

## Comrades and Apostles

### CHAPTER ONE

#### MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY

The wartime generation of students who came to the University of Melbourne in 1945 and 1946 differed from any who had gone before them. They were the first generation who had to face life without either a god or a mother country. All had memories of the Great Depression that had threatened to overthrow the western world order, and had in fact precipitated a terrible war in which they had all been involved. Those who had been in the services had had their lives interrupted, and were now trying to pick up their education in a world that had changed as much as they had. Those who had come straight from school had finished their school years with the shadow of war hanging over them, and now became students alongside adults whose experience gave them a mythic status and distance. All had known an Australian nation faced for the first time with a real threat of foreign invasion and occupation. The emergence of the United Nations as a tangible expression of hopes of peace was clouded by the divisions between the great powers and the smaller nations over whether the new organisation would be a true world authority or, like the League of Nations, a mere forum for debate. The compromise that gave the great powers the rights of veto over all effective decisions gave the new body a measure of authority at the expense of ultimate power. Rather than a body to enforce peace, it became an arena where conflicts could be staged at a less destructive level than war. At the same time, the lines of conflict were changing. As the United States and Soviet Russia had emerged as the world's major powers, the British Empire was dissolving into the vagueness of the British Commonwealth of Nations. While some Australian nationalists saw this as offering an alternative to the great power conflict, others saw it simply as an accessory to the efforts of the United States to block the emergence of a new world order based on socialism and national independence. Behind these divergent views lay the consciousness, still to emerge fully, of the horrors of Nazism and the terror of the atom bomb. The victorious Japanese thrust to the south had destroyed the illusion of safety within the British Empire, depression and the war had been the final blow to the certainties of religion and western civilisation. For students, the choice seemed to be between Rome, Moscow, Jerusalem and the desert. They could choose the disciplined certainties of the Catholic Church or the Communist Party, take the quieter ways of Christian or Fabian socialism or liberal meliorism, or retreat from the world into the barren wastes of religious fundamentalism. The Labor Club joined revolutionaries and radicals, the Student Christian Movement developed a social gospel, the Liberal Club attempted to combine conservative social principles with liberal concepts of individual freedom, and the Newman Society provided both a Catholic presence in the university and a place for spiritual formation. Yet, in the way of student politics, these ultimate issues were as often expressed through pragmatic debates about fees, accommodation and the quality of the cafeteria as through the philosophic or ideological passion that sustained the combatants.

The University of Melbourne in 1945 was an institution on the brink of change. Still, as it was to be for another two decades, the sole university in the state, and still educating a tiny proportion of the population, it was already taking the first reluctant steps to seeing its functions as a combination of research, vocational training and general education, rather than as a finishing school for a social elite. The division between old and new ran east to west through the middle of its grounds along Tin Alley, still fenced with the corrugated iron sheeting that gave it its name. To its north were the sports ovals, and around the perimeter beyond them the residential colleges constituted a world apart. Trinity, the oldest, was of course Anglican; as was its adjunct, Janet Clarke Hall, which provided separate residential facilities for women students. Ormond, where Ian Turner lived for a brief time when he first came to the university before the war, was Presbyterian, and Queens Methodist. These were all nineteenth or early twentieth century, vaguely Gothic stone and brick buildings that proclaimed their institutional confidence. The newest of the men's colleges, Newman, maintained through its name a tradition of liberal Catholicism, and through its architecture, the product of Walter Burley Griffin, a confidence in the modern world and its place in it. However, the one significant departure from Griffin's design, the chapel, showed a failure of this confidence. Rather than balancing the refectory, as he had intended, the chapel was given a bleak neo-Gothic design that overbalances the landscape-hugging outline of the rest. Inside, however, it provides a space of light and shade that offers a restrained background to the ceremonial centre of the College life. Women's College, on the far side of College Crescent, offered a different view of the future. Built in utilitarian brick, it provided an independent base for women students and in particular a haven for girls fresh from the country high schools that were about to enter a flourishing period of expansion. Yet as a whole the colleges still represented a past of privileged security that was about to be invaded by the rough democracy that had survived the war and was now determined to make a place in a brave new world of peace and opportunity.

Many of the recently discharged servicemen and women who constituted the new wave of students found their way into the colleges, where they disrupted desiccated rituals and came together in groups to discuss

and enlarge the ideas animating the wider university community, and planned campaigns to take control of the institutions of public debate and action. But the real field of contest was south of Tin Alley, in the lecture theatres and tutorial rooms, and in the cafeteria, theatre, library, music rooms and meeting rooms of the Union Building. This was the university proper, still adorned with professorial residences and gracious lawns that were soon marked with temporary huts that signified the pressures of increased numbers and served as reminders of dreary hours of military instruction. At least one professor still drove to work by horse and buggy from his nearby suburban residence, and beer was brought to the student pubs in wooden barrels on horse-drawn brewery wagons. Parking in the grounds was available to anyone who possessed a car. The lake had disappeared beneath the monstrous architectural marriage of the Commerce Building, but the older buildings that remained had seen the passions of a famous debate on the Spanish Civil War that had determined the allegiances of a generation, and the later discordance during the referendum campaign when university students supported their colleagues at Melbourne Teachers College who had been refused the opportunity to hear Ted Hill put the case for the affirmative. Now they were to become the scene for even more passionate struggles.

