

# Remembering the Brisbane Protests, 1965–72: The Civil Liberties Movement

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Beyond just my bias as a participant, I see a need to place the understanding of the innovative and distinctive character of Brisbane protests of the late 1960s and early 1970s on solid analytical foundations. These protests remain excluded from satisfying historical debate: while acknowledged as the product of the Queensland legacy of illiberality (Lunn; Whitton; Fitzgerald 1985, 1986), their connections with broader national and international social movements are largely ignored. This essay provides important details but points to broader reflections as well in its analysis of the civil liberties movement (CLM). My discussion focuses on the period 1965–75 but places the Brisbane protests historically in the general moves for liberalisation in the aftermath of World War II

Post-totalitarianism first emerged in Australia in a very subdued form, linked to Third World-oriented movements for formal decolonisation relevant to Indigenous Australians. However, it also had an agenda of human rights and peace which was closely connected to the United Nations. While Australian post-totalitarianism later included other reformist initiatives, such as ‘equal pay’, generally it was truncated and more conforming to the Cold War status quo and its conventions of cultural, political and personal behaviours. This post-totalitarian impulse is best demonstrated in the successful 1967 referendum in Australia — a symbolic rejection of colonial control, but a rejection conceived in white terms. Nevertheless, it articulated a more doctrinal liberalism than the typical Australian liberalism, which is liberalism *sans doctrines*.

With the advent of the Vietnam engagement, the protesters developed an historically parallel but radical Romantic and doctrine-driven form of post-totalitarianism. The radical version had a common emphasis on experiment, experience, commitment and the active: ‘the personal is the political’ and/or ‘revolution’ were both central catch-cries of resistance to perceived rational domination by technology, bureaucracy, conformity, market and culture. It was founded on anarchism (Bookchin) and Western Marxism; focused intellectually on Hegel (Anderson); and drew on the eclecticism of *New Left Review* and the radical feminism of Greer and Firestone. *The Dialectics of Liberation* (1971) included

many of these directions and those of the Negro and Third World spokespeople deconstructing colonialism in terms not of political economy, but racism and psychology. This discourse was extremely influential on the Brisbane protests.

The post-totalitarians and radical Romantic post-totalitarians interacted, while partly reflecting differing structural allegiances. The Communist Party was often a broker between the two, as was the Whitlam government in the rarefied atmosphere of Canberra. This was an important national historical dynamic, which in Queensland took a particular shape. Here, established working-class organisations rather than those of middle-class origins provided, almost exclusively, key orchestrations of the post-totalitarian agenda — but, more surprisingly, the work on the ground (the streets and the publicity) was the work of the radical Romantics, if with a style quite different from that of the typical post-totalitarians who, instead, looked to lobbying, traditional lines of influence, referendums and elections. The radical protesters largely shouldered the burden of both movements for a time in a very illiberal environment expressed by both political parties — dominated by right agrarian Romanticism. Without overstating Queensland exceptionalism, it is fair to say that these protestations of the need for liberalisation — not only by the dominant student groups but also Indigenous activists (proponents of radical Romantic post-totalitarianism) — provided the somewhat idiosyncratic face of local post-totalitarianism. The Protesters' ambitions were repelled for an inordinate length of time, such was the indifference to their claims for liberalisation. The liberal middle class was nowhere to be found (in public). The middle class was stagnant at a moment of historical disarray: the public and private had collapsed into private pursuits and clandestine manipulations without concern for rights.

The 1967 civil liberties march came to an abrupt end in Roma Street, Brisbane, on the periphery of the city centre and close to the central police holding prison — the watchhouse. The Queensland daily, *The Courier-Mail*, reported events. Headed offensively (yet in keeping with the local orientation to the pastoral motif) by a description of the demonstrators as a 'mob', the article — surprisingly — provided an otherwise accurate account, according to my own recollection:

The marchers completed a peaceful three-mile march. [When asked to disperse they] sat and linked arms. [M]arch organizers skirted the column urging non-violence ... Many police used restraint ... but others used throttle holds, headlocks and half-Nelsons ... dragged marchers by the hair to police wagons [and] punched, slapped and kicked [them]. (*Courier-Mail*, 9 September 1967: 2)

However, Glen Barclay, a local historian and contributor to a well-recognised contemporary academic journal, *The Australian Journal of Politics and History* (*AJPH*), described marchers being 'propelled backwards against convenient cars and parking meters'. He added that 1,500 sat down in Roma Street, passively to resist the police (Barclay St John 1967: 126). Barclay stated that the police deliberately interfered with commercial television cameras filming the events. The *Courier-Mail* article recorded the chants of the students as 'Police State, Police State' (9 September 1967: 2). This chant occurred at the watch-house and



Headlock

*Photograph by Karl Munnease. Mark Plunkett Collection, reproduced courtesy of the Fryer Library, University of Queensland*

Parliament House, where marchers subsequently gathered to express an apparent solidarity with arrestees.

