

'A map of the world that includes Utopia':
**The Self-Management Group and the Brisbane
libertarians**

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A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Bachelor of Arts
(Honours) at the University of Sydney, October 5, 2010.

Abstract

This thesis explores a slice of Brisbane's radical history. I focus on the Self-Management Group (SMG), a revolutionary organisation that flourished from 1971-1977. The SMG formed as Brisbane activism shifted from a politics based around conscience to a revolutionary subjectivity. In 1977, the SMG dissolved. Three new organisations were formed, one of which became the Brisbane Greens in 1984. I examine the potential and pitfalls of radical organisation. While the SMG had flaws, its practice was strengthened by a utopian desire, a creative flair and a sense of how the political relates to everyday life. I argue that such utopian desire is relevant to a revitalisation of political radicalism today.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support that I received from others.

Dave, Susan, Kristy, Ack, Steve and Em allowed me to stay in their homes during my numerous research trips to Brisbane. Many thanks to the former SMG members and the other Brisbane radicals who gladly shared their memories with me. In particular, thanks to Ian Rintoul, Frank Jordan, John Jiggins and Greg George, whose personal collections of leaflets and paraphernalia were invaluable. The Fryer librarians tolerated my incessant requests for photocopying and helped me negotiate their vast array of archival material. Thanks to my parents who supported me constantly, despite my fairly idiosyncratic interests.

My supervisor, Penny Russell, helped me to develop my ideas and always gave thoughtful and useful advice. Jon, Harrison and Mark read over drafts and provided valuable feedback. Everyone in Mutiny inspired me to research and write this piece. Finally, this thesis is dedicated to all those who continue to demand the impossible. *Lotta Continua*.

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Abbreviations

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation - APEC

Communist Party of Australia - CPA

Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) - CPA-ML

International Socialists - IS

Libertarian Socialist Organisation - LSO

New Student Movement - NSM

People for Direct Democracy - PDD

Public Interest Research Group - PIRG

Queensland Institute of Technology - QIT

Queensland University - UQ

Red and Black Bookshop - R & B

Revolutionary Socialist Alliance - RSA

Revolutionary Socialist Students Alliance - RSSA

Revolutionary Socialist Party - RSP

Self-Management Group - SMG

Self-Management Organisation - SMO

Socialisme Ou Barbarie - SouB

Society for Democratic Action - SDA

Trades and Labor Council - TLC

Women's Bookshop Collective - WBC

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Introduction

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing.¹

Oscar Wilde.

But the revolution is thoroughgoing. It is still travelling through purgatory... And when it has accomplished this second half of its preliminary work, Europe will leap from its seat and exult: Well burrowed, old mole!²

Karl Marx.

From 2007 - 2009 I was involved in a small anarchist collective from Sydney called Mutiny.³ We organised convergences of radicals, distributed a monthly publication and researched issues ranging from gentrification in Redfern to Australian imperialism in the Pacific.⁴ As anarchists we attempted to make our group as non-hierarchical as possible, prefiguring the world we wanted to create. Although I was only involved in the group from 2007, Mutiny formed in 2003 around the movement against the Iraq War. Its members were involved in occupations of corporations profiting from the war, and argued for the movement's use of these tactics.⁵ Mutiny saw Iraq as not just an aberration 'in a system that was otherwise fair & good' but as 'part of global systems of capitalist exploitation: systems that affect the lives of people all across the world, including our own lives'.⁶

Mutiny had its share of state persecution. One member was arrested on serious charges after anti-G20 protests and most of us were put on an 'Excluded Persons List' and

¹ Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man under Socialism," (1891), <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/wilde-oscar/soul-man/index.htm>. Accessed on 4/06/2010.

² Karl Marx, "Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," (1852), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch07.htm>. Accessed on 7/08/2010.

³ See Mutiny Collective, "Mutiny Zine ", <http://www.jura.org.au/mutiny>.

⁴ For instance see, ———, "War and Gentrification: Mutiny Evolves," *Wai Quarterly* (November, 2008), <http://waiquarterly.files.wordpress.com/2008/11/wai.pdf>; ———, "Interest Motivated Group: Collected Writings of the Mutiny Collective, 2003-2009," (2009). Out of print but available from the author on request.

⁵ ———, "War and Gentrification: Mutiny Evolves."

⁶ Mutiny Collective, "Description of Mutiny Zine," *Mutiny Zine*, no. 7 (2006): p. 1. Back issues of *Mutiny Zine* are available at Black Rose Anarchist Library and Social Centre, 22 Enmore Road, Newtown.

banned from areas of Sydney during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference in September 2007.⁷ Police intelligence files written around APEC described us as:

... an anarchist group consisting of a number of layers of trust and information management. Currently it consists of a small group of individuals who form what appears to be an inner core group responsible for the clandestine planning and preparation for violence and malicious damage aimed at police and APEC corporate targets. This core group meets regularly at a covert location to discuss the details of these plans.⁸

This security assessment likely had origins in Mutiny's association with 'violence' at the November 2006 G20 demonstrations in Melbourne.⁹ Shortly beforehand, *Mutiny Zine* published a call for an Arterial Bloc at the main anti-G20 rally. At the rally, the Arterial Bloc was concealed via bandanas and white overalls and, critiquing liberal democratic protest discourse, tried to refuse:

... the rules of the game of civil protest, the containment of the 'good protester'. We are choosing not to be compliant citizens who make their wishes, and show their faces, to 'their representatives'.¹⁰

Some property damage to bank windows and a police brawler van occurred at G20, for which Arterial Bloc and Mutiny were blamed.¹¹ At APEC, the police reports were exaggerated. We

⁷ "Excluded Persons List," <http://www.smh.com.au/pdf/excludedlist.pdf>. Accessed on 6/07/2010. For more discussion of policing around APEC, Dale Mills, "Liberties and A.P.E.C.," *Alternative Law Journal* 33, no. 2 (2008): pp. 103-04.

⁸ "Excluded Persons List." The most 'covert' location for our meetings was a Newtown park. Two analyses of these files are Dale Mills, "Protestors Spied On," *Green Left Weekly* (2008), <http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/40274>; "Police Intelligence Isn't," *Mutiny Zine*, no. 30 (2008), <http://jura.org.au/files/jura/Mutiny%2030%20-%20WEB.pdf>. "Protestors Spied On" accessed on 11/09/2010.

⁹ Shawn Davies, "Anarchists Ready for A.P.E.C Violence," *Ninemsn* (2007), <http://news.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=271050>. Accessed on 12/09/2010.

¹⁰ "Arterial Bloc Call-Out," <http://lists.perthimc.asn.au/pipermail/blackgreensolidarity/2006-November/001294.html>. Accessed on 14/09/2010. This call-out was published in *Mutiny Zine* No. 9, which is available in print at Black Rose Anarchist Library and Social Centre. A recent exploration of these themes is John Cunningham, "Clandestinity and Appearance," *Mute Magazine* (2010), http://www.metamute.org/content/clandestinity_and_appearance. Accessed on 15/09/2010.

¹¹ Josie Taylor, "Police Hunt for Violent G20 Protestors," *PM* (2007), <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2006/s1793165.htm>. Accessed on 9/08/2010. For critical reflections from G20 protestors, "A Rush and a Push: Discussion on Politics from the G20 Protests in Melbourne," <http://arushandapush.blogspot.com/>. This website includes articles such as Dave Eden, "In the Wake...After G20," (2006), <http://arushandapush.blogspot.com/in-the-wake-after-g20/>; "A First Communique from Two

thought that, given the massive security apparatus, which included 3,500 police, snipers and even jet fighters, direct action would only be possible with mass support.¹² However, the intelligence files can be read as a response to our statements and actions the previous year. In turn, we were being marked as something 'other', as people who were clandestine, sinister and well beyond the boundaries of respectable protest.

These experiences shaped my ideas about the kind of history I was interested in writing. I wanted to look at a story of people who were similarly 'other', who refused the security and easy moral satisfaction that comes with being 'good citizens' campaigning for rights within liberal democracy. In 2008, a friend mentioned the Self-Management Group (SMG), which he knew was a large revolutionary grouping from Brisbane that no one had researched. I became fascinated by them. I learnt that, like Mutiny, SMG's politics were left-libertarian, highly critical of vanguardist models of change that require building a party of professional revolutionaries. According to its political programme, SMG was:

... unified around the essential demand of workers' councils as the basis of a real democracy. In these councils people will have equal decision-making and be paid an equal wage. The Group does not see itself as yet another leadership, merely as people in socialist struggle where they live and work.¹³

Its members experienced police repression too. Brian Laver, a prominent SMG activist, recalls that he was arrested around a dozen times during the period of its existence.¹⁴ Greg George, another member, was put on trial for drug charges when police planted pethidine in

Uncitizens of the Arterial Bloc," (2006), <http://arushandapush.blogspot.com/a-first-communicate-from-two-uncitizens-of-arterial-bloc/>. Accessed on 9/08/2010.

¹² On this history, Mutiny Collective, "Interest Motivated Group: Collected Writings of the Mutiny Collective, 2003-2009," pp. 3-7. On the security apparatus, Holly Creenaune, "Turning Back the Terrorism Tag: Organising at A.P.E.C.," *Chain Reaction* (2007), <http://www.foe.org.au/resources/chain-reaction/editions/101/turning-back-the-terrorism-tag-organising-against-apec>. Accessed on 8/08/2010.

¹³ Self-Management Group, "Workers' Council Democracy Not Parliamentary," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library, FVF385); Joy Guyatt and Greg George, *Publications of Political Organisations in Queensland* (St Lucia: Fryer Memorial Library), p. 245.

¹⁴ Interview with Brian Laver No. 3, February 24, 2010.

his car.¹⁵ Of particular interest to me was the SMG's large numbers, dwarfing the small ultra-left networks that I had personally encountered in Australia.¹⁶ It was a product of the global upsurge of radicalism in the late sixties and early seventies, and was active from 1971 - 1977. Even compared to ideologically similar groups that existed around Australasia in that period, the SMG's size and level of organisation was unique.¹⁷ It had a 'two-tier structure', with two - three hundred activists in cells at places of study or work and sixty - seventy full members.¹⁸ It was 'the pre-eminent far left group' in Brisbane.¹⁹ Three former members argued that the SMG was as influential as the Brisbane section of the Communist Party (CPA) in the period.²⁰

Reclaiming its hidden history is a useful task in itself. For contemporary anarchists, there is sometimes a sense that such level of organisation is only possible in far-off places like Spain or Greece.²¹ A 'cultural cringe' can pervade activists' memory of Australian radicalism, limiting possibilities and understanding of local conditions.²² In the British context, where modern anarchist groups are comparatively marginal, John Quail describes how:

¹⁵ Interview with Greg George No. 1, April 17, 2009. The 2009 interviews referenced in this thesis were conducted for a research essay on the Self-Management Group for the Advanced Australia course that year.

¹⁶ Some groups in this ultra-left milieu include "Melbourne Black," <http://melbourneblack.wordpress.com/>; "Jura Books," <http://jura.org.au/>; "Ipswich/Brisbane Community Action Trajectory," <http://www.reliefline.tk/>.

¹⁷ See Toby Boraman, "Carnival Anarchism, Councilism and Class," (2009), http://anarchist-studies-network.org.uk/Conference_Papers; ———, *Rabble Rousers and Merry Pranksters: A History of Anarchism in Aotearoa/New Zealand from the Mid 1950s to the Early 1980s* (Christchurch: Katipo Books, 2008), pp. 58-60. Boraman article accessed 25/06/2010.