The university in 1945 was still a small, comfortable community, although it was on the brink of the postwar expansion and was already experiencing overcrowding. Any student who had passed Leaving Honours, which could be taken in year 11, could matriculate, and total enrolments had grown by 882 over two years to reach a total of 3814 in May, 1945. Half of these were studying part-time, and 446 were external students. Only 150 ex-servicemen entered the university in this year, but there were a small number from previous years, and a further 2000 men and women still enrolled in the forces were expected to enter the university in the following years. Medicine and Dentistry were among the “reserved courses”, which meant that their students were not otherwise subject to manpower control. Of the six or seven hundred graduates each year, one fifth came from Medicine or Dentistry. Employment prospects for the others were promising, with something like a thousand enquiries from employers for every 500 graduates seeking jobs. However, demand varied across subjects, so that although 52 science and technology graduates could choose between 318 positions, there were only 171 positions available for arts graduates. Of these, 115 were in teaching, which offered such poor pay and conditions that the secretary of the Appointments Boards warned that it should be considered only by those who, “in addition to an earnest desire to undertake work of prime national importance, possess some independent means.”<sup>1</sup>

Memories of this university experience vary. For Vincent Buckley, whose short time in the air force had been an episode that “interrupted my adolescence, made me in a mild way a cripple, and finished my football,” university was a mixture of hope and boredom.<sup>2</sup> For Ian Turner and Stephen Murray-Smith, freed from army routine, it was an opportunity to get on with the task of reforming the world while they completed the university courses they had started before enlistment. Murray-Smith had spent time behind the lines as a commando in New Guinea and in the Signals Corps at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne, and had contracted a deep suspicion of army leadership, planning and bureaucracy. He returned to the university as a reformist with the ambition of becoming an historian. For a brief time he was a member of the Liberal Party, which, his father persuaded him, represented a new beginning in Australian politics. Then he met Geoff Serle, whom he had already known in New Guinea, and who explained that the Liberal Party was nothing more than the old UAP reborn, and that the ALP was the party of the future.<sup>3</sup> Turner, who, apart from a brief interlude in New Guinea, had spent his time as a driver and later in the Army Education Service, came back as a revolutionary and already a member of the Communist Party.<sup>4</sup> When Murray-Smith explained that he had joined the Labor Party in order to become a member of Cabinet and change Australia, not necessarily in that order, Turner told him that revolution was imminent, and only by joining the Communist Party could he fulfil his ambitions. Thus

<sup>1</sup> H.F. Downes, Secretary, Appointments Board, writing in *Shop*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1945, citing enrolment figures from the *University Gazette*, May, 1945, and figures for employment enquiries directed to his own office. Figures for ex-service enrolment taken from Geoff Serle, ‘Soldier Students and the Shop’, *Shop*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Vincent Buckley, *Cutting Green Hay*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1983, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Murray-Smith, War Diaries, AWM, Canberra, AWM67 3/283, Part 1, the diary, covers period from his enlistment in 29 Dec 1941 to 4 April 1943; Part 2, Interview with Sgt. S. Murray-Smith, formerly 2/5 Independent Company, later LHQ Ciphers, by unnamed representative from HQ, Military History Section, AIF, Melbourne, 9/9/44 and 15/9/44. The interviewer notes that “In view of MURRAY-SMITH’S excellent diary, which is being copied in full, no effort was made to obtain a complete account of events described in the diary.” He goes on to comment that “Murray-Smith is very talkative, but is a very good type of young man. He had intended (he says) to specialise in history after graduation and started his diary as an exercise in contemporary history ...” See also Geoff Serle, ‘A Tribute to the Editor’, *Overland* 50-51, 1972, pp. 3-4. His reasons for joining each party came from Murray-Smith during conversations over many years.

<sup>4</sup> Ian Turner, ‘My Long March’, in *Room for Manoeuvre*, edited by Leonie Sandercock and Stephen Murray-Smith, Drummond, Richmond, Vic., 1982, pp. 111-19.

Murray-Smith became probably the only Australian ever to have been successively a convinced member of the Liberal, Labor and Communist Parties within the space of twelve months. Buckley, on the other hand, remained a supporter of the Labor Party but spent his energy in various forms of Catholic action, particularly the lay apostolate, which aimed to make as serious a revolution in Australia as did the Communists. For the apostles, unlike the comrades, revolution began within.

The centre of intellectual energy in the university at this time was in the History Department, headed by Professor Max Crawford. Crawford introduced his students to the idea that history could be a science, a way of making sense of diverse data by revealing the forces underlying historical change. His deputy, Katherine Fitzpatrick was a challenging and inspiring lecturer. Manning Clark was also in the Department, although he was shortly seconded to assist Professor Macmahon Ball in setting up the Department of Political Science. Clark is remembered by some of his students as the lecturer who first made Australian history come alive as a subject worthy of serious study, but by more as a tutor who led them to understand their own relation to history. Although the other departments could not match this trio for intellectual depth, they had their individual stars. In Politics, Macmahon Ball was admired for his experience and his range of knowledge. In English, Ian Maxwell and Keith Macartney were consummate performers, enthusing their students for the classic texts of English and Scottish literature, but failing to engage their minds in the importance of the subject. In philosophy, George Paul brought the ideas of Wittgenstein from Cambridge to his students and to the wider community of the university that he involved through the Freethought Society. This was one of those societies, central to the life of the campus, that made real the ideal of a university by taking ideas out of the classroom and making of them the substance of public debate.

These ideas, and the general ferment about the kind of society Australians wished to develop after the war, led to intense political activity. Although the Labour Club, formed in 1925, was the strongest political club on campus, and the one most recalled in what Buckley calls the “nostalgic myth ... that this university was a hotbed of purposive, probing constructive intelligence”, from 1943 it had an active rival in the Conservative Club. This club boasted ancestry from “numerous” clubs that had existed earlier, “generally with short and violent careers.” This Club, which later became the Liberal Club, attracted many ex-servicemen, and many of its members from these years many later went on to public careers. They included future judges Alex Southwell and A.E. Woodward, Alan Hunt, who was to hold several ministries in Victorian governments, and the future senators Ivor Greenwood and Allan Missen. Missen was variously described as sporting a fine chartreuse coat with exhibitions in each pocket, and as the hub of the club. Bruce Muirden, later to establish the short-lived literary journal Austrovert and still later become press secretary to a reforming Minister for Education in the South Australian Labor government led by Don Dunstan, was one of the few to go on to a public career as a writer.