The immediate political adversary — the Queensland government — suggested no official inquiry or official condemnation of the police. This typified the broad illiberal culture against which the protests were cast. The *Traffic Act* was a good example. The purpose of the *Traffic Act* was to create efficiency in the ever-escalating postwar traffic flows. However, the political purpose of restricting protest movement actions remained another key intention. This was an expression of liberalism *sans doctrines* rather than a matter of technically poor drafting because the ‘mistake’ reoccurs. The state *Transport Act* had Draconian provisions, while the election processes ensconced a gerrymander. This apparent liberal democracy, ideally focused against tyranny, in fact was itself tyrannical in a moderately vicious way. Glen Barclay observed that the last two Queensland premiers at the time of the CLM protests were promoted to that position from Police Minister (*AJPH* 1968: 429). The same writer confirmed that, at the time of the march, the Minister of Education was also the Minister of Police (1967: 126). This is evidence of the local view about education’s fruits and *modus operandi*.

Ross Fitzgerald, the Queensland historian and participant in events leading up to the march, quoted the later Deputy Prime Minister and Governor-General Bill Hayden, who began work as a Queensland policeman. Hayden referred to this era

by noting ‘a section of the poorly educated force viewed long-haired students as “dope-peddling agitators”, “egg-heads” and “ratbags”’ (Hayden in Fitzgerald 1985: 242). A wide cultural and political gulf existed between the physical antagonists, reflecting more directly and narrowly that between adversaries and protesters.

It was true that the Nicklin government — the political adversary of the CLM — gained power in the late 1950s, in small part by making a point of a lack of civil liberties in Queensland, and referring even to totalitarianism (Fitzgerald 1985). Some people were not oblivious to the concept of civil liberties, as can be assumed by the inclusion of a civil liberties plank in the platform of a long-standing opposition. Yet was it desperation that drew Nicklin to multiple causes, driven by his party’s extended distance from the corridors of power? His actions as premier, discussed below, suggested liberalism *sans doctrines* still prevailed and post-totalitarian ideas were here merely as window-dressing, as they so often were due to conforming political outlooks during the Cold War. In Queensland, that meant there was no room for freedoms outside the bounds of economic practicalities. The spectre of unwarranted government meddling remained and conscience stayed a secret, private matter (Fitzgerald 1985; Whitton; Coaldrake). The Liberal and Country Parties relied on the *Traffic Act* to suppress dissent, but Queensland’s Labor government had introduced it.

The relevant precursors of change oriented to civil liberties activism in Brisbane were overseas protesters concerned about human rights; Aborigines finding new directions of resistance; the anti-nuclear movement (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or CND); and women challenging dominant stereotypes. All were post-totalitarians, and some pointed to more radical critiques. These precursor groups were political outsiders, all of whom — women, Indigenous people, the CND and the Catholics — had international supporters. These latter were often lesser functionaries in the United Nations, but some allies belonged to international movements: after Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr was by far the most important precursor, but the local Freedom Rides had a more direct relevance. Some of the precursors — like the CND — sat in the margins between Cold Warriors, fearing both; some — like Aborigines and women, who were located between the institutions and organisations of labour and capital — were excluded in various ways from expressing a voice in local politics. CND was also at the margins, but amazingly, in Brisbane, it was in strong decline by the mid-1960s yet it had investigated local civil liberties problems and published material about them which turns up in activist archives, as does evidence of earlier shared public spaces like Centenary Place (Fryer Library).

