold War. This is a strong theme in Osmond's writings, for example.

In 1967, Osmond was a member of the Monash Labor Club committee which decided to send aid to the NLF. Yet, in an article the same year, he expressed cynicism about the value of such "shock therapy", fearing that it might only induce the invocation of "war-time symbols of loyalty and unanimity"

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<sup>79</sup> J. Hird, "Business as Usual - a Post Moratorium Discussion", *Tharunka*, 9 June, 1970, p 7.

<sup>80</sup> McKenzie, *op cit.*

<sup>81</sup> Editorial, *Tharunka*, (a special edition), 16:4, 26 March, 1970.

<sup>82</sup> "The Trouble With Students. An Australia-Wide Survey", *The Bulletin*, 5 July, 1969, p 26; A.H.Willis, *The University of New South Wales. The Baxter Years*, (Kensington: University of New South Wales Press, 1983), p 147/8.

<sup>83</sup> "Wizard attacked at Council Meeting", *Tharunka*, 2 September, 1969, p 3.

amongst a complacent public. At that time, for Osmond, who was aligned with the Whitlamite majority in the Labor Club, the real question behind discussion about the "centre of gravity of opinion" was the effect of the publicity on the electoral prestige of the ALP.<sup>84</sup> Osmond also shared the pessimism of ALP and CP members about potential for changes in the political climate in Australia. In 1967 he praised the Communist Party at its Twenty-First National Congress for recognising ("at last") that "Australia must be the most barren ground for any substantial socialist or revolutionary to work in". Australia, he believed, was "an exceptionally a-social kind of society," very materialistic and "tight-lipped," a society in which "ideas, intellect, analysis, passion and spontaneity don't fare well".<sup>85</sup>

This same theme of a uniquely backward, conservative populace is repeated throughout the writing of other Australian New Leftists at this time.<sup>86</sup> It was a theme which was reinforced by the fact that it reflected the concerns of intellectuals in other first world countries. British Marxist Perry Anderson, for example, argued that the most important task for the British working class was the establishment of an indigenous radical tradition, previously lacking.<sup>87</sup> This argument was also echoed in Australia by Humphrey McQueen in his influential book *A New Britannia*, published in 1970.<sup>88</sup> Though sympathetic to Maoism, McQueen criticised not only the existing labour movement Parties, but also the Australian working class itself, rejecting the romantic notions about workers associated with Left traditions in Australia and placing a spotlight on negative aspects of working class consciousness like racism and sexism. However, where Anderson and McQueen felt that greater attention must be given to the obstacles to working class radicalisation in their respective countries, Osmond and other

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<sup>84</sup> "Shock Therapy", *Dissent*, 21, Spring, 1967, pp 31-2. See also Osmond's debate with Cairnsite Dave Nadel in *Lot's Wife*, 1967 and his 1967 article "Australia's Communists look for a niche in history", *Lot's Wife*, 13 June, 1967, p 5, where he argues that real power lies in positions which give most access to changing basic thought, such as senior government positions.

<sup>85</sup> Osmond, "Australia's Communists...", *ibid*, p 4.

<sup>86</sup> See especially essays in Gordon, *op cit*.

<sup>87</sup> See for example P. Anderson, *Arguments Within English Marxism*, (London, 1980) and "Components of the National Culture" in A. Cockburn and R. Blackburn (eds) *Student Power. Problems, diagnosis, action*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin and New Left Review, 1969).

<sup>88</sup> H. McQueen, *A New Britannia: an Argument Concerning the Social Origins of Australian Radicalism and Nationalism*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970).

New Leftists in Australia followed those thinkers who believed that the socialist focus on workers must be abandoned altogether. Osmond, like "revisionists" in and around the Communist Party, argued that the working class had been integrated into capitalism: job-security and a higher standard of living, he argued, were "the basic worker-drives".<sup>89</sup>

The idea that workers no longer formed the most important radical class was hegemonic in the New Left in Australia, as it was overseas. As UNSW's Jim Mackenzie put it:

The Working Class is no longer oppressed, and is now a Middle Class in its way of life (materialist hedonism), its attitudes (complacency), and its aims (status symbols). The truly oppressed people are the Non-workers—including, apart from born slobs, the old, the sick, the coloured and the students.<sup>90</sup>

New Left approaches to workers reflected these kind of beliefs. Some New Left writing implies that students should make contact with workers as a means of helping students to change themselves, for example, by overcoming "feelings of status and snobbery"<sup>91</sup> (incompatible with socialism, even if led by students). Others suggest that workers and students are no different, separated only by "false consciousness".<sup>92</sup> Osmond argued that the radical rhetoric of the trade union Left "was not co-emergent with the growth of the movement,"<sup>93</sup> implying that radical ideas were somehow foreign to workers.

Instead, the New Left supported the view that students were the group which represented the new hope for social change. In making this argument, however, they sought legitimacy in the writings of Marxists. In particular, following overseas writers, Communist Party member Alastair

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<sup>89</sup> Osmond, "Australia's Communists...", *op cit*, p 5.

<sup>90</sup> J. Mackenzie, "Channelling the Revolution", *Tharunka*, 13 May, 1969, p 7. See also for similar arguments, *ISM* (Monash New Left Club regular leaflet), 1:1, July 10, 1968, p 2, John Playford Collection, P64/8, Noel Butlin Archive.

<sup>91</sup> Osmond, "Universities: the Critical Weakness", *Analysis*, No 2, 1968, p 5.

<sup>92</sup> Boyne-Anderson, *op cit*, p 14.

<sup>93</sup> Osmond, "Towards Self-Awareness", *The Australian New Left...*, *op cit*, p 173.



Davidson popularised the writings of Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci.<sup>94</sup> Osmond, following Davidson, interpreted Gramsci as supportive of the vision expressed by Herbert Marcuse, whereby the integration and cooption of workers within capitalism had made intellectuals, in place of the working class, the "most decisive class in the socialist movement."<sup>95</sup> Gramsci, one of a small group of Marxists who had attempted seriously to grapple with the implications for working class revolution of the hegemony of ruling class ideas in Western countries, could not, without serious injury to his thought and lifelong activism, be compared easily with Marcuse.<sup>96</sup> For the New Left, however, Gramsci's idea of "praxis" provided an initial means by which the leading role of intellectuals in revolutionary change could be given a Marxist pedigree.<sup>97</sup>

Osmond, for example, believed that the most important and neglected task for the Left was a radical critique of Australian society: "the Australian Left (and the student New Left)" he wrote in 1968, "is desperately short on critique".<sup>98</sup> Here, the university had a special role to play. Against the liberal "conscience of society" and Maoist "giant factory" conceptions of the university, Osmond argued that the university's role in society was "crucial, but primarily cultural". It was a place where a social outlook favourable only to the rulers of society was fostered.<sup>99</sup> Where Maoist students saw the universities as essentially capitalist institutions, New Leftists characterised them as "centres of struggle".<sup>100</sup> For Osmond the importance of the university was its role in producing hegemony, and hence, potentially, counter-hegemony: "I see our role in the university under capitalism...as the prevention of the creation of cadres for capitalism..."<sup>101</sup> He argued that

<sup>94</sup> A. Davidson, *Antonio Gramsci: the Man, His Ideas*, (Sydney: Australian Left Review Publications, 1968).

<sup>95</sup> Osmond, "Universities: the Critical Weakness", *Analysis*, No 2, 1968, Z458, box 14, Albert Langer collection.

<sup>96</sup> Supporting this view see J. Molyneux, *Marxism and the Party*, (London: Pluto Press, 1978).

<sup>97</sup> Osmond, "Towards Self-Awareness...", *op cit*, p 169.

<sup>98</sup> "Monash. Battling the Machine", *op cit*, p 196.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Grant Hannan, Monash New Left Club, interviewed in "Student Activism" (interviews), *Australian Left Review*, August-September 1968, p 37.

<sup>101</sup> Osmond, "Universities - the Critical Weakness", *Analysis*, No 2, 1968, p 3.

the student movement was faced with the task of building an authentic new left strategy for social change based in "our own *praxis*"<sup>102</sup>. This was primarily an ideological task, but Osmond denied that he was suggesting "we do nothing more than have seminars and read books". Rather, the fight for socialist ideas required the establishment of counter-institutions: radical student groups, informal social cliques and the radical movement itself.<sup>103</sup>

Osmond did not support the student movement because he believed it could achieve reforms; indeed, he argued that it was dangerous to encourage illusions that this might be possible.<sup>104</sup> The value of struggling for reform, he argued, lay not in what might be won, but in the development, precisely because of the "impossibility of solving problems piecemeal," of self-conscious radical movements and organisations.<sup>105</sup> Out of such constituencies, he argued, a socialist movement would eventually grow.<sup>106</sup> Hence his support for the demand for the reconstitution of the University Council to comprise a staff-student majority, a demand which he believed could not succeed but would be an "immensely radicalising political experience for students."<sup>107</sup> Similarly, off-campus, the major strength of the anti-war movement was seen by Osmond as being "expressive and symbolic, rather than political and instrumental".<sup>108</sup> These arguments, then, can be seen as representing early formulations of the ideas expressed by New Social Movement theorists like Melucci.<sup>109</sup>

It was on this basis that Osmond, like many other New Left activists, placed his hope in a radical education movement in the universities, inspired very loosely by SDS US' Radical Education Project.<sup>110</sup> Osmond argued that

<sup>102</sup> Osmond, *Arena*, 19, 1969, p 25.

<sup>103</sup> Osmond, "Universities - the Critical Weakness", *Analysis*, No 2, 1968, p 3.

<sup>104</sup> *Tribune*, 10 July, 1968.

<sup>105</sup> Osmond vs P. Morgan, "The State of Student Protest", *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 46:8, 7 September, 1970, p 124.

<sup>106</sup> *Tribune*, 10 July, 1968.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> W. Osmond, "The Anti-War Movement in Disintegration", *Tharunka*, 9 March, 1971, p 7.

<sup>109</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>110</sup> Perry, *op cit.*

students should develop critiques of their courses, alternative reading guides to identify the "class and conservative biases" of existing courses, and present radical alternatives. This kind of initiative was very popular,<sup>111</sup> and was embodied in *Up the Right Channels*, a book produced by students and staff at the University of Queensland.<sup>112</sup> In Sydney and Melbourne, students and staff also established Free Universities, modelled on European examples, with similar aims in mind.<sup>113</sup>

With the rise of new social movements from 1970, the New Left became associated especially with the celebration of those movements. In the late 1950s, those associated with what was later referred to as the "Old New Left" had concluded that a socialist revolution was a necessary but not sufficient prerequisite for human liberation. This assessment was based on a recognition that in the USSR and Eastern Europe, private property had been abolished, but oppression had continued. For the "New" New Left, following on from this analysis, the social movements came to be seen not only as a means to an end, but as an end in themselves. "Participatory democracy," for example, was supported not simply for "instrumental" reasons (its usefulness in achieving reform or mass action) but as a mode of cooperation which was seen as important *in itself*, as an alternative way of thinking and working which must prefigure any "structural" change in society.<sup>114</sup> The New Left saw the movements as social experiments, and a place where new values and practices for a new society could be established: ideas which echoed those of anarchist movements.

In mid-1970, for example, John Hird argued that the Moratorium could not succeed in stopping the Vietnam war or the social structure which produced it "until it shrugs off its own structure which is a mirror of our own social structure."<sup>115</sup> Dan O'Neill quoted radical German student leader Rudi

<sup>111</sup> See for example White et al, "Education in the modern industrial state. Towards a Radical Critique", *Outlook*, 14:5, October 1970, pp 9-24.

<sup>112</sup> *Up the Right Channels*, University of Queensland, July 1970.

<sup>113</sup> See for example A. Curthoys, "The End of the Free U", *Arena*, 20, 1969, pp 35-40; T.Irving, "The Mass University", *Outlook*, 12:1, February 1968, pp 6-8, and "The Free University as Utopia", *Outlook*, 12:2, April 1968, pp 8-10. Other references are listed in Gordon, *The Australian New Left...*, *op cit*, p 286/7.

<sup>114</sup> See Wertheim, "Whither Democracy?", *Dissent*, No 24, Winter 1969, p 10.

<sup>115</sup> J. Hird, "Business as Usual - a Post Moratorium Discussion", *Tharunka*, 9 June, 1970, p 7; see also Wertheim, *ibid*.

Dutschke:

The revolution is not an event that takes two or three days, in which there is shooting and hanging. It is a long, drawn-out process in which new people are created, capable of renovating society so that the revolution does not replace one elite with another, but so that the revolution creates a new anti-authoritarian structure with anti-authoritarian people who in their turn re-organise the society so that it becomes a non-alienated human society, free from war, hunger and exploitation.<sup>116</sup>

The focus on movements as a means of "subverting the dominant paradigm" reflected and fuelled the growth of the "counter-culture," where the adoption of a particular lifestyle and appearance was seen as anti-capitalist and destructive of capitalist values amongst people. By 1970, most student newspapers in Australia, including *National U*, bore the individualist marks of the counter-culture: drugs, "free love," and "doing your own thing". The drug culture took some sections of the movement in an even more introspective direction. While some blamed marijuana for the decline of political activity at Monash in 1972,<sup>117</sup> others argued that sustained drug use and its effects on personality structure had implications for established boundaries of "culture" and "politics".<sup>118</sup>

Gay activist Dennis Altman was perhaps the most important proponent in Australia of the idea of "counter-culture". For Altman, student unrest acted not only as a barometer of social change but also as the harbinger of a new era of human development. The university could be seen as the "soft underbelly" of a new society which was post-industrial and post-scarcity, an age in which electronics and technology would constitute the dynamic forces. Since "knowledge" would be crucial in the new era, the student revolt represented an historically unprecedented phenomena: "a revolt of the favoured against the system that increasingly favours them." Altman argued that in an age of affluence...:

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<sup>116</sup> Rude Dutschke, "The Students and the Revolution", *London Bulletin*, No 6, Autumn, 1968, quoted in D. O'Neill, "Abstract and Real Worlds: Intellectuals and Radical Social Change", in Gordon, *op cit*, p 274.

<sup>117</sup> According to Perry, *op cit*, p 107.

<sup>118</sup> W. Osmond, "The Anti-War Movement in Disintegration", *Tharunka*, 9 March, 1971, p 7.

... values born of scarcity and the requirements of capitalist-industrial society, such as competition, frugality, diligence and continence no longer are necessary, and out of the lack of their necessity, sensed rather than understood by the young, develops a new culture.<sup>119</sup>

This new culture, Altman argued, looked back in important ways to values of the past. The counter-culture, for example, represented both a reaffirmation of certain Christian and radical liberal doctrines and an attempt to give them new form in the circumstances of an affluent society.<sup>120</sup> The New Left, for this reason, tended to view liberalism and Christianity as embodying a radical potential.<sup>121</sup> This was consistent with their support for "pluralism".<sup>122</sup>

In retrospect, Altman can now be judged as having invested student radicalism with a novelty and social significance it did not possess. The New Left's Geoff Sharp also overplayed the "newness" of student styles of protest. Sharp argued that the working class unrest occasioned by the gaoling of Clarrie O'Shea was the result of the "cultural diffusion" and resonance of styles of protest hitherto characteristic of students with traditional forms of industrial struggle. O'Shea, it was argued, had, through his (actually very traditional) individual act of protest against the penal powers, "behaved like a student". In modern neo-capitalist society, Sharp argued "the very structure...of existence and hence of consciousness is changing". Because that structure did not convey a clear meaning, students, the section of society most advanced with respect to "existential issues" (those issues which tended to be thrown up directly "by the new structure of a new reality") must inspire workers to mobilise around such issues to help release them from the parochialism of trade union politics.<sup>123</sup>

Important in the development of the student New Left from 1970 was the

<sup>119</sup> D. Altman, "Students in the Electric Age" in Gordon, *op cit*, p 132.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Osmond vs P. Morgan, "The State of Student Protest", *Current Affairs Bulletin*, 46:8, 7 September, 1970, p 124/7.

<sup>122</sup> H. Boyne-Anderson, "The New Left - Vita Nuova?", *Arena*, 17, 1968, p 13.

<sup>123</sup> G. Sharp, "Notes on the Gaoling of Clarrie O'Shea", *Arena*, 19, 1969, pp 92-96.

impact of the new wave of the women's movement, though the movement was not based primarily on the campuses. The women's movement slogan, "The personal is political,"<sup>124</sup> encapsulated the way that sexism and inequality affected the most personal aspects of women's lives; but it was also a way of drawing attention to the way in which personal behaviour, including sexism within the Left and the anti-war movement, had political consequences. The focus on the personal also coincided with a turn within the radical movement towards introspection, embodied in the counter-culture. Consciousness-raising in the women's movement, in the context of the counter-culture, was not seen simply as a means of making women equal fighters with men in the struggle against the system. It was seen as an integral part of changing the system. A new consciousness had to be created within existing society, or, it was argued, any revolution would only reproduce the same prejudices and hence inequalities as before.

The women's movement was in many ways, from its inception, heavily stamped by the influence of the New Left and the counter-culture, as well as by the ambiguity of the New Left and student movement relationship with the working class. These influences were reflected in early tendencies towards separatism and an emphasis on structurelessness.

The women's movement was directly a response by women participants in the anti-war movement to obstacles placed in their way by sexist ideas about women. This sexism came from several sources. For example, supporters of the war attacked members of Save Our Sons (SOS), saying: "None of *them* would have sons. They're all so ugly you wouldn't root one of them with a borrowed cock...they're all fuckin' lesbians...a bloke oughta kick their fuckin' heads in".<sup>125</sup> McHugh claims this "extraordinarily violent and misogynistic attitude was echoed on the anti-war side," noting the hostility of listeners to Kate Jennings' provocative anti-war speech at Sydney University in 1970.<sup>126</sup> Certainly, the sexism of students exhibited in student newspapers of the early 1960s had changed little in some quarters. In early 1970, for example, the newly established Women's Liberation Group at UNSW failed to be

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<sup>124</sup> Best articulated in G.Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, (London, Toronto, Sydney, New York: Granada, 1970) and also in Dennis Altman's writings.

<sup>125</sup> S. McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts: Australian Women and the Vietnam War*, (Sydney: Doubleday, 1993), p 239.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

accepted as a non-financial affiliated society; the Students' Union opposed the application on the grounds that the group was not open to "all members of the university," as it was a women's-only group.<sup>127</sup> In the context of a growing recognition of the extent of women's oppression in supposedly communist countries, this trivialisation of women and women's issues within the student movement reinforced suspicions about the extent to which revolutionary structural changes such as socialising child care would facilitate women's liberation.

McHugh's own research indicates, however, that there were many men in the anti-war movement who did not respond adversarially to the rise of the women's movement. Margaret Reynolds, for example, found that working class trade unionists in the Townsville peace movement "were particularly forward-thinking and ahead of their time in terms of attitudes to women..."<sup>128</sup> Noreen Hewitt's husband, an industrial worker, was "unusually enlightened for his generation," facilitating her political activities by sharing shopping and cooking responsibilities.<sup>129</sup> This response reflected the trade union movement's support for equal pay throughout the 1960s, the important role of women workers in the new militancy, and also the pressure for less economically independent working class women to work out new domestic arrangements with their male partners rather than leave unsatisfactory relationships.

Directing "blame" for sexist attitudes is further complicated by examples which demonstrate how women's own attitudes towards one another and towards themselves inhibited them from playing a fuller role in the movement. Gillian Leahy, for example, remembered the intense anxiety she felt when she tried to force herself to speak at a front lawn meeting at Sydney University, and her concern that such unfeminine behaviour would prevent her ever getting a boyfriend.<sup>130</sup> A pessimistic emphasis on the sexism of the New Left also neglects the genuine attempts by young men of the New Left to understand and support women in their struggles. This supportive role is epitomised by the example of Martha Ansara's famous

<sup>127</sup> "Women's Application Fails", *Tharunka*, 14 April, 1970.

<sup>128</sup> McHugh, *op cit.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, p 221.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, p 244.

pamphlet *Only the Chains Have Changed*, which her boyfriend, "a journalist and a good writer" helped her to finish after she fell asleep writing it.<sup>131</sup> Brian Laver remembers he and other male comrades actively encouraging women to overcome their shyness and speak so that they could inspire and influence other women.<sup>132</sup> And despite her concerns, Gillian Leahy did attract a boyfriend, an exuberant draft resister who liked to yell out "murderers!" when they were passing a car containing army personnel.<sup>133</sup> Finally, as in Britain,<sup>134</sup> important moves to ban men from certain women's forums occurred in the context not of male opposition to women's demands, but of their over-enthusiastic defence of women who wanted to be able to stand up to their opponents themselves.<sup>135</sup>

Though less separatist than the US movement where New Left sexism was reinforced by an uncritical engagement with the poorest groups in society, the Australian women's movement, like the British, "wavered between two alternative paths: aligning with the labour movement...or going its own separatist way."<sup>136</sup> One reflection of this tension was the belief that war was men's business, that is, the implicit acceptance of the idea that women are naturally peaceful, a belief which could easily be the basis for the biological essentialism which came to be associated with radical separatism. Siobhan McHugh, for example, implies that women brought to the movement a more caring, less confrontational approach.<sup>137</sup> This account, however, underplays the role of militant women like Meredith Burgmann, Jean Curthoys, who lay on the ground in front of Johnson's car, and many others. As Ann Curthoys has noted: "Young women were a small voice in increasingly confrontational student politics".<sup>138</sup> In later years, the

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, p 230.

<sup>132</sup> Brian Laver, personal interview.

<sup>133</sup> McHugh, *op cit*, p 244.

<sup>134</sup> T. Cliff, *Class Struggle and Women's Liberation. 1640 to the Present Day*, (London: Bookmarks, 1984), p 175.

<sup>135</sup> "A Man's View", p 11, and "Must Men March", p 13, *Mejane*, 7, April 1972; letters, *Mejane*, 8, August 1972, p 3.

<sup>136</sup> Cliff, *op cit*, p 187.

<sup>137</sup> McHugh, *op cit*, p 282/3.

<sup>138</sup> A. Curthoys, "'Shut up you Bourgeois Bitch': Sexual Identity and Political Action in the anti-Vietnam War Movement", in M.Lake and J.Damoussi, (eds), *Gender and War: Australians*



argument that militancy was not "womanly" was used to portray Marxist women, for example, as male dupes who had not liberated themselves sufficiently to shake off "male" ideologies and personal styles.

A second basis for the ambiguity of the women's movement on the issue of class was the influence on them of the elitism of the student milieu. Indeed, the sexism of the student movement towards women was an important aspect of that elitism, which tended to focus on campaigning *on behalf* of those seen as incapable of defending themselves.<sup>139</sup> One basis for women's discomfort in the anti-war movement, for example, was the moralistic and individualist politics of the draft resistance movement, which focused on heroic acts by draft resisters themselves, leaving other opponents of conscription supporters to play a secondary "support" role.<sup>140</sup>

The women's movement was also prey to the pessimistic assessment of the radical potential of workers prevalent in much of the New Left. The turn of the student movement towards introspection, with its emphasis on "doing your own thing," shared with the counter-culture, contributed to this trend. The politics of the women's liberation movement reflected its emergence at a time when radical scholars and activists were already "spring-cleaning" Marxism.<sup>141</sup>

This lack of support for working class women was also engendered by the women's movement's acceptance from its inception of the New Left's rejection of any kind of formal structures for their organising. The women's movement was attempting to unite groups of women with vastly different outlooks. Ansara, for example, described the first national women's liberation meeting:

...there were these sort of Maoist women in their black leather jackets standing up and denouncing women who wore lipstick and women

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*at War in the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1995), p 328.

<sup>139</sup> Cliff, *op cit*, p 158.

<sup>140</sup> S. Evans, *Personal Politics. The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left*, (New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 1979).

<sup>141</sup> M. Sawyer and M. Simms, *A Woman's Place: Women and Politics in Australia*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984), p 188.

who knitted...and then at later times women who ran rape crisis centres would try and storm down everybody else because rape wasn't the one thing on the agenda...It was just unworkable.<sup>142</sup>

Similar problems had been encountered in the American movement, where a conscious lack of hierarchy resulted in a movement that "can neither be directed, controlled, nor even counted":

...women who acquired any public notoriety for any reason were denounced as 'elitists'...The ideology of 'structurelessness' created the 'star system' and the backlash to it encouraged the very kind of individualistic nonresponsibility that it most condemned.<sup>143</sup>

These were problems shared by other Australian New Left groups which eschewed leadership. In the Self-Management Group, for example, there were bitter conflicts over the monopolisation of leadership and responsibility by those most confident to undertake it.<sup>144</sup> In the black movement, the rejection of any kind of formal leadership structures created a climate, as in the US black power movement, where personally charismatic individuals were able to intimidate others in the movement and rely on the liberalism of white activists to enable them to attack with impunity those who criticised them as racists. In Brisbane, for example, SMG activists were accused of racism when they campaigned against sexual abuse of Aboriginal women by a leading Aboriginal militant.<sup>145</sup>

The rise of separatism also undermined the potential for constructive cooperation with radical men, as is illustrated in a document later written by an SMG supporter:

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<sup>142</sup> McHugh, *op cit*, p 236.

<sup>143</sup> J. Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation. A Case Study of an Emerging Social Movement and its Relation to the Policy Process*, (New York: McKay, 1975), p 121/2. See also S. Evans, *op cit*, on 'Doing Your Own Thing'.

<sup>144</sup> *Whither the SMG?* (undated, post 1975), Fryer library. In 1977 SMG collapsed following an argument about the importance of personal lifestyles and dress in radical practice. Brian Laver maintained an independent anarchist position, Drew Hutton went on to become a Green MP, and John Minns and Ian Rintoul joined the International Socialists (Ian Rintoul, personal communication).

<sup>145</sup> Self-Management Group, "Solidarity with Thugs and Fascists", December 1972, Fryer library; interviews with Brian Laver and Mitch Thompson.

One of the most disgusting aspects of the popular front especially at Queensland University was its sexism. The "communism" of some of these people expressed itself in some pretty perverse ways, as those people who can remember such terms of endearment as the "People's Ann" and the "People's Liz" might recall. The intensely bitter separatism of many of the women who initiated the feminist group on campus could largely be seen as a reaction to this...there can be no doubt that they were pretty ridiculously separatist...I can remember on one occasion hearing in the refec a number of women heaping shit on some woman because she was having a relationship with a man...They were discussing how to help this poor lady with her "problem"...I can remember a house which had a 6 pm curfew on men...SMG attacked the separatism of these women in the same way (and with very similar arguments) that we had attacked the black separatists. While this was certainly a principled stance, it was unfortunate that many of the first feminists in Brisbane were so politically dubious. In dismissing the politics of these people many of the political issues that their emergence raised were dismissed too.<sup>146</sup>

As Verity Burgmann has argued, in the 1970s, the arguments that men oppress women, that whites oppress Aboriginal people; and that straights oppress gays, fragmented the Left.<sup>147</sup> These political trends, combined with the splintering of the Left into small political groups, usually short-lived sects, undermined the ability of the more militant labour movement during the Whitlam years to unify the opponents of different kinds of oppression against a common enemy.

The celebration of autonomy, whose basis was the student power movement, masqueraded as a movement for a new, fundamentally more democratic and radical society. Yet to achieve change, the radical movement needed power, and for all its emphasis on empowering individuals, the student movement had very quickly experienced the essential powerlessness of student action as a social movement. As Isaac Deutscher

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<sup>146</sup> SMG, "Popular Fronts, United Fronts and Going It Alone" in *Whither the SMG*, undated (post 1975), Fryer library.

<sup>147</sup> V. Burgmann, *Power and Protest: Movements for Change in Australian Society*, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1993).

said, speaking to American students in the 1960s:

You are effervescently active on the margin of social life, and the workers are passive right at the core of it. That is the tragedy of our society. If you do not deal with this contrast, you will be defeated.<sup>148</sup>

At its best, the "student power" movement was indeed effervescent, generating and sustaining radical ideas and energies which in turn helped to nurture radical social movements and individuals off-campus. But ultimately, "student power" was very limited. It could not, on its own, bring down governments or force them to institute radical reforms. As a consequence, by 1972 New Left groupings, according to Higgins, were "virtually a spent force", crippled by:

...lack of theoretical rigour, the fragmentation of the movement into loose formations which fell under the domination of cliques, and the restriction of its social base to intellectuals and students.<sup>149</sup>

The fate of student groupings in the 1960s cannot be understood separate from the fate of the working class movement, the one sector of society which historically had been able to deliver major social change. The loss, partly due to intellectual disarray, of "organic intellectuals" of the working class in Australia, mostly in the Communist Party, meant that this new generation of radical intellectuals had one crucial weakness: a lack of "organic" links with the working class.

Under the heat of a mass movement necessarily riven by conflict about how to increase its influence, the liberalism and ideological fluidity of groups like SDA and SMG had temporary success. In the context of a revolutionary Left still badly infected by Stalinism, SDA's moralistic humanism, for example, brought to the Queensland movement a refreshing commitment to democratic ways of organising, alongside a refusal to apologise for undemocratic regimes overseas. The idea that workers could be changed

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<sup>148</sup> I. Deutscher, "Marxism and the New Left", in T. Deutscher, (ed.), *Marxism in Our Time*, (Berkeley: Ramparts, 1971). p 74.