¹⁸ On the 'two-tier' structure, Self-Management Group, "Introduction to the Self-Management Group," in *Personal Collection of Frank Jordan*. My estimate of numbers is based on interviews with former members. Most interviewees recalled that around two hundred people were in the cells - the highest figure offered was three hundred. Interview with Brian Laver No. 1, April 23, 2009; Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 1, April 2, 2009; Interview with Greg George No. 1; Interview with John Jiggins No. 1, April 18, 2009.

¹⁹ Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 1, January 2, 2010.

²⁰ Interview with Brian Laver No. 1; Interview with John Jiggins No. 1; Interview with Greg George No. 1.

²¹ On the thriving Greek anarchist movement, Occupied London, "From the Greek Streets," www.occupiedlondon.org/blog. One account of some of Spanish anarchism's rich history is Robert Alexander, *The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War, Volume 1* (London: Janus Publishing Company, 1998).

²² Iain McIntyre, "Only Dead Fish Go with the Flow-Introducing How to Make Trouble and Influence People," (2009), <http://howtomaketroubleandinfluencepeople.org/?p=60>. Accessed on 09/08/2010.

I had wondered why left-wing politics always had to do with foreign parts, though I had found much disputational mileage in the events in Barcelona in 1936 and Kronstadt in 1921 ... There was too much dreaming in our transference of the heady days of past revolutions in other places to the sooty backstreets and Arndale centres of Leeds. It was our own place and time we should have been talking about.²³

The SMG's practice ran counter to this fetishisation of revolutions in distant places. They emphasised the local, agitating against experiences of alienation and hierarchy in daily life. Despite the reputation of Brisbane, even within Australia, as being an especially boring and conservative place, they saw revolutionary potential in the mundane routine of everyday existence.²⁴ Their aspirations were utopian, seeing self-management as a total transformation of society, which would radically expand democracy.²⁵ Drew Hutton, a former member, argues:

There are two types of anarchists in the world. You can be a monastic anarchist and hope for the change you want to happen, or you can try and make it (revolution) happen. We tried to make it happen.²⁶

My interest in these points was linked to a desire to connect my own political aspirations and dilemmas in the present to study of the past. Although I recognised the vast differences between then and now, SMG's history offered some fertile ground for this. One particular problem that we had often faced in Mutiny was an uncertainty about how revolutionary organisations could complement emancipatory struggles for greater control over peoples' lives.²⁷ This issue acquired greater pertinence as by the time I began writing this thesis, Mutiny had dissolved as a collective. This was not out of a waning radicalism but because we

²³ John Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse: The Lost History of the British Anarchists* (London: Granada Publishing Limited, 1978), p. ix.

²⁴ On Brisbane's reputation for being boring, as well as events that run counter to this perception, Raymond Evans, "From Deserts the Marchers Come: Confessions of a Peripatetic Historian," *Queensland Review* 14, no. 1 (2007): pp. 17-18. Also see Gerard Lee, "H.A.R.P.O.," in *Hot Iron Corrugated Sky: 100 Years of Queensland Writing*, ed. Robyn Sheahan-Bright and Stuart Glover (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2002), p. 56.

²⁵ One example of this is "Don't Think of Self-Management as a Way of Running This Society," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

²⁶ Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1, April 17, 2009.

²⁷ For instance, seen in Mutiny Collective, "War and Gentrification: Mutiny Evolves."

were interested in searching for new forms of organisation that might be more creative and relevant to struggles going on right now. I therefore hope to make some contribution to better appreciating the potential of radical organisation and understanding the pitfalls that such groups face. I see SMG's history as not a static object but a *subject* from which to tease out lessons for liberatory politics. I argue that while idealist purism at times abstracted the concept of self-management, ignored material conditions and isolated SMG, it had a powerful utopian desire, a sense of how the everyday relates to the political and a creative flair.

In keeping with this focus on the potentially liberatory aspects of history, I also explore the SMG's origins and successors, beginning in 1966 with Society for Democratic Action (SDA), the key New Left organisation of the Brisbane Sixties, and ending with the 1984 formation of the Brisbane Greens. My analysis emphasises their transformation in subjectivity. SDA's stress on conscience and moral values evolved into support for a 'revolutionary movement' that could 'challenge the structures of this Society'.²⁸ From the late seventies an ecological politics influenced some ex-SMG members. This culminated in the 1984 establishment of the Brisbane Greens.²⁹ The *material reasons* for these developments are stressed, combining transnational and local factors, 'internal' deliberations of activists and 'external' pressures. Such a sense of how and why subjectivity can change helps undermine the notion - highlighted by Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal slogan 'there is no alternative' - that politics is set within essentially conservative boundaries.³⁰ To reject this perception of rigid conservatism, Marx brilliantly used the metaphor of a mole to represent the 19th century European proletariat. For Marx, low periods of working class activity could be seen as like a mole making tunnels underground. This 'old mole' would then burrow its way to the surface

²⁸ "S.D.A Dissolves," in *Society for Democratic Action Ephemera, 1966-1969* (Fryer Library, FVF381).

²⁹ Interview with Greg George No. 1.

³⁰ One critique of this slogan and its many uses is Peter Bohmer, "Participatory Socialism: There is an Alternative," (*ZNet*, 2010), <http://www.zcommunications.org/participatory-socialism-there-is-an-alternative-by-peter-bohmer-1>. Accessed on 25/09/2010.

in a high point of struggle.³¹ Similarly, in a context where radicalism is often hard to see and is sometimes dismissed as a 'lost cause' of the past, these dramatic shifts in Brisbane activists' subjectivity suggest that peoples' ideas are not fixed and could still move leftwards today.³²

In my research, I conducted thirty one interviews with twenty three different activists. Predominantly, these were with former SMG members. They were typically relaxed conversations for one or two hours over coffee. I interviewed key and peripheral members, activists from different workplace cells and from the group's three factions. Several interviews were with Brisbane activists who were not members. These helped illustrate the general atmosphere in the radical milieu. Melbourne, Sydney and Perth activists were contacted in order to help ascertain the spread of SMG's ideas. I had to negotiate some issues surrounding the relationship of memory to history.³³ For instance, some people would recount a story in great detail but then get the timeline of events wrong. A further complication was that former SMG activists gave different interpretations of events, shaped by their current political ideas. There are at least three camps that ex-members fall into. Some are orthodox Marxists, others anarchists and some are in the Greens. These subjective viewpoints made some reflections nostalgic, while the Marxists and Greens members were often very critical of their own actions. My main strategy for dealing with these difficulties was to compare oral accounts with written sources whenever possible.

One great advantage of this oral research was that it allowed me to acquire large amounts of material that would have otherwise been inaccessible. As a result of meeting former members, I was able to peruse their private collections. These include stacks of weathered but legible forty-year old leaflets, meeting minutes and agendas, personal

³¹ Marx, "Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte."

³² For instance, a critique of the contemporary dismissal of radicalism is Slavoj Žižek, *In Defence of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), pp. 1-8.

³³ Some of these issues are discussed in Robert Perks and Alastair Thompson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998).

reflections, correspondence, broadsheets, newspaper clippings and internal discussion papers. They have been vital to tracing developments in SMG's history, and filled in the gaps in the University of Queensland's collection in Fryer Library.

Nevertheless, Fryer does host a wonderful array of material, ranging from seventeen boxes donated by activist Dan O'Neill to a collection of 123 SMG leaflets. It covers radical activity from the heyday of SDA to well after SMG's dissolution. The State Library of Queensland provided access to some agitational pamphlets and copies of student newspapers. I also went through the archives of several left-wing libraries: Jura Books in Sydney, the Libertarian Library in Perth and Zapata's Library in Brisbane. Although Zapata's has closed down recently, their archives are still accessible in the garage of one of the volunteers who helped run the library. Finally, voluminous ASIO files, declassified under the National Archives Act, were ironically important sources. For ASIO, SMG members were considered to be 'of adverse notice'³⁴ and the group was clearly infiltrated in 1972.³⁵ The files provide a precise chronology of events. In some cases, they even serve as de facto meeting minutes.³⁶

Oral historians have contributed to the project of 'history from below', recovering stories ignored by what E.P Thompson wonderfully termed 'the enormous condescension of posterity'.³⁷ Such recovery was part of my intent. I could only piece together SMG's tale

³⁴ For instance, "A.S.I.O File of Greg George, Volume 1," (National Archives of Australia: A6119, 4745), p. 152.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ I examined, "A.S.I.O File of John Lawrence Jiggins," in *Personal Collection of John Jiggins*; "A.S.I.O File of Greg George, Volume 1"; "A.S.I.O File of Esme Garner, Volume 5," (National Archives of Australia: A6119, 4637); "A.S.I.O File of Esme Garner, Volume 6," (National Archives of Australia: A6119, 4638); "A.S.I.O File of Grahame Garner, Volume 4," (National Archives of Australia: A6119, 4637); "A.S.I.O File of Grahame Garner, Volume 6," (National Archives of Australia: A6119, 4691). On the use of similar police files as sources, Margaret Henderson and Alexandra Winter, "Memoirs of a Nervous Illness: the Queensland Special Branch Police Files of Carole Ferrier as Political Auto/Biography," *Life Writing* 6 no. 3 (2009): pp. 349-367.

³⁷ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 12. On oral history from below, Staughton Lynd, *Living Inside Our Hope: A Steadfast Radical's Thoughts on Rebuilding the Movement* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 36-44; Paul Thompson, "The Voice of the Past: Oral History," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 21-28.

through an extensive process of interviewing, giving context to printed sources. However, I wanted to avoid the tendency of oral history to obscure material factors. As Paula Hamilton points out, 'the passion for the personal story can ... occlude the social and cultural processes that have shaped subjectivity'.³⁸

As I noted earlier, there has been no previous research on the Self-Management Group. More general writing on Brisbane radicalism includes one PHD, one masters and three honours theses.³⁹ The publication of *Radical Brisbane: an unruly history*, several chapters of which focus on the movements of the sixties and seventies, sparked debate amongst former activists.⁴⁰ Drew Hutton and Libby Connors critiqued the exclusion of some campaigns, particularly conservationist ones.⁴¹ Brian Laver saw it as 'a history of the authoritarian left, leaving out Aboriginals, environmentalists and anarchists'.⁴² While this assessment may be overly harsh, given the 150 year scope of *Radical Brisbane*, my thesis corrects this neglect of the libertarian strand of Brisbane activism.

Broader analyses of the shift towards revolutionary politics in Australia during the period have been attempted by Christopher Rootes and Graham Hastings.⁴³ Some studies of seventies revolutionaries from Europe and North America have examined their use of

³⁸ Paula Hamilton and Linda Stoope, eds., *Oral History and Public Memories* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), p. xi.

³⁹ Christopher Rootes, "Australian Student Radicals: The Nature and Origins of Dissent" (Honours Thesis, The University of Queensland, 1969); James Prentice, "The New Left" (Masters Thesis, The University of Queensland, 1972); ———, "The Brisbane Protests: 1965-1972" (PHD Thesis, Griffith University, 2005); Mark Young, "A Historical Portrait of the Student Left at the University of Queensland, 1966-1972" (Honours Thesis, The University of Queensland, 1984); Jon Piccini, "Building Their Own Scene to Do Their Own Thing: Imagining and Contesting Spaces in Brisbane's Youth Radicalisation 1968-1976" (Honours Thesis, The University of Queensland, 2009).