In March 1965, Merle Thornton, who was a university tutor, ex-member of the Sydney libertarian ‘Push’ and later a major women’s liberation initiator, and her friend Ro Bogner protested, via direct action, the restrictions on women entering the public bars of Queensland hotels (see article in this issue of *Queensland Review*). Thornton’s comment that ‘[p]reservation of a genteel “feminine” front may well be fatal to real progress in women’s position’ (Thornton in *Compact*) defined this protest further as a movement of outsiders to the dominant culture. Centrally, Thornton’s protest initiative was different politics, in style and focus, from

the traditional conflict between waged labour and capital. This was a grassroots interaction and not the place where women and men usually interacted. Rather, it was where men avoided women. Neither the channels (organised personal confrontation at the grassroots), location nor issues were traditional modes of political complaint. Women inevitably were influenced by such strident claims and played a significant role in the civil liberties movement.

One institutional supporter of the CLM stood out, although it was influenced by both the ALP and the Communist Party of Australia. The Queensland Trades and Labour Council's general support of the civil liberties issue through its president, Jack (later Sir John) Egerton, and its secretary and Communist Party member, Alex Macdonald, reflected union history but was also a result of the exposure of the QTLC's vulnerability through a government State of Emergency Declaration during the strike at Mt Isa in the early 1960s. Some disputes were trade union sanctioned, but the directly political and/or conscience-driven or grassroots protests were not. Nevertheless, the sense in the trade union movement of being industrially and politically at odds with many laws proved significant. Unions were closer to the powerless than were those in conventional politics, but they remained distant supporters until 1968 when protesters were willing to compromise about the legality of protests, temporarily abandoning Romantic conscience-driven politics.

Support grew in the immediacy of the anti-war protests, sometimes from broad-based pre-existing sentiments without any organisational roots relevant to the emerging patterns of street protest. However, it was the wider connection to the peace protests which was crucial to the interest in civil liberties and therefore to the formation of the CLM. Their identification of civil liberties as important clearly connected to anti-war protesters' experiences of local police harassment. Furthermore, conscription raised issues about liberty that could hardly be ignored, given that it threatened an acceptable group — white, young males — and had a longer history of resistance. Further concerns were present in the protesters' view of the history of Vietnam and the Australian intervention, and the absence of liberty in Australia — particularly Queensland. Centrally the issue of civil liberties — especially regarding citizens' right to public assembly — slowly developed momentum independently from these viewpoints, though never entirely separated from them. At this time, the dominant peace protest umbrella group in Brisbane was the Youth Campaign Against Conscription (YCAC) and, although its concern was only very secondarily with the right to peaceful assembly, conscription was an issue of liberty. YCAC was an early partner or ally in the formation of the CLM. While involved in anti-war street protests — particularly in regard to conscription and foreign war service, which coincided with the 1964–65 introduction of conscription and the Australian commitment to sending troops to Vietnam — it experienced the absence of civil liberties. YCAC's publication *Marbles* was also a significant record of the early civil liberties awareness in Brisbane. Yet, in sum, no ally provided significant support to the march: the public sphere was bereft of liberal sentiment.

It is for this reason that the Brisbane protesters embraced new ideas derived from postwar radicalism elsewhere. They did this with greater eclecticism and

originally because they interwove a remnant Catholicism with a newly founded radical libertarianism of American origins, and because they were without ideological challenge from YCAC, the Young Communists, the Quakers or the working-class (not middle-class, as Murphy claims) women of Save Our Sons. The exact sentiment of this radical Romanticism through its university-based core became a hallmark of the Brisbane protests. Pre-existing Marxist sects, had they existed in a more palatable form than the Communist Party, might have pre-empted and even made inroads into the protests in the form of (for example) Maoism. Brisbane's intellectual environment, with these absences and presences, was fortuitous and idiosyncratic, and benefited from new Romanticism even if it was not entirely immune from the picture of these very sects that characterise the demise of the international new left by their contradiction of post-totalitarian sentiment (Stratera; Young).

The intellectual, social (rather than insurrectionary and incendiary) anarchist tradition existed in America and American activists — especially Ralph Summy — brought that perspective with them. The local reading of Erich Fromm encouraged by Summy ('Anti-Johnson Demonstration') meant that a transcendental psycho-moralism and concern for affectivity underwrote their socialist education — they inherited the European romantic Marxist tradition. Fromm's works are psychosocial critiques underwriting the intention to inspire freedom at the basic human level and to reinterpret socialism within the bounds of such an initially individual-focused project. His philosophy was rich in humanly sourced rather than rule-bound morality. Conscience was central, and so radicalism meant an inward dialogue. This is a very unusual emphasis in a mainstream student movement in the Australian context. Paul Goodman, popular at the time, also typified these perspectives in education and urban planning. Brian Laver led a student movement in Brisbane that was enriched with these perspectives.