The Club’s well-printed tabloid-style newsletter, Challenge, led its first issue, in 1944, with the sensational headline “Reds Vicious Campaign to Smash Conservatives” and the dramatic claim that from its birth the club had suffered from “internal sabotage and violent external attacks.”<sup>5</sup> ‘Auntie Maud’s Passing Parade’ qualified this tone with advice to the love-lorn, the libidinous and the uxorious, and a verse summary of the current political leadership:

When Mr. Menzies makes his speeches  
I think of grouse and candied peaches;  
When Mr. Curtin warns the nation  
I think of crumbs and cold collation;  
I think of nothing at all and sadden  
When I think of Arthur Fadden:  
And when I hear from Mr. Forde  
I go to sleep and praise the Lord.

At the same time, a welcome to “Freshers” and Freshettes” proclaimed a new awakening in the Shop, as the university was universally known by its students.

Once it was a giddy-go-round as merry as you chose to make it. It stood for something then. It was a mannequin parade for the lassies, and it meant pink gin for the lads. The Shop stood for something then.

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<sup>5</sup> Challenge, newsletter of the Conservative Club, no. 1, 1944. Further citations from later issues of this journal are identified in the text by issue number and year. Citations of the Labor Club journal, Shop, are identified by volume number, issue number and year. While noting that in 1948 two issues of volume II, no. 3, appeared. Volume and issue numbering was inconsistent, and neither journal carried listed the year of publication, which has been identified from internal evidence.

It stands for something now. Suppressed and downtrodden, University tradition has fought a losing battle. The quota and the canning factory rules with an iron hand.

The symbols of the promised renewal were “the return of the *balle maske*” and a revue. These offered two of the constants of student life, carnival and satire, while the club history offered the third: paranoia. The seed of this element appeared in an article on “Adolescent Communist Psychology” that claimed that Communism was no more than “an outlet of savage expression for the inferiority complex of the “have nots”, arguing with some prescience that any dictatorship of the proletariat would eventually “soon revert to dictatorship in the Fascist sense of the word.” An essay by Leon Freedman of the Commerce School, which continued through three issues, claimed that the keynote of “Progressive Capitalism” was compromise, and that it must be based on a system of education that prepared people both for the workplace and for responsible citizenship, on control of banking and on opposition to monopoly.

The Labor Club had long published a roneoed journal, most recently entitled Shop, but it was not until 1945 that this appeared in printed form, together with an announcement that it was to be a magazine rather than a newspaper. This issue (vol. 1, no. 1), edited by Amirah Gust, Jeanette Noye and Miriam Brilliant, was more sober than its Conservative Club counterpart, and lacked the epigrammatic and often sexist barbs and the social chatter that Challenge employed to lighten its political content. Its densest article was an essay by Arthur Burns, ‘Capitalism Accuses Itself’, replied to claims that socialism was ‘bureaucratic, regimenting, destructive of personal freedom and leading to an all-powerful totalitarian state’ by arguing that regimentation was itself an inevitable product of capitalism. Inevitably, Challenge responded with a cheap sneer at one of Burns’ more opaque remarks, but made no attempt to refute the article on its own terms. Burns starts from the liberal position that the world situation demands an acceptance of both total freedom and individual responsibility, but argues that this can be achieved only through socialism or communism, which embody these in “the only non-contradictory form possible—community.” By contrast, Nazism is a regression to the primitive “blood-and-soil” paganism that the Hebrews broke away from in the Euphrates valley 4000 years ago. Anticipating Erich Fromm, he argues that capitalism, based on a fear of the individual freedom that is now made possible through industrialism, generates the regimentation it ostensibly opposes. This argument, incorporating insights from history, theology and psychology, represents one aspect of the left’s approach to politics, as opposed to the individualistic and legalistic rhetoric of the right. The other, represented by the article that leads the issue, Geoff Serle’s “Soldier Students and the Shop”, is perhaps more characteristic. Serle rejects the fears that ex-servicemen are likely to be reactionary, believing it “their duty to introduce discipline into the community, along the lines of certain reactionary soldiers’ bodies we all know about.” Rather, he appeals to the memories of those who had come to “thoroughly detest discipline and the Army and all it stands for,” but who bring with them the “spirit of mateship, which was often the only thing which made army life tolerable.” This provides the basis of his call to all students to work together both to improve the lot of ex-service students but also to improve standards of learning, to avoid sectionalism, and to bring the spirit of solidarity into a capitalist society. This call is taken up by writers in this and later issues who look at general issues like the international treatment of refugees, the potential of a renewed movement of communal arts, and the possibilities of national health care, as well as at such issues of immediate moment as the attempts of the Commonwealth to control the banks, the appalling conditions of state education, the control of news media, or the composition and authority of the university council. There is also, naturally, polemic against the Liberal Club and the Liberal Party, and explanations of what the Labor Club stands for as a United Left Front.

Serle wrote that the Labor Club included members of the Communist Party, Labor Party and Christian Commonwealth Movement, and welcomed Catholics “if they honestly feel they can make a reconciliation between the principles of Socialism and the principles of Roman Catholicism”. He declared that the club offered “an open forum for reformist and revolutionary, Fabian and anarcho-syndicalist, Christian, atheist and Jew, Marx-man or Laski-disciple, all in a Popular Left Front, united to change the present structure of Society.” (1/4, 45) He distinguished the Labor Club from the Liberal Club, acknowledging that the two could work together on such issues as educational reform, but arguing that the differences between the two were not merely intellectual: “The difference basically is an ethical one about the functioning of Society ... most Liberal Club members have not thought out their ethical position, but have accepted it as synonymous with defending the status quo.” This was only partly fair, as members of both clubs started from the same position that the evils of poverty, unemployment and war must be eradicated. The difference was rather that Liberals believed that this end could be achieved largely through individual effort and goodwill, with the state merely making the rules and curbing excess, whereas socialists of every kind believed that the whole structure of society needed drastic change. The Liberals believed that where conflict occurred, typically in the form of strikes and lockouts, it was caused by people pursuing special interests or subversive agendas, and should be solved by co-operation in the name of the good of all, or, if this appeal failed, by legal process backed by criminal sanctions. All parts of the left, on the other hand, saw industrial conflict as a product of the unequal distribution of wealth and power in an unjust