⁴⁰ Carole Ferrier and Raymond Evans, eds., *Radical Brisbane: An Unruly History* (Carlton North: The Vulgar Press, 2004)

⁴¹ Libby Connors and Drew Hutton, "Who Owns Brisbane's Radical Past?," *Queensland Review* 12, no. 1 (2005): pp. 91-100.

⁴² Interview with Brian Laver No. 2, January 21, 2010.

⁴³ Christopher Rootes, "The Development of Radical Student Movements and Their Sequelae," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 34, no. 2 (1988): pp. 173-86; Graham Hastings, *It Can't Happen Here: A Political History of Australian Student Activism* (Adelaide: The Students Association of Flinders University, 2002).

violence.⁴⁴ In the Australian context the dominant status of 'social movement theory' has perhaps encouraged broad movement portraits.⁴⁵ A critical assessment of the organisation and experiences of revolutionaries is therefore a relatively untouched field. While the Maoist and Trotskyist milieus in Melbourne and Sydney have been written about, the ultra-left, libertarian tendency in Brisbane has not.⁴⁶

While the word ultra-left can be used pejoratively to describe activists considered to have an excessive revolutionary zeal that harms their own cause, it also refers to a rich strain of radicalism. This political tendency is generally characterised by an emphasis on critiquing hierarchy and on struggles from below that are not mediated by unions or parties.⁴⁷ Despite this bottom-up focus, international histories of the ultra-left have often emphasised individual thinkers, such as Guy Debord of the Situationist International and Cornelius Castoriadis from *Socialisme Ou Barbarie*.⁴⁸ This tendency has recently been critiqued. There have been several

⁴⁴ Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); J. Smith and Andre Moncourt, eds., *The Red Army Faction: A Documentary History Volume 1: Projectiles for the People* (Oakland: PM Press, 2007); Dan Berger, *Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity* (Oakland: AK Press, 2006).

⁴⁵ For instance, Verity Burgmann, *Power and Protest: Movements for Change in Australian Society* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993). On social movement theory, for instance, Jurgen Habermas, "New Social Movements," *Telos*, no. 49 (1982): pp. 33-37.

⁴⁶ For instance, Barry York, *Student Revolt! La Trobe University 1967-1973* (Campbell: Nicholas Press, 1989); Rick Kuhn, "The Australian Left, Nationalism and the Vietnam War," *Labour History*, no. 72 (1997): pp. 163-184.

⁴⁷ For a diverse selection of ultra-left texts, "Class against Class", <http://reocities.com/cordobakaf/>. Accessed on 11/09/2010. One example of the term ultra-left being used pejoratively is Abbie Bakan, "Ultra-Leftism: Left Words, Sectarian Practice", *Socialist Worker* (2004), <http://www.web.net/sworker/En/SW2004/429-07-ultraleft.htm>. Accessed on 12/08/2010.

⁴⁸ Anselm Jappe, *Guy Debord* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); David Ames Curtis, ed. *Cornelius Castoriadis Political and Social Writings*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); David Ames Curtis, ed. *Cornelius Castoriadis Political and Social Writings*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Andre Liebich, "Socialisme Ou Barbarie: A Radical Critique of Bureaucracy," *Our Generation* 12, no. 2 (1977): pp. 55-62; Marcel Van Der Linden, "Socialisme Ou Barbarie: A French Revolutionary Group (1949-1965)," *Left History* 5, no. 1 (1997), <http://www.left-dis.nl/uk/lindsob.htm>. Accessed on 07/08/2010.

attempts to examine ultra-left milieus from below, situate them in a global context, tease out lessons, and analyse prospects for future struggles.⁴⁹ I follow this approach.

Chapter One traces the origins of the Self-Management Group. From 1966 - 1971, there was a shift amongst Brisbane activists from liberalism to an explicitly revolutionary perspective. I argue that this did not occur because of a 'Great Leader' or a 'Great Idea', but from the accumulation of experiences and struggles, on a transnational and local level. Events such as the circulation of information about May '68 and the ongoing resistance to imperialism in Vietnam meshed with factors internal to activists. These included the experience of working collectively with others, mass assemblies in spaces like the University of Queensland Forum and the deterioration of relationships with more conservative groups such as the Communist Party (CPA) and the Trades and Labor Council (TLC).

Chapter Two discusses SMG's activity, importance and theoretical beliefs. They grappled with the decline of the extra-parliamentary radical movement after 1972 following the election of Gough Whitlam. Despite this context, they were able to grow rapidly and articulated an ultra-left politics emphasising radical democracy and critiques of alienation and hierarchy in everyday life. In 1974 they won victories around the more limited issues of civil liberties and assessment reform. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the weaknesses of SMG, such as sexism. Weaknesses were related to the context that SMG existed within and the nature of its own ideas.

Chapter Three, extending from 1975 - 1984, examines the reasons for the dissolution of SMG. Members were unable to reconcile the past of the organisation with the material and

⁴⁹ Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002); Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2009); Boraman, "Carnival Anarchism, Councilism and Class"; Benoit Challand, "When Anarchism Meets Critical Marxism: Paths and Paradoxes Of 'Socialisme Ou Barbarie' (and of Trotskyism)," (2009), http://anarchist-studies-network.org.uk/Conference_Papers; Boraman, *Rabble Rousers and Merry Pranksters: A History of Anarchism in Aotearoa/New Zealand from the Mid 1950s to the Early 1980s*. Challand article accessed on 03/07/2010.

political realities of the present, and the group's weaknesses became more apparent. This failure led to its split in 1977. Splits can be used as part of caricatures of left groups, highlighting their inability to tolerate difference.⁵⁰ I will instead argue that the split, while producing some bitterness, allowed ex-SMG members to clarify their views and develop politics that were, in the changed context, more effective. I then briefly follow the emergence of an ecological subjectivity amongst former members. This culminated in two ways. A reformist tendency formed the Brisbane Greens in 1984, while revolutionaries established the Bookchinite Institute of Social Ecology.⁵¹ Similarly this occurred not because of the sudden discovery of the importance of green politics, but from lived experience and material factors that had been coalescing for the past decade.

The dominance of liberal democratic ideology today makes researching unapologetically utopian revolutionaries from the seventies seem like an exercise in obscurantism rather than part of connecting history to struggles in the present. From both left and right, much discourse essentially accepts the triumphalist narrative of the 'End of History', with the end of the Cold War confirming liberal capitalism's claim to be the best possible social system.⁵² In this understanding of the world, what remains to be contested is only the form that liberal democracy takes, whether it is more or less authoritarian, whether it supports multiculturalism or restricts immigration.⁵³

Furthermore, the left's prime enemy can appear to simply be villainous governments, multinational corporations or free market ideology. This perception, leading to criticism of

⁵⁰ Perhaps the most famous cultural example of this is in the Monty Python film 'Life of Brian', where the anti-Roman People's Front of Judea above all loathe their fellow anti-imperialists, the Judean People's Front. The transcript of this scene is at "Life of Brian, Scene 7," *Left Spot*, <http://www.leftspot.com/blog/?q=node/129>. Accessed on 12/09/2010.

⁵¹ Interview with Greg George No. 2, April 21, 2009. On Bookchinite ideas, see "Institute for Social Ecology," www.social-ecology.org/.

⁵² On this argument, Jess Whyte, "Contesting Realities," *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal* 1, no. 2 (2009): pp. 199-206.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

aspects of capitalism rather than the system itself, has restricted radical thought.⁵⁴ Today, much of the Australian left polices itself, confining its demands to the amelioration of the market by the state and hopes for the re-emergence of post-war social democracy.⁵⁵ Despite the prominence of the Greens, the party is becoming more caught up in the web of parliamentarism.⁵⁶ The far-left sects are either static or in decline, employing deeply outdated ideologies.⁵⁷

For radicalism to emerge from this impasse there is a need for bold, imaginative thinking. The SMG was part of a transnational ultra-left network that attempted to rebuild 'the revolutionary movement ... from rock-bottom'.⁵⁸ In Europe, England, America and Australia, groupings brilliantly critiqued the left's teleological assumptions,⁵⁹ the association of socialism with state control of production⁶⁰ and argued that traditionally working class organisations had become integrated into capitalism.⁶¹ They instead emphasised the emergence of new rebellious subjects, such as youth and white-collar workers,⁶² and critiqued a managerial class in the Soviet Union and the West.⁶³ While the contemporary world is very

⁵⁴ For instance, on the similar limitations of left analyses that stress injustices caused by right-wing U.S governments, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 4-5.

⁵⁵ An example of this is "Left Action Plan: From Global Crisis to a Green Future," *Search Foundation* (2010), <http://www.search.org.au/projects/from-global-crisis-to-green-future-australian-left-renewal-conference/conference-declaration>. Accessed on 12/04/2010.

⁵⁶ On this parliamentary shift, Tad Tietze, "The Greens, the Crisis and the Left," *Overland*, no. 199, <http://web.overland.org.au/previous-issues/feature-tad-tietze/>. Accessed on 14/07/2010.

⁵⁷ An analysis of the Australian left's present 'atrophy, denial, confusion and crass opportunism' is Dave Eden, "The Practice of Hope," *Red Thread Brisbane* (2008), <http://redthreadbris.wordpress.com/2010/02/27/the-practice-of-hope/>. Accessed on 12/06/2010.

⁵⁸ Paul Cardan, "Redefining Revolution," (London: Solidarity, 1974), p. 16.

⁵⁹ For instance, Paul Cardan, "History and Revolution: A Revolutionary Critique of Historical Materialism," (London: Solidarity, 1971), pp. 22-26.

⁶⁰ ———, "The Meaning of Socialism," (Brisbane: Self-Management Group, 1972), pp. 11-14.

⁶¹ For instance, Solidarity, "As We See It," <http://libcom.org/library/as-we-see-it-solidarity-group>. Accessed on 15/04/2010. Self-Management Group, "As We See It," *Semper Floreat*, March, 1973, p. 10.

⁶² Cardan, "Redefining Revolution," pp. 16-19.

⁶³ ———, "The Meaning of Socialism," pp. 10-11.

different, appreciating SMG's determination to break with outdated orthodoxy might encourage political creativity and experimentation.

Utopianism that 'demands the impossible' could also provide a way of pushing the boundaries available for action today.⁶⁴ Despite its faults, SMG never lost sight of a 'map of the world' that 'includes Utopia'.⁶⁵ They brooked no compromise with electoral politics. In December 1973, around a referendum on prices and incomes, they advised:

... if habit drags your tired body to the local prison house for kids (school) to cast your compulsory, meaningless vote, that you write across the paper, 'Build a society based on Workers Councils, replace the parliament and bosses with a self-managed society' you might feel a tingling sense of joy at the first such productive work you have done in a polling booth!⁶⁶

Their commitment to the 'communist hypothesis', of a world in which labour is not inevitably subordinated to others, makes them worth remembering.⁶⁷ Moreover, studying them is not just a commemorative activity, but a small part of the task of reasserting this hypothesis into the ideological domain of the present.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ 'Be realistic, demand the impossible!' was a slogan from May '68. Some contemporary explorations of the political worth of utopianism include Stephen Shukiatis, "Space. Imagination//Rupture: The Cognitive Architecture of Utopian Political Thought in the Global Justice Movement," *University of Sussex Journal of Contemporary History*, no. 8 (2005); Frederic Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005). On the importance of radical dreams, Stephen Duncombe, *Dream : Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* (New York: NYU Press, 2007). A condensed version of his argument is ———, "Politics in an Age of Fantasy," *Turbulence* (2007), <http://turbulence.org.uk/turbulence-1/politics-in-an-age-of-fantasy/>. Accessed on 13/08/2010.