<sup>149</sup> W. Higgins, "Reconstructing Australian Communism", *Socialist Register*, 1974, p 172.

through argument and debate was also, in the context of groups sympathetic to very mechanical formulae about the process of revolution, a positive feature of SDA and SMG. Nonetheless, groups like SDA and SMG were ultimately weakened by their lack of organisational structure.

The most important weakness of Osmond and the New Left, following the New Left overseas, was their haste, based on the slow revival of working class militancy following the student upsurge, to diagnose the death of the working class. In retrospect, that class was not dead, but merely taking some time to recover from what may be seen as a long and paralysing illness: the Cold War. As events in France had shown, while student radicalism could provoke and upset the status quo, working class radicalism remained the one mass movement which could threaten governments. Moreover, working class mobilisations provided a democratic vision of the process of social change—one in which freedom was not supplied by an enlightened elite, but forged by working class people themselves. To the extent that this was accepted by the Left, New and Old, it was overwhelmingly not reflected in a radical practice related to working class struggle.<sup>150</sup>

The overhastened abandonment of a focus on the radical working class was an international phenomenon on the Left; but it can also be seen as reflecting a formulation of the problems facing the Left, which was fundamentally nationalist in its starting point. The Australian New Left accused the Old of engaging in action "uninformed by critical theory," in particular a failure to develop an analysis specific to Australia.<sup>151</sup> Yet this criticism itself involved a substantial concession to Stalinism, the theory of "socialism in one country," in that it was a criticism which did not necessitate a fundamental reassessment of "actually existing" socialisms in the Eastern bloc and Cuba. By implication, these issues were left open—it was the task of building *Australian* socialism that was most important. For all its faults, the Trotskyist movement aspired to developing a consistent internationalist critique of Stalinism 'as a basis for analyses and strategies in particular countries. The New Left approach, which began by focusing on what seemed to be distinctive about Australia, underestimated the influence

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<sup>150</sup> See also A. Milner, "Radical Intellectuals: an Unacknowledged Legislature?", in V. Burgmann and J. Lee (eds) *A People's History of Australia since 1788*, (Fitzroy: McPhee Gribble, 1988), pp 259-284.

<sup>151</sup> Preface to Gordon and Osmond, *op cit*, p vii.

which would be wielded by the reviving working class movement and, reflecting that, the on-going endurance of socialist ideas.<sup>152</sup>

The New Left, which accorded students a privileged position in radical strategies, then, can be seen as representing an attempt (as did the student movement itself, and Maoism in particular) to "crash through" the limits imposed by student powerlessness and working class passivity. In so doing they were attempting also to generate a new social theory, one which would shine a light into dark corners of social life which Stalinist torches could not hope to penetrate. Yet in retrospect, in their attempt to reclaim a place in social change for human agency, the New Left took superficial features of society as fundamental, and gave permanence to others which in retrospect were only temporary. While I have argued that the Old Left could not shake off the weight of Stalinism in its intellectual traditions and organisational practices, it must also be recognised that much genuine insight associated with the New Left was overwhelmed by the greater weight of arguments which over-emphasised the importance of students and intellectuals in society.

Marxists of the Old Left tended to see the masses as enslaved by affluence and the mass media (all attempts at counter-hegemony destined to be taken over and neutralised by market forces). New Left analyses allowed much more scope for the kinds of "superstructural" challenges which, in retrospect, were able to take place despite market forces. Nonetheless, the New Left over-estimated the extent to which students and intellectuals, the supposed heralds of a new post-industrial order, could make inroads into the culture of capitalist society.<sup>153</sup> This was reflected in the emphasis given within groups like SDS and SDA to their role as a moral force in society which would introduce new ideas and cultures. As a consequence, the New Left, like the Old, did not understand the process by which working class radicalism would come to wield a major weight in the politics of the student movement and in Australian society more generally.

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<sup>152</sup> See also R. Kuhn "The New Left and After" in "Class analysis and the left in Australian history", in R. Kuhn and T. O'Lincoln (eds), *Class and Class Conflict in Australia* (Melbourne: Longman, 1996).

<sup>153</sup> See J. Docker, "'Those Halcyon Days': The Moment of the New Left", in B. Head and J. Walter (eds) *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), though he is more favourable about the New Left analysis.



From *Foco Newsletter*, 20 November, 1968, in G.Mallory (compiler), *A Selection of Political Material from SDA, the Labor Club and Foco between 1967 - 1969*, unpublished, assisted by Fryer library, August/September 1992.



Brian Laver; Mike Jones. From "The Trouble with Students. An Australia-Wide Survey," *Bulletin*, 5 July 1969, p 28.





From *Whither SMG?* Fryer library.



## Chapter Eleven: Today the Students—Tomorrow the Workers?

*Student radicalism in Australia is not just the transplanting of overseas experiences. There is a long tradition of a dissenting and revolutionary spirit in the labour movement. Dissenting students carry on that tradition, even if they don't acknowledge it.<sup>1</sup>*

*...when I speak of the working class, I do not have in mind the trade unions, which are only a bureaucratic outgrowth of the working class. I do not even have in mind the older workers, who have been corrupted and demoralised by this society and are the victims of this society. They remember how desperately badly off they were in the thirties. Now they are a little better off, so they gaze at their televisions and ride in their cars. But these crumbs from the table do not satisfy you and they do not satisfy the young workers. Have you tried to talk to them? How do you know that they are not as disgruntled as you are? As disappointed and frustrated as you are, only with far deeper wounds hidden in them?<sup>2</sup>*

*...we talked about the worker-student alliance, but it was very much [that] the workers would do their thing and we'd do our thing and it'd be on the same thing...<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Rowan Cahill, interviewed for "Student Activism," *Australian Left Review*, August-September 1968, p 35.

<sup>2</sup> I. Deutscher, "Marxism and the New Left," in T. Deutscher, (ed.), *Marxism in Our Time*, (Berkeley: Ramparts, 1971), p 73/74.

<sup>3</sup> Hall Greenland, personal interview.

Australian student revolutionaries of the 1960s saw confrontations with university authorities and police as a way to draw Australian workers into the movement. They were inspired by events in France in 1968, a country which, like Australia, had parliamentary elections, legal trade unions and a developed capitalist economy; yet it had experienced a social upheaval verging on revolution. Australian students, these revolutionaries believed, could provide, as in France, the catalyst for a similar movement. In this chapter I suggest sociological bases for student-worker cooperation and discuss that cooperation in relation to the themes of youth, education, the Vietnam war and civil liberties, and oppression. The chapter then introduces important campaigns in which students and workers worked alongside one another. These include the anti-war movement in Brisbane in 1966 and 1967, as well as later alliances of Maoist students and radical trade unionists in Victoria and Adelaide, and of radical students and BLF militants, principally in New South Wales. However, the student/worker relationship, I will argue, was not always friendly, inhibited by a lack of understanding within both groups.

A key episode in student/worker relations was the Waterdale Road incident. The route of this infamous march, broken up by an unprovoked police attack in September 1970, deliberately took La Trobe students, led by campus Maoists, through factories crowded close to the road near the university.<sup>4</sup> By marching past the factories, students hoped "to propagate anti-war information amongst the working class people of Heidelberg-Preston". To show common cause with the workers, they chanted "Who killed Collingburn. The pigs killed Collingburn". The chant referred to the death of a young Heidelberg worker who had died while being interrogated by police at Russell Street police headquarters a few weeks previously.<sup>5</sup> But the students were disappointed when, coming out of the factories in response to the confrontation taking place, workers did not intervene, but merely stood "limply looking on," as one commentator describes it. Moreover:

When students went back to get eye-witness statements from workers, workers knew nothing, saw nothing, despite the fact many

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<sup>4</sup> B. Pola, *Perspectives on the Australian Radical Student Left Movement 1966-1975*, PhD, School of Education, La Trobe University, 1988, p 77.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p 84 and 168.

had seen everything.<sup>6</sup>

This description, provided by leading La Trobe activist and ALP member Brian Pola, implies that at Waterdale Road some kind of test was set for Australian workers, and that they failed that test. But information absent from Pola's account constitutes what might be seen as an indicative silence. No reference is given to the occupation of these workers or the company they worked for. We are not told whether they were unionised, and if so, to what union they belonged, nor who their officials were and whether there was any shop floor organisation in their workplace.<sup>7</sup> No mention is made either as to whether these workers had had any positive contact with student activism, for example through student support for local wages campaigns. They are just "workers," seen through student eyes and not their own. The greatest weakness of revolutionary students in this period was their lack of real understanding of workers, a problem associated with their over-reliance on simply "building the movement" as a means of winning workers to their revolutionary politics.

As argued in Chapter Ten, the New Left in the 1960s distinguished between struggle to change the ideas and values of people and the Marxist idea of the need for structural change as a prerequisite to achieving these kinds of changes. This counterposition, however, was a false one. Struggles to change society do tend to change the ideas of those participating in them. The nature of these changes is not pre-ordained, but, to a greater or lesser degree, contingent on historical circumstances. Ideas of "struggle" conceived as an abstract process (a "metaphysical sheep dip," as one New Leftist expressed it<sup>8</sup>), that is, separate from the real aspirations, ideas, goals, and arguments held and made by real people, are a nonsense. When powerful movements open up the possibility of change, they also open the possibility for contestation over the nature of the changes which should be sought. In the course of struggling, the aims of those involved in struggle may be changed or modified. Those struggling may themselves be changed, becoming

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Cochrane, quoted in Pola, *ibid*, p 81.

<sup>7</sup> Dave Nadel remembers that these workplaces were fairly small, and not well organised (Nadel, personal interview).

<sup>8</sup> P. Gray and J. Stanwell (compilers), *A Ten Years Restrospective of the Development of the "New Left" in Brisbane 1964-1974*, Research Project for a Film Proposal, November 1974. (Fryer library, University of Queensland), p 66.

different people with different ideas of who they wish to be.

The education crisis of the late 1960s in the context of an ideological crisis focused on the Vietnam war created the circumstances in which, internationally, the potential for "pre-revolutionary" student-worker cooperation became real. As Eric Hobsbawm noted recently, the main effect of the student upsurge in Europe in the late 1960s was a wave of working class struggle.<sup>9</sup> Author P.B. Levy has argued in the US context that the complexity of relations between the New Left and labour has been largely underestimated. These relations, he argues, "must be assessed *historically*, as an unfolding of conflict and collaboration, never simple and always in flux".<sup>10</sup> Or, as he states in another passage, "The New Left's relationship to labor should be viewed dialectically".<sup>11</sup> British author David Widgery, for example, wrote of the way that the student revolt "spread throughout the whole education system and trickled back to the soil of workers' organisations".<sup>12</sup> Students, he noted, borrowed tactics from the workers' movement: "sit-ins," pioneered by American car workers in the 1930s drive for unionisation, and "direct action" techniques used by British soldiers and sailors at the end of the First World War and by the suffrage movement. The relationship was reciprocal:

Just as the UK art-school rhythm-and-blues bands re-awoke a North American audience to the black originals, so the students of 1968 began to bring back to the workers' movement its own insurgent traditions.<sup>13</sup>

The basis for the different dynamics of student and trade union politics as they have been played out historically can in part be located in the different sociologies of the two movements. Student and trade union movements

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<sup>9</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes : the Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), p 301.

<sup>10</sup> P.B. Levy, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), p 3/4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p 5.

<sup>12</sup> D. Widgery, "On Not Looking Back" in *Preserving Disorder. Selected Essays 1968-88*, (London: Pluto Press, 1989), p xi.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*.

differ in their constituency, their structure and their aims. Students, despite pressures of competition at exam time, are relatively less supervised and more free to spend time engaging in political action compared with workers. Workers are more vulnerable to discipline because they are more easily dismissed for "disloyal" behaviour. Student representation is also more fluid, with terms of office usually lasting only one year, compared with the usually longer terms of trade union officials. As a consequence, student politics can be characterised as more fluid, more anarchic and usually more quickly responsive to mood changes in the rank and file compared with official trade unionism.

However, the bureaucracy of a trade union, whilst generally more entrenched, also requires rank and file participation in a way that student representation does not, because the capacity of trade union leaders to deliver reform rests on their ability to mobilise the rank and file to reinforce their demands. That requirement can be a source of conservatism, since majority support is necessary for major action to successfully occur, a proviso that does not apply on campus. Yet it is also the source of the trade union movements greatest strength: traditions of mass meetings and of solidarity. Industrial action can also have a direct and serious impact on employers where student protests rely on their less immediately forceful ability to embarrass university administrations and governments.

It is for this reason that student struggles, as one saying goes, may rise like sticks, but they can also fall like stones. Industrial action, while more difficult to initiate, can have a powerful momentum. The organic relationship between workers in different workplaces and industries, reflected in the infrastructure of the union movement as a whole and in arbitration and industrial legislation, provides a basis for disputes in one area to be taken up more widely. The autonomy of student politics across campuses, on the other hand, while it may facilitate radicalism in particular campuses, means that student solidarity across campuses is less easily established.

The socialist tradition is one product of the long-standing tradition of collective action and solidarity in the trade union movement, and an obvious basis for commonality between radical students and the labour movement. At the same time, there is also a less radical complex of common potential concerns between the two movements, based in mutual

or similar grievances towards employers, vice-chancellors and governments. The ways in which this commonality is perceived (or denied) occurs always in precise historical circumstances, depending on the relative influence of different political ideas and forces within these movements. In Australia over the course of the 1960s, for example, there was a tendency for commonality to be increasingly recognised and encouraged. The development of this trend in the dialectic of student and labour movement politics can be seen as being played out around a number of common themes or aspects of life. They include problems of youth; education; the Vietnam war and civil liberties; and oppression.

As I have argued in earlier chapters, in the early 1960s anti-Communism inhibited radicalism within the trade union movement and the potential for cooperation between radical students and workers. Though neither student nor trade union protest had been eradicated in the post-war years, the prevailing mood in both milieus at first undermined the possibilities for common cause to be made between the two movements. The strategies of Student Action, for example, fitted neatly with the long-standing belief of the mainstream wing of the labour movement that "politics" and "economics," that is, activism for change in parliament and for change in the industrial arena, should be kept separate. The resultant lack of understanding was reflected, as late as 1967, in a comment by an author writing in *Outlook*. He said: "it is not rare today to find militant trade unionists who contemptuously dismiss intellectuals as 'eggheads' and students as 'ratbags'".<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, early student campaigns illustrated common concerns of working class people and student politicians. The disillusionment of the young with existing society was particularly salient. In 1967, while students made up over 30% of the population of those aged from fifteen to twenty, most others within that age-group had entered the work force.<sup>15</sup> As Tony Cliff has noted in the British context, young workers at this time were "practically free" of "trade-union consciousness" and therefore could more easily adopt a socialist consciousness. Having not suffered long years of defeats and of learning to limit their aspirations for change in the Cold War

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<sup>14</sup> "Students and the Labour Movement," *Outlook*, October 1967, p 3.

<sup>15</sup> J. Clarke, "Young Workers and Politics," *Politics*, 2:2, November 1967, p 167.

years, young workers were more likely to be dissatisfied with the cautious approach of the existing trade union leadership.<sup>16</sup>

The student campaign in opposition to capital punishment, for example, reflected student concern about what was seen as the "dehumanising" of modern life. Similar concerns were also expressed within the trade union movement over issues such as the introduction of automation and the powerlessness of consumers against unscrupulous producers.<sup>17</sup> These kinds of concerns were felt perhaps especially by young workers, who had been enthusiastic supporters of the peace movement in the 1950s and in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament of the early 1960s.<sup>18</sup> The success of Melbourne University students in 1962 in obtaining 530 signatures on a petition against the Tait hanging from wharves and ships crews reflected the interest of young workers in the issue of capital punishment.<sup>19</sup> While a survey of young people in Melbourne found that interest in politics was low at this time, Port Melbourne provided a striking contrast: there, Communist Party fathers working on the wharves "had succeeded in transmitting their politics to their children".<sup>20</sup> By 1967, the year that Ronald Ryan was hung, there was a strong movement against capital punishment "especially amongst the young".<sup>21</sup> The disillusionment of the young was also important in the rise of "political" unionism in Australia. By the late 1960s, for example, young workers had become an important source of radicalism in the BLF.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> T. Cliff, *Neither Washington nor Moscow: Essays on Revolutionary Socialism*, (London: Bookmarks, 1982), p 235.

<sup>17</sup> See ACTU Congress Decisions, 1957, 1959, 1963 and 1965.

<sup>18</sup> B. Carter, "The Peace Movement in the 1950s," p 62, and R. Summy and M. Saunders, "The 1959 Melbourne Peace Congress: Culmination of Anti-Communism in Australia in the 1950s," p 86/7, both in A. Curthoys and J. Merritt (eds), *Australia's First Cold War. Better Dead Than Red*, vol 2, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984).

<sup>19</sup> "Protest Continues," *Farrago*, September 1962.

<sup>20</sup> Clarke, *op cit*, p 174.

<sup>21</sup> Billy Snedden, quoted in N. Rothwell, "The Final Execution," *Weekend Australian Review*, 1-2 February 1997, p 1.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Executive member Brother Austin noted in June 1970 that a recent strike had "showed that younger workers had what it takes" (NSW BLF Executive minutes, June 16 1970, Bob Pringle collection, Noel Butlin archives).

From the beginning of that decade, concern about education also provided a link between young workers and students. As Miller and Davey have noted, access to education was and is a long-standing issue in the labour movement.<sup>23</sup> In 1964, *Scope*, the journal of the Victorian trade union Left, noted that whilst 60% of workers in Victoria were manual workers, the proportion of university students from manual working class backgrounds was around 13%.<sup>24</sup> Working class frustration about limited access to higher education was a response to university expansion. In the 1960s, many working class families had the opportunity, for the first time, to see their children obtaining not just secondary but tertiary education. Zelda D'Aprano, for example, wrote of the great jubilation in her home when her husband passed his matriculation: "Who would ever have dreamt that we were going to have a university graduate in the family?"<sup>25</sup> Her daughter's attendance at Teacher's College meant a chance at establishing a career: "the heart-felt ambition of most industrial workers for their children".<sup>26</sup> Though the Commonwealth Government began to match state funding for tertiary education in the 1950s, gradually taking over financial responsibility for the universities, the tradition of funding of both secondary and tertiary education by State governments was reflected in the character of the education campaign in Victoria in the early 1960s, described in Chapter Three. University action in protest at the education crisis was organised as part of wider campaigns by school teachers, students and parents; this united action provided a basis for ongoing cooperation between university activists and teacher militants.<sup>27</sup>

Most of all, it was the introduction of conscription which provided a powerful basis for young workers to become a part of the "youth revolution" associated with opposition to the Vietnam War. The involvement of working class youth in the anti-war movement followed a

<sup>23</sup> P. Miller and I. Davey, "The Common Denominator: Schooling the People," in V. Burgmann and J. Lee (eds), *Constructing a Culture: a People's History of Australia since 1788*, (Fitzroy: McPhee Gribble, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> *Scope*, 35, 28 October 1964.

<sup>25</sup> Z. D'Aprano, *Zelda. The Becoming of a Woman*, (Melbourne: Visa, 1978), p 95.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p 98.

<sup>27</sup> See for example, *National U*, 14 October 1968, which reports NUAUS sending a telegram to the NSW Teachers Federation to express their "wholehearted support" for the recent one-day NSW teachers strike.



tradition of radicalism by young workers seen in 1916-17, the 1930s and the early 1950s.<sup>28</sup> Resistance to the draft brought young workers and students together: the first resister in July 1966 was school teacher Bill White,<sup>29</sup> others included postman John Zarb, a young worker who hoped to attend university, and Laurie Carmichael junior. As noted in Chapter Two, folk and rock music provided a cultural arena in which rebellious youth in the trade unions and the universities could interact. Pre-existing cultural forums were also altered to accommodate the new interaction: for example, in Sydney in September 1968, National Trade Union Youth Week included a University Day; and May Day 1969 placed a special "accent on youth".<sup>30</sup>

As early as 1966, opposition to the Vietnam war had become the basis for a significant student/worker alliance in Queensland, where the rise of anti-war protest quickly rekindled anger about a long-standing concern of the trade union movement: the defence of civil liberties.<sup>31</sup> The alliance demonstrated the kind of constructive relationship which could occur, based on a common commitment by student and workers to limited reform.

In the context of the rise of opposition to the Vietnam war, Queensland's State Traffic Act, which restricted the right to march and demonstrate, was found to be a hindrance to protesters, both students and workers. In January 1967 four radical students were jailed for refusing to pay fines after their participation in an NUAUS-sponsored march against conscription in October 1966.<sup>32</sup> Later that year, a broad Civil Liberties Co-ordinating

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<sup>28</sup> S. Poynting, "The Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship, March 1952," *Labour History*, 56, May 1989, pp 60-68; Poynting, "A New Tradition or a Continuity in the Australian Peace Movement?: Reply to Saunders and Summy," *Labour History*, 57, November 1989, pp 91-2. See also M. Saunders and R. Summy, "Youth and the Australian Peace Movement: Reply to Scott Poynting," *Labour History*, 57, November 1989, pp 89-90. Poynting rejects Saunders and Summy's emphasis on the "newness" and middle-class nature of the youth revolution, an emphasis marshalled in support of their characterisation of the movement as a new social movement.

<sup>29</sup> G. Langley, *A Decade of Dissent: Vietnam and the Conflict on the Australian Home Front*, (North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), p 44.

<sup>30</sup> *Tribune*, 25 September, 1968, p 10; 7 May 1969, p 1/12. August 11-15, 1969 was dubbed "university-union" week (*Tribune*, 2 July 1969, p 10).

<sup>31</sup> "Civil Liberties and the Queensland Police Force," *Semper Floreat*, 15 September 1966, p 1, 5, 6. The same issue contains an article on "Civil Liberties on the USA".

<sup>32</sup> D. O'Neill, "The Growth of the Radical Movement," *Semper Floreat*, 17 March 1969, p 9. The students were Brian Laver, Mitch Thompson, Gail Salmon and Barbara Jane Gaines.

Committee was formed, mainly at the initiative of Ralph Summy, Brian Laver and Mitch Thompson.<sup>33</sup> In September, 114 "students and lecturers" were arrested for defying restrictions on the right to hold processions and carry banners.<sup>34</sup> In fact, the widely publicised "student" arrests included:

...a school teacher, two tutors, five lecturers, a printer, an apprentice plumber, a chemist, two housewives, a labourer, a track cleaner, a truck driver and a cab driver...<sup>35</sup>

Within a week of these arrests, the Queensland TLC called a general stopwork (a half-day strike) and held a protest meeting against the State Transport Act in the city square, which was attended by three or four thousand workers and students; speakers included leading trade union officials and university lecturers and students.<sup>36</sup> A letter from TLC President Jack Egerton to affiliated unions reporting on the stopwork referred to the violence seen at the Brisbane demonstration against South Vietnamese Air-Marshall Ky in January. It noted that unions had been urging the TLC to take firmer action over civil liberties, which had long been an issue for unions (for example, in the Mt Isa dispute); and it argued that, to be successful, "we must join in with the campaign so vigorously commenced by the Students".<sup>37</sup> Commenting on the march itself he said:

...I would say that the rocks in the foundation of the City Hall must have been shaken to hear University Professors, Senior Lecturers, a Minister, addressing a Public Meeting in King George Square, condemning the Government for its failure to give Civil Liberties to

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<sup>33</sup> O'Neill, *ibid*, p 11.

<sup>34</sup> "Students and the Labour Movement," *Outlook*, October 1967, p 3. See also "The Brisbane March," *Nation*, 23 September 1967, pp 11-12, which contains details about the campaign and the role of student politicians Frank Gardiner and Alf Nucifora in negotiations with the Queensland Premier.

<sup>35</sup> Jarman, member for Deakin, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 4/5 October 1967, vol 57, p 1729, quoting the *Melbourne Herald*.

<sup>36</sup> Dan O'Neill's collection (box 14) includes a letter dated 12 September 1967, and sent to Queensland trade unions by A. Nucifora, the University of Queensland Student Union President, requesting donations in support of those arrested, noting previous trade union support for the students and the TLC's own similar campaign recently.

<sup>37</sup> J. Egerton, President of Queensland TLC: "Report re Civil Liberties to be sent to Union Journals, State and Federal," 22 September 1967, Dan O'Neill Collection.

Australian workers.<sup>38</sup>

The alliance affected the quality of student radicalism in Queensland. Rootes, for example, argues that the stopwork was the most significant event in the early history of the New Left group, Students for Democratic Action: "Suddenly a new streak of militancy was injected into the radical ranks, the militancy of the industrial strike".<sup>39</sup>

In 1967/early 1968, SDA, having launched their campaign against the State Traffic Act, now launched Foco,<sup>40</sup> an initiative which saw amicable relations between the student Left and official trade union Left which continued into 1968. Launched with the cooperation of the TLC and the Communist Party's Young Socialist League, Foco, which means "encampment" and was associated particularly with Che Guevara's guerilla tactics,<sup>41</sup> began in Brisbane as "a synthesis of guerilla art forms". It became a popular site for entertainment for radical young students and workers every Sunday night in Trades Hall, with poetry readings, folk, blues and films. The main attraction and "financial carry-all" was the disco. Popular visiting bands like Max Merritt and the Meteors and the Wild Cherries packed the halls.<sup>42</sup> While SDA and the YSL were at pains to permeate Foco with "a powerfully political atmosphere," by March 1969 it was judged by one commentator to be on its "epileptic hind legs," having been the subject of drug allegations in parliament and having had difficulty finding a wider audience. At the same time, those who wanted Foco to encourage radical and guerilla art-forms were also disappointed by its frequent "prostitution into an entertainment den" where "the balance sheet" became "the overriding factor".<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> C. Rootes, *Australian Student Radicals: the Nature and Origin of Dissent*, BA Hons, Government Department, University of Queensland, 1969, p 58.

<sup>40</sup> Melbourne Revolutionary Marxists, *A Call for the Regroupment of the Australian Left*, September 1975, p 9. D. O'Neill, "The Growth of the Radican Movement," *Semper Floreat*, 17 March 1969, p 12, says Foco was formed in early 1968.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Brian Laver; D. Freney, *A Map of Days. Life on the Left*, (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1991), p 234.

<sup>42</sup> "Guerrilla Theatre and Foco," *Semper Floreat*, 17 March 1969, p 16/17.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

Like other radical initiatives, this student/worker cooperation occurred in the face of hostility from more conservative forces both in the unions and on the campus, as was demonstrated by conflict between students over the national postal strike in January 1968. In an attempt to draw on sympathy for the war effort in Vietnam, opponents of the strike produced "punch-a-postie" bill-posters calling on soldiers to hit striking postal workers.<sup>44</sup> Conservative students were successfully recruited as the most important pool of strikebreakers, while radical students picketed Post Office recruiting offices in an attempt to deter them. In Sydney NUAUS at its National Conference condemned the strike-breakers,<sup>45</sup> and the Melbourne and Monash Labor Clubs also publicly appealed to students not to help break the strike.<sup>46</sup> Students in Brisbane marched with placards reading "Scab Labor"<sup>47</sup> and the Civil Liberties Co-ordinating Committee expressed support for the strikers.<sup>48</sup> SDA's Brian Laver and Mitch Thompson were charged after they distributed leaflets in support of the strike outside the Brisbane GPO.

In Queensland in July, a protest against the arrests of Laver and Thompson, against the back-drop of the conflictual demonstrations on the fourth of that month, culminated in a further march against the State Transport Act. This march built on the unions' earlier support for the September 1967 march, and ALP Senators and Trades Hall unionists formed a strong contingent at the front of the demonstration.<sup>49</sup> At the University of Queensland, two Student Union officials were forced to resign following protest at the Union Council's decision not to support the march. Student opponents of the march had criticised the march organisers for not inviting less-militant unions not affiliated to the TLC, and complained of "manipulation and a

<sup>44</sup> *Tribune*, 27 November 1968, p 2.

<sup>45</sup> "Students Condemn 'Blacklegs'," *Scope*, 29 February 1968, p 5.

<sup>46</sup> F. Waters, *Postal Unions and Politics. A History of the Amalgamated Postal Workers' Union of Australia*, (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1978), p 182. Waters says scab drivers were recruited most from the ranks of students, and also from some workers on recreation leave.

<sup>47</sup> "Student Condemn..." *op. cit.* See also "The Public Service," *Australian Left Review*, April-May 1968, p 33.

<sup>48</sup> F. Varghese, "Civil Liberties in Queensland," *National U*, 4:6, 24 June 1968, p 2.