society, and as an opportunity to remedy these injustices through collective action. These opposing views did not defined each other only in the sense that each saw the other as the enemy of its values. For the Liberals, organised labour represented a threat to the long tradition of British freedom that could finally realise its potential in Australia. For the left, this tradition was itself the source of the repression that denied its proclaimed ideal of liberty. precisely because of its commitment to wholesale structural change, and because of its need to reconcile the opposition between liberty and equality, it was on the left that the conflicts hidden within its ideology first became visible. Yet, as Serle's remarks about Catholics remind us, beyond both these beliefs there was another tradition which resolved the conflict between liberty and equality by an appeal to a higher order of justice.<sup>6</sup> This tradition also was to become involved with the conflicts on the left.

No such conflict troubled the right, who believed that liberty would bring about a prosperity that would remedy all injustices without need to struggle over the distribution of its fruits. The journal Challenge, still published by the Conservative Club, welcomed students in 1945 with a manifesto of this belief in individual liberty, opposition to "Fascism, Socialism and COMMUNISM", support for "private industry" as the "best safeguard of economic PROGRESS", employment preference for ex-servicemen, and progressive changes in education. Later this year, the club welcomed the establishment of the Liberal Party, and at its June conference changed its name to the Liberal Club (4/45). It now gave a fuller statement of its objectives, including presenting the case for liberalism, opposing Fascism, Communism and Socialism, promoting individualism, initiative and independence, developing a society based on free and voluntary co-operation, reforming education, providing social services on a contributory basis and securing peace through the strengthening of the British Commonwealth within a framework of international order. There were however limits to its acceptance of the individual. In a policy statement later in the year, the club called for increased immigration on both moral and security grounds, but opposed any relaxation of the White Australia Policy, at least until "the public is educated far more fully than today in principles of brotherhood." (7/45) Although it expressed a desire for "friendship and co-operation with all aliens in Australia", the club considered that their communities constituted a "potential minority problem" and declared that "they must be assimilated." Yet in 1945 the Club condemned the Education Department for banning Ted Laurie from presenting to a meeting of Teachers' College students the Communist Party's views on the forthcoming referendum (2/45), and the following year it attacked the RSL for banning Communists from membership (13/46).

Through its journal, the club condemned fascism and communism, criticising the Labor government for moving in the direction of the latter, and campaigned for a No vote in the 1944 powers referendum (1/3, 44). In 1946 it supported the referendum proposals to give the Commonwealth power over social services and marketing, but opposed extending its powers over employment (12/46). Alan Missen compared the Labor government's policies of national development with "National Socialism" (2/45), and a note in the following issue explicitly compared Labor policy to Nazism, arguing that an affirmative vote in the powers referendum would lead Australia towards a totalitarian state. Editorially, it condemned social security because it could be obtained only in through the planned economy, which was an assault on freedom (5/45). Needless to say, it opposed government control of the Commonwealth Bank and nationalisation of the airlines, which it described respectively as "Safecracking" and "skyway robbery". Yet there were inconsistencies. The club at times supported the use of the Commonwealth Bank to extend credit and provide full employment, and it advocated an affirmative vote for the referendum proposals to give the Commonwealth power over social services and orderly marketing. (12/45)

In general, it opposed the state to the people, equating government action with bureaucracy and bureaucracy with the stifling of the individual. Even imaginative acts of government drew its ire. A reviewer described the government's initiative in publishing the Australian Pocket Library, which had made Australian books available to a wide audience in cheap format, as "typical of government sponsorship" in omitting the first rate and representing even the writers it did publish by inferior work.<sup>7</sup> The example cited was Leonard Mann's fine novel of the Great War, Flesh in Armour, which the reviewer grudgingly admitted was convincing, but "subjugated to a pale socialistic philosophy" (6/45) Yet the club also wanted the opportunities that could only be prompted by collective organisation and provided by government. It supported a national union of students, and called for better pay for teachers, free admission to universities and tax-free subsidies for all students, and support for the national union of students (7/45).

Although the club welcomed the formation of the new Liberal Party (1/45), which it saw as breaking with the old conservatism, and even changed its own name in sympathy (3/45), it emphasised its independence

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<sup>6</sup> In an interview, Serle admitted to his embarrassment at having been a party during his student days to excluding Max Charlesworth from the Labor Club.

<sup>7</sup> The government made an allocation of paper available to publish books selected by Advisory Board of the Commonwealth Literary Fund selected books for publication.

from all political parties. Nevertheless, contributors to The Challenge often blurred this distinction in articles that refer to “the Liberal”, or “the Liberal Movement” in the course of spelling out the philosophy that binds them. The club, through its journal, took liberalism seriously, emphasising the obligations as well as the rights of the citizen in a liberal society. (3/45, 9/46) ‘Democritus’, in an issue directed at freshers, explained that the Liberal “realises he does not owe an obligation to the present and the future only, but that to the past he owes all that he has.” This, he continued, involved loyalty to Australia and the British Commonwealth, support for democracy and opposition to bureaucracy. An article by the editor called on students to unite in support of the United Nations: “We must think internationally and be damned to war and insecurity. We must back UNO and smash isolationism and racial prejudice.” Resolutions carried at the club conference included support for the United Nations and for sharing all results of atomic research with Russia (10/46) This was not so different from the Labour Club support for the development of peaceful applications of atomic energy under international control (2/4, 47).