⁶⁵ Wilde, "The Soul of Man under Socialism."

⁶⁶ Self-Management Group, "Equal Wages - Equal Power," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*.

⁶⁷ Alain Badiou, "The Communist Hypothesis," *New Left Review*, no. 49 (2008): p. 37.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Chapter One

'An insistent search for grass-roots forms of politics': from Society for Democratic Action to the Self-Management Group, 1966 - 1971

The time has arrived, for many of us, to pass from a protest organisation to a radical or revolutionary movement. A movement to challenge the structures of this Society.¹
SDA dissolves, 1969.

In 1966, Brian Laver, a Queensland University (UQ) student, penned an article for the journal *Viewpoint* that outlined the political programme of Society for Democratic Action (SDA). SDA was a burgeoning activist group which had been established that year. Laver emphasised participatory democracy, as opposed to rule by elites.² In a liberal vein, he stressed the moral responsibility of ordinary people to oppose this state of affairs. He argued that apathy was the main problem in Australian society.³ Five years later, Laver was a founder of the Self-Management Group. While democracy was still a key theme, the group's politics were vastly different to these notions. Conservative attitudes like apathy were seen to come from the experience of authoritarian relationships in capitalism, especially in the family.⁴ The SMG was convinced that only revolution could meaningfully solve social problems.⁵

This change suggests the profound transformation in politics involved in the formation of the SMG. This chapter will argue that such a transformation was shaped by *material forces and lived experience*. Revolutionary subjectivity developed out of a

¹ "S.D.A Dissolves."

² Brian Laver, "Brian Laver Speaks," *Viewpoint* (December, 1966): no page numbers.

³ Ibid. For a critique of moralistic liberal activism today, Peter Gelderloos, *How Non-Violence Protects the State* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2007), pp. 90-91.

⁴ Solidarity, "The Irrational in Politics," (Brisbane: Self-Management Group, 1972). Available in Zapata's Library.

⁵ Self-Management Group, "Workers' Council Democracy Not Parliamentary."

combination of experiences specific to Brisbane activists and through the transmission of struggles from overseas and elsewhere in Australia. As different issues accumulated, radical ideas gained more credibility. Experiences such as police repression, interaction with other activists and the existence of a non-Leninist, libertarian culture of left politics in Brisbane helped ferment SMG's revolutionary views.

It is a useful contribution to activist knowledge to investigate the reasons for this development. It can further an understanding of how movements change, instead of remaining static. I examine the specific circumstances involved in this shift, rather than reproducing the simplistic idea of a mature New Left descending into an 'infantile' ultra-left that harmed the movement.⁶ One can understand the experiences that change ideas, rather than dismissing radicalisation as destructive. In this vein, Jeremy Varon's analysis of the American and German movement emphasises New Leftists' 'long and winding' path to revolutionary politics.⁷ Varon argues that American activists were affected by numerous factors that they lived through, such as the failure of legal segregation to alter structures of racism, liberalism's association with the Vietnam War and violent police repression.⁸

There is a popular mythology surrounding 'Great Leaders' from various countries who rose to prominence amidst the high-tide of late sixties radicalism. Martin Luther King has been portrayed as a hero figure standing above the civil rights movement, obscuring its richness and diversity.⁹ Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Tom Hayden, Rudi Dutschke and Tariq Ali

⁶ For instance, Nigel Young, *An Infantile Disorder? The Crisis and Decline of the New Left* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1977). In an Australian context, Rootes, "The Development of Radical Student Movements and Their Sequelae," p. 183. The critique of the 'ultra-left' runs through several memoirs that discuss the period, such as John Sedy, *Comrades Come Rally: Recollections of an Australian Communist* (West Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1978); Bernie Taft, *Memoirs of Bernie Taft: Crossing the Party Line* (Newham: Scribe Publications, 1994).

⁷ Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*, p. 20.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-30.

⁹ George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End Press, 1987), pp. 21-22. An example of this tendency is Brian Ward and Tony Badger, eds., *The Making of Martin*

have been seen as demagogues who galvanised the radical student movement.¹⁰ In Cohn-Bendit's own *Obsolete Communism*, written in the aftermath of May '68, he notes that a compilation of articles from various left-wing journals could have been just as good as the book - but the publishers insisted that something be authored by him.¹¹

In the Australian context, this dynamic is illustrated through press articles focusing on student leaders' lives. In May 1969 Mungo McCallum profiled Albert Langer, Mike Jones, Brian Laver and Bob Gould, emphasising personal details behind their politicisation.¹² Several pieces in the Brisbane press discuss the life of their city's 'No. 1 protestor', Brian Laver.¹³ One leaflet (somewhat ironically) describes Laver's 'revolutionary moustache', 'revolutionary neck' and 'eyes that have seen tanks rolling down the streets of Czechoslovakia'.¹⁴ Laver literally embodied revolutionary activism. A tendency therefore emerges to attribute historical change to these figures' presence. This persists in memory of the movements, with for instance, former SMG members Drew Hutton and Greg George arguing that the skill and persistence of a core set of leaders was central to that group's

Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement (Washington Square: NYU Press, 1996). The fetishisation of King's leadership is critiqued in Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (2005): pp. 1233-63.

¹⁰ For an argument against the 'Great Man Theory of History' in relation to the New Left, see Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968*, pp. 21-22. On Cohn-Bendit, Daniel Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), pp. 16-17. On Dutschke, Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany & the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 97. Tariq Ali and Tom Hayden have written memoirs that discuss their rise to prominence, Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years: An Autobiography of the Sixties* (London: Verso, 2005); Tom Hayden, *Reunion: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1988).

¹¹ Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative* (London: Andre Deutsch Limited), p. 18.

¹² Mungo McCallum, "The Maoist from Melbourne," *The Australian*, May 14, 1969, p. 11; Mungo McCallum, "Keeping in Touch with the Masses," *The Australian*, May 13, 1969, p. 9; Mungo McCallum, "My Wife Made Me a Revolutionary!," *The Australian*, May 16, 1969, p. 9; Mungo McCallum, "A Man Who Wears Four Hats," *The Australian*, May 20, 1969, p. 11.

¹³ "Laver, the Professional Protestor, Hates Demonstrations," *The Sunday Mail*, April 28, 1968, p. 27; "He'll Tour Europe," *Courier Mail*, May 15, 1968, p. 20; Frank Gardiner, "Laver's Ideal: Revolution by Violence," *Sunday Truth*, December 29, 1968, p. 6.

¹⁴ "FOCO newsletter", November 20, 1968 in Greg Mallory (compiler), *A Selection of Political Material from SDA, the Labor Club and FOCO between 1967 - 1969* (Fryer Library, DS559.62.A8 L43 1992).

success.¹⁵ While individuals did have an impact, the collective nature of movements, central to any emancipatory project, is problematically downplayed in this analysis. Similarly, the shift towards revolutionary politics is seen as an abstract triumph of 'ideology' rather than a result of collective experiences.¹⁶

'SDA Cares': the Society for Democratic Action

In 1966, the milieu of activists at UQ, then Brisbane's only university, stressed a politics based around conscience. SDA described the 'characteristics' of their supporters in a series of early leaflets.¹⁷ These included 'concern for the degrading poverty of two out of every three people in a world of potential plenty' and 'a belief that the individual should be free from the unwarranted interference of the state'.¹⁸ The emphasis was on concern and individual rights rather than systemic critique, expressed through deliberately respectable language. SDA's 1967 newspaper, *Impact*, stressed the moral necessity for action. Every issue of *Impact* quoted Abbe Pire that 'what matters is not the difference between believers and unbelievers, but between those who care and those who do not care'.¹⁹ *Impact* proclaimed that 'SDA cares'.²⁰

Dan O'Neill was a UQ English lecturer and a well-known agitator in SDA during the period. Today, O'Neill reflects that SDA's early activism was driven by a 'sense that there was something wrong with the world, and that we ought to do something about it'.²¹

However, this emphasis on personal conscience was also combined with an attempt to 'search

¹⁵ Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1; Interview with Greg George No. 1.

¹⁶ Greg George understood this shift as a triumph of ideology. Ibid.

¹⁷ "What Is S.D.A.," in *Society for Democratic Action Ephemera, 1966-1969* (Fryer Library).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ James Prentice, "The Growth of the New Left in Queensland," (Zapata's Library), p. 4.

²⁰ "S.D.A Cares," *Brisbane Impact*, undated.

²¹ Interview with Dan O'Neill, January 22, 2010. Also see "What Is S.D.A?," *Brisbane Impact*, undated.

for grass-roots forms of politics'.²² SDA was interested in 'grass-roots' tactics and concepts that were extra-parliamentary and that mobilised people collectively. In particular, they argued for participatory democracy and experimented with large-scale direct action. Unlike the Sydney and Melbourne activist scene, SDA emerged independently of older radical traditions.²³ Instead, its blending of the extra-parliamentary with the liberal reflected a recent American influence. Their support of the 'American "New Left" ... concept of Grassroots Democracy' was publicised.²⁴ Ralph Summy, an American academic on campus, perhaps encouraged the interest in individual liberties.²⁵ SDA had success, and was one of the larger groups in the Australian student movement.²⁶

The Vietnam War was a trigger for activism. For Dan O'Neill, writing in 1976, Vietnam was 'the fire that brought down the rotten framework of Cold War Politics'.²⁷ Janita Cunnington, Brian Laver's wife at the time who was also active in SDA, reflected that Vietnam 'was the catalyst for radical action'.²⁸ The growing level of agitation over Vietnam made civil liberties important for left-wing students. A draconian Traffic Regulations Law existed in Queensland, essentially allowing police to outlaw demonstrations and make arrests at whim. On March 24, 1966, twenty five protestors were arrested at an anti-war action.²⁹ Twenty six activists were similarly detained in an October 5 protest.³⁰ Civil rights committees

²² "The Left in Australia," *Outlook* (June, 1968): p. 4.

²³ Such as the Trotskyist tradition in Sydney's student movement. Prentice, "The New Left", pp. 174-76.

²⁴ Laver, "Brian Laver Speaks."

²⁵ Prentice, "The New Left", p. 189.

²⁶ On this success, Dan O'Neill, "The Growth of the Radical Movement," *Semper Floreat*, March 17, 1969, p. 9.

²⁷ ———, "The Rise and Fall of Student Consciousness," *Semper Floreat*, March, 1976, p. 10.

²⁸ Janita Cunnington's Response to Self-Management Group Questionnaire, February 2010. Cunnington's first name is spelt Janita, not Juanita.

²⁹ Alistair Hall, "The Deep North," *Lot's Wife*, September 26, 1967, p. 4. On the Traffic Act and the campaign against it, Ross Fitzgerald, *From 1915 to the Early 1980s: A History of Queensland* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984), pp. 559-64.