The Catholic religious precursor group had a profound effect on the Brisbane protests. According to Dan O'Neill in the student newspaper *Semper Floreat*, it also was 'in revolt against the provincial climate in Brisbane', like SDA (17 March 1969: 9). The university's Newman Society was the source of many articulate activists, most centrally the above mentioned Dan O'Neill and Peter Wertheim, but also Maria O'Neill, Mary Murnane, Frank Varghese and Matthew Foley (Foley: 54). In 'Growth of the Radical Movement' in *Semper Floreat*, O'Neill describes them as 'intellectually puzzled', especially with the official position of the church in doctrinal matters, yet cognisant of orientations to social action and the new humanism stimulated by Vatican II (1969: 9).<sup>1</sup> The Catholic outlook had strong social commitment traditions, but the majority of Catholics leaned more commonly — and especially in this period — to the socially conservative right than to the left. The Newman Society, however, began to debate these social issues from positions outside the mainstream institution of the Catholic Church with the assistance of such perspectives as that of *The Catholic Worker*. *Dissent* was another new radical magazine edited by the Melbourne-originating Catholic Peter Wertheim who played an important role in the Brisbane protests. The moral absolutism typical of the Romantic influence, exemplified by Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr, was evident, and in concerns for civil liberties too there was a

shared agenda. This moral absolutism was pervasive in the campaign for civil liberties.

As O'Neill suggests in 'The Growth of the Radical Movement', the SDA and the Newman society were two major strands in the Brisbane Protests (*Semper Floreat*, 17 March 1969: 11). The two strands sometimes diverged but initially they united their common social commitment to moralism, transcendental pacifism, non-violence and activism, as well as general social awareness and — soon enough — civil liberties.

The local context is crucial not just in its Anglo-American and university attachment but also in the power of the critique of Australian utilitarianism, and particularly of Queensland's fundamentalism in a semi-democratic, semi-industrial society. What was important was the ability of the university staff and students to digest the new post-totalitarianism and mould their radical Romanticism. The absence of precursors and allies left a clean slate and — driven by their local adversaries' authoritarianism — radical liberalism, libertarianism and Western Marxism, as well as radical religious activism, prevailed and led the charge for civil liberties.

Based on a submission made by the Student Union with the aid of the Queensland Council for Civil Liberties (Barclay 1967: 127), the civil liberties campaign created great interest, and its activists set an initial deadline of 11 July 1967 for the government to agree to a civil liberties reappraisal. This union committee was involved, as well as 'lawyers and barristers ... staff and students' ('July 4th Movement' n.d.) but the deadline was not met.

The Civil Liberties Co-ordinating Committee (CLCC) proposed an illegal march irrespective of this deadline. It characterised the uncompromising attitude growing in a climate of oppression. Frank Gardiner, the soon-to-be ex-president of the Student Union, thwarted this proposal, convincing a meeting of 1,500 students, despite the urging of SDA and Newman Society leaders, to accept the government's support of an investigative committee and disregard the deadline transgression (Fitzgerald 1985: 560). Police turned back a limited march, based on the radicals' assertion of the minority's right to dissent from the majority. This provided the chance for the momentum to grow: the next time, 4,000 marched.

The government, despite negotiations with the Student Union, CLCC and QCCL and further prevarication, accepted 'only one point in the submission' ('July 4th Movement'). According to the Queensland historian Ross Fitzgerald, two changes appeared, although one was a fee reduction alone, and the other a reduction in a waiting period after application (1985: 560). The opportunity for spontaneity was denied and the potential costs of application for permits were prohibitive.

The civil liberties march, formally led by the Student Union's immediate past president, Frank Gardiner, happened three days later on 8 September 1967. According to Glen Barclay's 'Chronicles', immediately prior to this march the QTLC Secretary Alex Macdonald 'called on all unionists to give any possible assistance to the students'. The march had logic in its events and negotiations but it also had expressive intensity and an emotional climax. Barclay calls it 'pure protest' (1967: 126). This 'purity' was particularly apparent in the resistant

behaviour and the rejection of the permit given by the police. Some matters, the protesters decided, were non-negotiable, which does suggest a moral absolutism characteristic of radical Romanticism.