An article subtitled ‘The Basis and Working of Liberal Policy proves to be an exposition of Club rather than Party policy. (9/46) It calls for proportional representation, full employment, economic planning, control or dissolution of capital or labour monopolies, increased immigration and the maintenance of the White Australia Policy “on economic, social but not racial grounds” (9/46) However, practical examples of these general principles proved elusive. A book review of Salvador de Madariaga’s Victors, Beware welcomed its advice for creating an efficient world authority, but singled out for particular praise the chapter on equality, which argued that “liberty and inequality enrich each other and foster each other as well.” Here, as Isaiah Berlin recognised, lay the dilemma of Liberals, and of liberalism. They appealed to the integrity of the individual, but cultivated the inequality of individuals. Yet this is the only place where the problem is identified, let alone discussed.<sup>8</sup> F.A. Hayek’s The Road to Serfdom was influential, but so was David A. Liellenthal’s T.V.A., a tribute to the results of state planning and action under President F.D. Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal’.<sup>9</sup> In a review of the latter, Missen identifies the arguments against national planning as an interference with freedom, but advocates planning for freedom through such projects as a projected Murray Valley Authority (1/45). In a review of Hayek (10/46), Bruce Muirden followed Missen (2/45) in warning that democratic socialism is a contradiction, and that socialist planning leads to the same condition as Nazism. The first issue of the following year (15/47) started with a declaration that liberalism in Australia is concerned with finding a way between business and union power, keeping an open mind and selecting the best ideas from both left and right. But the only monopolies attacked were nationalised industries and trade unions. In 1947, Senator J.W. Leckie went so far as to declare in an address to the club that strikes robbed the people of their rightful standard of comfort, that strikers were therefore as much robbers as those who steal goods, and that they should be penalised the same way and strikes and lock-outs be made illegal. Like most writers in the journal, however, he supported the Arbitration system as a way of bring law and order into the field of industrial relations. Through the framework of the law, together with ensuring equality of opportunity by education, they hoped to resolve the conflicts of an otherwise unequal society.

The main venom of the newsletter was reserved for communism, and for Labour Club, which it saw as the vanguard of the red menace. With its emphasis on the need for co-operation rather than conflict, it saw unions as an unfortunate necessity, but drew the usual conservative distinction between unionists and their leaders. The “evil of today is the restrictions placed on union members by Trade Union officials,” and by the strikes and go-slow policies that constitute a “Reign of Terror against workers.” This, of course, was the fault of “the Communist and the paid agitator.” (11/46) Similarly, the success of the Labor Club in taking control of the Arts Association had been greeted with the headline “Reds Thrive on Apathy: Largest Faculty in Red Grip” (3/45). According to the report, this was an example of “the subtle seeping of Communism within ... the Arts Association”, which they had seized “by means of dubious legality” and used as a “virtual sub-committee of the [the] Labour Club.” Geoffrey Serle was among those identified as responsible for this outcome. They also noted that membership of the Liberal Club was only 130 to Labor’s 200, and that they drew only 30 participants to their conference, compared to over 100 at the Labor Club conference (12/46).<sup>10</sup> But as the 1946 federal election

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah Berlin, Four Essays on Liberty, OUP, Oxford, 1969, particularly pp. xlv-xlvii, xlix-l, liii-lv, and 118-72.

<sup>9</sup> Both books are listed in the contents of the Club Library, Challenge, 13/47)

<sup>10</sup> An ASIO report on the 1948 Labor Club Conference at Camp Eureka, Warburton, notes club membership as 360, of whom 250 were said to be politically active, between 40 and 80 members of the CPA, and between 60 and 80 sympathisers. It further noted that “ex-service members comprise approximately 100, half of whom are either C.P. supporters or lend support to that sect.” The report notes reports from Club delegates showed that Labor Clubs pursued a “firm, active policy” only in Sydney, Melbourne and Wellington, NZ; that Murray-Smith advocated a “united front of leftist bodies to meet the approaching capitalist crisis, and that Kurt Merz dismissed an Oslo Conference of Christian Youth “as relatively useless because of the members’ habit of praying when they should be taking action to achieve certain ends.” Australian Archives, V/27517. Held in Amirah Gust file, University of Melbourne Archives.

drew nearer, the newsletter gave more of its attention to national and philosophical issues. Issue 14, the last for that year was devoted entirely to a Liberal party manifesto.

In 1947 the invitation to Freshers started not with an affirmation of freedom but with a declaration of opposition to Communism, Conservatism, Regimentation and Reaction. A comment on the same page defends F.L. Edmunds, a notorious anti-Communist demagogue, the first speaker of the year, who had attacked Max Crawford as a Communist, and later organised a public meeting in the Melbourne Town Hall on the theme of "Red Dope in Education." Another article, 'It Is Happening Here', by Margaret Anderson, identifies the Communist Party's success in undermining the armed forces, taking control of the trade unions, weakening the British Empire and infiltrate universities, as part of its plan for world domination. Although the writer suspects that Communists constitute only a minority of the membership of the Labor Club, she points out that they dominate it to such an extent that at the last Freshers' Welcome they were able to call on everybody to sing 'The Internationale'<sup>11</sup>. Yet the Club's liberalism was not dead. It supported a general meeting of students called to consider the Edmunds affair, and the next issue of Challenge contained articles by the editor on practical liberalism, Bruce Muirden on the British Liberal Party, by Alan Missen on liberalism as an answer to despair, and even by Noel Ebbels defending socialism. Muirden also praised Kylie Tennant's Ride on, Stranger for revealing the tricks practised by the left, and Peter Isaacson provided an analysis and condemnation of anti-Semitism. Only an article by Delius Johnson, "Reflections on a Revolution", maintained the truly crusading spirit. But here, alas, the record ends.