³⁰ Andrew Stafford, *Pig City: From the Saints to Savage Garden* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2004), p. 14.

were established.³¹ During Lyndon Baines Johnson's trip to Australia in 1966, as well as during the visit of Marshal Ky, then the leader of South Vietnam's military junta, in January 1967, students were prosecuted for putting up anti-war posters.³² After the Ky demonstration, *Impact* denounced 'Police delinquency'.³³ The back page featured nine reports from activists horrified by police violence at the protest.³⁴

As a result of this repression, much of SDA's energy in 1967 and 1968 was devoted to activism around civil liberties.³⁵ The civil liberties campaign combined liberal democratic tendencies with direct action. Liberal activists were interested in negotiating with the state government and deputations were sent, proposing amendments to the law. This ideological disposition also saw a July 11, 1967, march postponed to give the Nicklin government time to consider UQ Union president Frank Gardiner's proposals for reform.³⁶ Other than removing a one dollar fee on placards, Nicklin rejected Gardiner's proposal.³⁷

On September 8, 1967, the campaign culminated in a four thousand strong march, about half of all UQ students. 250 police arrested 120 students, with 'wanton brutality'.³⁸ Some activists stressed the importance of the right to protest in a parliamentary democracy.³⁹ The protest saw large scale civil disobedience: around 1500 students began a sit-in at Roma Street and linked arms.⁴⁰ While civil disobedience can easily fall into liberal paradigms, this

³¹ Frank Varghese, "Civil Liberties in Queensland," *National U*, July 8, 1968, p. 2.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ "Police Delinquency," *Brisbane Impact*, undated.

³⁴ "Back Page," *Brisbane Impact*, undated.

³⁵ Varghese, "Civil Liberties in Queensland," p. 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Pete Thomas, "Thuggery in Battle of Brisbane," *Tribune*, September 13, 1967, p. 1.

³⁹ "Democracy Is Dissent," in *Geoffery Dalton-Morgan collection-Miscellaneous publications of the Society for Democratic Action* (Fryer Library, F3235).

⁴⁰ James Prentice, "Remembering the Brisbane Protests," *Queensland Review* 14, no. 1 (2007): p. 26.

direct action also reflected aspirations to expand democracy beyond the status quo.⁴¹ In a 1969 article for *Semper Floreat*, the university student rag, Dan O'Neill argued that the direct action was not just a tactic but:

... is the product of a constant desire for more communication, more democratic debate, more open attack on admitted but hypocritically dissembled vices of the society. The openness and free public communication of direct action protest ... are ends as well as means.⁴²

For Brian Laver, SDA's strategy of direct action informed the SMG's later ideas.⁴³

Police violence at the demonstration strengthened the critique of the 'dissembled vices of society'.⁴⁴ For activist Michael O'Neill an agricultural metaphor was apt - the protestors 'waited, a singing field of corn, and brown-shirted cops, their decency outraged, began to harvest us'.⁴⁵ The negative portrayal of the march in the media, with the *Courier Mail* describing the protestors as a 'mob', underlined how conservative groupings had a monopoly over the Queensland press.⁴⁶ The *Courier Mail* was Brisbane's only daily and provided vitriolic coverage of student protest.⁴⁷ For SDA members, it became clear that the mass media was actively opposed to them.⁴⁸

On September 14 over four thousand students and workers rallied again around civil liberties, after the Trades and Labor Council (TLC) called a four-hour stop work.⁴⁹ According

⁴¹ An exploration of this liberal association and also on giving civil disobedience a 'radical twist' is, Sergio Fiedler, "The Right to Rebel: Social Movements and Civil Disobedience," *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal* 1, no. 2 (2009): pp. 42-51.

⁴² O'Neill, "The Growth of the Radical Movement," pp. 11-12.

⁴³ Interview with Brian Laver No. 3, February 24, 2010.

⁴⁴ ———, "The Growth of the Radical Movement," p. 12.

⁴⁵ Jayson Althofer, "Brisbamm!?: Bringing the Streets into the Museum," *Queensland Review* 14, no. 1 (2007): p. 134.

⁴⁶ "114 Arrested: Students in Clashes with Police," *Courier Mail*, September 9, 1967, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Such as "Paid Agitators Cause Student Unrest", *Courier Mail*, May 7, 1969, p. 3; "Leaflet Urges Violence," *Courier Mail*, September 8, 1970, p. 7.

⁴⁸ For instance, Dan O'Neill quoted in Alan Knight, "Ratbags, Revolutionaries and Free Speech: The Queensland Radical Press in 1968," *Pacific Journalism Review* 10, no. 1 (2004): p. 155.

⁴⁹ Alec Macdonald, "Queensland Unions Join Students," *Outlook* (October, 1967): p. 18. Also "Students and the Labour Movement," *Outlook* (October, 1967), pp. 3-4.

to Alec Macdonald, the TLC's Communist secretary, this was the 'biggest meeting held in Brisbane for ... twenty years', discrediting the government and the police force.⁵⁰ Worker-student collaboration deepened. Brian Laver was appointed as a TLC research officer.⁵¹ A July 4, 1968, march on civil liberties was called when Laver and Mitch Thompson, a central SDA organiser, were arrested for handing out leaflets in support of a postal workers' strike.⁵² Students began advertising the rally by illegally distributing pamphlets in the city.⁵³ Two thousand people attended.⁵⁴

As Laver's and Thompson's support for the postal workers' cause suggests, activists were beginning to see more and more connections between different issues. Today, Dan O'Neill argues that the diversity of struggles that activists were involved in fostered radicalisation:

... as the number (of issues) accumulates, it looks as though there is a system here, you begin to be interested in the capitalist system, you investigate hierarchical structures, you begin looking at useful works in the anarchist and Marxist traditions.⁵⁵

The amount of issues contested by protestors was distinctive to Queensland. Although Sydney and Melbourne activists did more than oppose war and imperialism, the Brisbane movement's emphasis on other struggles was unique.⁵⁶ Alan Knight's study of *Student Guerrilla*, SDA's campus newsletter that replaced *Impact* in 1968, highlights this diversity.⁵⁷ Knight has categorised each article according to its political focus. Forty percent were around

⁵⁰ Macdonald, "Queensland Unions Join Students," p. 18.

⁵¹ "Laver Praises Unions for Civil Rights Battle," *Tribune*, July 31, 1968, p. 4.

⁵² Varghese, "Civil Liberties in Queensland," p. 2.

⁵³ "By Handing You This Leaflet I Have Just Broken the Law!," in *Civil Liberties Co-ordinating Committee Ephemera* (Fryer Library, FVF164).

⁵⁴ Frank Varghese and Peter Kaufman, "But Brisbane Orderly," *National U*, July 8, 1968, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Interview with Dan O'Neill.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Knight, "Ratbags, Revolutionaries and Free Speech: The Queensland Radical Press in 1968," pp. 153-170.

civil liberties. There was also extensive reportage on Vietnam, education, theory, racism, press ownership and conscription.⁵⁸

In 1967, the New Student Movement (NSM) was formed.⁵⁹ NSM challenged 'professional politicians' in the student union and signalled the existence of a UQ student power movement, critiquing hierarchies within the university.⁶⁰ Although it nearly split due to differences between Brian Laver and other activists when Laver was nominated as NSM's candidate for the 1967 student elections, they were able to regroup.⁶¹ They won around forty percent of the vote. More importantly, their presence helped spark discussion - encouraging 'a new climate of serious camaraderie' on campus.⁶² Dan O'Neill recalls that the experience of working collectively within groups like these radicalised people. As students interacted with activists who questioned the basic precepts of 'the system', they began to think similarly.⁶³

Nevertheless, by the end of 1968, SDA had begun to decline in strength. An over-reliance on Mitch Thompson and Laver was exposed. Thompson was preoccupied with secretarial work for ALP Senator George Georges, whereas Laver and his family had embarked upon a lengthy trip to Europe.⁶⁴ While Laver's talent for stirring rhetoric was important,⁶⁵ Thompson's organisational wizardry was missed. Tom Cochrane, a former member of SDA, recalled that Thompson brought a long list of tasks to campus everyday, which he would systematically go through.⁶⁶ SMG later emphasised that a reason for its formation was precisely this over-reliance. They argued:

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 160.

⁵⁹ O'Neill, "The Growth of the Radical Movement," p. 10.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

⁶² Ibid., p. 11.

⁶³ Interview with Dan O'Neill.

⁶⁴ ———, "The Growth of the Radical Movement," p. 12.

⁶⁵ For instance, Drew Hutton described Laver as 'a thrilling speaker'. Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1.

⁶⁶ Interview with Tom Cochrane, February 19, 2010.

The radical movement saw the growth of various super-rad personalities and background organisers ... there evolved an ad-hoc organisation based on cliques, hangouts ... and a dependence on demagogues.⁶⁷

In response to this decline, SDA organised an educational programme from late 1968 - 1969.⁶⁸ In 1969 O'Neill argued that activists now shared an 'anti-authoritarian' radicalism.⁶⁹ A December 1968 SDA conference included topics like 'Self-Management: Workers and Student Power'.⁷⁰ SDA's political culture was left-libertarian, with a general stress on greater democracy through the decentralisation of power.⁷¹ From 1968 - 1969 there was an upsurge in interest in revolutionary ideas. Activists stopped seeing international events in isolation to as a part of a system. In June 1968 Laver argued:

In Queensland, Vietnam has become the motivating force to some, mostly middle class students who have progressively developed from a belief that it was one aberration of the system to an understanding that the capitalist system is in fact suppressing human needs.⁷²

Today, Laver argues that a critique of imperialism forced activists to ask 'what are we for?'⁷³ According to Laver, many decided they were for self-management.⁷⁴ This general radicalisation helped student uprisings internationally get an enthusiastic reception. One item stated:

SDA asserts its solidarity with the French students and workers revolutionary socialist struggle. Workers and students power! ... We are after changes in discipline, the reversal of authoritarianism, the decentralisation of power within universities.⁷⁵

Despite earlier historiographical neglect, there has recently been increased interest in transnational links between manifestations of sixties radicalism.⁷⁶ This historiography has

⁶⁷ "Radical Censorship," in *Werner Schlick Collection* (Fryer Library, UQFL347).

⁶⁸ ———, "The Growth of the Radical Movement," pp. 12-13.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷⁰ "S.D.A Newsletter Vol. 1 No. 1," in *Student Guerrilla* (Fryer Library).

⁷¹ ———, "The Growth of the Radical Movement," p. 13.

⁷² Brian Laver, "Behind Student Action," *Australian Left Review* (June-July, 1968): p. 23.

⁷³ Interview with Brian Laver No. 3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Althofer, "Brisbamm!?: Bringing the Streets into the Museum," p. 133.

attempted to understand more concretely how movements were influenced by similar groupings worldwide, despite national and continental boundaries.⁷⁷ Although SDA's ties to the international New Left were very loose, personal experiences of travel helped ferment radicalism.⁷⁸ Tom Cochrane recalled that after Brian Laver returned from Europe he had 'the air of a prophet about him', and began arguing for revolutionary politics.⁷⁹ Laver was in Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring and the Russian invasion.⁸⁰ Overseas trips by Sydney radicals Hall Greenland and Denis Freney had influence too. Greenland visited Berlin and wrote about the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund, Europe's largest revolutionary socialist student grouping. He was published in a pamphlet distributed by SDA.⁸¹ Freney, an 'ambulant world revolutionary', was affected by time in Algeria.⁸² Some degree of self-management had been initiated by Algerian peasants and workers.⁸³ Freney emphasised the importance of self-management in interstate activist conferences.⁸⁴

⁷⁶ Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*; Carole Fink, Phillip Gassert, and Detlef Junker, eds., *1968: The World Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Paul Berman, *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968* (New York: Norton, 2000); Timothy S. Brown, "'1968' East and West: Divided Germany as a Case Study in Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 114, no. 1 (2009): pp. 69-96; Simon Prince, "The Global Revolt of 1968 and Northern Ireland," *The Historical Journal* 49, no. 3 (2006): pp. 851-75; Gerd Reiner-Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany & the United States in the Global Sixties*.