<sup>49</sup> Rootes, *Australian Student Radicals...*, *op cit*, p 58. See also "Union to Support March," *Semper Floreat*, 25 June 1968.

takeover":

The few Union Councillors who did march had to be content with playing second fiddle to the more brash Trades Hall and ALP frontrowers.<sup>50</sup>

Another reflection of the friendship between SDA and the trade union movement in Queensland was the appointment of leading SDA member Brian Laver as a research officer for Trades Hall.<sup>51</sup> In September 1968 Foco was defended by the TLC after being attacked by a Liberal MP as a drug and prostitution centre,<sup>52</sup> and in October was praised at the Queensland Trade Union Congress.<sup>53</sup> In Federal Parliament, Laver was characterised as "the Queensland Trades and Labor Council pin up boy" by MP Donald Cameron, who complained of a "very clever promotion campaign" which had associated "young people from all walks of life" with university demonstrations. He noted that twenty of forty-one arrested at a recent demonstration were:

...in no way associated with the Queensland University. They included plumbers, waterside workers, teachers, brewery workers, bricklayers, boilermakers, garage attendants and the like.<sup>54</sup>

One other product of the friendship between the Queensland SDA and Trades Hall was the Socialist Humanist Action Centre (SHAC), jointly convened by SDA's Brian Laver and the Communist Party's Charlie Gifford. SHAC aimed to be a "common meeting ground for blue and white-collar workers, students, academics," and had a library. In 1969 it held discussions on Workers Self Management and conferences at the University of Queensland run jointly with the Revolutionary Socialist Student Alliance

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<sup>50</sup> "Council attacked on March Stand. Smith, Booth resign; petition planned," *Semper Floreat* (Supplement), 5 July 1968, p 1.

<sup>51</sup> Rootes, *op cit.* In July 1968 Brian Laver spoke at a Trades Hall farewell (*Tribune*, 31 July 1968, p 4).

<sup>52</sup> *Tribune*, 25 September 1968, p 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Tribune*, 23 October 1968, p 12.

<sup>54</sup> Donald Cameron, federal member for Griffith, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 27 May 1969, p 2261.

(RSSA).<sup>55</sup>

Thus, in Queensland a student-worker alliance existed several months before events in Paris had popularised the concept amongst the rest of the student Left.<sup>56</sup> In March 1969, radical English lecturer Dan O'Neill could write:

SDA has now emerged as a far more organised movement. It has absorbed the more dynamic elements of the young workers' movement, the Young Socialist League, and has continued to build up contacts with the militants in the Queensland trade union movement. It has come to a recognition that it is simultaneously a student movement within the university, and a student-worker movement within the institutions of society.<sup>57</sup>

Yet as SDA activists began to see the movement which had developed between workers and students in Queensland as potentially revolutionary, more conservative forces within the ALP and Trades Hall were losing enthusiasm rapidly. This conflict came to a head in May 1969, the month of the Clarrie O'Shea dispute. On May Day in 1969, radical Foco supporters antagonised the Labor Right with their vocal preference for Ho Chi Minh over Gough Whitlam.<sup>58</sup> In the midst of the angry reaction to the jailing of O'Shea that month, Trades Hall was reported as having decided, with the ALP, that Foco had "grown into something which apparently has become uncontrollable" and that the "end of the road had arrived..."<sup>59</sup> May Day the following year saw further conflict between the student Left and Trades Hall Right "after the red flags erupted".<sup>60</sup>

The Queensland civil liberties campaign was a movement for radical

<sup>55</sup> Melbourne Revolutionary Marxists, *op cit*, p 9.

<sup>56</sup> R.J. Cahill, "The Dissolution of SDA," *Australian Left Review*, August-September 1969, p 32; D. O'Neill, "The Growth...", *op cit*, p 12.

<sup>57</sup> O'Neill, "The Growth...", *op cit*, p 13.

<sup>58</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>59</sup> ABC News, as reported by Donald Cameron, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 27 May 1969, p 2260.

<sup>60</sup> D. O'Neill, *Semper Floreat*, 46:6, 20 May 1976.

reform, not for revolution. It demonstrated that civil liberties issues were a very good basis for a cooperative movement involving a sizeable proportion of members of both the student and trade union communities. This was the strength of the campaign. But its strength was also its weakness. While the movement accepted the limits of respectability, it was unable to achieve success. Faced with the unwillingness of the Queensland government to implement civil liberties reforms, a section of the movement increasingly embraced revolutionary politics. With only a limited support base, they and the comparatively small official trade union Left in Queensland were vulnerable to isolation in the face of the Right's panic at the radical development of the movement.

In Victoria, however, a split in Trades Hall reflecting the rise of rank and file militancy in the large and powerful "rebel" unions produced circumstances in which Left officials were less constrained by the Right. In that context, the efforts of Maoist students in particular to facilitate a radical alliance with trade unionists met with some success. That alliance became more radical as repression of anti-war activism and militant trade unionism increased, the militancy of both groups mutually reinforcing one another.

Early in 1968, the Monash Labor Club established a Student/Worker Coordinating Committee to facilitate their efforts to encourage joint work.<sup>61</sup> July meetings between students and trade unionists before and after the July 4 police "riot" "kept students from being isolated from other parts of the peace movement". The demonstration "...greatly increased student/worker cooperation in Melbourne".<sup>62</sup> Students and workers cooperated to raise defence funds when, as a result of incidents at the demonstration, Albert Langer and WWF organiser Dave Rubin were tried, Langer for "rioting, inciting a riot and obstructing a police officer" and Rubin for a total of fourteen charges including riot charges.<sup>63</sup> As of September 1968, Monash's

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<sup>61</sup> K. Mansell, *The Fragmentation of the Australian Left: a History of a Development*, (unpublished, undated). Evidence of earlier efforts to establish links include a letter to the Monash Labor Club from the Secretary of Trades Hall Council regarding an invitation to address the club on "The Need for Control of Shop-Committees" (20 February 1967), Z458 box 14, Langer collection. See also *Left Hook*, an early publication of the club which called for support for strikers (Dave Nadel, personal interview).

<sup>62</sup> M. Connolly, Melbourne report in "Workers and Students," *Brisbane Line*, 5 September 1968, p 6.

<sup>63</sup> *Tribune*, 4 June 1969, p 12. See also P. Mendes, *The New Left, the Jews and the Vietnam War 1965-1972*, (Melbourne: Lazare Press, 1993), p 66, and generally for further information about

SWCC could boast that:

...members have talked to the leaders of the Meat Workers, Wharf Labourers, Builders Labourers and Boilermakers Union among others. The Wharfies, Builders Labourers and the Australian Railways Union have had student speakers at job and delegate meetings.

Other Unions have offered to have student speakers arranged for job meetings; one unionist arranged an ALP meeting on students, and Labor Club members addressed it.<sup>64</sup>

The campaign in defence of Rubin and Langer, which lasted until the third trial in August 1969, cemented a relationship between the Monash Labor Club's Student Worker Coordinating Committee (SWCC) and waterside workers in Melbourne, where the local branch was dominated by Maoist officials. Rubin's home became a central meeting place for "waterside workers, CPA and ALP activists and university students opposed to the war".<sup>65</sup>

A similar process took place in Adelaide. Early in 1968 the experience of being arrested and gaoled together in anti-war actions and of working together to raise the fines which followed led to a growing awareness amongst students and workers in Adelaide that their effectiveness could be improved by co-ordination and mutual planning of their activities. As a result, the Student-Worker Co-ordinating Committee was formed at a Trades Hall meeting "to which all trade unionists were invited". SWCC formed a subsequent committee to produce *New Approach*, a news-sheet which was distributed widely in factories and universities, which pushed the SDA line of worker and student control of factories and universities through extra-parliamentary participatory democracy.<sup>66</sup>

In all States, joint opposition to the Vietnam war provided a central arena

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Rubin's role in the anti-war movement.

<sup>64</sup> Connolly, *op cit*, p 6/7.

<sup>65</sup> Mendes, *op cit*, p 135.

<sup>66</sup> "Adelaide. The Origins and Aims of SWCC," *Brisbane Line*, 5 September 1968, p 6.



in which students and workers met and cooperated together. This was reflected in the increasing recognition of workers and students as the major groups in the movement. It was also reflected in the rise within the anti-war movement of forces consciously attempting to build constructive links between the two movements, especially after 1968. Student/worker unity, for example, was a major issue at the Left Action Conference in April 1969, where of 800 participants the largest single groups were students (164, including 33 high school students), industrial workers (158) and white-collar and professional workers (111).<sup>67</sup>

In an April 1969 discussion about Workers Control, Brisbane boilermaker Jim Craig said:

I may be over-simplifying the problem, but I think the sooner the trade union movement takes a leaf from the students and youth in their actions for civil liberties and anti-draft actions the better— if it's a bad law, defy it; and the sooner we start publicly burning Court Orders, as the kids burn their draft cards, the better.<sup>68</sup>

In May Tramways official Clarrie O'Shea was jailed when he did defy the Courts, sparking student-worker marches in his support. As one commentator argued, opposition to the penal powers by the Left had always existed. What had changed was the whole climate for a challenge to the powers, a change in part due to the:

...developing general concern for restrictions on democratic rights conditioned by such campaigns as anti-conscription, opposition to the Vietnam war, the right to demonstrate, opposition to censorship and the hypocrisy of capitalist ethics...<sup>69</sup>

A significant feature of the campaign in defence of O'Shea was the new unity of students and workers in demonstrations, "emphasising the affinity

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<sup>67</sup> "Left Links up in Easter Meet," *Tribune*, 9 April 1969, p 1. See also "Left Action Conference," *Outlook*, June, 1969, p 10/11 and "Sydney anti-draft demo marks new stage in student-worker link up," *Tribune*, 30 April 1969.

<sup>68</sup> J. Craig, one of seven discussing "Workers Control," *Australian Left Review*, April-May 1969, p 13.

<sup>69</sup> *News Action*, 15-19 September 1969.

of issues concerning them both".<sup>70</sup> O'Shea himself later wrote:

During this struggle, workers and students came closer together. I have greatly admired the revolt of students, their daring, their resource. Their struggle against the aggressive war in Vietnam and against conscription has stirred many. It is merging with workers struggle.<sup>71</sup>

The O'Shea dispute was part of a new burst of student/worker activity. With Victorian students and workers campaigning in the lead-up to the June and August trials against Langer and Rubin, in South Australia in May twenty-five students attended a meeting holding placards in support of three sacked Chrysler shop stewards, and put out a leaflet against the sackings, adding to pressures which led to the workers' reinstatement.<sup>72</sup> The same month, South Australian students marched against penalties on students and trade unionists, supported by NUAUS and the Flinders University SRC.<sup>73</sup> In October, in an echo of events in Queensland in May, Adelaide's Labor Day saw a debate about the association of the day with radicals.<sup>74</sup>

An AICD broadsheet for July 4, 1969, sponsored by representatives of eighteen different unions, showed the extent to which the anti-war movement, student and worker concerns had become merged. It included articles on conscription, penal powers and the media, with special reference to media-bias against workers in the O'Shea dispute and against radical students.<sup>75</sup> In the late 1960s, support for radical students became part of the culture of left-wing trade unionism, as support for radical trade unionism became part of revolutionary student politics. This is reflected in the cultural products of the time: common songs like "We Shall Not be Moved," borrowed from the American civil rights movement (and in turn

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<sup>70</sup> J. Palmada, "Industrial Perspectives," *Australian Left Review*, June-July 1969, p 9.

<sup>71</sup> C. O'Shea, *Worker's Power vs Penal Power!!*, (Coburg: Challenge Press, 1969).

<sup>72</sup> *Tribune*, 21 May 1969, p 10.

<sup>73</sup> *Tribune*, 28 May 1969.

<sup>74</sup> *Tribune*, 22 October 1969, p 4.

<sup>75</sup> "July 4. Freedom Day. Protest at Oppression at Home and Abroad. Conscription, penal powers, censorship, Vietnam war...", broadsheet, N24/265, Albert Langer collection.

from striking US workers appropriating church songs for their picket lines in the 1930s), the "Internationale," red flags and the Moratorium slogan "Stop Work to Stop the War".

In Victoria, September 1969 brought a new focus for student/worker campaigning—the trial of draft resister and AEU official Laurie Carmichael Junior. Before the trial, university and technical college students and officials of the AEU met in the AEU's Office to discuss draft resistance and the trial in particular, which was seen as "a unique opportunity for students and workers to demonstrate together".<sup>76</sup> At Carmichael's trial following his violent arrest, a protest supported by the twenty-six "rebel" unions resulted in a fierce clash between 400 students and workers, and police.<sup>77</sup> References in the tabloid press at this time to "leather-jacketed university students...and dockyard workers" reflect the public conception of the composition of this campaign.<sup>78</sup> AEU officials were plainly impressed by student involvement in the campaign, arguing in their newsletter in October that:

The unions are lagging in their responsibility to the youth, the working class youth cannot turn for support with confidence anywhere.

Where the youth are concentrated in the Universities they are standing on their own feet. Today the students do not romp through the city like children with flour bombs. They demonstrate on important issues just as the workers did on Fascism and the War 25 years ago. If they make a few mistakes on how they go about it, it is because they have been denied the continuity of experience from those who should be in it with them.<sup>79</sup>

The campaign was not free of conflict, however. At a demonstration at Williamstown Court called by the twenty-six rebel unions in defence of

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<sup>76</sup> *News Action*, 15-19 September 1969.

<sup>77</sup> *Tribune*, 24 September 1969, p 1, and 1 October 1969, p 1.

<sup>78</sup> See for example "Mob Battle Police. Court uproar then station 'siege'." *Herald*, 19 September 1969, which refers to "dockyard workers and students".

<sup>79</sup> AEU Newsletter, 9 October 1969, box 114, Albert Langer collection.

Carmichael, following police violence at an earlier demonstration there:

...protesters were diverted by arrangement with the police into a back-street meeting, well away from the court. Then they were subjected to a series of long-winded speeches by union officials and a politician who praised the police. Many were critical and said so.<sup>80</sup>

The incident caused conflict within the ALP. At this gathering, WWF official, "Curly" Rourke "attacked militant students and especially slandered Albert Langer" provoking the secretary of the Rebel Unions, Ken Carr, to stress later that "...the unions have welcomed the students in the past, welcome them in the present and will welcome them in the future". *Waterside News* criticised Langer as anti-working class.<sup>81</sup> In October, Melbourne students protested outside the *Herald* offices over the paper's coverage of the Carmichael case and in Sydney university students expressed support for Waterside Workers supporting Carmichael.<sup>82</sup>

The following year at Monash University during the October 1 occupation, students produced broadsheets for the rest of the campus, including staff, and for schools, factories and railway stations, explaining their aims:

...If there is one thing we want to get across it is that anything interpreted as violence is not directed at the workers, it is directed at those who have made this building into a fortress...we believe that we (students and workers) ultimately have a common aim...to change this society so that it works for the people and not for the big businesses who control this university...<sup>83</sup>

That same month, an article in *The Sun* warned of the situation at Monash:

The administration clearly fears...that the expelled and suspended students may now become full-time agitators, aided and abetted by a

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<sup>80</sup> "Williamstown...Effective Demonstration or Effective Diversion?," *Worker-Student Voice*, October 1969 (leaflet put out by "Melbourne Workers Committee in co-operation with militant Students," Albert Langer collection).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Tribune*, 1 October 1969, p 12.

<sup>83</sup> "To University Staff," reprinted in Hyde *et al*, *It is Right...*, p 141.

growing number of wharfies, builders' laborers and bakery workers that are appearing on campus whenever there's a crisis.<sup>84</sup>

In December, following the announcement of charges against thirty-two Monash students due to their involvement in the occupations, a dozen rank and file wharfies, with Ted Bull, the secretary of the WWF, attended a MAS rally to demonstrate their solidarity. Students subsequently spoke at job site meetings on the wharves, where workers passed strike and black-ban motions in support of them; resolutions called for a 24-hour stopwork supported unanimously on five job sites, and members called on Bull to take the case to the twenty-six rebel unions.<sup>85</sup> According to Langer, one effect of the wharfies' support was to popularise the idea of worker-student unity amongst the students.<sup>86</sup>

By the end of 1970, as a result of off-campus demonstrations, especially the Waterdale Road marches, La Trobe students had established various contacts in left-wing trade unions as well as the local community, in the context of which the La Trobe Worker-Student Alliance was formed.<sup>87</sup> In 1972, the jailing of La Trobe students Brian Pola, Barry York and Fergus Robinson sparked a major trade union campaign in their support. In May 1972, a number of unions were distributing material to explain some of the issues in the case.<sup>88</sup> The same month, a deputation of trade union officials addressed a student rally, then met with the vice-chancellor over the issue, later reporting back to students of the result.<sup>89</sup>

The working class upsurge following the Clarrie O'Shea dispute was influenced by the new militant atmosphere engendered by the anti-Vietnam war movement in which student radicals were central. That upsurge in turn injected a new urgency and confidence into student radicalism and the anti-

<sup>84</sup> "Learning to keep the peace," p 33, Z113, box 21, Albert Langer collection.

<sup>85</sup> Hyde *et al*, *op cit*, p 155. See letter from Bull to Vice-Chancellor Matheson in same.

<sup>86</sup> Langer "More on the Orientation of the Youth Movement," 25 May 1971, reprinted in hostile Democratic Labor Club leaflet entitled "Education Crisis".

<sup>87</sup> York, *Sources...*, *op cit*, p 208/9.

<sup>88</sup> *Tribune*, 30 May 1972, p 10.

<sup>89</sup> B. York, chronology of events, *Sources of Student Unrest in Australia with Particular Reference to La Trobe University, 1967-73*, MA, University of Sydney, 1983, p 377.

war movement. The impact of the new mood and ideas produced by that cross-fertilisation made itself felt throughout Australian society. Alongside a dramatic increase in strike figures in the second half of 1969 is an equally dramatic shift in responses registered in opinion polls about the Vietnam war.<sup>90</sup>

The rise of the "new" social movements in this period can be seen as a logical extension of the principle of political involvement "from below" embodied in both the "student power" and union "self-management" movements of the time. The new radicalism in the social movements had a mutually reinforcing relationship with both student and trade union radicalism. In early 1970, for example, Abschol sent a team to Wattie Creek in the Northern Territory to assist the Gurindji people in their dispute with the company, Vestey's, and the Territory Government. During their visit, an industrial dispute at Limbunya, a Vestey station, revealed that the working conditions embodied in the 1965 Cattle Stations Industry award were not being observed. Further investigation revealed that pastoralists more generally had refused to implement the award. On returning to Melbourne, Abschol members contacted representatives of the meat industry union (AMIEU), who regularly negotiated with Vestey's and had a long involvement in supporting land rights. As a consequence of Abschol's approach to the AMIEU, the year 1970 saw dramatic advances in the involvement of these unions in support for the Gurindji, as well as the involvement of a greater number of unions, including one white-collar organisation. Late in 1970, Abschol recruited tradesman Alan Thorpe, who had an in-depth understanding of industrial awards, to travel to Wattie Creek and make his skills available to the Gurindji for thirty weeks; his wages were funded by the AMIEU and eleven other unions.<sup>91</sup>

Similarly, the radicalism of the NSW Builders Labourers Federation had a reciprocal relationship with the strength of other social movements as well as the student movement. In March 1969, police violence took place at the Sydney Commonwealth Centre, after a march of 2,000 anti-conscriptionists from three universities in Sydney was joined by workers from building

<sup>90</sup> See D. Fields, *Pains and Penalties: the penal powers of arbitration 1956-1970*, BA Hons thesis, ANU, 1976, table, p 52, and graph, p 53; J. Murphy, *Harvest of Fear: a History of Australia's Vietnam War*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993), p 229.

<sup>91</sup> J. O'Toole, paper presented at FCAATSI Annual Conference, *Action*, 1, 15 May 1971, p 4/5.

sites.<sup>92</sup> BLF secretary Jack Munday addressed the students at Martin Place, later thanking the Sydney University SRC for this opportunity to bring "the students and the workers closer" over the issue of conscription.<sup>93</sup> This event took place amidst strikes over the jailing of objectors and penalties for union leaders.<sup>94</sup> The convenor of the march and member of the Sydney University SRC, Murray Sime, was later targeted for his role in organising the demonstration. The NSW BLF then convinced the NSW Labor Council to endorse a letter calling on the ACTU to take up Sime's case, "no mean feat, considering the position in the NSW Labor Council which...is dominated by conservative elements".<sup>95</sup>

Then in April 1969, 128 were arrested at an anti-Vietnam demonstration organised by the Sydney University SRC when protesters occupied the attorney-generals office. Jim Spigelman, SRC President, appealed to trade unions for funds for the defence of those arrested:

The SRC appreciated the support we received from the trade union movement for our demonstration on April 11th, especially the number of trade union officials who spoke at our teach-in. I enclose a circular calling for funds to help defend the 100 or so who were arrested...

At this stage it seems appropriate for students to attend shop-meetings of trade unionists to explain our stand on conscription and appeal for funds.<sup>96</sup>

On June 24, 1969, some 1,500 Sydney University students heard speakers

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<sup>92</sup> *Tribune*, 12 March 1969, p 1.

<sup>93</sup> J.B. Munday, 11 March 1969 letter to M.F. Sime, march convenor (Joe Owens collection, Box 12, folder "Universities").

<sup>94</sup> *Tribune*, 19 March 1969, p 1.

<sup>95</sup> J.B. Munday, letter to Murray Sime, dated 14 March 1969. See also his letters written the same day to Spigelman and to the Macquarie University SRC congratulating them on associating themselves with the anti-Vietnam demonstration, offering the BLF letter addressed to the Labor Council for use in their newspaper if they wished and asking that the Union be contacted about any future anti-war demonstrations the SRC might be planning (Joe Owens collection, Box 12, folder "Universities").

<sup>96</sup> Copy of form letter sent to NSW BLF received 23 April 1969 (Joe Owens collection, Box 12, folder "Universities").

including union officials Jack Heffernan (Sheet Metal Workers Union), Pat Clancy (BWIU), and Jack Munday (BLF) at a front-lawn forum in protest at the Government's threat to charge Professors Birch and Martin under the Crimes Act over their anti-war activities.<sup>97</sup> In July 1969, trade unionists attended a Sydney University student meeting to vote against the presence of university regiment guards at ceremonies that week, with *Tribune* commenting that ties between trade unionists, students and university staff were being strengthened.<sup>98</sup>

The upsurge in May surrounding the jailing of O'Shea and subsequent defeat of the penal powers provided part of the context in which the NSW BLF in particular developed into a "new style of union." That development occurred in response, not only to the particular conditions of the industry there, but to international events and ideas, including the radical movements in France, Italy and Japan, the Black Power movement in the US and the activities of students in many countries including Australia.<sup>99</sup> The militancy of Builders Labourers' "vigilante activity" against strike-breakers, especially from 1970 on, has been seen in the context of student anti-warism:

...BLs were looking at their TV screens and newspapers and seeing people in their thousands committing acts of disobedience. They were...standing up to the police and defying police. And not only were the authorities powerless to stop it, this massive action went on and on...<sup>100</sup>

Sydney libertarians involved in anti-censorship activity centred around the University of NSW student newspaper *Tharunka* also developed a strong association with the BLF, whose direct-action tactics were seen as something "new and exciting" in working class struggle.<sup>101</sup> Editor Wendy Bacon

<sup>97</sup> *Resist*, 2, 1969.

<sup>98</sup> *Tribune*, 2 July 1969, p 1.

<sup>99</sup> M. Burgmann, *A New Concept of Unionism: the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation 1970-1974*, PhD, School of History, Philosophy and Politics, Macquarie University, 1981, pp 36-38. See also J. Munday, "Towards New Union Militancy," *Australian Left Review*, No 26, August-September 1970, p 2.

<sup>100</sup> R. Kelly, interviewed by Pat Fiske, 1979, quoted in Burgmann, *op cit*, p 68.

<sup>101</sup> Burgmann, *op cit*, p 85.



interviewed Builders' Labourer Brian Hogan at the time of an important dispute, with a view to broadening the anti-censorship campaign to involve working class struggle.<sup>102</sup> When the same issue of *Tharunka* became the subject of an obscenity charge, as part of Bacon's defence, Jack Munday was called to give evidence that Builders' Labourers, as one group likely to read the issue (which had been widely distributed on building sites) was unlikely to be offended by it.<sup>103</sup>

Other universities also made links with the BLF. At Sydney University in March, Builders Labourers sent a letter of congratulation to the students involved in the Victoria Lee occupation, and called on officials to arrange job meetings for students to address on the issue.<sup>104</sup> Support went both ways. In November 1970, Sydney University students supported Builders Labourers working at the Wentworth site on campus in their campaign for better amenities, some taking time off from studying for exams to accompany a union organiser to discuss the issue with their employer.<sup>105</sup>

New South Wales, in particular, became the site of a series of "community campaigns" involving radical students and the BLF. For example, in January 1971, students and industrial unionists from nineteen unions were among over 100 in Sydney who resolved to defend the rights of the residents of Rosebank, a home for elderly men in Glebe, to run the home themselves.<sup>106</sup> Community campaigns tended to follow the pattern of BLF "green bans" in that they involved not only workers and students, but also "respectable" groups such as the owners of churches, the National Trust, or middle class home-owners seeking to preserve bushland near their properties. While some radicals saw these campaigns as a means of building alliances with the trade union movement, their "cross-class" character also appealed to the Communist Party's enthusiasm for "peoples' struggles". At the same time, these campaigns were popular with students influenced by the US New Left

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<sup>102</sup> "Five-week Strike Ends in Success?," *Tharunka*, 7 June 1970, p 2.

<sup>103</sup> Burgmann, *op cit*, p 85. See also A. Coombs, *Sex and Anarchy: the Life and Death of the Sydney Push*, (Ringwood, Victoria: Viking, 1996).

<sup>104</sup> NSW BLF Executive minutes, 31 March 1970, Bob Pringle collection, Noel Butlin Archives.

<sup>105</sup> *Tribune*, 18 November 1970, p 3.

<sup>106</sup> *Tribune*, 20 January 1971, p 2.

argument that modern political struggles would be based in the community, at the place of residence rather than at the point of production.<sup>107</sup>

Builders Labourers in other States were also influenced by their NSW brothers. In September 1968, ad hoc contact between BLs and the Monash Labor Club's Student/Worker Co-ordinating Committee had been going on "for some time" after student participation in a Builders Labourers' march.<sup>108</sup> In July 1970, students occupying the Monash University Careers and Appointments office were addressed at lunchtime by a return delegation of Builders Labourers.<sup>109</sup> In February 1971, federal BLF Secretary Norm Gallagher was arrested for picketing to save parkland in Carlton where, following the requests of residents, a ban had been placed on the construction of a Kleenex tissue warehouse there. The same week, *Tharunka* editor Wendy Bacon was remanded for a week in custody to be sentenced again on an obscenity charge; *Tribune* commented:

...The new harsh measures are apparently seen by employers and governments as the way to make up for the inadequacies of previous methods of dampening down militant radical action on peace, industrial and other issues.<sup>110</sup>

In April 1971 in South Australia, building workers initiating a lightening strike over the issue of holidays stormed onto building sites in Adelaide, gathering further support, and then marched through the university collecting student supporters. The marchers then occupied the boardroom of the Chamber of Manufactures and then continued to Parliament House.<sup>111</sup> Also in 1971, South Australian Builders Labourers were jailed on Contempt of Court charges in circumstances compared by activists with charges against La Trobe students and dockers in London at that time.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> See Levy, *op cit*, p 31, on similar trends in the United States.

<sup>108</sup> Connolly, *op cit*.

<sup>109</sup> Leaflet "Occupation News No 2," undated, Albert Langer collection.

<sup>110</sup> *Tribune*, "Unionist, Girl in Political Jailings," 10 February 1971, p 1.

<sup>111</sup> *The Worker* 1:1 (WSA leaflet), 2 April 1971.

<sup>112</sup> WSA Leaflet, Z458, box 13, Albert Langer collection.

Nationally, Builders Labourers were prominent working alongside radical students and other unionists in the Springboks campaign in 1971. By 1972 working with students was a regular aspect of the life of a Builders Laborers official. BLF secretary Jack Munday, for example, addressed University of New England students in Armidale at their O-week.<sup>113</sup> In March 1972 Michael Matteson and the BLF's Tom Hogan spoke on the front lawn at Sydney University to 1,000 students, with Hogan stressing the use of the Summary Offences Act to crush dissent.<sup>114</sup> The following month, the BLF in Canberra took support in action of ANU students campaigning for the use of Reid House, a deserted Commonwealth hostel, as cheap student housing. When the Government not only rejected student demands but advanced the date of demolition of the building, the BLF black-banned the demolition.<sup>115</sup>

Working outside on building sites also put Builders Labourers in a unique position to express their solidarity with demonstrators. In June 1972, for example, ANU students and staff overwhelmingly supported a highly successful strike, along with Canberra CAE, to protest the arrest of Steve Padgham, a local draft resister. As students and staff marched to the Courthouse they were cheered on by "a large number of building workers on job sites".<sup>116</sup> In July 1972, Builders' Labourers helped barricade the stairways to the top floor of the Sydney University Union Building, to prevent police from arresting student draft resisters.<sup>117</sup>

As Burgmann, herself a student who worked closely with the BLF, has commented:

In many ways the BLF became the centre of radical activity during the vacuum which occurred after the Vietnam and Springbok campaigns.

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<sup>113</sup> J.B. Munday, letter to Anne Bunning, Co-Director Student Orientation Representative Council, UNE, dated 9 March 1972, thanking her for a cheque sent to cover his travel expenses and saying that he had found the opportunity "extremely enjoyable" (Joe Owens collection, Box 12, folder "Universities").

<sup>114</sup> *Tribune*, 9-16 March 1972, p 11.