Membership of the Liberal Club cost a mere two shillings, and Challenge was free. The Labour Club required more dedication - membership was three shillings, and its journal, Shop, was sold for threepence, at a time when beer was sixpence a glass.<sup>(2/1)</sup> The Labor Club dated back to at least 1925, and an earlier journal, Proletariat, had been established in 1932.<sup>12</sup> In the immediate postwar years, the Club gathered together the left, including roughly equal numbers of Communist and Labor members and supporters. However, the Communist Party was able to exercise a large measure of control through its numbers on the executive, who voted in accordance with prior decisions made by the University Branch of the Party.<sup>13</sup> This led to reaction within the Labor Club, where David Bennett and others formed a Socialist Study Group to further socialism outside Party control and in the university generally. An attempt to carry a vote of no confidence in Ian Turner as Secretary of the SRC was defeated in April 1946, when 1200 students turned up to consider it, but a similar vote was carried in October 1947. A Centre Group was launched by Lloyd Buley to counter the activity of minority groups on both the left and right that constituted a threat to the "Australian way of life." The professed aims of the group were to "maintain constitutional government in Australia" and to combat fascism, communism and antisemitism. The Labor Club identified it as just another organisation using the banner of anti-communism as a cover for reactionary politics, and cited two of its first speakers, in evidence. Stan Keon, MLA, demonstrated his hatred of Communism, was followed by Wilfred Kent Hughes MLA, famous for his prewar articles on "Why I Have Become a Fascist". According to Shop, Dinny Lovegrove, organising secretary of the Victorian ALP and "infamous for his red-baiting", was prevented from addressing the group until his party had investigated it (3/2, 48). The Liberals' Alan Missen also had doubts about this grouping, and the Labor Club succeeded in getting a mole, Owen Graber elected to its committee.<sup>14</sup> He was apparently soon identified, and is singled out for attack in a satire on the Centre in Challenge (16/97). The burden of the satire is that, in the generally absurd world of student politics, the Centre is merely frivolous.

The differences between the clubs were as much of attitudes as of politics and there were overlaps in their membership. David Packer, who wrote in the first issue of Challenge on the need for some form of

<sup>11</sup> 'The Internationale', incidentally, was composed by an Irishman in the nineteenth century.

<sup>12</sup> Shop, vol. 3, no. 1. [1948] claims the Labor Club was founded in 1925, although a reminiscent note from Brian Fitzpatrick in vol. 1, no. 6, 1954, suggests that it was established in 1925. The Melbourne University Labour Club Minute Book, 1931 - 1937, notes that the Professorial Board had rejected the proposed names of 'Hammer and Sickle' and 'Torch', but approved "Proletariat". Speakers recorded in the Minutes include Guido Baracchi, Jean Devanney, Maurice Blackburn, Ralph Gibson, Geoffrey Sawyer, Alan Nicholls, George Patton (described as a "Christian socialist") Charles Silver, Jack Blake, Judah Waten, Brian Fitzpatrick (on behalf of Radical Club), Len Fox. Minutes of a joint meeting with CAW refer to organised interruptions of meetings and planned and actual ducking of Labor Club officials in the university lake. May Day meeting, 1935, addressed by Tony Riddell on subject of 'Culture and May Day'. "Capitalism restricts culture of intellectuals through censorship, concentration on individualism - attacks decadence of Proust and TS Eliot, cubism, etc. "Why should intellectuals be interested in May Day? - Because on this day they can unite with the working class, in whose hands lies the power to abolish the system which restricts culture."

<sup>13</sup> In 1946, six of eleven members of the Executive can be identified as probable CP members, five as ALP members or supporters. See Amirah Gust file, note 5 above. On activities of University branch of CP, see for example Stephen Murray-Smith file, Australian Archives, A61119/2, Item 468, file 68, vol. 1, 19/3/48.

<sup>14</sup> Notes in Amirah Gust file, loc.cit.

socialism to provide a framework for competition, but distinguished this from the socialism that is “really gangsterism and the rule of a power-loving clique,” appears later among the members of the Socialist Study Group in the Labor Club. The clubs co-operated on ameliorative issues. As the new crowds of students were cramped in prewar buildings and wartime huts, they worked together on campaigns to improve student conditions. At a time when memories of depression and war still dominated the public mind, the clubs agreed on supporting ex-servicemen and women through study allowances and preferential employment, on the need to supply housing, reform education and encourage immigration, on full employment and the elimination of poverty, and on the need for an international organisation to prevent war.

Despite these areas of agreement, political divisions were real. In part, they rested on differences of temperament. Liberals tended to believe either believed that human nature would collectively always be the same, and would thwart state attempts at social reform, or that such reform could come about only through individuals changing their values. Consequently that the business of politics was managing the state with as little interference as possible. Labor Club members, on the other hand, believed that conditions determined human values. This belief was continuous with that expressed at a prewar Labor Club meeting, where the speaker, Quentin Gibson, accepted the propositions that fundamental aspects of human nature cannot be changed, and that it cannot be changed at will, but argued that changes do occur with changes in the environment. He applied this to socialism by proposing that when the workers form a social group “the direction of their gregarious desires will be influenced toward the formation of a socialist society.”<sup>15</sup> For ex-service and other students at this time, the memories of wartime unity had produced a similar effect, and they were determined to use the opportunity they believed they had to use the state to remake society.<sup>16</sup> These differences were apparent in the lessons club members drew from the war. While the right remembered Churchill rallying Britain as it stood alone, the left remembered the plight of the masses: prewar hunger marches, the betrayal of Spain, and the dogged resistance of our gallant Russian allies. The right, whether they called themselves conservatives or liberals, believed in the sturdy independence of the individual, and, for all their talk of co-operation, were incapable of imagining collective action or any form of collective will that was not either imposed or manipulated. In general, they equated fascism, communism, and socialism<sup>17</sup>. They believed that even a social security system was dependent on totalitarian control.(5/45) These equations followed the lead given by Robert Menzies in a speech in the Melbourne Town Hall, in which he claimed that he had recently witnessed “instance after instance of the ordinary methods of totalitarian government in Canberra”, and went on to identify government by dictatorship - communism and fascism - with the parliamentary socialism of the Labor government.(2/45) In explaining the Liberal alternative, he argued that the only obligation of government is to protect and develop the individual. Central to this protection is the authority of the law, which governments must uphold to prevent the kind of descent into anarchy that he had recently witnessed in Australia, where, despite “the most liberal and flexible system of industrial laws in the world ...there has been the spectacle of masses of men treating the law with contempt”, and remaining unpunished by a “feeble, invertebrate government.” This is the authentic voice of the authoritarian who speaks to the “forgotten people” of his fears of the masses and of the need for control. It is the dark side of the lofty ideals of individual freedom espoused by the Liberal Club and its leaders.