Not long after the 1967 march, one of its very few high-profile public and political supporters, the QTLC president Jack Egerton, proclaimed his tacit approval in *The Courier-Mail* on 22 September 1967. A week after the march, a legal rally in King George Square in the centre of Brisbane attracted 1,500 people at which the ALP's Manfred Cross, the federal member for Brisbane, spoke. Thus the march drew supporters of considerable political significance. Again, the question of legality divided the protesters from potential allies, suggesting that this division was a central dividing point for the Brisbane protesters. At best, a quarter of the student protesters attended. The divide between organised labour and students was palpable. The students embraced defiance and a new spontaneity while the labour movement embraced legality and resistance organised by trade union officialdom. This was a very tenuous alliance — if alliance it in fact was. The trade union position would never bring the issue to the public sphere. *Modus operandi*, culture, age and many other matters divided the parties, yet these strange bedfellows were the public faces of post-totalitarianism and expressed it more precisely in its typical form the following year. However, the students were now also veterans of the radical Romantic strategy and discourse.

Historians might equally see the radical students' spontaneity as typical of non-institutional based challenges based on identity (Melucci) or solidarity (Tarrow). Was the solidarity of the students real? As an immediate outcome, expressions of solidarity were provided by those who milled around the watchhouse calling out 'police state; police state' on behalf of the arrestees (*Courier-Mail*, 9 September 1967). In reflecting upon the march, participants and subsequent commentators Chris Rootes in 'The Civil Liberties Campaign' in *Social Alternatives*, and Dan O'Neill, in particular in 'Growth of the Radical Movement', note a changed perspective. Referring to the march, O'Neill asserted that 'a whole political generation was born on that day' (1969: 11–12). Both solidarity and identity were implied as outcomes. Yet Rootes, in his revisiting of events, also suggested a gender divide in the response (1983: 55–58), arguing that women felt a greater discomfort at the events of that day and registered its violence more acutely. Perhaps mutual investigation of the experience by the actors might have catalysed the sense of grievance for which the evidence is clear, but such a debriefing was not then the way.

The summer campaign which followed suggested a relative indifference: solidarity was shallow and temporary against the standard of other forms of solidarity discussed in the Brisbane protests. According to the University of Queensland Union president, only 50 of those arrested wished to defend their case (Nucifora). Thus the subsequent legal process lacked personal appeal. There were no legal challenges, no appeals to higher jurisdictions contemplated. They planned no official redress. Certainly the characteristics of Australian law did not encourage this path. The arrestees' indifference to the courts suggested that the solidarity was narrowly focused and had a peak of intensity that would not sustain protesters through a process that would highlight their case but lead to humiliation in these

courts. This may not be solidarity of great substance, but rather one narrowed to collective defiance — not insignificant in such oppressive circumstances. The summer campaign failure reminds us of the same limitations. Further studies suggest that such solidarity was deeper in the women’s movement and in the Aboriginal movement but also in some of the anti-conscription activities. Deeper, longer and more threatening oppression may tend to produce — not unsurprisingly — solidarity of deeper quality. Nevertheless, while apparently a product of social movements, its analysis occurred only to O’Neill — and then only tangentially. Nevertheless, his reference to generational change pre-empted one of the conclusions of this essay and might represent a type of very diffuse solidarity.

Following the summer campaign, the leaflet distribution issue concerned a revamped Civil Liberties Coordinating Committee of 1968. Restrictive legislation now no longer applied to business literature but to every other form of literature! This decision drew pertinent hostile comment from the movement (*Student Guerrilla*, 13 June 1968). One leading activist rebuked its philistinism (O’Neill, *Queensland Rotten Boroughs*). This criticism indicates an analysis that characteristically comes from the university, since it was not a customary comment of Queensland politicians. ‘Philistinism’ was an obscure charge for an electorate with a well-described education deficit. More importantly, the analysis deepened, and the need to develop an immanent critique of democracy characterises the Brisbane protests and the greater post-totalitarian residue in the radical Romanticism locally.

