

Alan Doesn't Get Arrested Again

by Ted Reithmuller

"It was the time Jimmy Beatson was going to burn his draftcard", Alan said. "It was in 1965 or 66. It wasn't the first anti-war demonstration in that period. They were getting rough, more confrontational than the sedate protests we used to have in the past. The idea was that he would run out into one of the main intersections in town and burn his draft card before the cops could prevent him. There were quite a few protesters milling around on the street corners but they were well outnumbered by police. There were heaps of uniformed officers, Special Branch Ds, even traffic cops."

"It was the corner of Queen St and Albert Street. I wasn't there I was overseas but I had heard about it since." I said I had left Australia in '63 and came back in 1967. I had left Australia because nothing seemed to happen here.

"Anyway, what with all the police, the paddy wagons and all, the public knew something was up and they contributed to the drama by trying to see what was going on. Office workers had climbed out of the windows and were standing on the roof of the shop awnings – anything for a bit of free entertainment." Alan continued, "Jimmy, who had an arm in plaster, all of a sudden raced out into the intersection and it was on. A couple of police grabbed me and started to carry me away to the paddy wagon. On the way there a respectably dressed bystander called out, 'Leave him alone!' So they dropped me on the ground and arrested the public minded citizen instead."

So you missed out again?

"Yes, but they arrested some of the others in addition to Jimmy. One of the Rooke boys ended up arrested. They broke Jimmy's arm again, I think."

"You lead a charmed life" I said. "What about the big civil liberties demo in 1967?"

"I didn't even know that it was on. I happened to be in town that day. I was at Trades Hall doing some organising for Trade Union Youth Week and I had reason to go down Roma Street way. The next thing I knew there was this big mob of protesters, mainly students, and scores of coppers. They sat down on the road – the protesters, not the police. So I felt I had to join them. The Special Branch was there in force, including Special Branch chief Leo De Lange. He pointed his finger at me and I heard him say, 'Grab him, he's behind all this.' And so I was grabbed with a lot of others and dragged off the roadway."

So you were arrested?

"No, I was just dumped down and I must have got overlooked in the melee because I just got up and walked away. But what really annoyed me was that I had been wearing a good set of clothes and they were ruined. My strides were all in strips from being dragged along the road. And one sleeve of my shirt was completely torn off. I felt embarrassed when I had to go home on the tram. When I got home Pauline said that next time I should wear my old clothes."

"The campaign for civil liberties was quite dramatic while it lasted" I said.

"Yes, I am reminded of one occasion it was decided Brian Laver and I should challenge the ban on speaking in public but, of course, as soon as we started to speak the coppers grabbed us. I was being led off by an old uniformed sergeant. When we got away from the scene of the crime a bit he said to me, 'Listen Son, I don't want to arrest you but the law is the law.' Then he gave me a push and said, 'Now piss off and get lost.'"

"So you missed out on being a martyr again" I said. "You must have had a charmed life."

"Yes, I did in some ways, but not all. It helps a lot if you know what to say and what not to say" he said.

I thought there might be another story here, so I said, "What do you mean Alan?"

"Well, I'll give you an example: Vic Slater* and I were doing a paste-up, late one night in town – Adelaide Street actually. I was doing one side and Vic was doing the other and before we knew it a cop car pulled up across the street and a copper crossed the road and accosted me. 'What do you think you're doing? That's not allowed.' he said. And I said, "well yes, but I am doing it neatly." He didn't know how to reply to that one so he just said, 'Yeah, well go on, just piss off.' So I didn't argue, I made my getaway."

So what happened to Vic? Did he get off?

"No way. You know what a great bush lawyer Vic was. He would have been busy quoting some piece of legislation or some council ordinance or other. The police are not impressed with that sort of thing and the last I saw of him that night as I made myself scarce, was poor old Vic being helped into the back of a police car."

So the message is?

"The police are not interested in matters of law."

"Yes, people should remember that" I said as I nodded my head wisely.

END

* **Victor Charles Slater** was born in Queensland in March 1944 the only child of Jim and Joyce Slater, card carrying members of the Communist Party of Australia. Vic's mother, Joyce, joined up in Great Britain. Vic too joined the party in 1962 after a stint as president of the Eureka Youth League. He stayed with the more broad left CPA when it split from the hardline Stalinists after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Vic joined the **Waterside Workers' Federation** before his 21st birthday in January 1965, one of 300 casual workers recruited to the Port of Brisbane that year. On the wharves he soon earned the nickname 'the Professor' arriving on the job each day bespectacled and carrying a briefcase heavy with reading matter on world politics and economics - a walking encyclopaedia of information.

Vic Slater was the MUA assistant national secretary in the 1998 Patricks Dispute.