Both Labor and Liberal Clubs claimed to stand for freedom, but their policies and practice represented opposing understandings of liberty. For the Liberals, liberty was what Isaiah Berlin’s termed negative liberty, a freedom from external restraints on the individual.<sup>18</sup> For Labor, it was rather a freedom to be, to be free not merely in oneself but in society.<sup>19</sup> This implies a freedom to engage in collective action and to escape the constraints imposed by the economically powerful. Members of both clubs emphasised that their beliefs were not merely a set of ideals, but a way of life. So ‘Democrat’, writing in *Challenge* (9/46), claims that “Liberalism is more than a political doctrine ... It is a philosophy of life which is evidenced in the attitude of every Liberal towards others.” This attitude includes loyalty to the Australian nation and the British Commonwealth, support for democracy, and support for “men of all races, classes and creeds,” upholding “the right whoever is in the wrong.” The liberal, we are told, opposes bureaucracy and believes in the four freedoms – freedom from want and fear, freedom of religion and of speech, but beyond these he believes in “the freedom to be an individual.” In response, an editorial in *Shop* 2/2, 1946, describing Liberal behaviour as “abstract progressivism and practical reaction,” pointed to the vacuity of the concept of “freedom to be an individual,” and argued that in

<sup>15</sup> Melbourne University Labour Club Minutes, report of public meeting, 13 May 35.

<sup>16</sup> See for example *Challenge*, 3/45; 13/46. *Shop*, 1/1, 45.

<sup>17</sup> See invitation to freshers, *Challenge*, 1/45.

<sup>18</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, p. xliii-xliv.

<sup>19</sup> Berlin identifies the ideal of positive liberty with thinkers like Erich Fromm, with his ideal of the “spontaneous, rational activity of the total, integrated personality,” p. xlii.

fact their policies were directed to the protection of privilege. In the same issue, Geoff Serle argued that “socialism ... is a way of life, with a fundamentally different ethic to that of capitalism ... socialists believe that it can not only cure many capitalist maladies, but that it will open up new possibilities of happiness.”

The Labor Club was united around the understandings of class conflict, which it believed must be resolved as a condition of justice at home and peace abroad. Liberal Club rhetoric tended to legalism or lofty philosophic idealism built around the concept, then being promoted by Robert Menzies through his new Liberal Party, of individuals struggling for freedom against a bureaucratic government and tyrannous trade unions. The underlying contradiction of this argument was identified by a correspondent in Shop who pointed out how Menzies in successive paragraphs of his The Forgotten People could claim that “There is no such thing as a class war in this country” and that “The middle class is being ground between the upper and nether millstones” of the privileged and the workers (2/2, 46). Yet, when it came to the alternative ideals of collective justice, the Labor Club could be as legalistic as the Liberals. While it supported joint action with the Student Christian Movement on such matters of common interest as independence for India and Indonesia (3/2, 48), it was suspicious of Catholics. In an attack on Catholic Action, disguised as a review of a Communist pamphlet, the author claim that there can be no Communist malpractice in trade unions because “Communists in unions submit ... to the rules of the Unions” and that, while “Communists may be executive members of unions ... the Communist Party has no connection with the Unions.” ((2/2, 46) He then attacks Catholic Action as purely an instrument of the Pope and the Catholic hierarchy, citing papal and other statements that put opposition to Communism ahead of all other objectives, but ignoring the foundational papal documents relating to social justice as well as the aims and activities of the founders of Catholic Action. In doing so, the writer fails to distinguish between Catholic ideals of social justice and the actual control of Catholic Action in Australia, and consequently misses the opportunity to establish a broader basis for social action. A later article is more careful in its discussion of Pope Leo XIII’s Rerum Novarum, but again it concentrates on differences rather than common ground. It concentrates on the limitations of the encyclical’s remarks on private property, and the nastiness of its remarks on socialism, without examining the underlying principles. The failure of the left to make these distinctions was to be of great assistance to B.A. Santamaria in enlisting the church to his own sectarian aims.<sup>20</sup> In a similar failure to come to grips with an opposing argument, a review of Hayek leaves the ground open to the Liberals by claiming that whole problem of socialist production can be resolved by using accounting techniques. (2/3, 46)