There was another key target: the local press. Despite the *Courier-Mail*’s satisfactory depiction of the civil liberties conflict in Roma Street in 1967, its subsequent misreporting, hostile editorials, and inadequate or sensationalist coverage identified a central institution as hostile. There are frequent criticisms (*Student Guerrilla*, 13 and 20 June 1968). Anthony Bowen, a central SDA activist, argued in *Student Guerrilla* that ‘the press is basically an instrumentality of the establishment’, and the CLCC broadsheet *The Press, The Protest Movement and The Propagation of Minority Ideas* asserted, significantly, that the Soviet situation, so despised, was comparable (13 June 1968). This type of critique was also in SDA’s *PRESS STATEMENT* (4 January 1968). The critique indicated the protesters’ recognition of a real problem about liberal democracy, particularly apparent in a place where there was only one publisher of daily newspapers.

The notion of authoritarianism underwrote this new criticism. In *The Free Press Ain’t Free*, O’Neill and Wertheim argue: ‘Our enemy is indivisible authoritarianism ... So must be our attitude [a]gainst it — a vigilant commitment to freedom in all spheres of our life and work. LIBERTY IS INDIVISIBLE.’ While such a slogan was pure Kantianism, a more grounded concept influenced the discourse. Repressive tolerance — a concept peculiar to Western Marxists such as Adorno and Marcuse — appeared in discussing government reactions with the assertion that ‘we are only as free as we are politically harmless. Submission alone means freedom’ (*Student Guerrilla*, 16 October 1968). The protesters looked to new theory informed by the Frankfurt School critique, inclusive of the social psychology of ‘alienation and powerlessness’ of which Fromm was a proselytiser.

The critique of the lack of rights within the public domain and of the level of its critical strength and reflectivity continued, as O'Neill stated that in Queensland there are 'neither minority nor majority rights', inducing specific social-psychologies: 'the electorate is perplexed and disgusted into indifference ... hardened into an a-political cynicism' (O'Neill, *Queensland Rotten Boroughs*, n.d.). This sort of assertion reappeared in *THE CIVIL LIBERTIES MOVEMENT*: 'the great majority, confronted with the same run of "orthodox" opinions lapses further into complacency, apathy and ignorant prejudice' (O'Neill and Wertheim).

However, the protesters also lived with the problems of local survival, demonstrated in their arrests on the streets in 1967 and 1968. There was a need for supporters. Their most obvious ally in the anti-war and civil liberties movement was one of the totalitarian stalwarts, although one (as can be seen with hindsight) about to abandon this outlook for a far more independent one. The Communist Party in Australia was also a proselytiser of post-totalitarianism, especially in Aboriginal matters. The Communist Party of Australia was often, in sentiment, an apparently willing ally — its Cold War associations and experiences nevertheless problematic to the students' dispositions. More importantly, its attention to the trade union bureaucracy was equally problematic in the eyes of the young protesters. This particularly divided location was an historical feature of the times — peculiar but important — and the party's location at this fulcrum of divided social forces for change was exacerbated in Brisbane by the paucity of any support.

The march of 4 July 1968 evidenced new alliances in the civil liberties movement with the recognition by students that alternative approaches needed consideration, and specifically through the realisation by the trade union movement that the civil liberties movement might benefit it. The possibilities of this alliance were only real to the extent that both organisations had commonalities. The trade unions' historical connections, interests and current conditions needed to meet the aspirations of the marchers, whose connections to organisations and to power were completely tenuous.

The relationship between the ALP and the CLM was much more hostile despite the role of notable individuals, who included Senator George Georges and MHR Manfred Cross. There were vociferous attacks on the CLM in parliament by Labor's Colin Bennett, MLA for South Brisbane. The ALP had a conservative past as well as a present. In the main, it offered little support for those driven by ideals.

Yet the students — or some of them — saw a real alliance with the trade union movement as possible. They said so rhetorically, placing themselves within the Labourite tradition. Referring to the march on 4 July, they 'welcome[d] the fact that our trade union allies will be there ... Their struggle for civil liberty ... has been one fought without allies.' (*Student Guerrilla*, 4 July 1968) Mitch Thompson in SDA's *Action This Year* foreshadowed a march: its date — 4 July — apparently symbolically uniting several movement-articulated hypocrisies — the notion that Australia and America were fighting for independence in Vietnam, while civil liberties in Queensland faltered. However, it is equally possible that, at a time when Labor — like the rest of Australia — looked to America, many trade unionists recognised that America held up a standard of democracy that Queensland lacked.