⁷⁷ This is a focus of Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany & the United States in the Global Sixties*.

⁷⁸ On travel, Richard Ivan Jobs, "Youth Movements: Travel, Protest and Europe in 1968," *American Historical Review* 114, no. 2 (2009): pp. 376-404.

⁷⁹ Interview with Tom Cochrane.

⁸⁰ Interview with Brian Laver No. 1.

⁸¹ "An Analysis of the German Student Uprising of Easter 1968," in *Society for Democratic Action Ephemera, 1966-1969* (Fryer Library).

⁸² Denis Freney, *A Map of Days: Life on the Left* (Port Melbourne: William Heinemann Australia, 1991), p. 194.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-68.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 238-39.

The New Left's radical rethinking of established notions about society helped encourage a culture of comment and debate.⁸⁵ In particular, the vast University of Queensland Forum was an ideal site for mass meetings and soapboxing.⁸⁶ John Jiggins, a member of the Draft Resisters Union and later an SMG activist, described how, due to the quality of the speaking, discussions held there became 'the lunchtime entertainment'.⁸⁷ For Tom Cochrane, the forum meetings were 'really exciting ... you'd look forward to them and wonder what was going to happen'.⁸⁸ Tony Sheather, also a future member of the SMG, was at this stage 'hardly an anarchist' but was inspired by the oratory of Dan O'Neill, Brian Laver and Dick Shearman, who 'spoke with passion and conviction'.⁸⁹ The recurrent use of this space led to ongoing politicisation.

There was a 'huge display' of SDA books in the Forum, which helped connect theory to the movement.⁹⁰ Cochrane argues that the Forum discussions were more academically rigorous than those in the classroom.⁹¹ Erich Fromm and the early Marx had influence.⁹² Janita Cunnington recalled how:

... it was the young Marx who was most frequently cited, with his notion of alienation, interpreted psychologically. Personal powerlessness was seen to be the crux of capitalism's evil.⁹³

Fromm was the 'intellectual inspiration' instead of 'any other more orthodox Marxist'.⁹⁴ While earlier SDA statements had emphasised a refusal of 'ideological blueprints', this growing interest in radical theory made ideas that critiqued capitalism systemically more palatable.⁹⁵

⁸⁵ For instance, Dan O'Neill noted that the movement produced a 'pile of information and comment the height of kitchen table'. O'Neill, "The Rise and Fall of Student Consciousness," p. 12.

⁸⁶ Interview with Greg George No. 2.

⁸⁷ Interview with John Jiggins No. 2, February 16, 2010.

⁸⁸ Interview with Tom Cochrane.

⁸⁹ Interview with Tony Sheather No. 1, January 27, 2010.

⁹⁰ Interview with Tom Cochrane.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² For instance see Greg Mallory (compiler), "Student Guerrilla No. 1," in *A Selection of Political Material from SDA, the Labor Club and FOCO between 1967-1969* (Fryer Library).

⁹³ Janita Cunnington's Response to Self-Management Group Questionnaire, February 19, 2010.

SDA members tried to form ties with agitators from other cities. Although Brisbane activists did not necessarily agree with their views, the existence of spaces in which different ideas could be shared helped develop a revolutionary milieu. The arguments of activists at a January 1967 Sydney anti-war conference, around the need to show solidarity with the National Liberation Front (NLF), influenced SDA members.⁹⁶ By 1969, *Student Guerrilla* would not only support the NLF but publish an article that gave instructions on the best way to destroy an American Iroquois Helicopter.⁹⁷ SDA was involved in the Socialist Students Alliance, a short-lived national formation for radical students that succeeded the Australian Labor Students Federation.⁹⁸

The Left Action Conference was a gathering of around eight hundred radicals in Easter 1969 in Sydney.⁹⁹ Although only fifty one Queensland activists attended, three SDA members, Peter Wertheim, Dan O'Neill and Brian Laver, delivered keynote speeches.¹⁰⁰ Though differing on some political points, their presentations all contained left-libertarian themes. Wertheim, for instance, stressed the need for non-hierarchical 'means' to achieve liberatory ends.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, Laver emphasised the need for revolutionary change. He was met with 'thunderous applause'.¹⁰²

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ On the refusal of 'ideological blueprints', "Laver a Study in Commitment," *Semper Floreat*, June 2, 1967, p. 7.

⁹⁶ Prentice, "The Growth of the New Left in Queensland," p. 4.

⁹⁷ "Student Guerilla", March 4, 1969 in *Student Guerilla* (Fryer Library).

⁹⁸ Rootes, "The Development of Radical Student Movements and Their Sequelae," p. 180.

⁹⁹ "Left Links up at Easter Meet," *Tribune*, April 9, 1969, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Conference for Left Action, Papers*, (Sydney, 1969); "Conference for Left Action - Attendance," in *Dan O'Neill Collection* (Fryer Library, Box 3, Folder 8, UQFL132).

¹⁰¹ Peter Wertheim, "The Need for a Moral Example to Rekindle Hope," in *Conference for Left Action, Papers* (Sydney, 1969), pp. 4-7.

¹⁰² See Bob Gould, "Honeymoon Over: The Decline and Fall of the Left Coalition" *The Old Mole*, no. 3 (June 29, 1970), <http://members.optushome.com.au/spainter/Honeymoon.html>; "Tape 4 - Saturday Afternoon, Conference for Left Action," in *Communist Party of Australia records, 1920-1987* (Mitchell Library, MLOH 39/1-21).

Despite this leftward shift, Christopher Rootes's study of activists' views notes that around one third of SDA members still identified as liberals or social democrats.¹⁰³ James Prentice argues that differences were increasing between humanists around the Newman Society, who stressed generating a sense of 'community', and the revolutionary socialists, who saw struggle at 'points of production' as central.¹⁰⁴ The revolutionaries were dissatisfied with campaigns that they perceived as liberal, like around electoral gerrymandering.¹⁰⁵ With these divisions, SDA could not continue. 'SDA dissolves', penned in April 1969 by Mitch Thompson, is the only leaflet that analyses its dissolution.¹⁰⁶ Thompson observed a sense that:

... we can no longer protest about specific issues without becoming sensitive to the fact that these are only symptoms of a deep malaise and it is this malaise that we must challenge.¹⁰⁷

Instead of a 'protest organisation', they now wanted a 'radical or revolutionary movement'.¹⁰⁸

'Talking about revolution': Brisbane's revolutionary groups¹⁰⁹

In 1969, the Revolutionary Socialist Alliance (RSA) was formed. While SDA still existed, a broad left conference had been held in Brisbane in December 1968. Several different radical tendencies participated.¹¹⁰ Denis Freney, then a member of the Pabloite Australian section of the Fourth International, proposed an alliance.¹¹¹ A founding conference was held in Sydney in February 1969.¹¹² There was a substantial transfer of personnel from

¹⁰³ Rootes, "Australian Student Radicals: The Nature and Origins of Dissent", p. 93.

¹⁰⁴ Prentice, "The New Left", pp. 103-05.

¹⁰⁵ ———, "The Growth of the New Left in Queensland," p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ "S.D.A Dissolves."

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Frank Varghese, "The '69 Uni-Year," *Semper Floreat*, February 24, 1970, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Freney, *A Map of Days: Life on the Left*, pp. 233-35.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 235.

¹¹² "Revolutionary Socialist Conference," *Outlook* (April, 1969): p. 19.

SDA into RSA.¹¹³ RSA incorporated divergent views, with some dismissing any role for the ALP and CPA in radical change, while others argued that they could be revitalised.¹¹⁴

The first action of the Brisbane RSA, and its student wing, the Revolutionary Socialist Students Alliance (RSSA), was an intervention at the 1969 May Day rally. They chanted slogans like 'Socialism Yes, Whitlam No!' and heckled speakers.¹¹⁵ While the unions had been allies in the civil liberties campaign this antagonised them considerably. TLC President Jack Egerton deemed them 'a group of scrubby, confused individuals who are unable to differentiate between civil liberties and anarchy'.¹¹⁶ RSA/RSSA began propounding self-management as a form of radical democracy. A pamphlet, *Self-Management in Education*, was distributed, written by a participant in the French high school assemblies of 1968.¹¹⁷ A five page manifesto on self-management was published in the March 1970 *Semper Floreat*.¹¹⁸

RSSA had some success at UQ in 1969 and 1970. Frank Varghese commented in a *Semper Floreat* review of the 1969 university year that a 'dwindling, dispirited and disunited S.D.A' had been transformed into an organisation that was 'talking about revolution' and 'talking about it seriously'.¹¹⁹ Direct actions consolidated these views. In a 1969 Senate occupation, it was declared that the university's role was 'to serve capitalism'.¹²⁰ The first week of September 1970 was especially noteworthy. On September 2, the UQ Army

¹¹³ Lani Russell, "Today the Students, Tomorrow the Workers! Radical Student Politics and the Australian Labour Movement, 1960-1972" (PHD thesis, University of Technology Sydney, 1999), p. 339.

¹¹⁴ "Revolutionary Socialist Conference," p. 19.

¹¹⁵ Brian Laver, "The Communist Party Is Behind This Moratorium - Way Behind," (Fryer Library, DS559.62.A8 C6 197*); "No Union Money Lent to FOCO," *Courier Mail*, May 16, 1969, p. 10. The chant 'Socialism Yes, Whitlam No' is from Carole Ferrier and Ken Mansell, "Student Revolt, 1960s and 1970s," in *Radical Brisbane: An Unruly History*, ed. Carole Ferrier and Raymond Evans (Carlton North: The Vulgar Press), p. 271.

¹¹⁶ "No Union Money Lent to FOCO," p. 10.

¹¹⁷ "Self-Management in Education," in *Revolutionary Socialist Alliance Ephemera* (Fryer Library, FVF368).

¹¹⁸ "R.S.S.A Manifesto on Self-Management," *Semper Floreat*, March 12, 1970, pp. 12-17.

¹¹⁹ Varghese, "The '69 Uni-Year," p. 3.

¹²⁰ Ferrier and Mansell, "Student Revolt, 1960s and 1970s," p. 272.

Regiment was temporarily 'liberated' by around fifty students.¹²¹ The 'black flag of anarchy' was raised outside.¹²² The 'Quang Incident' took place on September 7.¹²³ Quang was a South Vietnamese diplomat detained in a lecture theatre by protestors after giving a pro-war presentation. A furious melee broke out with police.¹²⁴ Two students and one policeman were injured.¹²⁵ Afterwards, Police Commissioner Hodge threatened to 'starch' the University.¹²⁶

While Hodge's threat was exaggerated, RSSA's actions in 1969 and 1970 were met with repression from both the university and the state, causing further radicalisation. Following the September actions, police raided Jim Prentice's home, drove him out to a cemetery and threatened him with Russian roulette.¹²⁷ About thirteen people, including Laver, were suspended for disrupting a psychology lecture. Six activists were banned from the university grounds.¹²⁸ In June 1971, Mitch Thompson was banned from UQ for life.¹²⁹

Nationally, RSA soon floundered. Denis Freney became closer to the CPA, encouraged by its increasing criticisms of Stalinism.¹³⁰ This was viewed with suspicion by organisers in Resistance, a Sydney-based Trotskyist outfit. In Freney's account, Bob Gould, then a Resistance leader, foiled plans for a Sydney RSA centre - leasing a possible

¹²¹ "Student Raid on Army Office at St. Lucia," *Courier Mail*, September 3, 1970, p. 1; "The University Regiment Now Stands on Liberated Ground," in *Revolutionary Socialist Students Alliance Ephemera* (Fryer Library, FVF355).