<sup>115</sup> *National U*, 10 April 1972, p 11.

<sup>116</sup> *Tribune*, 6-12 and 13-19 June 1972.

<sup>117</sup> *Tribune*, 25-31 July, 1972, p 10.

For many students it was their one and only experience of a real "worker-student alliance". Builders labourers were the only blue collar workers most of us had ever met. Wharfies and miners were mythical creatures of legendary militancy. We never met rank and file wharfies and their union officials wore suits and sat in sedate wood and leather offices with single roses in specimen vases. The builders labourers on the other hand were with us often; building barricades for draft resisters; slapping on green bans in support of women's studies or expelled homosexuals; or just socialising. Their office was open to us as it was to their members. They supported us so we supported them.<sup>118</sup>

These episodes, some of the high points of student/worker cooperation in this period, can be seen as representing one end of a spectrum of student/worker relations. The relationship was not always so friendly. Not surprisingly, given the overwhelmingly unfriendly attitude of most trade union officials to radical students and the dismissive and elitist attitude of many student radicals towards workers, mutual suspicion or, more often, simply a lack of deliberate interaction appear to have been common. One reflection of this is the relative absence of mutual reference in written sources produced by both groups. There is no doubt also, that in the polarised atmosphere of the time, genuine hostility was felt by some workers towards radical students. After Monash students disrupted a University Council meeting in July 1969, they received a newsclipping of Kerry Langer sitting in the chancellor's chair with her feet on a table. The photograph was defaced with the words "dirt" and "slut" and accompanied by a note which said "I am a worker. My taxes pay for university furniture. Keep your — feet off my Property!!!"<sup>119</sup>

Radical student propaganda, however, tended to romanticise workers, rarely acknowledging these kinds of difficulties. A radical student leaflet produced in 1971, for example, was unusual in arguing that "the working class isn't to be deified, nor to be perceived as the centre of all virtue. They are often reactionary, conservative, and authoritarian".<sup>120</sup> The relatively shallow

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<sup>118</sup> Burgmann, *op cit*, p 11/12.

<sup>119</sup> Dated 11 August 1969, box Z458/14, Albert Langer collection.

<sup>120</sup> Socialist Union, "May Day. Students, March in Solidarity with Workers," 29 April 1971, Fryer library folio.

involvement of the small groups of revolutionary students in trade union politics was also reflected in their tendency to rely on fairly abstract appeals to "build the struggle" as a means of winning over workers:

...increasingly, through strikes, actions against the penal clauses and protest against the Vietnam War, they [workers] are showing their strength and ability to challenge the present political, economic and social system; and it is in the heightened development of this fight that they will confront those negative values like authoritarianism that are necessary for the maintenance of the ruling class.<sup>121</sup>

There *was* a tendency for workers to be drawn into the radical movement, simply as a product of its radicalising momentum. Rank and file workers often, for example, spontaneously showed their support for anti-war demonstrations which occurred during work hours. One example was a confrontation at the Aquarius Festival in Canberra in May 1971, which led to 187 arrests:

Demonstrators received a sympathetic response from workers in government offices, many of whom gave peace signs. At Garema Place, after demonstrators were attacked by police, several hundred bystanders joined the march.<sup>122</sup>

Nonetheless, those students interested in organising joint student/worker activity were very much a minority, and were theoretically ill-equipped to create such an alliance when it failed to materialise from "objective conditions". There was a certain passivity and crude determinism in the way that student activists envisaged their role as "detonators" of worker unrest, as if beyond the model of the French Night of the Barricades they had little concrete idea about how to win worker sympathy where it did not "spontaneously" occur.

As Charles Demby, a life-long radical auto-worker in the United States, said of the 1960s New Left:

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Tribune*, 26 May 1971, p 12.

What workers will not respond to are those who are out to lead or direct them. They have seen enough of that...They won't ally with student radicals who see workers as muscle, but not reason. Yet, this was exactly how many student radicals envisioned workers: as the soldiers in their revolutionary army.<sup>123</sup>

Any explanation for the problems between students and workers in this period which rests on a characterisation of trade unionists as apolitical, conservative and reconciled with capitalism, does not stand up in the light of examples where trade unionists themselves took political initiatives for unity. For example, in late 1971, radical University of Queensland English lecturer Dan O'Neill received a friendly letter from the secretary of the Woollongabba AEU. Having had O'Neill speak at their branch on the problems of the relationship of workers and students and the "New Left dissent" generally, the branch requested that he provide names of representatives of the student movement who could be invited to speak to the branch on the same issues. A one-day seminar at the university was proposed, and it was suggested that a committee or structure composed of students and workers "from as many Unions as possible" be set up to discuss unity of action on a "whole host of subjects" including:

...Peace, International Traffic in arms, United States Communication Stations established in Australia, Pine Gap, etc, Quality of Life, also Pollution.<sup>124</sup>

Further, while some student radicals expressed disappointment about lack of support from workers, workers also had reason to feel disappointed by lack of the kind of support they wanted from students. For example, a WSA leaflet in October 1970 noted that WSA students had recently been asked by some young railway workers to come to a stop-work meeting "to talk to workers as a first step towards developing firm links":

However at this meeting no students came...In contrast many students came to the Budget Rally because it was thought there would

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<sup>123</sup> Quoted in P.B. Levy, *op cit*, p 110.

<sup>124</sup> Dan O'Neill collection, box 1, folder marked "Correspondence". See also letter from Victorian May Day Committee, asking the Monash Labor Club if the Committee could provide a speaker on the History, Objects and Aims of May Day for the University, 31 March, 1967, Z458, box 14, Langer collection.

be a large number of workers on the streets.<sup>125</sup>

In 1968, a WSA bulletin discussing joint student/worker initiatives, commented that "...Some unionists told the students that many workers, even militant ones, did not regard the students as being serious".<sup>126</sup>

The strengths and weaknesses of the Queensland civil liberties campaign, compared with later student/ worker cooperation around a variety of radical movement demands in Melbourne and Sydney, in some ways mirrored one another. While it restricted its aims to reforms, SDA could mobilise large numbers of students and workers. Once a revolutionary minority began to develop, however, SDA members immediately faced the challenge faced by revolutionary socialists throughout the twentieth century: how to engage constructively but provocatively with the majority of individuals and the leadership of movements who were not motivated by a desire for revolutionary change. For radicals of WSA and those who worked together with unionists like members of the BLF, this problem was obscured by the increasing willingness of particular union officials and a sizeable proportion of rank and file workers to adopt the kind of controversial, illegal tactics favoured by the revolutionaries.

It was easy to imagine in these circumstances, that, simply by following the movement's apparently natural momentum, revolutionaries' ideas would become general. The urgent necessity of simultaneously creating a wider willingness to defend radical action (amongst workers who were not themselves revolutionary) was therefore neglected. To paraphrase Prime Minister Gorton, once dissent began to be effective, it was no longer tolerated. With the Government and media waging a concerted campaign to portray radicals as violent and destructive of economic well-being, there was an urgent need to buttress radical action with united fronts around less radical aims while continuing to attempt to build support for a more radical politics. Such strategies may have lessened the isolation of radicals and their vulnerability to repression. The revolutionary Left, however, were not clear about how to participate effectively in joint work with non-revolutionary leaders. A tradition of popular front strategies based on the watering down

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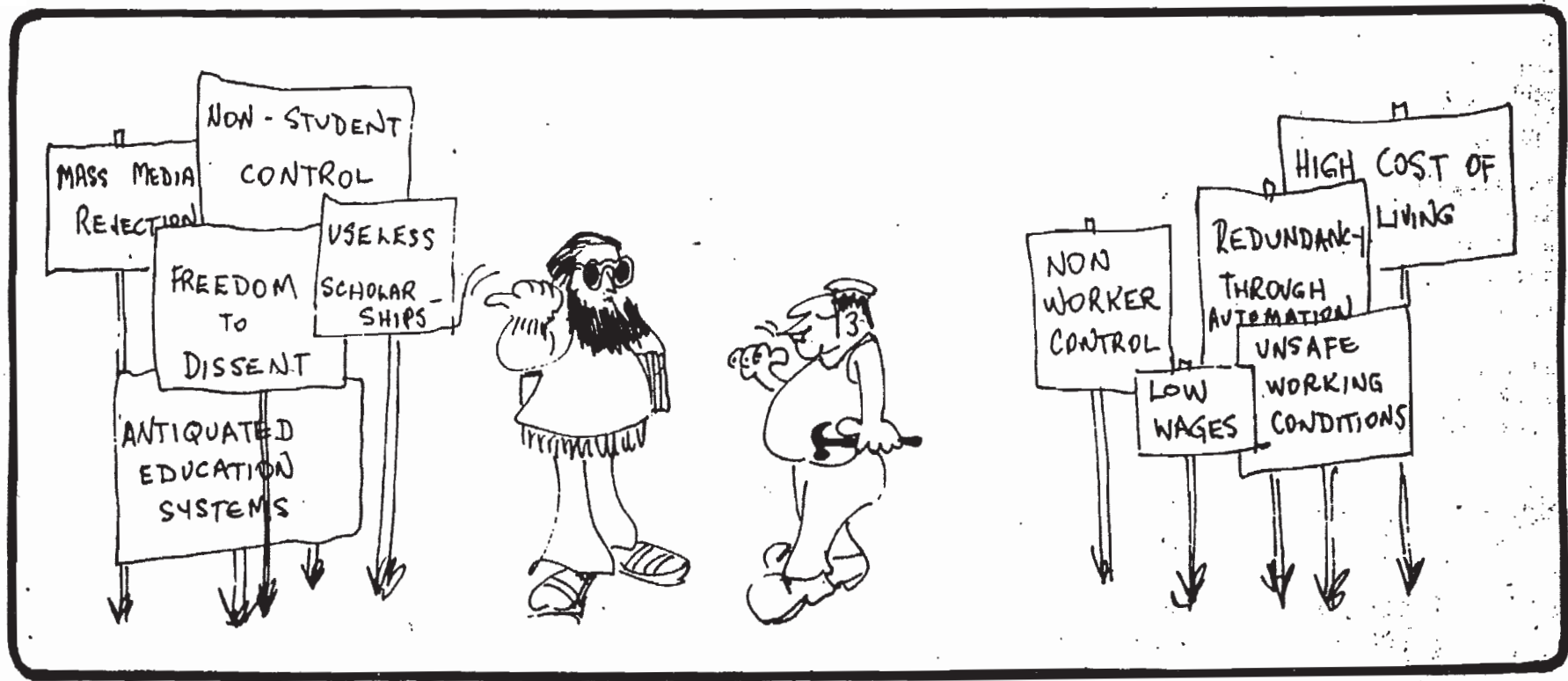
<sup>125</sup> "Mass Work—A Reply," 17 October 1970, Albert Langer collection.

<sup>126</sup> Connolly, *op cit*, p 6/7.

of the politics of revolutionaries (a legacy of stalinist populism), as well as ultraleft and sectarian condemnation of trade union officialdom and unhelpful formulas like "transitional demands" all contributed to this lack of a constructive policy. Similarly, separatism in the women's and land rights movements were symptoms of a cynicism about men and about whites which were not allayed by a lack of clarity amongst revolutionaries about the relation between oppression and working class revolution.

I have argued that student/worker cooperation in the 1960s and 1970s was inhibited by the conservatism of trade union leaders and a mechanistic view of social change prevalent amongst the minority of student radicals committed to fostering student/worker joint activities. Nonetheless, there were real bases for student/worker cooperation, reflected in the episodes I have described. In 1965, the idea of a student/worker alliance barely existed at all. By 1973, thousands, throughout the labour movement and in small organisations, were committed to its success or participated in campaigns whose success was based on cooperation between those groups and on the real and enthusiastic ties which had already been forged.





•• YOU THINK YOU'VE GOT PROBLEMS!



Petty, *The Australian*, 29 June 1968.

# JULY 4

# FREEBEEBDOOMTIDAY



**PROTEST AGAINST OPPRESSION  
AT HOME AND ABROAD**

**conscription, penal powers,  
censorship, vietnam war...**

# DEMO

**5,000  
CHIFFLEY  
SQUARE**

**SPONSORS:** F. O'Sullivan, P. Clancy, T. McDonald, E. Boatswain (B.W.I.U.); R. Rickard, P. Hillyer, B. Sheehy (Milk & Ice Carters); A. McVeigh, B. Roser, Jim. Clarke S. Kelly, B. Kerr (Liquor & Allied Trades); R. Wheeler, A.C. Keen (Bridges & Wharf Carpenters); J.E. Anderson, J. Foster, S. Vaughan; B. Howell (Painters); R. Taylor, L. Ross (A.R.U.); E.V. Elliott, J. Benson, P. Swetenson, P. Geraghty (Seamen); J. Bevan, D. Scott, R. Arnold, H. Grant, C. Brown, R. Engert, T.

Sponberg (Boilermakers-Blacksmiths); J. Munday, B. Cook, B. McGill, D. Prendergast (Builders Labourers); D. Fergusson, D. Ross, J. Canbourn, G. Edwards (FEDFA); F. Bryce (Firemen); D.C. Henderson (Firemen & Deckhands); W.M. Rigby (Misc. Workers); T. Gordon (Painters & Dockers); J. Heffernan T. Wright, H. Hatfield, F. Bollins (Sheet Metal Workers); T. Nelson, T. Bull, B. Bolger, H. Gilmour (Waterside Workers); M. Nixon (W'gong Labour Council); D. Jobling (Teachers).

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## Chapter Twelve: The "New" Trade Union Movement

*Permissiveness was in the air, and this was reflected in industrial life.<sup>1</sup>*

*...a Yank guard on the Jeparit...was sweltering in full combat gear, bristling with guns, while a seaman with only a pair of shorts on casually leaned over the rail giving him a lecture on why he should not be in Vietnam. The Yank kept nodding in agreement all the time and said: "You don't have to tell me, Bud. I wish I could get to hell out of here right now".<sup>2</sup>*

*Today I stood before a meeting of over a thousand trade unionists and begged them to take some positive action on unemployment. I told them about the previous methods which we have used to fight this problem...overtime bans, shift work, protest telegrams to governments and short protest stoppages. I tried to impress upon them the fact that these methods were ineffective. I pleaded with them to go out onto the streets and let the general public know what's happening in our industry...They cheered and clapped me and patted me on the back. I was certain that I had convinced them but, when it was put to a vote, my motion was defeated.. I sat down defeated and dejected.*

*What can you do? How can you convince the older workers that the old system which has exploited them and turned arund and laughed at them has to be removed from power? ...*

*My immediate reaction after the vote was to let them get what they deserve. But then I thought of the younger men coming on...The Generation that wanted to fight but were unable to do so because they were shouted down by the mass of older workers. Soon the old men will have vanished but the system they supported will remain and it will be up to the young generation of today to destroy it. <sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> S. Short, talking about the 1960s in Australia, in *Laurie Short. A Political Life*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), p 233.

<sup>2</sup> B. Flint (Jeparit delegate), "Background: Boonaroo, Jeparit," *Vietnam Action*, 1, April 1967, p 14.

<sup>3</sup> "A letter from Brisbane (a comrade from Brisbane who has just made contact with RSA sends the following account to us)," *Discussion Bulletin of the Revolutionary Socialist Alliance*, 8, 11 March 1969, p 7.

The 1960s and early 1970s was a period of widespread industrial militancy, over economic and, increasingly also, over political issues. At the same time as students were inspired by the Paris events, ideas about the boundaries between economic or industrial issues and "politics" were being reconstructed in the trade union movement, creating the circumstances for increased working class action in support of a variety of political campaigns. The enormous changes which had occurred in Australian and international capitalism since the Second World War ultimately worked not to cement consensus but to rip it apart. This occurred in the context of attempts by radicals and conservatives inside and outside the labour movement to win the hearts and minds of rank and file workers. Those unions who had real success in mobilising their members in support of political campaigns were characterised by a leadership which stressed the importance of shop-floor organisation, radical leadership and political argument.

The focus of this chapter, this "new," more political trade unionism, has so far received little scholarly attention. Sixteen years ago, Malcolm Saunders commented that it was surprising, given the emphasis put on winning working class support by the anti-war movement, that academics of the movement had "almost completely ignored the role of the trade unions within it".<sup>4</sup> Today, this single academic article and Saunders' doctoral thesis still remain the only in-depth analyses of labour-movement involvement in the anti-war movement.<sup>5</sup> This neglect is mirrored in official and unofficial trade union histories which have focused overwhelmingly on the industrial arena. George Crawford, for example, though involved personally in a variety of political campaigns in this period, has written a history of the Plumber's Union which barely mentions the anti-war movement at all.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> M.J. Saunders, "The Trade Unions in Australia and Opposition to Vietnam and Conscription: 1965-73," *Labour History*, 43, November 1982, p 64.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*; M. Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement in Australia: 1969-73*, PhD, Flinders University, 1977.

<sup>6</sup> G. Crawford, *Footprints. History of the Plumber's Union*, (Beaumaris: George Crawford, 1997). Similarly, see W. Lowenstein and T.Hills, *Under the Hook: Melbourne Waterside Workers Remember Working Lives and Class War 1900-1980*, (Prahran, Victoria: Melbourne Bookworkers, 1982) on this period.

The lack of interest in "political" trade unionism<sup>7</sup> reflects the greater interest of most Australian academics in the field of social movements in strategies centred around middle class radicalism and the influence on historians of official trade unions of the usually economic preoccupations of trade unions themselves. Ideas of working class revolution in Australia have long been dismissed in most quarters as utopian, even more so in recent decades. In the 1960s, Donald Horne was despised by radical students as an opponent of their movement. By 1993, largely on the basis of his book on the period, *Time of Hope. Australia 1966-1972*, he was considered such an authority as to be appropriate to head a Sydney conference on "the Sixties" marking twenty-five years since 1968.<sup>8</sup> In his book, Horne argues that the revolutionaries inspired by student/worker solidarity in France in 1968 were romantics, since the movement against the Vietnam war was essentially middle class. When it came to political issues, Australian workers, he wrote, proved "hard of hearing".<sup>9</sup> Malcolm Saunders provided a compelling description of the courageous and (his own research suggests) very successful struggle by a minority in the trade union movement to obtain support for the anti-war movement in the face of a generally profoundly conservative trade union officialdom. Yet Saunders echoed Horne's conclusions, stating that:

...the anti-war movement's goal of a mass political strike against the war, much mooted during its final years, was not only never realised but, in retrospect, was little more than a pipe dream.<sup>10</sup>

Working class culture, Saunders argued, quoting Horne, lacked a "feeling of responsibility and involvement" found in middle class Australia.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Trade unions have always been "political" organisations and historically have often been involved in non-industrial issues. Nonetheless, as a distinction which can be loosely made between issues which affect workers immediately in their workplaces and those whose impact affects them more broadly as a class, it is a valid description and certainly one which accords with perceptions of actors at this time. See for example, a hostile publication *Political Strikes!* (Melbourne: Federated Clerk's Union of Australia, Victorian branch, 1976).

<sup>8</sup> *Generations of '68*, State Library of NSW, 22 May, 1993.

<sup>9</sup> D. Horne, *Time of Hope: Australia 1966-1972*, (Angus and Robertson, 1980), p 171.

<sup>10</sup> Saunders, "The Trade Unions...", *op cit*, p 80.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* See also M. Saunders and R. Summy, "Youth and the Australian Peace Movement: Reply to Scott Poynting," *Labour History*, 57, November 1989, pp 89-90, which stresses the middle class nature of the peace movement in this period as part of an argument for viewing

Unlike Horne, Saunders based his assertions on a detailed examination of trade union activity. But his conclusion seems not to do justice to his research, nor to the Australian working class. As Barry York has noted, with his focus on trade union leaderships and stress on the limitations of trade union involvement, Saunders underplays the significance as a "morale-booster" of actions such as the (albeit isolated) Seamen's Union bans on ships bound for Vietnam in 1966 and 1967.<sup>12</sup> Further, Saunders provides insufficient context and no theoretical framework in which the conflicts he describes might be understood. This failure to examine the sociology of the ACTU and unions themselves prevents any assessment of the factors which differentiated pro- and anti-war trade unions and how or why they changed over time.

There was no revolution in Australia in the 1960s, nor in the 1970s. But the parameters of potentiality have been seriously misdrawn by authors like Horne and Saunders. Their research has contributed to a view of the period which assumes rather than explains working class conservatism, an approach which resonates with international scholarship. In the United States, for example, one of the most enduring images of this period has been a demonstration of construction workers in New York marching in opposition to anti-war student radicals in 1970. This image has been taken to suggest that the New Left and labour, as US author P.B. Levy comments, "were adversaries and adversaries alone".<sup>13</sup> This theory, he argues, "falls short. It is at once too neat, uni-dimensional and ultimately ahistorical".<sup>14</sup>

The changes in the Australian trade union movement's response to the anti-Vietnam war movement (and to radical students) cannot be understood without an appreciation of the sociology of trade unionism and of trade union bureaucracy in particular. As York has suggested, the failure of the Moratorium campaign to gain overwhelming trade union support

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the movement as a "new social movement".

<sup>12</sup> B. York, "The Australian Anti-Vietnam Movement: 1965-1973," *Melbourne Journal of Politics*, 15, 1983-4, p 34.

<sup>13</sup> P.B. Levy, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), pp 3/4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

tells us more about the short-sightedness of orthodox trade unionism than about the weaknesses of the trade union movement.<sup>15</sup> Historically trade unions arose to enable workers in different workplaces or industries to organise to defend their economic conditions. This sectionalism inhibits the potential for unions to involve themselves in political issues which affect the working class as a whole. Without examining the context in which they operate, the operations of trade unions cannot be made meaningful. Trade unions are dynamic, not static, organisations, sensitive to changes in wider society. Importantly also, the trade union movement, like student movements, is not a monolith, but is structurally divided between paid functionaries and rank and file members, whose different life positions are the basis for very different perspectives. As Cliff and Gluckstein argue:

The trade union bureaucracy is a distinct, basically conservative social formation. Like the God Janus it presents two faces: it balances between employers and workers...The pressure from employers and state on the one hand, and rank-and-file workers on the other, does not remain in equilibrium. The relative strength of the internal and external forces bearing upon the union shifts and fluctuates...But the bureaucracy always tries to pursue its own needs and so in no case can it be trusted to truly represent those it speaks for.<sup>16</sup>

Any understanding of the beliefs and actions of rank and file trade unionists, for this reason, must be based on a nuanced and contextualised account of trade union activity in the period.

As outlined in Chapter Two, Australian trade unionism in the 1960s reflected years of consensus and relative prosperity. But although the social "cake" had grown larger, polite, nonconfrontational trade unionism allowed business to ensure that their portion of that cake began to increase.<sup>17</sup> In 1959, employers predicted economic catastrophe if unions

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<sup>15</sup> York, *op cit.*

<sup>16</sup> T. Cliff and D. Gluckstein, *Marxism and Trade Union Struggle. The General Strike of 1926*, (London: Bookmarks, 1986), p 28.

<sup>17</sup> See for example Table 8.8 "Distribution of Personal Wealth, Australia, 1915, 1966-7 and 1970 (%)," in E.A. Boehm, *Twentieth Century Economic Development in Australia*, 3rd edition, (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1993), p 345, which shows that from 1966-7 to 1970 the top 1%, 5%, 10% and the upper quintile of the population substantially increased their percentage of national wealth, while the percentage for all other quintiles, except the



were granted a real wage increase, and maintained their argument that the cupboard was bare throughout the 1960s.<sup>18</sup> Real wages stagnated as prices increased, reflected, for example, in a march of Melbourne pensioners in September 1964 against crippling increases in prices and government charges.<sup>19</sup> Winning wage increases, therefore, was a major concern of trade unionists throughout the 1960s and fuelled anger about "penal powers," laws used to financially penalise unions who went outside the arbitration system.<sup>20</sup> Used only sparingly until 1961, the penal provisions began to be used extensively from the following year, particularly against workers in the metal and transport industries.<sup>21</sup>

From the first, the ACTU attempted to resist pressures to defy arbitration and, in particular, the role played by shop committees in these disputes. In 1961, right-wing trade unionists persuaded the ACTU to try to control these rank and file bodies by introducing a charter for shop committees. The charter, although a partial recognition of the committees, demanded that union officials have ultimate say over union matters. This proviso gave some employers a basis on which to refuse to discuss wages with shop committees. In 1962, the ACTU Executive twice condemned stoppages of work organised by shop committees in support of a campaign for increased margins without first obtaining ACTU authorisation. The same year, the Chamber of Manufacturers sent a circular to its members urging them not to recognise shop committees and to refuse them facilities or working-time off for their meetings. In 1964 it expressed disapproval of unions acting contrary

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poorest, decreased. See also J. Senyard, (compiler), *Labor in Cartoons. Cartoons of the Australian Labor Party in Victoria 1891-1990*, (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1991), p 97.

<sup>18</sup> See J. Hurst, "The Missionary and his Converts," in *Hawke. The Definitive Biography*, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1980), pp 28-41.

<sup>19</sup> *Scope*, 34, 30 September 1964. Pensioners also campaigned in Queensland in response to the 1968 budget and in the lead-up to the 1969 election ("Pensions" folder, Box 1, Dan O'Neill collection). See also B. Taft, "Exploitation in Affluent Society," *Australian Left Review*, April-May 1967, p 9.

<sup>20</sup> See J. Hutson, "The History of the Commonwealth Penal Powers," in *Penal Colony to Penal Powers*, (Surry Hills, NSW: Amalgamated Metals Foundry and Shipwrights' Union (Australia), 1983), pp 230-253, and "The Operation of the 'Old' Penal Powers," and "Escape by Deletion of Bans Clause," pp 237-253.

<sup>21</sup> I. Turner and L. Sandercock, *In Union is Strength. A History of Trade Unions in Australia 1788-1983*, (Melbourne: Nelson, 1983), p 122.

to its decisions and coercing others to participate in unauthorised industrial disputes, reminding them of the 1961 charter.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the efforts of major Australian employers, by mid-1964 strikes over wages had already led to combined fines and court costs for unions of 76,000 pounds and a national strike over the penal clauses was, in Hagan's words, "a distinct possibility".<sup>23</sup> While the proportion of the blue-collar workforce, where militant traditions were strongest, had declined, it had done so only very slightly,<sup>24</sup> and these workers were in the forefront of a gradual revival of industrial unrest. Employers were determined not to yield, and in 1965, the Arbitration Commission made important shifts in their favour, one judge saying: "I think there is no such right to strike and the sooner the belief is abandoned the better for this country and the better for every working man".<sup>25</sup>

Trade union officials were nonetheless committed to ensuring that negotiations over wages be contained within the arbitration system. Stoppages held in some Commonwealth establishments in protest against long delays and a lack of leadership in obtaining their log of claims provoked a savage attack at the 1965 ACTU Congress on area and shop committees. They were accused of "fomenting actions which had the effect of dragging unions before the Industrial Court and were deliberately designed to create anarchy".<sup>26</sup> Waterside Workers were buoyed that action had not been taken against the committees by the Congress, which, they argued, showed that "the pressure and activity from workers on the jobs has had a profound effect on the ACTU leadership".<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, in October that year, the Metal Trades Employers' Association urged its members not to

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<sup>22</sup> J. Hagan, *The History of the ACTU*, (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1981), p 227.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p 222.

<sup>24</sup> Between 1947 and 1971, the proportion of blue collar workers in the Australian workforce declined from 42% to 38% of the total (R. Lansbury, "The Growth and Unionisation of White-Collar Workers in Australia: Some Recent Trends," *Journal of Industrial Relations*, March 1977, p 36).

<sup>25</sup> Hurst, *op cit*, p 44.

<sup>26</sup> Hutson, *op cit*, p 225.

<sup>27</sup> Brisbane WWF, *Branch News*, 20 September 1967.

recognise shop committees, suggesting that the committees were to a large extent the tools of communists and not an integral part of the trade union movement.<sup>28</sup>

As miners at Mt. Isa discovered in 1965, governments were prepared to deal aggressively with unions who defied arbitration in their efforts to secure wage rises.<sup>29</sup> A protracted strike led to the imposition of a State of Emergency and the introduction of new legislation to restrict workers organising. Concerned about the effect of the dispute on Australia's trade reputation, the Prime Minister sent a telegram to the Queensland Premier suggesting that information collected by ASIO about strike leader Pat Mackie be used in an attempt to discredit him amongst rank and file miners.<sup>30</sup> Harsh new legislation for the waterfront was enacted the same year, described by the Victorian ALP Left newspaper *Scope* as "the worst anti-Australian and alien legislation ever passed by any Australian government".<sup>31</sup>

Though strike days had been decreasing since 1946,<sup>32</sup> from 1965 rank and file frustration at ACTU timidity in the face of the failure of arbitration to grant wage increases resulted in a reversal of that trend. Unions reacted bitterly to Arbitration's decision in the national wage case of that year, which adopted the principle of awarding wage rises in accordance with the capacity of the economy to pay, holding protest stoppages. A motion for a twenty-four hour national strike was narrowly defeated at a special meeting of the ACTU Executive in July, but State ACTU branches organised mass protest rallies. The ACTU sought a review of the decision, announcing that in the absence of such a review, the union movement would have no alternative but to seek redress of wage injustices outside the arbitration system. Their appeal

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<sup>28</sup> Hutson, *op cit*, p 227.