Again, post-totalitarianism manifested itself in Brisbane in an idiosyncratic way. The only real support for the civil libertarians came from the unions, particularly the left wing. There was no evidence of united meetings and shared strategic discussions between groups, and no campus alliance. In early 1968, some unionists called a half-day strike to support the issue of civil liberties (Anderson: 5). This lacked official support. The move of unionists into the political sphere by grassroots action was outside the world-view of the trade union hierarchy.

Ross Fitzgerald characterises the 1968 march as not attracting the radicals (Fitzgerald 1985: 564). However, various issues of *Student Guerrilla* (the SDA newsletter) advocated participation in it. They encouraged the march, seeing the gaining of the permit as a victory based on pressure, and welcomed broad community support, especially from the trade unions (*Student Guerrilla*, 25 June 1968), who gave it in the last days prior to the march. This was unlike the Student Union, which withdrew support the day before (Barclay St John 1968: 430). Other supporters were fickle too, despite or because of their legally and organisationally embedded character. The march was the campus-based radicals' moment of unity with the wider community, yet the numbers suggested that even students had lost a degree of interest, which appears to be in keeping with ambivalent feelings about the efficacy and experiences of marching. Many evidently did not feel solidarity, and particularly not with these organisations.

It is easy to forget that Don Dunstan and then Whitlam would soon be elected to power, both with a raft of liberalisations, and that other states slowly followed suit. The moment of Whitlam's arrival in the prime ministership shows that Romanticism penetrated into the federal Labor Party, which breached the sacred dependence of the great white power. This indicates that, in Australia, only such deeper challenges to cultural and political identity initiate change rather than appeals to political ideology, suggesting a particular dynamic of national identity and class ideology in this core-peripheral (Wallestein; Arrighi) location.

Queensland suffered a gerrymander so pronounced as to engender a liberal revolution — had there been such public persons in Queensland! The lack of local support and the barriers to political change, which extended for another 25 years, do suggest that this Queensland environment was particularly oppressive. Twenty-five years after the march, if not quite a generational span (even if parents were younger then), the tide had changed through slow occupational and industrial transformation in Queensland and the related blossoming of the inner city as the playground, political meeting place and domicile of the younger, wealthier and better educated new middle class/working class — professional, white collar and technical workers (Rootes). The unions, conservative still, and inner city-located ALP politicians, demonstrated the virtue of longevity and survival often lacking in protest organisations. The Communist Party was finished: split at the point of the fulcrum it offered to the protesters between the new radical post-totalitarianism and, in its case, a very suspect post-totalitarianism — one which was anti-colonial and anti-racist, but which had connections to the totalitarianism of Stalinism. The other supporters permitted the slow accretion of new ideas and instituted them, while new forces reinitiated civil liberties campaigns of the late 1970s.

Institutionalisation of reform certainly came, but not in the typical modern political process described in social movement theories or in liberal discourse about the public sphere: Queensland remains a type of semi-democracy.

The Brisbane protests were innovative and distinctive when viewed against contemporaneous protests in Australia. Somewhat — but far from entirely — idiosyncratic, actors took on locally specific roles. Here the protesters introduced change and doubt, political discourse and a sense of public conflict, which is the picture of democratic life. The received view of Brisbane's 'new left' needs reworking. It must be placed in the context of broader intellectual and historical changes, and the intellectual debt to actors' ideas initially expressed elsewhere must be acknowledged. The Brisbane protests must be seen in the specificity of national and local histories, even global structural influences. The protests' current exclusion on the margins of history is not its rightful place. The protests were fought in a context with allies and supporters whose associations were not 'proper' or expected. They were not ideologically sourced from the ephemera of affluence, or from a beneficent liberalism of the middle class, but through the force of new ideas thrown against local imaginings of state and nation. This was an emergent more equalitarian liberalism whose advocates sought radical understandings beyond liberal democracy. The study of the Brisbane protests enriches our understanding of Australian history and its indebtedness to social movements.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> One cannot ignore the use of the phrase ‘the movement’ as self-description by the CLM in this regard as a competitor to the Catholic Social Studies Movement led by B.A. Santamaria, which was so crucial in the 1950s and early 1960s.