¹²² "Student Raid on Army Office at St. Lucia," p. 1.

¹²³ "Hodges Threat to 'Starch up' University Senate," *Courier Mail*, September 5, 1970, p. 1.

¹²⁴ "Correspondence from Brian Laver," in *Humphrey McQueen Collection* (National Library of Australia, MS4809, Box 1 Folder 1); Jon Piccini, "The University Regiment Stands on Liberated Ground! Contested Understanding of the Vietnam War on The University of Queensland," (2009), [http://www.uq.edu.au/crossroads/Archives/ACSEC09/ACSEC09%20-%207.Piccini%20\(p.35-40\).pdf](http://www.uq.edu.au/crossroads/Archives/ACSEC09/ACSEC09%20-%207.Piccini%20(p.35-40).pdf).

¹²⁵ "Hodges Threat to 'Starch up' University Senate," p. 1.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Interview with Tom Cochrane.

¹²⁸ "This Means War," in *Dan O'Neill Collection* (Fryer Library, Box 1, Folder 6).

¹²⁹ "Fifth Column," *National U*, May 3, 1971, p. 12.

¹³⁰ Freney, *A Map of Days: Life on the Left*, p. 238.

headquarters out to another group.¹³¹ Freney joined the CPA in May 1970.¹³² The RSA was always a 'loose coalition' and these losses led to its demise.¹³³

Like the earlier dispute with the unions over the 1969 May Day rally, as revolutionary subjectivity grew, differences between young activists and established left groups became explicit. The Vietnam Moratorium in Brisbane on May 8, 1970, highlighted such divisions between Brian Laver and the CPA.¹³⁴ Laver had been nominated as a speaker for the student contingent at the demonstration. He wanted to propose that the moratorium not conclude after they marched, but be extended into a discussion forum on Roma Street. This forum would prevent the rally being just a 'quick stroll through the streets' and disrupt 'business as usual in the city'.¹³⁵ When Laver tried to speak, CPA unionists gagged and physically restrained him.¹³⁶ Later, party members argued that a forum would have provoked



Brian Laver being restrained at the Moratorium by CPA members. From "Containment and Revolution," in Jura Books.

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 240-41.

¹³² Denis Freney, "Why I've Joined the C.P.A.," *Tribune*, May 27, 1970, p. 8.

¹³³ Freney, *A Map of Days: Life on the Left*, p. 236.

¹³⁴ Interview with Brian Laver No. 1.

¹³⁵ Laver, "The Communist Party Is Behind This Moratorium - Way Behind."

¹³⁶ Ibid. Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 1.

'police violence'.¹³⁷ In the past, the CPA had supported Laver, so this was a particularly significant schism.¹³⁸ According to Laver, they attempted to recruit him in 1969, offering a *Tribune* editorial position and membership of the CPA Central Executive.¹³⁹ In 1970, the Socialist Humanist Action Centre had been established in Brisbane, an attempt to create dialogue between student radicals like Laver and CPA militants.¹⁴⁰

This dramatic confrontation 'set the tone' for SMG.¹⁴¹ At least five thousand copies of a four page broadsheet condemning the CPA were produced.¹⁴² It was savagely titled *The Communist Party Is Behind This Moratorium - Way Behind*. The broadsheet's front page depicted Laver being gagged and restrained.¹⁴³ Laver's silencing gave a series of political ideas a basis in activists' lived experience. First, it suggested the need for *organised struggle*. Laver and his sympathisers now saw organisation as vital to counter the influence of the ALP and the CPA and to create genuinely democratic movements.¹⁴⁴ Second, it radicalised activists further, making their position even more clearly to the CPA's left.¹⁴⁵ Finally, it made them distrust 'popular fronts' - campaign groups based around a set of minimum demands but not a shared ideology. Although Laver had been prominent in such groups before, it was clear after the Moratorium that he and his comrades could not work with the CPA again.¹⁴⁶ It was

¹³⁷ Charlie Giffen, "The Facts About the Laver Incident," *Tribune*, June 24, 1970, p. 4.

¹³⁸ For instance, publishing positive articles about him, like "Laver Praises Unions for Civil Rights Battle," p. 4.

¹³⁹ Russell, "Today the Students, Tomorrow the Workers! Radical Student Politics and the Australian Labour Movement, 1960-1972", pp. 273-74.

¹⁴⁰ "Socialist Humanist Action Centre," in *Socialist Humanist Action Centre Ephemera* (Fryer Library, FVF402).

¹⁴¹ Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 1.

¹⁴² Laver, "The Communist Party Is Behind This Moratorium - Way Behind."

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ "Correspondence from Brian Laver."

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Brian Laver No. 2.

argued that all 'popular fronts' were easily subject to manipulation by more conservative activists.¹⁴⁷ These beliefs encouraged them to establish a unified, revolutionary organisation.

On June 20, 1970, a leaflet, signed by Brian and Janita Laver and Larry and Diane Zetlin, proposed the formation of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP).¹⁴⁸ Unlike the relative openness of RSA/RSSA, only activists judged to have similar politics to the authors were invited to join.¹⁴⁹ The leaflet emphasised fighting capitalism 'in an organised way'.¹⁵⁰ Around thirty five people attended the first meeting.¹⁵¹ Despite their own emphasis on 'ideological unity', in practice RSP was composed of libertarian socialists and Trotskyists.¹⁵² Its main success was in recruiting a number of industrial militants, especially in the meat works and metal trades.¹⁵³

Around this time, John Jiggins recalls that 'everyone on the left had to read (Lenin's) *What is to be Done* and *The State and Revolution*'.¹⁵⁴ Members of the Brisbane Independent Marxist Group further influenced some RSP members in a Leninist direction.¹⁵⁵ Eventually, some activists formed a Leninist tendency that wanted the whole RSP to accept its views.¹⁵⁶ Others were deeply influenced by Cornelius Castoriadis, the libertarian socialist theorist from

¹⁴⁷ Expressed later in Self-Management Group, "Popular Fronts and the S.M.G.," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*.

¹⁴⁸ "Revolutionary Socialist Party Invitation," in *Dan O'Neill Collection* (Fryer Library, Box 1, Folder 22, 1970).

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Dan O'Neill.

¹⁵⁰ "Revolutionary Socialist Party Invitation," in *Dan O'Neill Collection* (Fryer Library, Box 1, Folder 22, 1972).

¹⁵¹ "A.S.I.O File of Grahame Garner, Volume 6," pp. 14-16.

¹⁵² "Revolutionary Socialist Party Invitation."

¹⁵³ "Correspondence from Brian Laver." On the RSP's working-class orientation, James Prentice, "Up the Right Channels," *Arena*, no. 24 (1971): p. 14. Some leaflets on these lines are Revolutionary Socialist Party, "Workmen the 'Bosses'-'Leaders' the Servants," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*; ———, "There Are Basically Two Kinds of Workers: There Are the Ones Who Have the Right to Strike, and There Are the Slaves," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*; ———, "The Boss Demands 24 Hour Notice of the Class Struggle," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*; ———, "Blacklists and Repression," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*; ———, "Sold out Again!," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with John Jiggins No. 2.

¹⁵⁵ "Correspondence from Brian Laver."

¹⁵⁶ "Declaration of the Formation of a Tendency in R.S.P.," in *Revolutionary Socialist Party Ephemera* (Fryer Library, FVF359).

Socialisme Ou Barbarie (SouB), whose writings had been translated by the English group Solidarity.¹⁵⁷ Both SouB and Solidarity's ideas differed sharply from Leninism, so conflict between the two factions was unsurprising.¹⁵⁸

SouB was formed by dissident French Trotskyists in 1949.¹⁵⁹ Its idiosyncratic politics emphasised critiquing bureaucracy within 'the left' (which it saw especially in the trade unions and the French Communist Party) and modern capitalism, and stressed the potential of youth and white-collar workers as revolutionary subjects. SouB consisted of around three hundred militants at its peak and dissolved in 1965.¹⁶⁰ However, SouB's previously obscure journal became popular in France during May '68, with its 'heretical ideas' seemingly confirmed by the uprising.¹⁶¹

Despite this rise to prominence, it may still seem strange that a small French group, which formed out of debates between post-war European Trotskyists, exerted such influence upon activists in far away Brisbane. Solidarity, though prolific writers of pamphlets on radical history, was an even smaller group of eighty - one hundred members.¹⁶² ASIO files point to the role of Brian Laver in imbuing activists with these libertarian socialist politics. Laver's 'brilliance' was seen as giving members confidence that their ideas were essentially correct.¹⁶³ Laver's regular correspondence with Solidarity in Britain, experiences in Europe

¹⁵⁷ Louis Robertson, "Recollections of My Time in Solidarity," (2006), <http://libcom.org/library/recollections-solidarity-louis-robertson>. Accessed on 5/07/2010.

¹⁵⁸ For instance, see Maurice Brinton, "The Malaise on the Left," *Solidarity* 7, no. 12, <http://libcom.org/library/malaise-on-the-left-brinton-solidarity>. Accessed on 6/08/2010.

¹⁵⁹ Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 201-05; Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically* (Austin University of Texas Press, 1979), pp. 49-51.

¹⁶⁰ Linden, "Socialisme Ou Barbarie: A French Revolutionary Group (1949-1965)." On SouB's analysis of bureaucracy, Andre Liebich, "Socialisme Ou Barbarie: A Radical Critique of Bureaucracy," pp. 55-62; George Lichteim, *Marxism in Modern France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), pp. 185-91.

¹⁶¹ Linden, "Socialisme Ou Barbarie: A French Revolutionary Group (1949-1965)."

¹⁶² Robertson, "Recollections of My Time in Solidarity."

¹⁶³ "A.S.I.O File of Esme Garner, Volume 6," pp. 38-39.

and personal charisma give this explanation some credence.¹⁶⁴ However, SouB's 'heretical ideas' resonated primarily because of the culture and earlier experiences of Brisbane activists.

The Brisbane left had emphasised self-management since SDA's dissolution.¹⁶⁵ SouB had extensively discussed this theme, stressing 'workers' management' as an alternative to the bureaucratic degeneration of revolutions.¹⁶⁶ The broad libertarianism prevalent in Brisbane was important. The book *Up the Right Channels* typified this. Over two hundred pages long, it critiqued nearly every department at UQ.¹⁶⁷ It was the collective work of over a hundred activists, most of who were always out of the ambit of the SMG.¹⁶⁸ Nearly two thousand copies were sold on campus.¹⁶⁹ Its politics were radical, mocking those who politely asked the university administration for improvements and expected change. They were also left-libertarian, stressing the need for students to have democratic control over their lives.¹⁷⁰

Brisbane's relative independence from the Leninist left also provides some explanation. By contrast, as Melbourne activists developed revolutionary politics some of them became attracted to the Maoist Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) (CPA-ML).¹⁷¹ The CPA-ML boasted a number of working class militants, such as tramways union secretary Clarrie O'Shea.¹⁷² Their prestige was greatly enhanced by the perception of the

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Brian Laver No. 1. On his charisma, for instance, Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1; Interview with Peter Kearney, April 20, 2009.