<sup>29</sup> P. Mackie with E. Vassilieff, *Mt Isa: the Story of a Dispute*, (Hawthorne, Vic: Hudson, 1989). The Mount Isa Miners were attempting to obtain a basic wage rise or an increase in bonuses, both of which had been denied them by arbitration. Their strike was in defiance of the conservative State leadership of their union, the AWU, as well as arbitration.

<sup>30</sup> Part 3, State of Emergency file, Batch No 255A, Queensland Premier's Department.

<sup>31</sup> *Scope*, 47, 24 November 1965. See also, "McMahon: 'I'll Take Unions On'. Anti-Union Legislation," *Scope*, 46, 27 October 1965.

<sup>32</sup> Hurst, *op cit*, p 44.

was rejected and on August 10 the ACTU Executive became deadlocked over a proposal for a national twenty-four hour strike. In September at the ACTU Congress militants called, unsuccessfully, for a campaign for a higher living wage, and demanded that the unions abandon arbitration in favour of collective bargaining. ACTU President Monk rejected this option, arguing that it would be to the disadvantage of the economically weak unions and to the advantage of the strong.<sup>33</sup>

From the mid-1960s, rank and file workers put increasing pressure on the ACTU, on Trades Halls and on individual union leaders to take a more militant left-wing stance, shaking up the conservative balance of forces and creating the basis for a more aggressive and political trade unionism. By 1966, the ACTU was under mounting pressure to take more militant action in support of pay increases. Reporting a protest of 3,000 nurses in Sydney against poor wages and conditions, a writer for *Scope* noted that the erosion of wages by price and Budget imposts had created widespread hostility and that a protest movement was rapidly spreading.<sup>34</sup> Though the ACTU leaderships continued with what the Communist Party described as "leave-it-to arbitration inaction," they were under pressure from a widespread mood of workers to hold them to account.<sup>35</sup> Arbitration's rejection of wage rises for clerks and General Motors-Holden workers led to exasperated threats of withdrawal from arbitration by union officials and the ACTU secretary.<sup>36</sup> A tiny increase in the basic wage at the 1966 wage case, and long delays in a decision about a claim for a margins increase in the metal trades finally led the ACTU to endorse a twenty-four hour national stoppage for the first time in its history, in a prolonged dispute that caused "the worst industrial strife in the metal industry since 1947" and lasted until February 1968.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, pp 45/46.

<sup>34</sup> *Scope*, 25 August 1966.

<sup>35</sup> "Arbitration is in Deep, Chronic Crisis," *Australian Left Review*, October-November, 1966, p 3. See also "Unions Move: Against Price Rises. For Margins Speed-up," *Scope*, 11 August 1966.

<sup>36</sup> "Arbitration...", *ibid*.

<sup>37</sup> Hurst, *op cit*, p 50.

At the end of 1966, as Labor supporters despaired over their Party's defeat in the federal election of November, Qantas pilots defied arbitration and tradition when they successfully struck over pay and safety, demanding the right to have some say in the conduct of their industry. William McMahon, then the federal Treasurer, said that the Government "would not allow pilots...to act with contemptuous [dis]regard of...the community at large" and appealed to them to return to work, an appeal which they ignored. The press characterised the strike as an attack by "capitalist" pilots on the working class.<sup>38</sup> As a writer for the Communist Party's *Australian Left Review* noted, the strike represented a challenge to the idea that members of a new class of highly paid, well-educated and trained workers had rendered obsolete "not only social revolution, but even social-democratic reformism".<sup>39</sup>

The following year, strike levels in Australia, in O'Lincoln's words, "took off like a sky-rocket".<sup>40</sup> Early in 1967 the Arbitration Commission decided to change the system of wage fixing from a basic wage plus margins for skill to a "total wage". The concept of a total wage proved advantageous for women workers in obtaining a commitment to equal pay by the Arbitration Commission in 1969.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, the concept was proposed and favoured by employers, because it effectively reduced by half the opportunities for any union to obtain a legal pay rise. When four Victorian Metal Trades unions defied an ACTU directive not to hold four-hour stoppages in response, they were suspended, but after the normally peaceful Electrical Trades Union and Australasian Society of Engineers joined them, the Executive was forced to approve a four-hour stoppage.<sup>42</sup> In late 1967, *Australian Left Review* reported that, in the midst of divisions in Government about economic issues:

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<sup>38</sup> *Australian Left Review*, February-March 1967, p 1/21. See also newspaper clippings in Box 64, "Strikes 1965-71," Communist Party of Australia records, Mitchell library.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> T. O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream. The Decline of Australian Communism*, (Sydney: Stained Wattle Press, 1985), p 139. According to O'Lincoln's figures there were .705 million strike days lost in 1967, 1.079 in 1968, 2.393 in 1970, 3.068 in 1971 and 2.010 in 1972.

<sup>41</sup> B. Curthoys and A. McDonald, *More Than a Hat and Glove Brigade. The Story of the Union of Australian Women*, (Sydney: UAW, 1966), p 90.

<sup>42</sup> Hagan, *op cit*, p 268.

...union unrest is rising to new heights. 400,000 metal workers are about to stop work, hundreds of thousands more will protest over the total wage decision, postal workers are acting both for improved conditions and in answer to high-handed government authoritarianism.<sup>43</sup>

In November, the Victorian Trades Hall Council suspended twenty-seven Victorian unions, generally the larger, more militant unions, especially in the metal industry. They were suspended for refusing to pay affiliation fees, but the real issue was their demand that Trades Hall more accurately reflect the wishes of the large numbers of militant workers they represented, workers impatient with the staid approach of the existing officialdom.<sup>44</sup> In the following months employers reacted fiercely to the long awaited award of a margin increase for the Metal Trades, with applications for restraining orders and contempt proceedings against unions "flying about like confetti at a double wedding".<sup>45</sup> When Arbitration tried to find a compromise more amenable to employers, they sparked 400 stoppages and one twenty-four hour national strike by metal tradesmen within six weeks.<sup>46</sup>

One new feature of strikes in this period was their challenge to the right of management to make all major decisions in a workplace.<sup>47</sup> Pilots striking in late 1966, for example, demanded a top-to-bottom investigation of Qantas management, "a dangerous precedent, to say the least," according to a writer for *The Australian*.<sup>48</sup> The New South Wales Askin Government had also recently repudiated its electoral promise to allow Teachers Federation

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<sup>43</sup> *Australian Left Review*, August/September 1967, p 5.

<sup>44</sup> M. Grattan and G. Barker, "A House Divided: a Study in Trade Union Conflicts in Victoria," *Australian Quarterly*, 42:2, June 1970, pp 4-19; D. Plowman, "The Victorian Trades Hall Split: a Study of Inter-Union Conflict," in B. Ford and D. Plowman (eds), *Australian Unions. An Industrial Relations Perspective*, (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1983), pp 303-324.

<sup>45</sup> Hurst, *op cit*, p 51.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Australian Left Review*, February-March 1967, p 2; newspaper clippings, Box 64, "Strikes 1965-71," Communist Party of Australia collection, Mitchell library.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted in *Australian Left Review*, February-March 1967, p 2.

representatives to participate in an Education Commission, allegedly because of "left control" of the Federation, which had campaigned for radical solutions to problems posed by the "education explosion".<sup>49</sup> In the Sydney Press Strike of 1967, employees on strike over the arbitrary change of their grading or skill-rating (that is, a wages issue) began to publish their own newspaper, a challenge to the right of newspaper owners to monopolise public portrayal of the issues in the strike.<sup>50</sup>

One important aspect of this rising militancy was an increase in strikes by white-collar workers. Between 1947 and 1971, the number of white-collar workers in Australia increased by 130%, compared with a growth rate of 67% for the workforce as a whole.<sup>51</sup> The proportion of white-collar workers increased from 33% to 45% of the total.<sup>52</sup> These new workers included "teachers, banking, insurance and clerical, wholesale and retail trade" workers.<sup>53</sup> The numerical growth of the white-collar workforce assisted those who wished to see white-collar associations more closely linked with the trade union movement as a whole. At a meeting of 2,000 shop stewards in Melbourne in February 1964, for example, white-collar unionists were included amongst the speakers. "In 1914," claimed one of them, "it was something to be a member of the Public Service; in 1964 it is just another job". Another said:

White collar workers are learning, very quickly, lessons which other unionists learnt years ago. We want to hold our heads up as people who have shared in the winning, not just the receiving, of the benefits won by other sections of the Union movement.<sup>54</sup>

In 1966 it was reported that the growth of the white-collar workforce was being reflected in attempts by the largest white-collar union, the Australian

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> "The control of public opinion, or media manipulations," AICD broadsheet, 1969, Albert Langer Collection.

<sup>51</sup> Lansbury, *op cit*, p 36.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> I. Turner with L. Sandercock, *op cit*, p 118.

<sup>54</sup> "Claim for Wage Justice 'Hots-up'," *Scope*, 27, 26 February 1964.

Council of Salaried and Professional Associations, to increase its links with other white-collar unions, encourage new affiliates and merge with the ACTU.<sup>55</sup> Criticism by some officials of the Liberal Government, and attempts to link white-collar organisations with the ALP were controversial in the context of complex rivalry between pro- and anti-Communist and pro- and anti-ALP forces, and between "professional" and "clerical" workers.<sup>56</sup>

A major aspect of white-collar militancy and disputation in the working class more generally was the increasing profile of women in the workforce. As Russell Lansbury argued, women were a major contributor to the trend toward greater unionisation in white-collar unions in Australia from 1970 to 1974, enlarging the base of the white-collar pyramid.<sup>57</sup> Though existing women's organisations were respectable, moderate groups appealing to older women, the communist-led Union of Australian Women in particular mobilised working class women in the early 1960s.<sup>58</sup> In March 1965, three women chained themselves to a bar at the Regatta Hotel and tossed the key into the Brisbane River in protest at the non-admission of women to public bars.<sup>59</sup> It was an early example of the kind of civil disobedience which would characterise the new and more radical women's movement which arose in 1970.

Most important, however, was the campaign for equal pay for women workers, in which the Teachers Federation and Public Service Association played a leading role.<sup>60</sup> The growing numbers of women in the workforce were also reflected in the support in the 1950s and 1960s given by the ACTU and other unions to the equal pay campaign. Since the 1950s, for example, the ACTU had annually organised an Equal Pay Week in association with

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<sup>55</sup> B. Buckley, "White Collar Power," *The Bulletin*, 12 November 1966.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Lansbury, *op cit*, pp 34/39.

<sup>58</sup> Curthoys and McDonald, *op cit*, pp 87/88.

<sup>59</sup> A. Curthoys, "Doing it for Themselves: the Women's Movement since 1970," in K.Saunders and R.Evans, (eds) *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, (Sydney: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p 430.

<sup>60</sup> Curthoys and McDonald, *op cit*, p 87.



trade unions and women's organisations.<sup>61</sup> Improved conditions for women workers such as the 1966 removal of the bar on married women in the Commonwealth Public Service reflected both the pressure wielded by trade union and women's organisations and a growing recognition by Government and employers of their interest in the better use of "woman power".<sup>62</sup>

One reflection of the changing position of women was the decline in support for trade union women's committees formed in the early 1960s, many affiliated to the Union of Australian Women. Union support organisations set up by the wives, girlfriends and daughters of trade unionists became unfashionable as women became members of the workforce themselves. Another reflection of this trend was the establishment in 1967 of the NSW Sheet Metal Workers Union Women's Committee which, unlike earlier women's committees, was formed to give a voice to the large female membership of that union.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, the achievement of equal pay for 70,000 women in the metal industry in 1970, and subsequently in the vehicle and aircraft industries, reflected the strength of workers in the metal industry, where many strikes involving large numbers of women took place with the support of male workers.<sup>64</sup>

In the trade union movement more generally, by 1967 disillusionment with the Government and, to a lesser extent, with the ACTU was fuelling a new militancy in which old ideas about the parameters of acceptable trade union action were under challenge. In 1968, strike levels were even higher and employers were on the defensive.<sup>65</sup> Many unions, notably those in the white-collar professions, were striking for the first time. In this context, the

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> M. Sawyer (ed.), *Removal of the Commonwealth Marriage Bar: A Documentary History* (Canberra: University of Canberra Centre for Research in Public Sector Management, 1996); L. Russell and M. Sawyer, "Where Does Policy Come From? A Case Study of the Origins of the Australian Women's Bureau," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, forthcoming.

<sup>63</sup> Curthoys and McDonald, *op cit*, p 95.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p 90. See also "Women at Work" series, *Mejane*, 1971-2.

<sup>65</sup> "Industrial Disputes - Reach Climax," *Scope*, 28 March 1968, reporting the highest level of disputes ever, with unions standing firm with strong ACTU backing against the threat of penal powers.

promise of affluence, previously a rhetorical device for minimising social discontent, now became for employers and Government something of an ideological liability. This was demonstrated by a comment made in federal parliament early that year:

Here the influences that have brought Britain almost to bankruptcy are at work...The Communists and the left wingers appeal to the greed that is in all of us. They promise bigger and bigger profits, higher and higher wages, shorter and shorter hours and bigger and bigger handouts, but in the end it means bankruptcy. We have strikes that are not recognised by the trade union leaders but organised by the shop stewards and the juniors who seek to disturb the economy.<sup>66</sup>

The demand for wage increases strained the relationship between a number of unions and the ACTU. In early 1968, shop committees in the Postal Workers' Union agitated for a strike in defiance of the ACTU after their pay rise was rejected, saying:

WE ARE NOT GOING TO ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE BOGGED DOWN AGAIN IN USELESS DISCUSSIONS...If some ACTU leaders—in the face of nation-wide activity by thousands of Australian workers—continue to stall, to hesitate and try to 'meet' the Government, then we have to consider going our own way...We do not see trade union unity as unity with inaction.<sup>67</sup>

Postal workers struck across Australia in January, their dispute pushing all other news from front-page headlines of *The Age* for ten days, in what was only one episode in a spate of strikes by a variety of trade unions around the country.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Sir Wilfred Kent Hughes, member for Chisholm, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 20 March 1968, p 286.

<sup>67</sup> Hagan, *op cit*, p 268.

<sup>68</sup> "Postal Peace Move Fails. Deliveries in Chaos as Letters Pile Up," 13 January; "PM Offers Talks if Mail Men Resume," 15 January; "Mail Piles Up as Talks Lead Nowhere. Resume Work or We Act, says Govt," 16 January; "Govt will Move Mails. Bid to Recruit Non-Union Drivers Today," 18 January; "Sorters Stop as Mail Moves," 19 January; "Mail Strike Peace Talks. ACTU Takes Over as More Unionists Go Out," 20 January; "Agreement Reached in Strike," 22 January; "Now Strikes Hit Industry as Postal Crisis Goes On," "Margins Showdown," "Mail Men to Vote Today on Go-Back," 25 January.

In 1969, strikes against the penal powers increased still further,<sup>69</sup> culminating in a massive strike of one million workers in May 1969 in defence of Tramways official and Maoist Clarrie O'Shea, who was jailed for refusing to pay fines owed by his union.<sup>70</sup> One author described it as "the catalyst embodying twenty years of bitter frustration".<sup>71</sup> The ACTU, according to O'Shea, did "absolutely nothing about organising the stoppages" which were led by the Victorian "rebel" unions.<sup>72</sup> The O'Shea dispute was a precedent for the trade union movement, altering the whole climate of trade unionism. In the second half of 1969, strike figures jumped dramatically<sup>73</sup> as the dispute had made the penal powers inoperative and seriously weakened the authority of the ACTU.

The rise of a new style of unionism was reflected in the election of Bob Hawke as a replacement for retiring ACTU President Albert Monk in November 1969. Monk, as Hurst describes, had been a man who "steered a middle course," holding the movement together at a time when it threatened to split over ideological issues, steadfastly refusing "to be swung too far one way or the other by any of the extreme factions, knowing the bitterness and division that would follow".<sup>74</sup> By 1969 this cautious approach no longer suited the Australian union movement. Hawke, on the other hand, had in 1959 begun to be called "Mr Inflation" by employers after he convinced arbitration to award a basic wage increase on the basis that the

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<sup>69</sup> "Bad Laws Must Go!," *Scope*, 81, 3 April 1968, p 1.

<sup>70</sup> "Historic Strike Wave Defies Penal System," *Tribune*, 21 May 1969, p 1. See also leaflet referring to resolution passed by 10,000 job delegates in Brisbane's Festival Hall, 28 May 1969, reaffirming that any action against union officers for opposition to the penal powers would be "fully and immediately supported by industrial action" (Dan O'Neill collection, Box 14, AMIEU folder).

<sup>71</sup> J. Palmada, "Industrial Perspectives," *Australian Left Review*, June-July 1969, p 9.

<sup>72</sup> Clarrie O'Shea, interviewed by John Merritt, 1982, tape 1/1, pp 6/7 of transcript (National Library of Australia Oral History Collection). See also J. Hutson, "The Fall of the Old Penal Powers," *op cit*, pp 264-284 and Grattan and Barker, *op cit*.

<sup>73</sup> See graph in D. Fields, *Pains and Penalties: the Penal Powers of Arbitration 1956-1970*, BA Hons, ANU, 1976, p 53.

<sup>74</sup> Hurst, *op cit*, p 58.

economy was fundamentally sound and that workers had not received a fair share of the increased prosperity.<sup>75</sup>

The O'Shea dispute marked the beginning of a period of industrial unrest which lasted into the 1970s. In most countries, the global wave of industrial militancy of this period had passed its peak by 1970.<sup>76</sup> Australia was an exception. An upsurge of rank and file activism and political strikes<sup>77</sup> made the advocates of "top-down," "industrial issues only" trade unionism look increasingly old-fashioned. Prominent in this trend were unions in booming industries where a demand for labour had put workers in a powerful position and encouraged the rise of shop committees, notably builders' labourers, especially in New South Wales, and the Victorian rebel unions.<sup>78</sup> Builders' labourers' militancy put them in direct conflict with harsh new industrial measures introduced to prevent action against strike-breakers. In May 1970, a major strike by NSW builders labourers over wage margins heralded the emergence of "a new style of union". As their most prominent official, Communist Party member Jack Munday proclaimed: "We will no longer accept low wages while employers, investors and developers in the industry are making record profits".<sup>79</sup>

Also important contributors to increasing industrial militancy were women workers. Teachers, in particular, frequently engaged in industrial disputation in the late 1960s, protesting inadequate expenditure on education. A meeting of 12,400 New South Wales teachers on the occasion of their first strike on 1 October, 1968 was described by Bruce Mitchell as "probably the largest meeting of members of a single trade union in the

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, pp 30/31.

<sup>76</sup> C. Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After*, (London: Bookmarks, 1988), p 226.

<sup>77</sup> A discussion of political strikes, including some examples in Australia in the early 1960s, appeared in *Labour History* as early as 1966 (see S. Silverman, "Australian Political Strikes," *Labour History*, 11, November 1966, pp 28-39).

<sup>78</sup> M. Burgmann, *A New Concept of Unionism: the New South Wales Builders Labourers Federation 1970-1974*, PhD, School of History, Philosophy and Politics, Macquarie University, 1981, p 34. As Burgmann commented: "These hard won gains of the sixties were to stand the leadership in good stead. The loyalty of members who could remember the 'bad old days' was immense and long lasting".

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Burgmann, *ibid*, p 39.

country's history".<sup>80</sup> Campaigns by Victorian teachers, including a forty-five day strike by teachers at Northcote High School in late 1969, led to them being described as the "new militants".<sup>81</sup> The increased militancy of women as workers was reflected in women wanting to play a more prominent role in the union movement and the Left. Zelda D'Aprano, for example, remembered feeling incensed at being forced to sit silently at the 1969 equal pay case while men argued the case for women's worth.<sup>82</sup> At the Left Action Conference, she demanded better representation of women at the Conference, kept figures of how many women spoke; and spoke to other women individually about the lack of self-confidence which prevented them from speaking.<sup>83</sup> Later that year, she achieved national publicity when she chained herself to the Commonwealth Building as part of an equal pay demonstration, and again with others across the doors of the Arbitration Court.<sup>84</sup>

Also connected with political trade unionism was the rise of the idea of workers' control and self-management, an international trend associated with the rise of shop committees. Workers increasingly did not trust employers to make decisions in their interests, and began to use their industrial strength to challenge decisions which previously had been considered management prerogative. Brisbane building workers for example, waged a successful campaign for the establishment of safety committees on all jobs, challenging the right of employers to dictate the composition of such committees. Similar disputes occurred in the railways and Brisbane City Council transport system. At SGIO Insurance there was a further successful struggle for a full-time safety officer suitable to the workers on the

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<sup>80</sup> B. Mitchell, *Teachers, Education and Politics. A History of Organisations of Public School Teachers in New South Wales*, (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1975), p 202.

<sup>81</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle September-December 1969," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 16:1, April 1970, p 88; "Australian Political Chronicle January-April 1970," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 16:2, August 1970, p 246. See also "Australian Political Chronicle January-April 1971," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 17:2, August 1971, p 279.

<sup>82</sup> Z. D'Aprano, *Zelda. The Becoming of a Woman*, (Melbourne: Visa, 1978), p 116.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, pp 114/115.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, p 141.

job and Naco factory workers struck over the dismissal of their shop steward.<sup>85</sup>

The early 1970s saw a steady rise in disputes about managerial policy in Australia, associated with a greater involvement of workers in political issues.<sup>86</sup> The rise of unemployment in 1971 also sparked concern about redundancy.<sup>87</sup> The Harco work-in at the end of 1971 reflected both these trends, challenging the right of employers to sack workers. Inspired by a work-in at the Upper Clydeside shipyards in Scotland, a mass meeting of workers in a small metal shop in Campbelltown, outside Sydney, refused to accept the sacking of five boilermakers. They voted for the men to continue working, and demanded forty hours' pay for thirty-five hours' work. When the employer attempted to stop them from working, the workers took over production themselves. Police were called in, and court actions were launched; but the workers did not budge until their officials directed them to stop.<sup>88</sup> In May 1972, South Clifton miners staged their own work-in, demanding that Clutha Development Pty Ltd re-open closed mines or that the Joint Coal Board recognise the miners as legal owners.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> H. Hamilton "Worker's Power - Worker's Control," in *Building Workers Contribution to Seminar on Worker's Control*, 2/3 August 1969, Fryer library, p 7.

<sup>86</sup> Writing in 1974, Greg Evans said that disputes over managerial policy had risen steadily since 1966 and particularly since 1971, indicating a tendency for workers to become involved in actions not traditionally associated with trade unionism (G. Evans, "Perspectives for Working Class Struggle in Australia," *Intervention*, 4, May 1974, p 18). J. Palmada noted a growing number of strikes associated with political and social issues and questions of managerial policy and said that this trend had been given momentum by the success of workers since the mid-1960s in achieving over-award payments as well as the impetus given the movement by non-use of penal powers following the O'Shea dispute (J. Palmada, "Trade Unions and Revolutionary Strategy," *Australian Left Review*, October 1972, p 7/8).

<sup>87</sup> Waterfront employers and the Gorton Government Department of Labor, for example, were in conflict with the WWF over this "deep-going industrial and social issue" (*Tribune*, 27 January 1971, p 10).

<sup>88</sup> Communist Party leader Laurie Aarons noted that moral and financial support for the Harco workers came from all over the country because of the new issues it raised when sackings were widespread and growing (L. Aarons, "Viewpoint," *Australian Left Review*, March 1972, p 9). See also D. Freney, "Workers' Control Perspectives," *Australian Left Review*, March 1973, p 4.

<sup>89</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle May-August 1972," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 18:3, December 1972, p 418.

The 1971 onset of a recession played a part in an increasing polarisation of Australian society. In early February of that year, the prime minister met with ACTU representatives and told them to restrain wage demands to dampen consumer demand.<sup>90</sup> Yet workers and their families continued to be frustrated to see prices and profits overtaking wage increases. A metal workers leaflet reproduced a cartoon which encapsulated trade unionist anger about double standards: "When the company raises their prices to make more profit! That's prosperity! BUT when the union wants to raise wages so that workers can pay the higher prices! That's inflation!". The leaflet argued:

The employers have lost the power to intimidate workers and their unions with penal powers. With the help of the Federal Government, they are now trying to intimidate workers with their deceptive inflation hysteria.<sup>91</sup>

The pressure of rank and file activism was also felt in the Labor Party and the ACTU. In late 1971, for example, Clyde Cameron was under fire over his support for the inclusion of penal sanctions in Labor industrial policies. At a stormy meeting in Melbourne Trades Hall, he told listeners that unionists should face the facts of life about the declining proportion of the work force in unions and their lack of funds to fight long strikes.<sup>92</sup> As the stakes got higher in 1972, with the McMahon Government campaigning fiercely about "law and order," the tendency for rank and file workers to disregard the ACTU was only intensified by Hawke's "fireman" role in several protracted strikes. As Hurst describes it, Hawke "didn't start strikes, he finished them":

Hawke could open doors that were closed to lowlier brethren...He entered disputes like a showman following an inferior act, with a flourish of publicity. By then the disputants were bloodied, usually at a deadlock and looking for a way out. Hawke found it, usually

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<sup>90</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle January-April 1971," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 17:2, August 1971, p 262.

<sup>91</sup> "Support the 'New Deal' Metal Workers Claim," leaflet authorised by J. Halfpenny, State secretary, AMIEU and R. Baldwin, State secretary, Boilermakers and Blacksmiths Society, Dan O'Neill collection, box 14, AMIEU folder.

<sup>92</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle September-December 1971," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 18:1, April 1972, p 101.

through arbitration, which the militants had sworn they would avoid.<sup>93</sup>

The ACTU's unpopularity with militant unions was shown in early 1972 when the TWU imposed a black ban on the ACTU's own store after its chairman accused union leaders of not supporting the venture.<sup>94</sup> In May 1972, the ACTU rejected suggestions of a strike over the national wage decision. Some suggested they had acted with the ALP's electoral hopes in mind. In early June, however, a strike of petroleum workers in Victoria over the issue of the 35-hour week spread to Queensland and was then upstaged by a three-day national railway strike. Though Hawke intervened to end the dispute, within days a new strike began over the same issue; it involved workers in four States.<sup>95</sup> Though strike levels were lower in 1972 due to pressure from Labor parliamentarians for unions to "exercise restraint" in the months preceding the December 1972 federal election, Hawke warned Whitlam in March that, in Hurst's words, "it wasn't in his power as ACTU president to tell unions how to behave".<sup>96</sup>

The re-emergence of industrial militancy and a shift in power towards the rank and file in the trade union movement was influenced by, but also itself facilitated, the rise of the anti-Vietnam war movement. Throughout the 1960s, a minority of communist and Left ALP trade union officials and rank and file workers had fought for a more "political" trade unionism. Even as early as 1959, rank and file unionists had put pressure on Communist Party union officials to organise action against French nuclear testing.<sup>97</sup> The

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<sup>93</sup> Hurst, *op cit*, p 88. Hurst states: "Boozing with his union mates, Hawke would happily join in a raucous rendition of "Keep the Red Flag Flying". Boozing with Polites [employers representative] the two could sing with great gusto, "The working class can kiss my arse, I've got the foreman's job at last" (p 90).

<sup>94</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle January-April 1972," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 18:2, August 1972, p 275.

<sup>95</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle May-August 1972," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 18:3, December 1972, p 405.

<sup>96</sup> Hurst, *op cit*, p 120.

<sup>97</sup> At the 1959 Peace Congress, a large minority of the 350 delegates to the Trade Union Conference were militant rank and file workers. The motion for a twenty-four hour strike was rejected, the CP's Jim Healy explaining that "there are unions and union leaders who are afraid of such a move" (R. Summy and M. Saunders, "The 1959 Melbourne Peace Congress: Culmination of Anti-Communism in Australia in the 1950s," in A. Curthoys and J. Merritt



Communist Party newspaper, *Tribune*, and *Scope*, the paper of the Victorian trade union Left in the ALP are a testament to this current. Both papers championed those challenging racism and sexism in Australia, and supported struggles of the oppressed overseas throughout the 1960s at a time when the mainstream press (and, at least in the early 1960s, the student press) were profoundly conservative. The maritime unions in particular, long a stronghold of the Communist Party, had a long tradition of intervention on political and especially foreign policy issues.<sup>98</sup> Nine workers were arrested when wharfies rallied in Wynyard Park in Sydney against the US invasion of Cuba in 1961; and in the early 1960s waterside workers campaigned against French nuclear testing in the Pacific.<sup>99</sup> Wharfies also provided support for Aboriginal issues in the 1960s.<sup>100</sup>

Wharfies had already protested in support of Vietnamese independence against the French in 1954.<sup>101</sup> In June 1962, Melbourne waterside workers refused to load barbed wire bound for Vietnam.<sup>102</sup> In 1965, as Saunders notes, a number of trade unions expressed opposition to the war even before the Australian Government's April announcement that it would send a battalion; their protests were "as strong and conspicuous as any other made against the war at this time".<sup>103</sup> The WWF in particular criticised the

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(eds), *Australia's First Cold War. Better Dead Than Red*, vol 2, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984), pp 88/89).