Similar differences were evident in the approaches of the clubs to postwar settlement in Europe and Asia. For the right, the imperative was to restore order and democracy or, in Asia, order and colonialism. Although they supported the United Nations, their policy stressed the role of the British Commonwealth in maintaining world peace. (5/45) They regarded the support by the waterside workers’ support of the “Free Indonesia Movement” as both a threat to Australian security and a demonstration of the treacherous manipulation of the union movement in favour of world communism. A columnist in Challenge used the words of Labor members of a Queensland parliamentary delegation to condemn the Movement as comprising uncontrolled factions led by men who had collaborated with the Japanese and others who had a “sorry record of crime, violence and spying on their countrymen,” and to dismiss “native independence” as “a policy most dangerous to Australia.”(9/46) The Labor Club saw matters differently. The first four items of its policy concerned international matters, including “the extension of wartime co-operation into the peace period through U.N.O.,” peaceful settlement of international disputes, “the replacement or rival imperialisms by economic co-operation” and the “right of all peoples to democratic self-government.” Three articles in one of Shop suggest the importance its editors gave to understanding the international environment(1/6, 45). In a discussion of Australia’s role in the United Nations, Arthur Burns analysed Australia’s dilemma as a small nation as needing peace to its north, but tied culturally to Britain and implicated in the economic battles between Britain and America. He believed Australia’s best policy was to ally itself with a socialising Britain committed to making the changes necessary to preserve peace. Others more frankly supported independence movements. An editorial article in Shop supported the Indonesian seamen who were manhandled by Dutch service police and threatened with deportation when they went on strike in Melbourne against “carrying arms for their Dutch ex-masters to use against their compatriots.” It defended Sukarno against the charges of collaboration, arguing that he was “first and foremost a fighter for Indonesian independence,” and proclaimed that the “struggle of Indonesia is a part of the world struggle, and as such it is our struggle.” A further article, by G. Karoli and Lloyd Churchward, analysed the record of Dutch rule in Indonesia, contrasting it unfavourably with British rule in India, and explained the political origins of the independence movement, its responses to the Japanese occupation and the postwar rising against the Dutch. Later, an analysis of the situation in China showed the incompetence and

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<sup>20</sup> Geoff Serle says that at this time, to his shame, he was involved in successful efforts to prevent Max Charlesworth, then beginning his career as a liberal Catholic thinker, from joining the Labor Club.

reaction of the Kuomintang government, but was less than critical in accepting the reports of unnamed observers that the Communist Party was pursuing Sun Yat-sen's goals of nationalism, democracy and the livelihood of the people rather than either communism or socialism (2/4, 47).

There were similar divisions of opinion on European affairs. In general, the Liberals distrusted the Communists and were aware of the excesses of Stalinism, although there was little sustained attempt at analysis of Communist regimes.<sup>21</sup> Its writers welcomed the results of the referendum in France, which curbed the powers of the Assembly and gave encouragement to the Christian Democrats and the right, and the defeat of the Communists in the elections in Greece. (10/45) Shop, on the other hand, condemned the actions of the British army in Greece, citing the evidence of Alex Shepherd, who had spent two years as head of the British Economic Mission there, that the combination of British military occupation and Greek and British secret police made democracy impossible (3/2, 48). It was less convincing in its welcome to the new regimes in Poland, Rumania, Yugoslavia and East Germany, and defended the Soviet trial and condemnation as saboteurs of supporters of the Polish government in exile. The Soviet was correct, it claimed, because this government was financed by the British "despite all its intrigues and efforts to destroy the unity of the United Nations." (2/1, 47) Noel Ebbels' defence of the new governments of eastern Europe almost mirrors the Liberals' legalism, relying on the reports of sympathetic observers, membership figures of the political institutions supporting them, and action taken against former landlords (2/2, 47). In 1948, Shop published an article by Helen Ginz that even more effusively welcomed the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia, claiming that it was a response to the effort of reactionary elements in the previous coalition, and to foreign interference, particularly by the Americans, who it claimed were using the Marshall Plan to build up an anti-democratic alliance of Germany, Greece and Spain. She explained the suicide of the Foreign Minister, Jan Masaryk, as the action of a mentally unstable man who "could find no place for himself in the new world." (3/2, 48)

Despite the immediate postwar enthusiasm for united action, strains soon started to appear between socialist and communist members of the Labour Club. In a development of his earlier analysis of German affairs, Noel Ebbels argued that the Social Democrats in western Europe, by rejecting the opportunity to co-operate with Communist parties, particularly in Germany, and by seeking to offer an alternative policies, were destroying working class unity in favour of tactical advantage. (2/3, 47). Although the next issue of Shop was led by Ian Turner's passionate support of republican Spain and denunciation of Franco, an article that raised memories of an earlier united front, the paper also published a swingeing attack on Communist policies in Germany and a defence of the Social Democrats (2/4, 47.) This article analysed the fraudulent nature of the fusion imposed by the German Communist Party on Social Democrats in the east, and pointed to the democrat leaders who were now again imprisoned in the concentration camps they had once shared with communists. The writer vigorously denied the right of the Communists to claim leadership of the labour movement, in Germany and by implication anywhere else, and asserted the democratic legitimacy of the Social Democrats as the party that in fact had secured the support of the working classes. It was about this time that democratic socialists in the Labor Club established a Socialist Studies Group to take the initiative away from the Party. This was formally confirmed in a notice in Shop (???), which explained that the Group had been meeting since January, 1946, and was broadly sympathetic to British Labor and to the left-wing of the Australian Labor Party. Similar conflict was emerging in this party, which at its state conference in 1946 (???) rejected by 123 to six a motion by S.M. Keon that the party use the A.L.P. Industrial Groups for the purpose of combatting Communism. Shop interpreted this editorially as evidence that "the Labor membership are not only supporting the industrial policy of the Communist Party, but are determined not to split the Labor movement to the advantage of the workers." (3/3, 47???) Significantly, it was the Communists who supported the Aborigines' strike in Port Headland in 1948, and Noel Ebbels who brought to the attention of people in the eastern states the Western Australian State Native Affairs Act that had enabled three of the strike leaders to be gaoled. The issue at stake in this strike was not merely wages or conditions, but the control of resources. Had it been successful, the history of Aboriginal affairs, and of mining in Australia, may well have been different. Like so much else at this time, progress foundered on the twin rocks of the sectarianism of the left and the greed and authoritarianism of the right.

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<sup>21</sup> One of the few examples of such analysis is Delius Johnson, 'Reflections on a Revolution', Challenge, 16/47, which analyses statements from the Communist Manifesto to Stalin as a guide to action. This approach no doubt reflects the legalistic basis of the Club's rhetoric.