<sup>98</sup> R. Lockwood, *Ship to Shore: a History of Melbourne's Waterfront and its Union Struggles*, (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1990); R. Lockwood, *War on the Waterfront: Menzies, Japan and the Pig-Iron Dispute*, (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1987); R. Lockwood, *Black Armada*, (South Sydney, NSW: Australasian Book Society, 1975).

<sup>99</sup> M. Beasley, *The Wharfies. A History of the Waterside Workers Federation of Australia*, (Rushcutters Bay, NSW: Halstead Press in association with the Australian National Maritime Museum, 1996), pp 211/212, 216.

<sup>100</sup> In December 1966, for example, the Brisbane branch of the WWF imposed a compulsory levy on members to assist Aboriginal struggles, stating that members who did not immediately pay the levy would be considered unfinancial (Brisbane WWF, "Levy to Assist Aborigines," *Branch News*, 22 December 1966). See also Brisbane WWF, *Branch News*, 29 April 1967; 17 May 1967 and 20 June 1967.

<sup>101</sup> G. Lockhart, "Fear and Dependence: Australia's Vietnam Policy, 1965-1985" in K. Maddock and B. Wright (eds), *War: Australia and Vietnam*, (Artarmon: Harper and Row, 1987), p 16.

<sup>102</sup> Beasley, *op cit*, p 218.

<sup>103</sup> Saunders, "The Trade Unions..." *op cit*, p 65.

ACTU's lukewarm position on the war and actively protested against it, but decided against taking industrial action. Nonetheless, waterside workers at Sydney, Melbourne and Port Kembla conducted unauthorised stoppages against the war.<sup>104</sup> In response, the ACTU, backed by anti-communist union officials and following Calwell's position, made clear that whilst it opposed the Vietnam war and might express support for rallies, it did not support industrial action.<sup>105</sup> Many unions did not wholeheartedly oppose Australian involvement in the war and others strongly supported it.<sup>106</sup>

Official divisions were no less sharp at rank and file level, with workers in one reported instance coming to blows over the issue at a workplace meeting. Jim Frazer tells how the assistant secretary of his union, the Australian Railway Union (ARU), came to speak to his workshop about Vietnam; but because it was a controversial issue, workers were told he would speak about the wages struggle. A rumour went around that the speaker was to call for a 48-hour stoppage about Vietnam, leading to a fight as he took the stand:

There was howling and screaming and people jumping around. Two blokes there were pretty good mates, but one supported Australia's involvement and the other didn't. They ended up getting stuck into each other and rolled around on the floor throwing punches. A mate of mine stepped in to try and quieten them down, but he got jobbed out cold. It was on for young and old then. Fist fights broke out all over the place and chairs were put through windows...Later, many of the people who opposed any position on Vietnam that day walked off the job to protest about the war and gladly lost the money to do it. Then opinion was still very divided.<sup>107</sup>

Arguments in trade unions about Vietnam were not only about the war itself but also a reflection of divisions stemming from the Cold War. As

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Saunders, "The Trade Unions...", *op cit.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p 66.

<sup>107</sup> Jim Frazer in G. Langley, *A Decade of Dissent: Vietnam and the Conflict on the Australian Home Front*, (North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), pp 27/28.

Frazer noted, "even half-day stoppages were light years away then".<sup>108</sup> In July 1965 a public meeting called by the Central Gippsland TLC in Victoria to discuss the war had to be closed after thirty-five minutes and police called to disperse the audience after 350 DLP supporters stormed the stage, calling "We want to hear two sides—not just the ALP and the Commos".<sup>109</sup>

Frazer's testimony (above) is reproduced in the official history of the Vietnam war, as evidence that even within left-wing unions the rank and file were divided about the war at this time.<sup>110</sup> The intense division within the trade union movement at this early stage of the war cannot, however, be accurately considered a symbol of the working class response to the war. As argued in Chapter Three, most Australians, including most students, supported Australian involvement in the Vietnam war in 1965. The war was a source of division amongst rank and file workers, but this division occurred and must be understood in the context of the dynamic shift in the relationship between trade union officials and the rank and file taking place by the mid-1960s.

In May 1966, the Seamen's Union clashed with the ACTU and much of union movement over their refusal to provide crews for the Vietnam-bound *Boonaroo* and, facing harsh criticism from some unions, were forced to back down.<sup>111</sup> Later that year, the federal Government trusted ACTU leader Monk sufficiently to inform him that in February 1967 the *Boonaroo* would carry munitions to Vietnam; he kept this information secret until just before the ship was to be loaded.<sup>112</sup> Yet the mood amongst rank and file workers was shifting. Edwards notes that the death of the first conscript, Errol Noack, in May 1966, appears to have aroused especially strong emotions amongst many trade unionists.<sup>113</sup> In January 1967, six Queensland

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> "Rowdy Meeting on Vietnam," *Age*, 2 July 1965, p 3.

<sup>110</sup> P. Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), p 42.

<sup>111</sup> Saunders, "The Trade Unions...", *op cit*, pp 66/67.

<sup>112</sup> Edwards, *op cit*, pp 163/164.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, p 126.

unions imposed a black ban on all aircraft used by Air Vice-Marshal Ky during his visit.<sup>114</sup> In February, in the context of metal trades stoppages in defiance of the ACTU over wages issues, seamen learnt of the *Boonaroo's* cargo; they again attempted to take action against the war and refused to obey the ACTU's directive to return to work.<sup>115</sup> Though the Union was extremely isolated and met "overwhelming opposition" in the union movement as a whole, they continued to refuse to man ships, their actions appearing "to have greatly emboldened other unions to take stronger action" against the Vietnam war.<sup>116</sup>

But trade unionists were also being emboldened, simply by the industrial successes of their movement. In September 1967, in the context of a strike-wave over industrial issues, 2600 Sydney wharfies refused to work on the *Jeparit*, an ANL vessel bound for Vietnam, and WWF officials asked the ACTU to call on the union movement to ban the handling of munitions for Vietnam. It refused.<sup>117</sup> But the balance of forces in the trade union movement was changing. Trust between the federal Government and the trade unions had been receding year by year. Workers, having been assured for some time that things had never been so good, simply did not believe government and employer claims that their wage increases could not be afforded. Workers' ideas about the parameters of what constituted acceptable issues for trade union action were also changing. In this context, those within and outside the labour movement who argued that the government was being dishonest and acting against workers' interests in relation to the Vietnam war and that trade unions could justifiably involve themselves in "politics," were sowing their seeds of discontent on fertile ground.

Other currents associated with the trade union movement in the 1960s also contributed to the potential for more "political" trade unionism amongst workers. The equal pay demands of women and Aboriginal workers, for example, were a factor. In 1966, Northern Territory stockmen, members of

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<sup>114</sup> Saunders, "The Trade Unions...", *op cit*, p 69.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, p 68.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, p 69.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*; see also B. Flint (*Jeparit* delegate), "Background: *Boonaroo, Jeparit* ," *Vietnam Action*, 1, April 1967, pp 14/15.

the Gurindji, struck in support of their demand to be paid a monetary wage, in a campaign widely supported by trade unionists.<sup>118</sup> Even left-wing union leaderships were put under pressure by the rise of these movements. In July 1967, for example, the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) had grown impatient with Seamen's Union officials over their failure to respond to letters regarding the wages and conditions of Torres Strait Islanders who were working from Thursday Island as crews on pearling luggers. Impatient for change, FCAATSI decided instead to write directly to fifty ships delegates about the issue, evoking an objection from the Union's Federal Secretary.<sup>119</sup> In this atmosphere, left-wing unions stepped up their support for political issues, where previously they had not been confident to do so. The Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union (FMWU), for example, became a leading union in the anti-war movement; and in 1968 it canvassed the French student riots and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in its journal.<sup>120</sup>

The relevance of "politics" for trade unionists also became more salient as the Vietnam war began to affect young workers more directly. John Zarb was a 21-year-old postman and member of the Australian Postal Workers Union (the APWU). In October 1968, only months after the national postal strike, he was sentenced to jail for defying conscription. His union took up his case in the union movement. In a form letter to other unions, its secretary-treasurer said:

There will be some who will say that this is not a trade union matter. We think differently. It is a trade union matter of the most urgent character. Today the living standards of the Australian people are being cut back. This is common knowledge. One of the reasons for this is the huge expenditure on the war of aggression in Vietnam and the maintenance of troops in other parts of Asia for the purpose of suppressing the local people. We hold that it is the political policy of

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<sup>118</sup> See for example, *Rights and Advancement* (FCAATSI Newsletter), 1966, 1967.

<sup>119</sup> These workers earned one quarter of the award rates applicable to other seamen and forty years of attempts by the Union to obtain equal wages for these workers had been unsuccessful (*Rights and Advancement* (FCAATSI Newsletter), 10, July 1967, p 6; *Rights and Advancement*, 12, December 1967, p 3).

<sup>120</sup> M. Beasley, *The Missos. A History of the Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1996), p 135.

the Gorton Government which is directly causing the downward pressure on the whole wage structure.<sup>121</sup>

Attempts to influence rank and file attitudes about the war were organised by left-wing unions in co-operation with the peace movement. In late October 1968, for example, following the sentencing of John Zarb, the Victorian Congress for International Co-operation and Disarmament (CICD) and Victorian trade unions organised a series of thirty factory meetings to build the anti-war movement. Prominent speakers from CICD addressed workplaces across Melbourne.<sup>122</sup> The higher level of rank and file involvement over economic issues in the trade union movement and the increased number of workplace meetings at this time meant that such forums were increasingly available. A motion expressing strong support for Zarb, for example, was scribbled on the back of a union resolution in support of a national twenty-four hour stoppage over wages put to ARU and AFULE members in October 1968.<sup>123</sup> Left union leaders, especially some Communist Party members, consciously campaigned against those who argued that politics should be left to politicians, *Brisbane Waterside News*, stressing, for example: "No politics in the union means bosses' politics".<sup>124</sup>

In at least one instance, the initiative for action over Vietnam began with the rank and file. Railway apprentices at the Chullora railway workshops who were concerned about conscription prepared a petition calling upon the Combined Railway Stewards to convene a meeting to discuss the implications of the National Service Act for railway juniors and apprentices. After a number of other workshops and shop stewards requested copies of the petition, the Combined Delegates Committee for Government Transport in New South Wales agreed to convene a meeting on the issue.<sup>125</sup> The

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<sup>121</sup> G. Slater, APWU General Secretary-Treasurer, form letter to trade unions, 30 October, 1968, in Laurie Carmichael collection.

<sup>122</sup> Form letter dated 18 October, 1968, sent to union representatives responsible for meetings in different workplaces. The letter suggests that the Zarb case be mentioned as a possible feature of the meeting and a rally outside Dow Chemicals be announced (Laurie Carmichael collection).

<sup>123</sup> Laurie Carmichael collection.

<sup>124</sup> *Waterside News*, 19 November 1969.

<sup>125</sup> The petition also called for discussion on the effect of the war on the future lives of railway workers, referring, for example, to higher taxation, and on how ACTU opposition to

Victorian Trades Hall Council also registered a protest at Zarb's sentencing;<sup>126</sup> and the following month a leaflet signed by 133 union leaders from thirty-two unions registered "our most bitter condemnation" at Zarb's jailing. The leaflet made reference to opposition to the Vietnam war expressed at the 1967 ACTU Congress, calling for "the greatest and most effective protest possible" to bring the war to an immediate end.<sup>127</sup> These events stand in contrast to Saunders' assertion that, during 1968 and the first half of 1969, "expressed trade union opposition to the war was conspicuous by its absence".<sup>128</sup>

It was in the latter half of 1969 that Australian trade unionists, having defied the ACTU over their own industrial issues in the O'Shea dispute, had the confidence to defy it over Vietnam. In September, fifty watersiders refused to load the *Jeparit* and their delegate was suspended for a month, sparking a twenty-four hour stoppage by 4,000 Sydney watersiders.<sup>129</sup> The same month, the son of Laurie Carmichael, secretary of the Victorian AEU, one of the leaders of the powerful rebel unions, was arrested at an anti-conscription protest after he had avoided the call-up; the event provoked stop-works of hundreds of waterside and meat-workers, and threats of stoppages by the twenty-seven rebel unions. Angry confrontations occurred outside Williamstown Court in his defence.<sup>130</sup> In December that year, trade union opposition to the Vietnam war reached a peak in an act of mass defiance of the National Service Act; officials representing over 150,000 Victorian workers in Fitzroy Town Hall issued a call for young men to lay down their arms in mutiny against the "heinous barbarism perpetrated in our name upon innocent aged men, women and children".<sup>131</sup>

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the war could be implemented and on ways of hindering the official processes of conscription of railway juniors (undated leaflet, file no 8, Laurie Carmichael collection).

<sup>126</sup> 31 October 1968, Laurie Carmichael collection.

<sup>127</sup> "An Appeal to the People of Victoria from Secretaries and Officials of Victorian Trade Unions," Laurie Carmichael collection.

<sup>128</sup> Saunders, *op cit*, p 69.

<sup>129</sup> Beasley, *The Wharfies...*, *op cit*, p 218.

<sup>130</sup> "The Sons: Now the Mothers," *Scope*, 25 September 1969; *Tribune*, 24 September and 1 October 1969; *Waterside News*, 6 November 1969.

<sup>131</sup> Saunders, "The Trade Unions...", *op cit*, p 70; "Unions Pledge Strength to Beat Draft, Back Resisters." *Tribune*. 19 November 1969.

Though the ACTU had shifted to the left since 1965, lifted along by a wave of rank and file anger, it remained a bureaucracy committed to negotiation and not strikes. Hawke's commitment to "political" trade unionism was strictly limited. Hawke, who spoke early at the December "mutiny" meeting, left before the controversial motion was passed and then quickly dissociated himself and the ACTU from it.<sup>132</sup> Hurst argues that the Vietnam war presented a "danger area" for Hawke, who, while projecting himself as a socialist and a supporter of radical change in the movement, was careful to avoid statements which might, in Hurst's words, "provide his opponents with grounds for serious complaint". So, while he identified himself with the movement as it became more intense, Hawke made little contribution to it. Hurst says, "it wasn't his style to take to the streets at the head of the column with Cairns and company and march to the police barricades".<sup>133</sup>

The most remembered focus of trade union political activity in this period is the mobilisation for the anti-war Moratoriums, documented in detail by Malcolm Saunders.<sup>134</sup> The ACTU's lukewarm decision in February 1970 "by the narrowest of margins" to announce that affiliated unions were "entitled" to participate in the Moratorium was hardly a rallying cry; indeed, it was used by the trade union right to fight to keep rank and file trade unionists at home on the day.<sup>135</sup> Nonetheless, the decision provided sufficient encouragement to ensure that many trade unions played a major role in the three Moratoriums in 1970 and 1971, mobilising under the slogan "stop work to stop the war".<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Saunders, *ibid*, p 70.

<sup>133</sup> Hurst, *op cit*, p 55.

<sup>134</sup> Saunders, "The Trade Union Movement" in *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement...*, *op cit*, pp 57-70.

<sup>135</sup> The trade union right, led by J. Ducker of the New South Wales Labor Council were "...chary of committing either the ALP or the ACTU to a close association with the anti-war movement". In Tasmania the TLC even considered disciplinary action against two members who claimed the ACTU supported the Moratorium and tried to involve some TLC unions in the protest (Saunders, "The Trade Unions..." *op cit*, pp 71-76). In New South Wales their influence ensured a much lower turn-out in May 1970 (A. Picot, "Vietnam: How We Won Last Time," *Socialist Review*, 4, Winter 1991, p 121).

<sup>136</sup> Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement...*, *op cit*.



There are many examples of rank and file enthusiasm for the Moratorium, especially amongst those unions first to act against the war. For example, the thirty members of the Seamen's Union working on the *Caltex Sydney* not only actively and financially supported the AICD and sponsored the VMC from its inception; for the September Moratorium each member individually donated money. The crew proposed that in keeping with the Moratorium slogan "stop business as usual" speakers from the *Caltex Sydney* and members of the Seamen's Union of Australia more widely should be made available to address job meetings of all kinds whenever and wherever possible.<sup>137</sup>

Left-wing trade union leaderships also risked criticism in their support for the anti-war movement. In 1970, the left-dominated Queensland TLC sponsored the establishment of a Draft Resistance Centre in Trades Hall, quoting in defence of their actions their pamphlet "Trade Unions in Australia," which stated that it was normal and necessary for unions to take a stand on a "wide range of local, national and international issues".<sup>138</sup> One union affiliated to the council made clear its opposition to the Centre and, amongst those who supported it, many sought "to contain its activities within the limits prescribed by the establishment".<sup>139</sup> Supporters of the Centre also noted that some union officials and TLC Executive members "find the step from wordy declamations to resolute action a bit too high and quite embarrassing".<sup>140</sup> Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen branded the Centre a "Treason Room" and said that he would investigate the possibility of ending the TLC's lease on the land on which Trades Hall was erected.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Letter to VMC from W.H. Langlois, signed also by the thirty members of the union working on the *Caltex Sydney*, 20 August 1970 (Seamen's Union of Australian, Ships Delegate's correspondence on Moratorium and other proposals, Noel Butlin Archives).

<sup>138</sup> Queensland TLC, "Draft Resistance Centre," Fryer library, p 1.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, p 6.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>141</sup> BWIU, authorised T.W. Chard and H.R. Hamilton, *Don't Register*, box 1, Dan O'Neill collection.

The involvement of trade unionists in mobilising for the Moratorium had a reciprocal relationship on industrial militancy. The new militancy of teachers, for example, occurred in the context of intense political mobilisations against the Vietnam war by high school students, often supported by their teachers.<sup>142</sup> Cathy Bloch, an official in the NSW Teacher's Federation from 1969, was also unofficially a member of the rank and file Teachers' Anti-Vietnam War Movement.<sup>143</sup> The relationship between radical trade union support for the anti-war movement and increasing industrial disputation in general was a major and under-emphasised aspect of Government calls for "law and order" in the early 1970s.<sup>144</sup> In May 1969, discussing student demonstrations and the threat of the far left, MP Munro said:

The kind of reaction and the kind of success for which these people look include the costs to industry...The kind of return they get is measured by the industrial and economic loss to this country.<sup>145</sup>

On August 25, 1970 a federal budget described by the *Sydney Morning Herald* as "the most dramatic budget in a generation"<sup>146</sup> was the focus of an ACTU-sponsored two-hour national strike, which was described by one parliamentarian as "the most dreadful thing that had ever happened in Australia".<sup>147</sup> Some 750,000 men struck for three hours or more, though only a tiny proportion attended rallies on the day, the best attendances being in Sydney where numbers were estimated at 20,000 by the unions and 10,000 by the police. The strike, as one author noted, "tied in nicely" with the

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<sup>142</sup> See especially Saunders, *The Australian Vietnam Moratorium Movement, op cit*, in relation to high school mobilisations surrounding the moratorium.

<sup>143</sup> Cathy Bloch, interviewed by Inara Walden for A. Curthoys "Women in the Anti-War Movement" project, transcript courtesy A. Curthoys.

<sup>144</sup> M.J. Saunders, "'Law and Order' and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement: 1965-72," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 28:3, 1982.

<sup>145</sup> *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 27 May 1969, p 2257.

<sup>146</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle May-August 1970," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 16:3, December 1970, p 396.

<sup>147</sup> Cohen, member for Robertson, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 22 September 1970, p 1437.

Government's concern about law and order stemming from events in the anti-war movement.<sup>148</sup> At the end of July the attorney-general was held on Sydney University campus for an hour by student demonstrators; and on August 16 protesters demonstrated outside his home. The prime minister declared that the budget strike "struck at the roots of democracy," and on 26 August foreshadowed a public order bill.<sup>149</sup> In parliament MP Mr Kelly asked:

Is the Prime Minister aware that acts of lawlessness and industrial and political blackmail, such as yesterday's Australian Council of Trade Unions strike, with which the Leader of the Opposition is certainly associated, or the statement of the Labor Premier of South Australia encouraging people to break laws they do not like, fill the ordinary public in Australia with acute anxiety and disquiet? Does the Prime Minister know that if the Government does so he will receive the solid backing of the quiet majority of the people in this country, many of whom are fearful that the very cornerstones of Australian life as they know it are beginning to crumble?<sup>150</sup>

Left unions consciously formulated associations between their economic issues and the Vietnam war, arguing that spending on the war was another example of the State spending money against workers' interests. In the campaign for a major strike in the metal trades, for example, metal-workers produced a leaflet which argued that spending on the war had contributed to an increase in indirect taxation in that budget.<sup>151</sup>

The rising profile of radical trade unionism was reflected in the decision of the Sydney national anti-war conference held in February 1971 to make its main aim working-class and labour-movement consciousness and action to achieve a mass political strike.<sup>152</sup> It was decided also that in doing so the

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<sup>148</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle May-August 1970," *op cit*, p 396.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 26 August 1970, p 499.

<sup>151</sup> "...of every six dollars of Commonwealth spending, one dollar is spent on war, particularly the war in Vietnam" ("Support the 'New Deal' Metal Workers Claim," *op cit*).

<sup>152</sup> Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement*, *op cit*, pp 250-7 for a detailed description of the conference. See also J. Harris, "Workers and the Moratorium" (paper delivered at the

conference "recognise that a significant percentage of workers are women and that Moratorium policies should be presented in such a way as to help break down sexist, chauvinist and discriminatory practices and attitudes to women".<sup>153</sup>

A number of trade unionists were arrested as a result of their involvement in anti-war actions in this period; the campaigns in their support were conducted as part of a general campaign against police repression towards trade unionists. For example, in January 1971, Jim Donovan, a WWF delegate, was tried under NSW "law and order" legislation over his arrest at the September Moratorium. A demonstration was held outside the court and smoko meetings extended at the port in protest.<sup>154</sup>

But in April of 1971, a new issue captured the imagination of the trade union movement. The ACTU was again approached by several militant unions to take action about South Africa; the result this time was that the Executive asked all affiliated unions to withhold services to the visiting Springboks team "as an act of conscience".<sup>155</sup> Many unions did so, placing bans on the servicing of aircraft carrying the team, and on laundry, mail, and the serving of drinks for the Springboks at the hotels where they stayed. Their actions led to angry threats by the prime minister. He accused the unions of attempting to impose their views on the Government and the Australian people by force and intimidation, and undermining the "principles for the proper functioning of responsible government in Australia".<sup>156</sup> Victorian premier Henry Bolte also suggested that Hawke and

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conference), Albert Langer collection.

<sup>153</sup> Quoted in D. Lorimer, "The Movement Against the Vietnam War - its Lessons for Today," *War in the Gulf. A Socialist View*, (Chippendale: New Course Publications, 1991), p 34.

<sup>154</sup> *Tribune*, 27 January 1971, p 10.

<sup>155</sup> S. Harris, p 60. The vote on the Executive was sixteen to one (Harradine, Tasmanian TLC Secretary, voted against). TLCs in all states except Tasmania overwhelmingly adopted the ACTU proposal, with even greater consensus between Left and Right than there had been on opposition to the penal powers according to I. Carroll, industrial reporter for the *Age*, 2 July 1971.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*, p 67. See also *Tribune*, 10 February 1971; "Australian Political Chronicle May-August 1971," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 17:3, December 1971, p 442; J. Halfpenny, K. Cook and A. McDonald in P. O'Connell and L. Simons (eds), *Australians Against Racism. Testimonies from the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Australia*, (Annandale: Pluto Press, 1995), pp 38/48/59.

the unions were "trying to take over the country".<sup>157</sup> In Queensland, a strike for higher pensions on July 21 became a protest strike by most of the State's trade unions against the State of Emergency proclaimed by Premier Bjelke-Petersen in response to demonstrations and strikes against the Springboks.<sup>158</sup>

Increasingly prominent in left-wing politics, including opposition to the Springboks tour, was the Builders Labourers Federation. By 1971 their willingness to challenge employers decisions by imposing "black bans" made them powerful allies of communities campaigning to save parkland and buildings in New South Wales, earning them an international reputation.<sup>159</sup> In August 1972, BLF State president Bob Pringle and ironworker J. Phillips faced the courts for damaging Sydney Cricket Ground goal posts during the Springboks tour.<sup>160</sup> By the end of that month the union had black bans on construction projects including the Rocks project; the Opera House car park; the North Western expressway; the Moore Park-Centennial Park sports complex; high rise buildings on single blocks in Botany; the Pitt Street Congregational Church; and three buildings in the Martin Plaza area.<sup>161</sup> The Builders Labourers Federation also began to show special interest in mobilising the female spouses of builders labourers in support of their campaigns and winning the right for women to work as BLs.<sup>162</sup> In turn, women's liberationists challenged personal sexism in the trade union movement, criticising ACTU leader Bob Hawke, for example, for his unapologetic "male chauvinism".<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> *Age*, 9 June 1971.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, p 134. The strikes occurred against the advice of TLC President Jack Egerton.

<sup>159</sup> M. Burgmann, *A New Concept of Unionism...*, *op cit*; J. Munday, *Green Bans and Beyond*, (London: Angus and Robertson, 1981); P. Thomas, *Taming the Concrete Jungle. The Builder's Laborers' Story*, (Sydney: NSW Branch of the Australian Building Construction and Builder's Laborers' Federation, 1973); D. Widgery, "Green Bans Down Under" in D. Widgery (ed.), *Preserving Disorder. Selected Essays 1968-88*, (London: Pluto Press, 1989), pp 32-39.

<sup>160</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle May-August 1972," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 18:3, December 1972, p 418/9.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>162</sup> *This Leaflet For You and Your Wife*, May 1971 (distributed during a 1971 strike), in M. Burgmann, *op cit*, p 127.

<sup>163</sup> "Male Chauvinist of the Month," *Mejane*, 2, May 1971, p 16. See also "I remember May Day," same page, in which a woman who has traditionally spent May Day at home with the

Other unions were also involved in co-operating with community and conservation groups in defence of the environment. In early 1970, conservationists were unable to prevent plans to drill oil on the Barrier Reef in Queensland; but the threat of a black ban by the TWU and TLC, in which Senator George Georges played a major role, led to the suspension of drilling plans pending an inquiry.<sup>164</sup> In 1971, members of several trade unions supported a community campaign in NSW to oppose an Act of parliament which had been passed to allow Clutha Development Pty Ltd to take out mining leases in the Blue Mountains.<sup>165</sup> The Victorian rebel unions, the strongest section of organised labour in the Moratorium campaign, were also involved in environmental issues, notably a campaign against the building of a pipeline across Port Phillip Bay which would encroach on parkland and residential areas.<sup>166</sup>

For setting new parameters for trade union action, builders labourers in particular became the increasing target of conservative hostility. They were the target of accusations of trade union "violence," accusations which echoed those made against radicals in the anti-war and anti-apartheid movements. In 1972, the BLF was accused by the NSW Minister for Labour and Industry of "creating a state of anarchy" over their black bans and militant demands for wage increases and the right to appoint their own foreman. NSW ALP president J.P. Ducker accused builders labourer Jack Munday of spreading a philosophy of organised violence as a tactical weapon; and the NSW Labor Council voted overwhelmingly for a resolution condemning violence and intimidation in the union movement. The ACTU Executive decided unanimously that unions not disciplining members guilty of violence would be disaffiliated.<sup>167</sup>

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children while her husband marches complains May Day reminds her of Anzac Day.

<sup>164</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle January-April 1970," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 16:2, August 1970, p 248/9.

<sup>165</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle September-December 1971," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 18:1, April 1972, p 105.

<sup>166</sup> "Brief Introduction to Anti-Bay Pipe Line Struggle," *Worker Student Alliance Bulletin* No 14, 1973, pp 1-6, Albert Langer collection; "Australian Political Chronicle May-August 1971," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 17:3, December 1971, p 437.

<sup>167</sup> "Australian Political Chronicle May-August 1972," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 18:3, December 1972, p 418/9.

Nonetheless, the new style of trade unionism was now firmly entrenched, and had won the trade union left new allies. In 1972 an incident which occurred during conflict between the NSW Right and striking Sydney plumbers led Hawke to announce publicly that "everybody" would condemn the violence of the plumbers towards Ducker. FCAATSI's Faith Bandler sent Hawke an exasperated telegram, informing him that black people would not condemn the "violence" because they considered Mr Ducker a wall between them and the union movement in NSW.<sup>168</sup>

One of the "strongest and most effective actions" of trade unionists against the war occurred in early 1973.<sup>169</sup> This final campaign against the war can be seen as a testament to those who rejected seeing working class attitudes as somehow fixed. Only weeks after the election of Whitlam, which was seen as a triumph for the Left and the unions, massive air raids were resumed by the United States Government on North Vietnam. In response, the Seamen's Union banned trade with the United States, sparking the greatest solidarity yet seen of maritime unions against the war, with the ban spreading to other unions and nation-wide. As Saunders notes, with two-thirds of Australia's trade threatening to grind to a halt, the potency of these bans was evident from reactions within Australia and the US. Queensland Treasurer Sir Gordon Chalk described the bans as "the greatest international incident outside of war that Australia had become involved in".<sup>170</sup>

Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) officials were concerned to undermine the supposed rift between trade unionists and the radical anti-war movement, in Australia and overseas. Following the Australian media's fascination with the US hard-hat demonstration in support of the war in early 1970, the AEU circulated to all its shop stewards and branches a letter written to US President Nixon by Walter Reuther, President of the US United Auto Workers (UAW). It protested the invasion of Cambodia and accused Nixon of dividing the nation and alienating young Americans. It

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<sup>168</sup> D. Nagle, "Solidarity (for whites) forever," newspaper cutting, no title or date, box 171, Gordon Bryant collection, National Library.

<sup>169</sup> Saunders, "The Trade Unions...", *op cit*, p 76.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, p 77/8.

branded the killing of four students at Kent State University as a "needless and inexcusable use of military force" as a result of which: "At no time in the history of our free society have so many troops been sent to so many campuses to suppress the voice of protest by so many young Americans". Reuther also made a point about violence:

With the exception of a small minority, the American people, including our young people, reject violence in all its forms as morally repugnant and counter-productive. The problem, Mr President, is that we cannot successfully preach non-violence at home while we escalate mass violence abroad.<sup>171</sup>

Some trade union activists also wrote of the need for radicals to consolidate the role of shop committees, which could act as a political focal point. For example, the Communist Party's Max Ogden pointed to the Preston tramway workshop whose shop committee had organised successful discussions on overseas and community issues as a way of moving outside ordinary trade union affairs.<sup>172</sup>

More often, however, these kinds of initiatives to convince rank and file workers about political issues and to involve them in other social movements simply did not occur, as was recognised in particular by members of the Communist Party in relation to the Moratorium movement. Builders' Labourers Federation official Jack Munday blamed a lack of conviction, leadership and involvement of many union leaders and a failure to convince rank and file workers of the economic and moral issues involved in the war:

...there was too much lip-service and insufficient physical presence in the anti-war demonstrations... in the moratoriums...too few unions really worked to get the whole membership to stop. This indecision in leadership was naturally reflected among the rank and file.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> AEU Circular, 27 July 1970, Laurie Carmichael collection. See also M. Salmon, "New York Vietnam demonstration that should never have been," *Tribune*, 3 June 1970, p 9.

<sup>172</sup> M. Ogden, "Looking at the Unions," *Australian Left Review*, December 1968, pp 47-52.

<sup>173</sup> J. Munday, interviewed, *Australian Left Review*, September 1971, p 14.



*Waterside News* was critical of trade union participation in the second Moratorium. While the leaders of most Victorian trade unions led the Melbourne march, *Waterside News* argued that they were only paying "lip service," because only the maritime group of unions actually stopped work in support.<sup>174</sup> Railway worker and representative of the Sydney Rank and File Moratorium Committee, Brian Dunnet, wrote in *Tribune* that in all industries there were workers "who want to do something about the Moratorium but whom no one organises".<sup>175</sup> Dunnet stressed the need to create an atmosphere of debating the issues in workplaces where there was not majority support for the moratorium, and organising the minority who did support it. Trade union activists needed to be sufficiently convinced of the importance of the Moratorium to call meetings of Moratorium supporters on their jobs, so as to form Moratorium action committees to work amongst the rest of workers to convince them to also actively support the campaign. In one large railway shop of 1,000, for example, criticism of the Moratorium had meant the defeat of a resolution for a stop work at a mass meeting. Nonetheless, workers had half-heartedly agreed to call a meeting of Moratorium supporters on the job and over 200 workers had attended. Similarly, the Teachers Moratorium Group had been formed using a collection of names of teachers who had indicated their opposition to the war over the years.<sup>176</sup>

Writing about the Springboks campaign, Munday said: "The students left us for dead".<sup>177</sup> Officials were also unenthusiastic about mobilising their membership for rallies, even over industrial issues, with even some "Left" officials themselves not attending anti-Springboks rallies.<sup>178</sup> Greg Evans argued that though Hawke helped to break down the traditional opposition between trade union affairs and social issues, there had been no real attempt to argue out such decisions with rank and file workers, which was reflected

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<sup>174</sup> *Waterside News*, 21 September 1970.

<sup>175</sup> B. Dunnet, "On-the-job organisation vital," *Tribune*, 17 February 1971. See also L. Carmichael, "Failings in Union Action on Moratorium," *Tribune*, 17 February 1971.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> Quoted in Harris, *op cit*, p 219.

<sup>178</sup> J. Munday, interviewed, *Australian Left Review*, September 1971, p 9.

in divisions which arose in the anti-apartheid campaign.<sup>179</sup> A writer in *Action* suggested that trade union leaders were not using the facilities they had in order to reach a far wider audience than the anti-apartheid groups, for example, by presenting their case in union journals and educating their members to counter the influence of daily newspapers critical of the campaign.<sup>180</sup> Efforts by trade union leaders to actively mobilise rank and file workers for political campaigns often were simply not made.

The foregoing discussion illustrates that many trade union officials were unwilling to support political campaigns in this period. It is a mistake, however, to assume that this stance necessarily reflected the beliefs and feelings of rank and file workers. Also mistaken is the idea that when workers failed to support direct action over political issues such as the Vietnam war, they did so because they were more interested in "their own back-pockets." Unions tended to have similar levels of activity in both industrial and political matters. The unions that were most successful in achieving economic gains through their industrial muscle were also the most politically radical, energised by a level of rank and file anger and inspiration powerful enough to overcome institutional inertia at the "top" of the movement. Similarly, those with low industrial activity had low political activity. This kind of potential in ordinary trade unionism was recognised as early as 1906 by German revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, who wrote:

The economic struggle constitutes, so to speak, the permanent reservoir of working class strength from which political struggles always imbibe new strength...The political struggle periodically fertilises the ground for the economic struggle. Cause and effect interchange every second.....<sup>181</sup>

Successful radical union leadership, however, required democratic argument and strong rank and file organisation: the kinds of factors which

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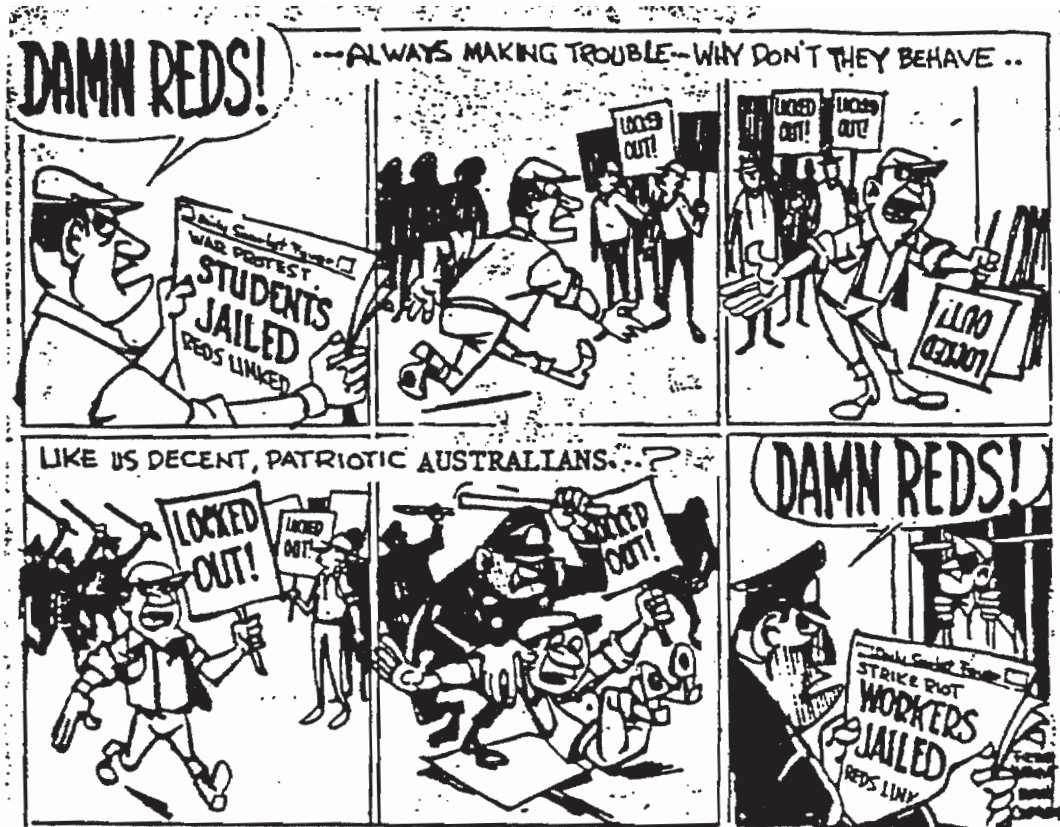
<sup>179</sup> G. Evans, "Perspectives for Working Class Struggle in Australia," *Intervention*, 4, May 1974, p 10.

<sup>180</sup> *Action*, 3, 12 June 1971, p 3.

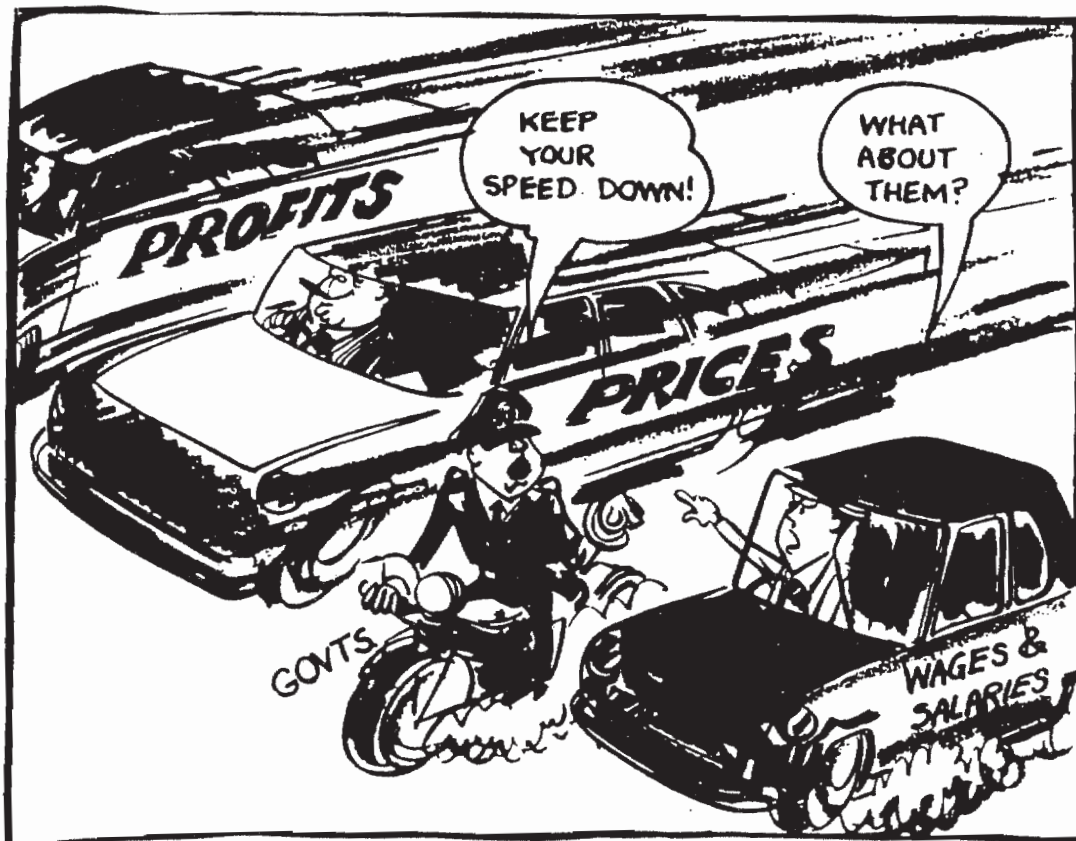
<sup>181</sup> R. Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* in *Ausgewahlte Reden und Schriften* (selected speeches and writings), (Berlin, 1955) translated in T. Cliff, *Rosa Luxemburg*, (London: Bookmarks, 1983), p 35.

contributed to the success of unions like the Builders Labourers Federation, but were sadly lacking in the movement generally. The revolutionary alliance between students and workers which radicals had hoped for did not eventuate. The revolutionaries were simply too inexperienced and too few to overcome the obstacles posed by entrenched and pessimistic bureaucracies.

Nonetheless, under the new Whitlam Labor Government, it was the labour movement, now at its most confident since the upsurge of the late 1940s, which was the focus of the aspirations and energies of radical intellectuals and activists. The reforms achieved under the Whitlam Government can be seen as a testament to the ways in which the radical movements, including the labour movement, had reshaped and continued to shape Australian society. For most participants in the trade union and student movements the political events of this period were entirely unexpected. They were taken by surprise, firstly, by the provocative actions of the Monash students when they sent aid to the NLF in July 1967, and secondly, by the way in which that cry of dissent, in the echo-chamber of the labour movement, became, by 1969, a roar.



From leaflet "Smash the Crimes Act. Smash the Draft. Workers and Students Unite to Fight Repression", 1969 in G.Mallory (compiler) *A Selection of Political Material from SDA, the Labor Club and Foco between 1967 - 1969*, unpublished, assisted by Fryer library, August/September 1992.



From J.Senyard (compiler), *Labor in Cartoons. Cartoons of the Australian Labor Party in Victoria 1891-1990*, (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1991), p 97.



### RELEASE JOHN ZARB

We, the undersigned union officials in Victoria register our most bitter condemnation against the gaoling of 21 year old JOHN ZARB for 2 years because of his refusal to be conscripted to the war in Vietnam.

We demand his immediate release and that all other similar charges be dropped immediately.

The long standing tradition of the Australian Labour Movement is in direct opposition to such outrageous acts, and the policy of the 1967 A.C.T.U. Congress calls for this war to be brought to an end.

**WE CALL ON ALL TRADE UNIONISTS TO REGISTER THE GREATEST AND MOST EFFECTIVE PROTEST POSSIBLE TO END THIS SHOCKING VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND TO DEMAND AN END TO THE WAR IN VIETNAM WITHOUT FURTHER DELAY.**

<b>Amalgamated Engineering Union</b> L. Carmichael F. Mutton N. Hill J. Brown J. Halfpenny L. Smith W. Butler J. Arter H.E. Walklate F. Self	<b>Butchers' Union</b> G. Seelaf T. Mills M. McPike T. O'Toole J. Timms J. Sparks	<b>Clothing Trades Union</b> D. MacSween F. Lovegrove G. Philpoulos E. Austin V. Stevens R. Basso C. George W. Claringbold J. Lewis	<b>Federated Liquor Trades Union</b> J. Munro J. Mannix D. Martin J. Goddard	<b>Painters' Union</b> G.A. Lewins D. Scott A. Campbell J. Ellis	<b>Transport Workers' Union</b> M. Windram W. Burke E. Bouiter J. Thompson O. O'Grady J. Fuller
<b>Australian Railways Union</b> J.J. Brown E.C. Bone W. O'Brien A. Cregan A. Leno L. Loy J. Healy R. Pauline G. Stapleton	<b>Boilermakers' and Blacksmiths' Society</b> A. Sanger S. Willis J. Roulston J. O'Neill P. Johnson J. Ryan	<b>Electrical Trades Union</b> U.E. Inness J.P. Anderson P. Higgins R. Turner C. Hall R. Sorrell C. Faure	<b>Federated Moulders' Union</b> F. Martin J. Woods	<b>Plumbers' Union</b> G. Crawford F. Lack J. Shepherd B. Miers G. Smith	<b>Tramways' Union</b> C. O'Shea S.E. Edwards
<b>Amalgamated Postal Workers' Union</b> G. Slater D. Hamilton W. Peeler C. Brock G. Blunden	<b>Breadcarters' Union</b> E. McGowan	<b>Federated Engine Drivers and Firemans' Association</b> S. Williams G. Winberg	<b>Federated Municipal Employees' Union</b> R. Coles R. Meredith P. Slape C. Bentley	<b>Rubber Workers' Union</b> R. Pettiona J. Rowe L. Duncan	<b>Vehicle Builders' Union</b> C. Jarrad T. Coole C.R. Hirst S. Longstaff E.C. Wilson J. Simpson
<b>Federated Union of Loco Enginemen</b> F. Carey A.C. Wilson G. Moorehead	<b>Builders' Labourers Federation</b> P. Malone J. McEwan N. Ballagher J. Masterton	<b>Furniture Trades Society</b> W. Brown K. Carr	<b>Gas Employees' Union</b> R. Poynton	<b>Seamen's Union</b> B. Nolan R. Wilson	<b>Wool and Basil Workers' Union</b> J.T. Wilson
	<b>Bakers' Union</b> E. Maconachy		<b>Miscellaneous Workers' Union</b> R. Cameron R. Hogan L. Dalloway E. Forbes K. Johnson W. Delton D. Allen B. Darcy H. Mitchell	<b>Shipwrights' Union</b> P. Pearson J. Murray C. Stanton	<b>Sheetmetal Workers' Union</b> A. McNolty R. Baldwin E. Scott R. McNolty L. Gibson
	<b>Brick Tile and Pottery Union</b> E.G. Millsham		<b>Food Preservers' Union</b> M. Lyng T. Ryan	<b>Ships' Painters' and Dockers' Union</b> J. Donegan A. Morris S. Sproule	
	<b>Building Workers' Industrial Union</b> J. Chandler A. Zeeno A. Lecke F. Gaspari E. Warren		<b>Plasterers' Union</b> C. Ellis	<b>Timber Workers' Union</b> H. Hubbard	

ON OCTOBER 31st, 1968, THE VICTORIAN TRADES HALL COUNCIL SAID:—

"Council registers its strongest protest against the sentence recently imposed on a person because of his conscientious objection to military service. Council regards such a law as being outmoded, undemocratic and usurping the basic rights of the individual to exercise his objections to military service according to his conscience.

The gaol sentence imposed becomes more difficult to understand when it is taken into account that the Commonwealth Government has not yet made a declaration of war. It should be the inalienable right of any individual in a democracy to be permitted to decide according to his conscience and not be dealt with on the same basis as a convicted criminal."

**AN APPEAL TO THE PEOPLE OF VICTORIA  
FROM SECRETARIES AND OFFICIALS OF VICTORIAN TRADE UNIONS**



From J.Hagan, *The ACTU: A Short History on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary*, (Sydney: ACTU, 1977), p 77.

# Unions pledge strength to beat draft, back resisters

MEETINGS REPRESENTING hundreds of thousands of Australian trade unionists last week pledged militant action for repeal of the National Service Act and withdrawal of Australian troops from Vietnam.



A forest of hands at last week's Sydney union delegates' meeting as a unanimous vote was recorded in support of industrial action in the event of the jailing of any union official signatory to the Statement of Defiance of the National Service Act.

From *Tribune*, 19 November 1969.

## Conclusion

*At the end of 1968 the editorial board of International Socialism journal received a draft of an editorial on the year from one of its members, Peter Sedgewick. It began with a quote from the poet Yeats: "The centre cannot hold..."It was brilliantly written....Except...Except we all agreed (including Peter), that the centre had held. It had been besieged, shaken, battered, but at the end of the day it still survived...*

Chris Harman, British socialist<sup>1</sup>

*Men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they  
fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and  
when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other  
men have to fight for what they meant under another name.*

William Morris

*Be realistic—demand the impossible.*

Slogan, France 1968

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<sup>1</sup>C. Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After*, (London: Bookmarks, 1988), p 166.

In conclusion, what are the implications of my dissertation for social movement theory? In Chapter One, I noted that new social movements are commonly seen as non-revolutionary. This characterisation frames revolutionary participation in these movements as somehow imposed. It echoes the analyses of more conservative writers like Edwards who argue that revolutionary influence on the radical movement in the 1960s was extraordinary given the non-revolutionary character of Australian society. I have shown, however, that revolutionaries played a central role in the Australian student movement in this period and that their involvement resulted from the movement's own organic evolution.

My thesis also highlights the important role of political parties more generally in the process by which meanings are generated within social movements. Social movements are not parties, but values and meanings germinate within social movements in the context of pre-existing institutionalised ideas about social change. Further, social movements do not exist in isolation from one another. In particular, trade union action influences the potentiality of other social movements, which is reflected in their ideological complexions. Participants in social movements take on values and find meanings for their action because of an interaction between struggle and inherited ideas.

This collective and individual search for meaning cannot be understood if a false counter-position is made between "authentic" nonaligned social movement actors and those who are members or supporters of political parties. Social movements may be said to be possible where there is general agreement by more or less diverse participants about a particular goal and strategy. Yet all participants in social movements enter those movements with pre-existing ideas about goals and how to achieve them. In the course of trying to achieve those goals, movement actors attempt to make sense of problems and successes they encounter. In expressing their attempts to make sense they effectively compete to frame events their way. Those who entered the movement as members of political parties, or became aligned



with a party in the course of their movement activism, adopt framings which are likely to be more systematic but also less fluid than those of non-aligned participants. In practice, these different framings are manifest in arguments about goals, strategies and the internal organisation of movements.

The consequences of these arguments for the movement as a whole and for the beliefs and actions of individual participants, depend on factors such as the resources, theoretical and personal, of social movement actors. They are also profoundly sensitive to the course of events as participants struggle to achieve their aims. Particular events can lend support and credibility to particular framings, and hence to particular political groupings in the movement with their specific interpretations of what the goals and strategies of the movement should be.

Other events may serve to draw attention to inconsistencies in the ways in which some movement actors have formulated movement aims and problems. These inconsistencies may be experienced as more or less fundamental. Participants in movements work to greater or lesser degrees to make their ideas understood in light of the problems and successes of the movement and, vice versa, to make problems understood in the light of their ideas. They draw the attention of other participants to events which seem to vindicate their theories. Where events and debates seem to pose problems for their theories, they struggle more or less successfully and more or less honestly to find a place for these events in their framing which is not catastrophic for it. They may also find themselves simultaneously grappling personally with real or apparent weaknesses in the pre-existing systems of thought which they have adopted as their own. This is particularly the case for members of political parties. This was the case for members of the Communist Party in the 1960s.

The popularity of socialist politics in the 1960s, notwithstanding the problems posed for Stalinist socialism by events like the Hungarian

revolution, rested on factors like the propensity of governments to try to suppress protest and suppress it violently. Police violence towards anti-war protesters in the movement in general bolstered the support of revolutionary students who argued that the state represented the interests of Australian capitalism in its relationship with US capitalism. Perhaps more important, though, was the powerful role played by organised workers in supporting the movements. Working class activism offered a way to turn symbolic protest into the actual achievement of concrete gains. It lent support to a particular vision of a possible future, one where society is run "from the bottom up" through workers councils made up of delegates elected directly from factory and office floors.

Yet this aspect of social movements has been and continues to be neglected. The ability of current social movement theory to incorporate the full complexity of the search by movement participants for symbolic self-representation is impoverished by the emphasis in the literature of new social movement theorists on the middle class. In their desire to focus on "pre-revolutionary" protest, these theorists have tended to dismiss protest that doesn't conform to their prefiguration model, a model that focuses on internal movement practice as against movement goals. Those movements or movement participants whose attention is primarily focussed on immediate concrete aims rather than the ways in which their activism might contribute to the reconstruction of civil society are seen as old-fashioned. Specifically, workers' lives and attitudes are easily prejudged as conservative and incorporated, whether goal-oriented or not.

The elitist idea which sees middle class leaders of social movements as teaching new values, generated by their own practice, to members of the working class, must be rejected. The development of new or altered meanings can be better understood by investigating the subtle interactive relationship between the overlapping struggles of working people and of social movement participants and how those relationships are expressed in the ways in which participants understand and codify their actions.

I have also suggested that in considering the role of social movements in prefiguring the future we need to recognise continuities with earlier and other political traditions and forces, specifically socialism, labourism and the working class, as well as the discontinuities emphasised by most social movement theorists. We must also be wary of identifying as 'discontinuities' particular features of the movement that can be shown instead to represent new kinds of continuity.<sup>2</sup> As I suggested in Chapter Ten, for example, many elements of "New" Left thinking represented, on closer examination, new variants of very old theoretical traditions, notably liberalism.

The Australian radical movements of the 1960s demonstrate the capacity of social movements to prefigure social ideas and practices which may be adopted in society more widely. Anti-war activists modelled ideas that today provide the framework for national discourses - attitudes, for example, about the right to self-determination, both for nations and for indigenous peoples. In experimenting with new and less restrictive sexual relationships or more generally trying to establish less oppressive modes of personal interaction between the sexes, and between those of differing cultural backgrounds or sexualities, these radicals were the first to engage in new patterns of behaviour which were adopted by millions of people worldwide. Prefiguration does not occur in a social vacuum, however. The potential for social movement ideals and ways of operating to become models for actors in other settings is contingent on the capacity of social groups, in particular the working class, to successfully achieve social change.

Further, the context in which movement participants define their activities must also encompass the influence of international stimulus and example, not in counter-position to understanding local dynamics and specificities

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<sup>2</sup>See also Introduction to Richard G. Fox and Orin Starn, (eds), *Between Resistance and Revolution: Cultural Politics and Social Protest*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997.

but as an adjunct. Again, the international aspect of social movement development cannot be understood only as a discursive phenomenon, but one based in concrete shared experience. To understand the local and philosophical genesis and development of student radicalism in Australia it is necessary to situate those mobilisations within a broader social and economic context. That context includes the concomitant development of capitalism and of imperialism, the self-confidence of the trade union movement, and the historically specific ensemble of political ideologies as played out in political parties and more widely in society as a whole.

One consequence of neglecting international aspects of social movement experience, together with the aforementioned tendency to celebrate middle class over working class activism, has been the construction of a view of the national population as singularly backward and conservative. As I argued in Chapter Ten, in the 1960s, this characterisation was not unique to Australia. Yet the mobilisation of a comparatively large proportion of the Australian population in opposition to the Vietnam war contradicts this view that Australians are peculiarly conservative. Yet more recent attempts to construct student radicalism as history in this country can be seen to suffer from this same kind of Australian exceptionalism.

If you can remember the sixties, they tell us, you weren't there. Yet "the sixties" has been remembered, and is being remembered. As Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton have suggested, following Hobsbawm, the process by which individual memories enter the realm of social or collective rememberings is reflected and reinforced by the invention of traditions: "prescribed or repeated forms of behaviour, often of a symbolic nature, which derive their social authority by claiming to be descended from a suitably identified past".<sup>3</sup> The social formation of memory is a ceaseless, dynamic activity. In the 1990s, public debate in Australia has frequently been

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<sup>3</sup> K. Darian-Smith and P. Hamilton, *Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p 2; E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

expressed by reference to differing versions of the past;<sup>4</sup> and in contesting the events of the past the participants contribute to its codification. This contestation does not take place in a social vacuum. In Marxist terms, the past is remembered in the context of ongoing class conflict. From the late 1970s, the labour movement found itself on the defensive, and from the 1980s it has been increasingly embattled. The process by which the sixties is becoming part of public memory must be seen in relation to the rightward shift in society.

Those who see the sixties as a bad time best forgotten have played a prominent role in public remembrance of this period since the 1980s. Remembrance of the anti-Vietnam War movement, for example, has been shaped in the context of the desire of politicians, supported especially by military historians, to reverse what might be seen as Australia's "Vietnam syndrome". In the aftermath of the Gulf War in the early 1990s, new efforts were made to symbolically re-legitimise intervention in Vietnam. In 1992, a new memorial was opened to the Australians who fought in Vietnam. The ceremony was seen as part of an effort to redress the shame and derision suffered by soldiers due to the unpopularity of the war.<sup>5</sup> This act of commemoration simultaneously involved the screening out or negative framing of aspects of that period which did not accord with the symbolic meaning chosen for it. The government speaker who unveiled the memorial spoke pointedly of the event as marking "the end of that divisive period of the 1960s and 1970s".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>A. Curthoys, in G. Gray and C. Winter, (eds), *The Resurgence of Racism: Hanson, Howard and the Race Debate*, (Clayton, Victoria: Department of History, Monash University, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the construction of memory of the relationship between soldiers and protesters see A. Curthoys, "Vietnam: Public Memory of an Anti-War Movement" in Darian Smith and Hamilton, *op cit*.

<sup>6</sup> ABC News, 1 October 1992 (personal diary).

From the 1980s, those who have sought to portray the sixties as shameful and bizarre have been more confident to share their views. Greg Sheridan argued that from the standpoint of the 1980s the sixties looked:

...even more deranged than it must have looked close up. It was as if the whole Western world had taken LSD in its morning coffee. The world went mad and it went mad at what had seemed its sanest points, the universities..<sup>7</sup>

Those who now felt that their opposition to the war was "naive" and mistaken found willing publishers.<sup>8</sup> Others have explicitly framed their calls for a harshly critical view of sixties radicalism by reference to "tradition". Jeffrey Grey argues that support for the NLF could not easily be justified by appeals to an anti-war tradition in Australia ("no one subscribed funds for the Kaiser, and the members of the 'Australia First' movement who were unwise enough to suggest that Hitler had a point found themselves interned for the duration")<sup>9</sup>. The spectacle of Australians marching under "enemy" flags, therefore, "seemed to confirm the immaturity, even stupidity, of those concerned...".<sup>10</sup> The depiction of the Moratorium and related groups as a "peace" movement, he argues, is an example of the ways in which "the past is falsified to be pressed into service in the present".<sup>11</sup>

Other conservative historians have also sought to put the sixties "genie" back in its bottle. For those who seek to frame the anti-war movement as representing something strange, borrowed, "unAustralian" (and by

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<sup>7</sup> G. Sheridan, "The 1960s God that Failed. 'This Loathsome Generation'", *Quadrant*, no 261, vol 33, no 11, November 1989, p 26.

<sup>8</sup> See R. Champion, "Second Thoughts on Vietnam", *Quadrant*, no 245, vol 32, no 6, June 1988, pp 54-55.

<sup>9</sup> J. Grey, "Memory and Public Myth", in J. Grey and J. Doyle (eds), *Vietnam. War, Myth and Memory*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), p 149.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

implication unlikely to be repeated), the whole project of remembering the sixties is viewed as one of dubious social value. Jan Bassett expressed this in a recent article entitled: "Remembering the Sixties: Don't Do It".<sup>12</sup> The framing of the protest movement as a kind of deviation from the natural order of things is also reflected in Peter Edwards' 1997 official history of the Vietnam war. By 4 July 1969, he acknowledges, people "everywhere" were debating how the blame for violent conflicts should be apportioned between radicals and police: a testament to the success of the militants in pushing people towards "extreme" opinions, hardening conservative and radicalising moderates. Yet he frames this success as a paradox, an historical aberration, based on a preconceived assessment of the nature of Australian society which he feels is so self-evident it does not need to be explained: "In one of the least revolutionary of countries, classic revolutionary tactics were beginning to have an effect".<sup>13</sup>

In Australia, remembering the sixties is complicated because our "sixties," that is, the period of radical upsurge of that time, can be said to have dated from 1965 to 1975, spanning the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>14</sup> Student activism, for example, did not end with the election of the Whitlam Government. During the Government's term the student power movement continued, students campaigning successfully, for example, for new kinds of courses.<sup>15</sup> Though such episodes became less frequent and widespread following the dismissal of the Whitlam Government, the campuses remained an important base of radical activism. Ex-students became leading personnel in

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<sup>12</sup> J. Bassett, "Remembering 'The Sixties': Don't Do It!", *Sydney Papers*, 5:3, Winter 1993, pp 129-135.

<sup>13</sup> P. Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), p 227.

<sup>14</sup> P. Pierce, "Australia, the Sixties and the Vietnam War", in Grey and Doyle, *op cit*, pp 70/71.

<sup>15</sup> F. Stilwell, "Political Economy: Then and Now", paper delivered at *Anniversary Conference: Twenty Years of Political Economy at the University of Sydney*, 22 October 1994, University of Sydney.

the new social movements and the left more generally, keeping alive a tradition of activism. Others contributed to working class militancy. Ex-students, for example, injected a new flavour of militancy into trade union activism amongst teachers, university lecturers and other white-collar workers. A small number of Maoist ex-students obtained employment in the South Australian car industry, where they played a prominent role in encouraging rank and file activism. In July 1977, Chrysler Australia dismissed 700 workers, including twenty-eight WSA militants who had been targeted as a scapegoat for the car industry's ills by the media, the Dunstan Government and "union leaders from Hawke down".<sup>16</sup>

Institutional changes which occurred during the era of the Whitlam Government also owed a great deal to the aspirations and energy of veterans of the student movement. Ex-student activists helped to establish rape crisis centres, legal aid and community centres, and became functionaries in the public service, legal and parliamentary systems. Many of the individuals named in this thesis are now prominent public figures and politicians. Finally, the sixties revolt began in the universities, and much of its energy and ideas returned there. Many student activists obtained post-graduate qualifications, and like their teacher comrades, set about transforming the education system into something more similar to their own image.<sup>17</sup>

The subsequent careers of student radicals have ensured that they played an important role themselves in shaping public memory of the sixties. One discernible school of memory-makers, for example, involves those who sustained what could be described as "the Whitlam myth". The dismissal of

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<sup>16</sup> H. McQueen, *Gone Tomorrow. Australia in the 1980s*, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1982), p 23/4. See also T. Bramble, "Conflict, Coercion and Co-option: the Role of Full-Time Officials in the South Australian Branch of the Vehicle Builders Employees' Federation, 1967-80", *Labour History*, November 1992, p 141.

<sup>17</sup> A similar trend occurred in other industrialised countries. See for example, M. Isserman, "The Not-So-Dark and Bloody Ground: New Works on the 1960s", *American Historical Review*, 94:2, 1989, p 1006.



the Whitlam Government in 1975 is seen as marking the end of Australia's "sixties". The cut-off point is significant. The hope and anger of the anti-war movement is remembered in conjunction with the reforming zeal of the Whitlam Government which occurred in the context of a still robust economy and a confident trade union movement. Conservatives have framed this period as one of union thuggery, greed and "holding the nation to ransom," with the acquiescence of the union-controlled Whitlam government. This framing was recalled in April 1998 following the dismissal of union labour on the waterfront, with Industrial Relation Minister Peter Reith explaining his support for the employers' action by reference to a particular characterisation of the recent history of trade unionists in the maritime industry.

For the Left, the Whitlam years are remembered by many with enthusiasm. Whitlam's dismissal by the governor-general in 1975 continues to loom large in Australian politics, most recently heavily affecting the debates and proceedings of the 1998 Australian Constitutional Convention. Indeed, if there is nostalgia held in relation to "the sixties," it can be argued that it centres on Whitlam, not on the protest movements. One reflection of this is the widely accepted collective "memory" of Whitlam "bringing back the troops". Yet as Curthoys notes, the last troops left Vietnam on 8 December 1971, a year before Whitlam's election.<sup>18</sup>

Memory of the hopeful sixties, then, is for some coterminous with memory of the Whitlam Government. For those who view the Whitlam years as the highpoint of our "sixties;" the protest movements represent the over-exuberant margins of a more important change. In 1993 at a Sydney conference marking twenty-five years since 1968, a common theme of those speakers who did not discuss the protest movement was to present the sixties as marking the birth of a new Australian nationalism, a new self-confidence and independence in the area of culture and the arts. The

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<sup>18</sup> A. Curthoys, "The Anti-War Movement", in Grey and Doyle, *op cit*, p 96.

conference was opened by a one-time critic of radical students, Donald Horne, who explained that the social changes which had occurred since that time should not be seen as resulting from the radical protests—in his view, "they would have happened anyway".<sup>19</sup> Other speakers, including Craig McGregor, stressed the middle class character of the protest movement.<sup>20</sup>

It might be argued that the "screening out" of the confrontational and working class aspects of the 1960s, by either the Right or what might be described as the reformist Left, is reflected in and also facilitated by the ambivalence with which some ex-participants now view their involvement in the protest movements. Perhaps the most important source of the ambivalent feelings of activists towards their past is the recognition of the failure of Ho Chi Minh's victory to deliver substantial improvement in the lives of the Vietnamese people.<sup>21</sup> As Stephen Spender observed in 1969, "idealism is the reverse of cynicism, its opposite which it may easily become".<sup>22</sup> Unrealistic expectations clearly played a part in the rightward shift after 1975, and not only in Australia. One intellectual impact of the disappointment of failed revolutions was to reinforce a renewed focus on gradual, limited social change.<sup>23</sup> This has coincided with the overwhelming emphasis within the academy on the importance of intellectuals and ideas in social change, reflected, for example, in the emphasis on the intelligentsia as the motivating force within the new social movements.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Generations of '68*, State Library of NSW, 22 May 1993.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> C. Clutterbuck, "Protests and Peace Marches. From Vietnam to Palm Sunday", in K. Maddock and B. Wright, *War: Australia and Vietnam*, (Sydney: Harper and Row, 1987), p 141.

<sup>22</sup> S. Spender, *The Year of the Young Rebels*, (New York: Vintage, 1969), p 130.

<sup>23</sup> See for example the introduction to J.C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>24</sup> See V. Burgmann and A. Milner, "Intellectuals and the New Social Movements", in R. Kuhn and T.O'Lincoln (eds), *Class and Class Conflict in Australia*, (Melbourne: Longman Australia, 1996), pp 114-130; E. Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New "True" Socialism*,

However, while disappointment in the Vietnamese revolution may have been an element in the defensive attitude of many ex-activists, the importance of this event has been overplayed. Malcolm Saunders' 1991 comment that on many issues "the protestors were as misguided as the politicians"<sup>25</sup> is taken by Jeff Grey, for example, as evidence that some protesters now have misgivings about their stand in relation to the war. Yet Saunders' statement does not represent a reassessment, because he clearly held similar views in the 1970s.<sup>26</sup> As the preceding chapters illustrate, there were in fact three positions in relation to "support for the NLF" during the sixties. Labor party and "moderate" anti-war groups believed support for the NLF was "ultra-left". Indeed, for a substantial portion of the Labor Party, the defeat of the NLF and victory of the US was desirable, but would be better achieved by non-military means. Amongst those who supported the NLF, there were two positions. While the Maoists in particular were largely uncritical of the NLF, most other radicals who adopted the "support the NLF" slogan, including Trotskyists and New Leftists, did so on the basis of an analysis which was critical of the leaders of the Vietnamese nationalist movement. Despite their concerns about Ho Chi Minh, they felt that the interests of the Vietnamese people would be best served by an NLF rather than a US victory.

By focusing on the failure of the Vietnamese revolution, conservative writers betray their own defensive attitude about the unpopularity of the US administration's self-appointed role as a world police force, wanting to create an image of anti-war activists as naive about "Communism". Overwhelmingly, however, the disappointment and bitterness of ex-sixties

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(London: Verso, 1986); B. Frankel, *From the Prophets Deserts Come: The Struggle to Reshape Australian Political Culture*, (Melbourne: Arena Publications, 1992).

<sup>25</sup> J. Grey, "Memory and Public Myth" in Grey and Doyle, *op cit*, p 149, referring to Saunders' review of *Vietnam Remembered* in *Social Alternatives*, 10:2, July 1991, p 57.

<sup>26</sup> M. Saunders, *The Vietnam Moratorium Movement in Australia: 1969-1973*, PhD, Flinders University, 1977.

activists relate not to a perceived misassessment of the NLF but to the retreat of the Left in the years that followed and the immediate failure of their hopes for radical change. For radicals and historians seeking to sustain and extend a different memorial tradition in this context, the desire for a critical and not simply "heroic" construction of the period must be balanced against the danger of playing into the hands of conservative critics. In their willingness, even eagerness, to identify any naiveté on their part which may have contributed to the disappointment of their hopes, ex-radicals may inadvertently contribute to the portrayal of their activism as naive and thoughtless, which it was not.

As Anthony Ashbolt observed in 1985, "Billboards for the future resonate with a distaste for the past".<sup>27</sup> Accounts of the Vietnam war, he warned, were in danger of falling prey to what Chomsky described as the "pathology of intellectual life" in which "memories fade, and only official history remains".<sup>28</sup> For many once on the Left, Ashbolt suggests, Vietnam has become "a thing to be buried, to be shunted off to the back door of history". Rejecting the resuscitation of nostalgia for the sixties, he nonetheless argues that memory must not become "obliterated by a 'goodbye to all that syndrome' which is merely a fashionable form of reification".<sup>29</sup> As Ronald Wright has suggested (in a different context), against the triumphalist myths of history's "winners," its "losers" need to preserve their own mythical heritage for the purpose of explaining and overcoming catastrophe: "If the vanquished culture is to survive at all, its myths must provide it with a rugged terrain in which to resist the invader and do battle with *his* myths".<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>A. Ashbolt, "Requiem for the Sixties? On David Horowitz and the Politics of Forgetting", *Arena*, 73, 1985, pp 127/9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> R. Wright, *Stolen Continents. The "New World" Through Indian Eyes*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), p 5.

In Australia as in the US, there has been a certain fascination with those who "sold out" as well as with those who are now embarrassed by their involvement in the radical sixties movements.<sup>31</sup> This focus serves those who seek to view the period as a "failure". Yet many student activists did not find a place within the "establishment," and had important impacts on Australian society, as did the social movements germinated in the sixties. As Julie Stephens has written: "Given that the sixties had a multiplicity of aftermaths it is surprising that only one outcome—the failure scenario—is so regularly accentuated".<sup>32</sup>

This is especially surprising given the ongoing recognition of the "Vietnam syndrome," over twenty years from the end of that war. In April 1995, the Maritime Union of Australia viewed as a vindication of the involvement of maritime workers in the anti-war movement the announcement of Robert McNamara (US Defence Secretary during the Vietnam War), that he now believed US military involvement in Vietnam to have been a mistake.<sup>33</sup> Efforts to reconstruct Australian involvement in the Vietnam War in a more positive light must be recognised as a defensive response to the widespread and long-lasting condemnation of that involvement. In 1991, opponents of the Gulf War consciously and unconsciously made reference to that earlier unpopular war as they constructed a public image for their campaign. "George Bush, USA, How many kids did you kill today?" (an updated version of "Hey, Hey, LBJ...") and "No More Vietnams", for example, were prominent slogans of that movement.<sup>34</sup> The anti-Gulf War movement, in turn, has already been the focus of a familiar framing. Peter

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<sup>31</sup> J. Stephens, "Up Against the Wall Revisionists!", *Arena Magazine*, June-July 1994, p 24.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> "Vietnam: We Were Right All Along!", *Maritime Workers' Journal*, May/June 1995, pp 20-23.

<sup>34</sup> D. Glanz, "Gulf War: Lessons of the Movement", *Socialist Review*, 4, Winter 1991, pp 126-151.

Pierce describes the movement as "in the main uncertain of any cause apart from a visceral anti-Americanism" and representing "the last gasp of the halcyon radical days of the late 1960s and 1970s".<sup>35</sup>

It might be suggested, however, that, regardless of how often it is proclaimed, the moment of the final "gasp" of the sixties nonetheless never arrives. The ongoing legitimacy of extra-parliamentary protest reflects another important and highly visible legacy of the sixties: the change in attitudes and values it directly and indirectly engendered.<sup>36</sup> As a writer for *The Age* recently acknowledged, "what divides the old Australia from the new is the Vietnam War".<sup>37</sup> In 1993, to mark twenty-five years since 1968, the Sydney University student newspaper *Honi Soit* repeated a survey of student attitudes which had been carried out in 1968.<sup>38</sup> The results showed increases in the proportion of women students, ALP and "left" party voters, and atheists. It showed substantial increases in the numbers of students opposed to military conscription and who believed the SRC should be able to pass motions on foreign affairs, civil rights and national issues. On four questions regarding non-white immigrants students surveyed in 1993 were substantially more liberal than students in 1968.<sup>39</sup> Overwhelmingly, student attitudes had become less conservative since the highpoint of the sixties radicalism.

Maurice Isserman, writing about the US New Left, suggests that the New Left failed politically in the short run but triumphed culturally in many ways in the long run.<sup>40</sup> This "cultural" success, however, has political

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<sup>35</sup> Pierce, *op cit*, p 71.

<sup>36</sup> Stephens, *op cit*.

<sup>37</sup> "Vietnam Revisited", (review of Edwards, *op cit*), *The Age*, 24 May 1997.

<sup>38</sup> "Student Survey", *Honi Soit*, issue 26, 26 October 1993, p 19.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>40</sup> Isserman, *op cit*, p 1009.

implications. Oppression has not only divided the working class, it has weakened a large proportion of that class as individuals. There is debate about whether the new social movements amount to struggles for recognition or redistribution.<sup>41</sup> But if there was no need for redistribution, there would be none for recognition. The rise of these movements and the social institutions and expectations they have created can be seen as perhaps the most important legacy of the 1960s, a legacy which has important implications for the character of class struggle.<sup>42</sup>

The past thirty years can be seen as a time in which, under the impact of forceful new social movements, a variety of "elitisms" have been rolled back on many fronts. Changes in the education system have also contributed to this change. For much of human history, intellectuals have been sponsored by social elites. Consequently, a contempt for the "lower" classes, in various guises, has resonated through centuries of justification for minority rule. With the rise of capitalism and the ideal, if not actuality, of "universal" education, the basis of that elitism has shifted from arguments based on God's will or biology to those which emphasise the importance of "cultural capital" as the prerequisite for the right to rule. As secondary and tertiary education have embraced wider layers of people in relatively wealthy countries, the idea of "intelligence," for example, as a biological given, has been undermined.

The expansion of the tertiary education system since the 1960s nonetheless reflected elitist ideas about who could and who could not become an "intellectual". The establishment of "red brick" universities and polytechnics in Britain and the development of the binary system of

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<sup>41</sup> See for example N. Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age", *New Left Review*, 212, July/August, 1995, pp 68-93, and other contributions to this debate in *NLR*.

<sup>42</sup> E. Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism. Renewing Historical Materialism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

education in Australia, which separated tertiary students into those being "educated" in a more traditional sense and those being "trained" for less exclusive occupations, reflected those ideas. With university education simultaneously becoming more obviously "market driven," however, that distinction was already questionable—in Australia in the late 1980s, the binary system was abandoned for that reason. The student protest of the 1960s itself reflected university students' own recognition that they were mostly being "trained" to become workers, not "educated" to become opinion-shapers in society.

At the same time, however, university students rebelling in the 1960s did so largely without abandoning their ideas about the fundamental superiority of those who had gained entrance to these elite institutions. This was reflected in the arguments made by Fabian students, for whom workers embodied backward, conservative ideas in society, ideas which could only be changed (if at all) by education itself. Amongst revolutionary students it was reflected in a tendency to see students and workers as leaders and led. The lack of understanding of the dynamics of the labour movement meant that even where this elitism began to be rejected, it was replaced by an equally moralistic and mechanical alternative, the idea that revolutionary students must never lead but always follow radical workers. In fact, these approaches were not opposites, but two faces of the same failure of imagination, whereby students and workers were seen as basically different kinds of people.

To an extent, that imagining reflected real differences in the lives of students and workers. Those differences are easy to recognise from the vantage point of the 1990s, in which they have to some extent been undermined. Students are less of an elite than they ever were.<sup>43</sup> With a much higher percentage of students embarking on tertiary education than

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<sup>43</sup> Similar comments appear in A. Curthoys, "Women and Class", in *For and Against Feminism. A Personal Journey into Feminist Theory and History*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1988), pp 100/101.



in the 1960s, the pressure to obtain university entrance is higher, and so too are the costs of undertaking tertiary study. An increasing proportion of students are workers studying part-time, and a major proportion of graduates do not earn more than the average wage, with employment becoming more difficult to obtain. The idea of the university as a "degree factory" has never been a better description, as successive federal governments have aggressively brought market forces more and more directly to bear on university departments. Academic staff have themselves been increasingly "proletarianised".

The consequence of these developments for student activism is a greater potential for common cause with the trade union movement. From the trade union side, this potential is enhanced by the important role which has been played by tertiary educated white collar workers. The idea that social conflict in first world countries in the late twentieth century centres on "moral" rather than "economic" issues has become increasingly untenable in the 1990s. Nonetheless, the potential for radical protest has plainly been inhibited. The restructuring of the labour force has undermined trade union confidence, together with the determination of Labor Party leaders to market their Party in terms acceptable to industry in tightened economic circumstances. Most of all, the status quo has been sustained, not predominantly by active support for conservative government policy, but by deep cynicism about the possibility of any but the most local and personal resistance.

On the other hand, alongside this bleak picture have been brief episodes which have clearly demonstrated the potential for opposition. This potential has been expressed in one-off demonstrations which have been significantly larger than the anti-Vietnam Moratoria, including a demonstration in Sydney in 1995 against French nuclear testing and another in Melbourne in May 1998 in the context of the maritime dispute. On August 19, 1996, the doors of Parliament House in Canberra were destroyed in a large protest against the policies of the conservative Howard

Government. These protests took place in the context of a turbulent international mood. In 1998, for example, demonstrations have been held in Australia in support of students in Indonesia, whose protests played a decisive role in the retirement, after over thirty years, of the dictator Suharto. Student and worker activists have been present at all of these protests, while opposition to cuts in the universities has continued, with students frequently making common cause with academic and general staff over these issues. The minority participating in these activities continue a tradition which owes much to the activists, both students and workers, of the 1960s.

In 1970 Michael Hamel-Green argued that the main deterrent to draft resistance was "not so much the coercive threats of the Government Authorities as the cynicism of those around one, a cynicism that is an integral component of the hegemonic ideology which functions to preserve the status quo".<sup>44</sup> Have things changed so much? On 14 June, as I was in the final stages of preparing this thesis, the television news showed armed Black Panther militants attending the funeral of a black disabled man tortured and murdered by racist whites in Texas. The same news report announced the success of Pauline Hanson's anti-immigration One Nation party in winning a number of seats in an election in Queensland. The "affluent" society seems a distant memory. In this context I find myself sympathetic to Barry York, who wrote:

If the view of the sixties as a "time of hope" is in fact an illusion then it is an illusion that we need. For hope itself might be an illusion, but we still need it more than ever.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> M. Hamel-Green, "Vietnam. Beyond Pity", *Dissent*, 1970, p 36.

<sup>45</sup> B. York, "The Sixties Revisited", (review of Joseph Conlin's *The Troubles: A Jaundiced Look Back at the Movement of the Sixties*), *Melbourne Journal of Politics*, 16, 1984-5, p 111.



ANU Law Students Occupation, 1994, courtesy Hamish McPherson, ANU Students Association President, 1995.

## *Appendix*

*Extracts from letters sent to Peter Price and the Monash Labor Club in response to their campaign to raise money for the NLF in 1967.*

Albert Langer's collection at the Noel Butlin Archives contains seventy-seven letters sent to the Labor Club during the "aid for the NLF" campaign, which provide compelling evidence of the impact of the campaign on those most moved by it. Twenty of the letters are from opponents of the NLF's campaign. One of these was written from a different anti-war stance:

I hereby submit my resignation from the Labour Club [sic]...I feel that to support the NLF cannot be justified, even though it may strengthen the movement to be anti-commitment, of which I am a strong supporter, because in my opinion the whole war is immoral and unjust... At the risk of appearing trite I do however admire the way the members of the club concerned in moving the motions stuck to their principles and integrity, even though I strongly disapprove the motion.

Other letters were extremely hostile:

Read your article Price why aren't you in Vietnam you bludging rat. You and your Labor Club. Got a bad heart Price?... You know it would be unfortunate if a conscript got hit with a Monash Uni. Labor Club what have you. Well all I can say is, "It would be most unfortunate if you had an accident the same way". There's only one place for 'Ratbags' like you and your mob. That's out of the way. Have you ever heard of fellows getting bumped off Price. Tread lightly Price you rat.

The recurrence of the word "ratbag", is the most common feature of these letters. For example:

I tried to join the army to go and fight these Viet Cong over there but it seems to me that you RATBAGS want them over here to take everything off us...

GO HOME YOU LOUSE COMMUNIST BASTARDS. DOWN

WITH COMMOS AND ALL COMMS STAND FOR. UP WITH  
FREEDOM.

But the majority of letters (fifty-seven) were supportive. Many of these writers did not support the Labor Club's position of supporting the NLF but wrote anyway, most often to thank the Club for having the courage to stand up against the prevailing pro-war mood and risk vilification, even violence, for what they believed in. For example, this writer left her name and address in Strathmore:

I have read a great deal about you and other members of both the Melbourne University and Monash Labour Clubs, who have been abused because of your plans to support the Vietnamese Liberation Front. I do not write this because I agree with you—I don't think I do.

I suppose in a way you could call this an apology for all the terrible things people have said about you and others in the last few days. That people could be so down and out rude to someone because they disagree with him, or her, to me, seems childish, and showing something sadly lacking in character.

I think you, and your family, are very noble sticking by what you say and believe and I hope that Australia never declares war, so that you become a traitor, this and every country needs people like you.

A number of those who wrote, however, stated that they were afraid to sign their names to their letters. For example:

...Just a word of encouragement for yourself and family, it is quite refreshing to hear of anybody these days who has the courage of their convictions, unfortunately they are few and far between. I must confess I am not one of them as you may notice by no signature on the bottom. There would be very many thousands of people throughout Australia who hold the same view as Peter does but modern society seems to demand that you go with the tide or go under...

This letter was signed "A Family of Friends":

On behalf of my husband, three sons and myself I would like to congratulate you on the stand you have taken...

It takes courage to do what you and your fellows have done, and your action must cause people to think, even if they think in opposition and judging by reports you have plenty, some I'm sure quite deliberately whipped up by people who have a stake in maintaining the war. However, there are many people who do not believe that human beings are meant to kill each other as they have done for so many years.

The tremendous courage of the Vietnamese people is an inspiration to all who believe that good will triumph over evil...

It seems cowardly, but I will not sign this, for obvious reasons, there are too many issues involved, as you well know.

One writer who did sign his name makes clear the concern of those who did not:

Just a note of encouragement to you. Please keep sticking up for your principles. The world needs more young people like yourself. I am fully behind you. And should Secret or Intelligence Service open and read any mail addressed to you, I could not care less and invite them to jump into our beautiful Lake Burley Griffin. God Bless You, sincerely...

Writers were of all ages. This long extract is from a Victorian high school student taking a break from chemistry homework:

...I feel I must interrupt my work to extend a few words of congratulations and admiration towards you and your followers for the brave and sincere stand which you have made.

Me, I am merely a leaving science student in a reputable victorian high school; but last year I had the revealing pleasure

of writing two well filled exercise books on Vietnam and its political history. In my investigations I discovered many factors, which shattered my previous conviction and caused a general upheaval both at school with my less informed teachers and at home with rather biased parents...

I have found that even Encyclopaedia Britannica could not lie on various aspects of the Vietnam war, and when attempting to do so contradicted itself outrageously.

I am sorry that I cannot follow your example, and declare my name to you or the public, as by doing so I could well cause an abrupt end to any future plans I have as to becoming a doctor...

It is about time a groups such as yours got together and denounced our policy for what it really is...Give people a booklet which will leave *no* question in their minds as to our involvement in the war. Give facts, and point out emphatically the misconception and impossibility of an invasion from the communists "in their sweep south"...

I realise the work involved in such a pamphlet, but once completed and if done properly, you will achieve a surprising amount of success. I base this prediction on my arguments with both adults or adolescents. They *do not know* the facts, they confuse them. Every question and statement they make in their defence has an easy straightforward counter attacking fact...

Repeating my admiration and congratulations. You are *not* traitors, but true 'Aussies,' doing what is best for our country...I am ashamed at not signing this letter, but you need *some* supporting letter, amongst the hundreds which will condemn you...

Many who wrote clearly did so in the belief that they would be in the minority. For example, one woman writes:

I saw the article about you in an old Herald we had, and

decided this might make a change from the abusive letters you've been having.

Thank goodness that somebody today has the guts to stick to their opinion in the face of strong opposition. This is probably the biggest row about university activities there has been.

"An elderly woman, who is grateful," sent one dollar:

In case it may interest you, there are many people who think you are behaving in a very thoughtful fashion, in your effort to show the NLF as a patriotic and proper body in Viet Nam...

I have lived through two world wars, indoctrinated to believe the first one was to save the world from further wars. Apparently the 'powers that be' want this sort of indoctrination to continue, and so become upset when 'ratbags' start thinking for themselves...

Another letter was signed in this way:

\$100 enclosed to congratulate you, wish you well and to promise you every support in your inspiring campaign for the people of Vietnam in their mighty struggle against US imperialism. We know you will not retreat an inch. With best wishes for success in your struggle, A. Wellwisher.

Supporters came from a variety of political backgrounds:

I am and have since the Vietnam issue began, been of the same opinion, regarding aid to Women and children of the NLF. Many people have classified me as a 'ratbag' and 'traitor' because of my outlook on this undeclared war also I have been on many occasions called a Communist. I am a supporter of the ALP.

Another writer suffered similar labelling, as he ended his letter by saying:

For the record I would like to say that I am not a Communist



and, man, am I ever sick of prefacing every observation I make in this country with that line.

One father wrote a two-page letter expressing his thoughts about Vietnam, on which a Club member has noted that a reply was sent to him which stimulated him to write a further four page letter. It ended poignantly:

PPS: Since my political awakening a few years ago my relations and fine-weather-friends have deserted me in droves—I'm the "black-sheep"—even my wife just puts-up-with my political thinking—I am really in "enemy" territory—an outcast.

Another writer had been a 1914 Volunteer in the Royal Sussex Regiment and sent the Club a copy of a letter he sent to the Herald, which said, in part:

...I endorse the youths of the MULC, although they are a minority group, I do not consider them to be wooly headed fools or unpatriotic, but sensible youths who have given the matter serious thought, and are voicing with conviction, compassion and fair play, in the spirit of true democracy. It has been proved beyond doubt, that the majority are not always right, for I recall the persecution of Gallileo years years ago, when he said the earth was round and not flat...

If anyone from the MULC cares to call on me, I'll donate to their cause.

A female member of the Communist Party told this story:

In 1946 or 1947 I was walking up Elizabeth St. when a chap I didn't recognise called out to me. "[her name]!" he shouted. When I came up he said "You don't recognise me. I used to be in the MUR [Melbourne University Rifles]. I was opposed to you blokes then. I'll never oppose you again. But I've been through the war. I've seen how people really live. I know what war is like. Mind I don't support communism. But I'll never oppose you. That's all!"...Perhaps some of those who would have liked to duck you in the pond will be expressing similar sentiments to you.

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