¹⁶⁵ Revolutionary Socialist Alliance, "Towards a Socialist Humanist Society," in *Revolutionary Socialist Alliance Ephemera* (Fryer Library), p. 3; "R.S.S.A Manifesto on Self-Management," pp. 12-17; ———, "May Day 1970," in *Revolutionary Socialist Alliance Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

¹⁶⁶ For instance, Socialisme Ou Barbarie, "On the Content of Socialism 1," (1955), <http://libcom.org/library/content-socialism-socialisme-ou-barbarie>. Accessed on 21/01/2010.

¹⁶⁷ Dan O'Neill et al, *Up the Right Channels* (St Lucia, 1970).

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Dan O'Neill.

¹⁶⁹ Prentice, "Up the Right Channels," p. 9.

¹⁷⁰ Dan O'Neill et al, *Up the Right Channels*, pp. 6-9.

¹⁷¹ John Herouvim, "Politics of the Revolving Door: The Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist)," *Melbourne Journal of Politics* 15 (1983-1984): pp. 56-57.

¹⁷² Jeff Sparrow and Jill Sparrow, *Radical Melbourne 2: The Enemy Within* (Carlton North: The Vulgar Press, 2004), p. 173.

Cultural Revolution as an anti-bureaucratic, deeply radical event.¹⁷³ In Sydney, Trotskyism was influential. Trotskyist Bob Gould was prominent in the Vietnam Action Committee.¹⁷⁴ Hall Greenland, also from a Trotskyist background, was a key figure in the Sydney University left.¹⁷⁵ Besides the Communist Party, primarily composed of older, non-student militants, Brisbane did not have a Leninist grouping that activists could turn to.¹⁷⁶ While sects like the Communist League existed, they lacked the popularity amongst movements that Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide Leninist groupings had.¹⁷⁷

Although anarchist pamphlets that espoused libertarian politics were available, they generally did not discuss changes in capitalism.¹⁷⁸ Greg George recalls that the Sydney anarchists they had contact with were also seen as 'disorganised' and even 'wimpy'.¹⁷⁹ Solidarity and SouB however, developed revolutionary ideas in a modern context. Castoriadis's *Modern Capitalism and Revolution* - for SMG a 'profound analysis' - was a significant example of this.¹⁸⁰ *Modern Capitalism and Revolution* examined changes in society, not only in economic terms, but 'in the content of ... ideologies and ... the function of their institutions'.¹⁸¹ The level of worker-student collaboration in Brisbane perhaps encouraged activists to move beyond the New Left tendency to see students as a new vanguard class.¹⁸² The Brisbane New Left's questioning of hierarchical structures in

¹⁷³ Herouvim, "Politics of the Revolving Door: The Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist)," p. 156.

¹⁷⁴ Russell, "Today the Students, Tomorrow the Workers! Radical Student Politics and the Australian Labour Movement, 1960-1972", pp. 318-19.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 316-18.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 257-58.

¹⁷⁷ On the Adelaide Maoists' strength, Graham Hastings, *It Can't Happen Here: A Political History of Australian Student Activism* (Adelaide: The Students' Association of Flinders University, 2003), p. 40.

¹⁷⁸ For instance see "Anarchy from Enrage," in *Personal Collection of Peter Gamble*.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Greg George No. 1.

¹⁸⁰ Self-Management Group, "Preface to Modern Capitalism and Revolution," (Brisbane: Self-Management Group, 1972). Available in Zapata's Library.

¹⁸¹ Paul Cardan, "Modern Capitalism and Revolution," (Brisbane: Self-Management Group, 1972), p. i. Available in Zapata's Library.

¹⁸² For instance, Russell, "Today the Students, Tomorrow the Workers! Radical Student Politics and the Australian Labour Movement, 1960-1972", pp. 364-65; Warren Osmond, "Toward Self-Awareness," in *The*

universities could fit in with SouB's analysis of how capital increasingly affected all aspects of social life.¹⁸³

The Leninist tendency in the RSP soon departed. Midway through 1971 members of the tendency like Bomber Perrier and Terry Cook formed the Labor Action Group.¹⁸⁴ In December 1971, the RSP changed its name to the Self-Management Group, identifying itself with 'the essence of our socialist position' - self-management.¹⁸⁵

The Self-Management Group emerged out of the New Left's shift to revolutionary politics. Although activists like Brian Laver had a substantial presence in public discourse, their role in shaping revolutionary subjectivity was much less significant than factors such as the emergence of a non-Leninist, libertarian culture in Brisbane and the circulation of international struggles. Activists' lived experiences of state repression, direct action and collective organisation also played a pivotal part in this transformation. Although this revolutionary shift was a common development for New Left groupings across the world, the SMG's politics were unique, reflecting the features of the protest movement distinctive to Brisbane. SMG took SDA's search for 'grassroots forms of politics' a step further, and saw autonomous rebellions by students and workers as constantly going on, and as capable of radically changing society.¹⁸⁶ They attempted to go beyond the 'modesty' of some of the Brisbane New Left's demands, and expressed a utopian politics centred around the concept of self-management.¹⁸⁷

Australian New Left: Critical Essays and Strategies, ed. Richard Gordon (Melbourne: William Heinemann Australia, 1970), pp. 215-16.

¹⁸³ See Paul Cardan, "The Crisis of Modern Society," (London: Solidarity). Available in Zapata's Library.

¹⁸⁴ Joy Guyatt and Greg George, *Publications of Political Organisations in Queensland* (St Lucia: Fryer Memorial Library, 1983), p. 156.

¹⁸⁵ Self-Management Group, "Race, Power, Oppression: Black-White Attitudes in Australia," (Brisbane: Self-Management Group, 1972), p. 2. The December 1971 name change to SMG is mentioned in Janita Cunnington, "The Road to Freedom Is Paved with Struggle," in *Personal Collection of Tony Kneipp*, p. 1.

¹⁸⁶ "The Left in Australia," p. 4.

¹⁸⁷ "The Modesty of Our Demands: An Attempt to Define an Indignation," (Zapata's Library).

'Workers' council democracy not parliamentary': The Self-Management Group, 1971 - 1975

The Self-Management Group has developed a maturity and crystallisation of purpose ... Their policy of Self-Management/Workers' Control, whatever one might think of it, has a distinct appeal to all sections of the Community, in this present day and age.¹
ASIO file, 1972.

From today's vantage point, self-management may seem like an unusual concept with which to define a grouping from the revolutionary left. A plethora of business literature discusses techniques for developing a corporate culture of 'self-management' - more about encouraging people to better manage their own exploitation, or the exploitation of others.² However, radicals of the late sixties and seventies understood self-management very differently. For George Katsiaficas it was a central aspiration of the 'global New Left', shared by movements against racism, patriarchy and bureaucracy.³ In contemporary neoliberal discourse self-management is framed in terms of individuals improving their workplace 'productivity', but it was then seen as a democratisation of social institutions, creating a new world in which 'hierarchical authority' was abolished.⁴ Self-management was contrasted with

¹ "A.S.I.O File of Esme Garner, Volume 6," p. 38.

² Such as Martin De Waale, Jean Morval, and Robert Georges Sheitoyan, *Self-Management in Organisations: The Dynamics of Interaction* (Seattle: Hogrefe and Huber, 1993); Kenneth Blanchard, *Self-Leadership and the One Minute Manager: Discover the Magic of No Excuses!* (New York: Morrow, 2005); Frank McNair, *It's Ok to Ask 'Em to Work: And Other Essential Maxims for Smart Managers* (New York: AMACON, 2000); Alan Stanton, *Invitation to Self-Management* (Dab Hand, 1989).

³ Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968*, pp. 17-18. On this conception of self-management, also Jaroslav Vanek, ed. *Self-Management: Economic Liberation of Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Education, 1975).

⁴ Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968*, p. 106. On self-management's importance to Australian radicals, see Russell, "Today the Students, Tomorrow the Workers! Radical Student Politics and the Australian Labour Movement, 1960-1972", pp. 333-67. Also Humphrey McQueen, "Some

both the bureaucratic class in the West and the state-run managerial apparatus of the Soviet Union.⁵

The SMG promulgated this optimism about such utopian possibilities. Members were 'drawn to its democratic message'.⁶ Ian Rintoul explained that the SMG was all about 'socialism from below' and recollected how in his first student election he crossed out the official options and scrawled 'For Workers' Councils'.⁷ Through arguing for self-management in all areas of society, SMG critiqued capitalism systemically.

Nevertheless, revolutions are not simply the product of action by revolutionary groups. St Petersburg 1917, Spain 1936 and May 1968 all surprised organised revolutionaries.⁸ These 'orgasms of history' were the products of vast social dynamics, beyond the control of any one organisation or milieu.⁹ It would therefore be wrong to judge SMG by their success or failure at sparking revolution. However, revolutionaries can complement processes of struggle. They can argue for greater democracy and militancy. They can foster a culture of radical thought, and connect everyday antagonisms to politics.¹⁰ In a 1979 essay, Greg George and Brian Laver argued similarly that their task was not 'to make

Considerations on Certain Forms of Industrial Democracy in Australia," (2003), http://home.alphalink.com.au/~loge27/work/work_control.htm. Accessed on 16/08/2010.

⁵ Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968*, pp. 18-19.

⁶ Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1.

⁷ Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 1.

⁸ On Spain, Tom Wetzel, "Workers' Power and the Spanish Revolution," <http://libcom.org/library/workers-power-and-the-spanish-revolution-tom-wetzel>. Accessed on 12/08/2010. On Trotsky's own assessment that revolutionaries 'were asleep' in February 1917, Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative*, p. 203. On the surprise that greeted May '68, Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968*, p. 112. Andre Gorz argued in 1968 that there will no longer be 'revolutionary general strikes' of the European working class. Andre Gorz, "Reform and Revolution," *Socialist Register* 5(1968): p. 111.

⁹ An analysis that understands May '68 similarly is Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002). On the 'orgasms of history', Ives Fremion, *Orgasms of History: 3000 Years of Spontaneous Insurrections* (Oakland: AK Press, 2002).

¹⁰ On the role of revolutionary groups in a recent Australian context, see Eden, "The Practice of Hope." Also Mark Gawne, "The Praxis of Revolutionary Action: Class, Autonomy & Democracy" (Honours Thesis, The University of Wollongong, 2006).

revolutions' but to help people become revolutionaries.¹¹ They believed that broader social forces posed a 'multiform challenge' to authority.¹² Without the existence of these forces, their task would be absurd.

This chapter will examine the SMG's attempt at this task from 1971 - 1975. The SMG grappled with the decline of the extra-parliamentary radical movement after Gough Whitlam's 1972 election. Nevertheless, it was able to flourish. It articulated a distinct set of ultra-left views, emphasising radical democracy, the integration of traditionally working class organisations into capitalism and the centrality of everyday life to politics. These views blended concepts developed overseas with the SMG's original ideas. In 1974 it won victories around civil liberties and assessment reform. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the weaknesses of the SMG, including 'idealism', restrictions on membership and sexism. They were linked to the limitations inherent in the SMG's own ideas as well as to the context that it existed within.

Firstly, SMG must be understood as part of a transnational response, alongside Solidarity and SouB, to the fixed categories of the global left. Theoretically, they critiqued the tendency to fetishise a narrowly defined working class.¹³ They attacked the blind acceptance of orthodox Marxist dogma, rather than attempting to analyse changes in social reality.¹⁴ For SMG, the left's focus on conquering 'political power' de-emphasised the egalitarian nature of socialism.¹⁵ In contrast to the fixed hierarchies of other left groups, they tried to organise democratically, 'creating in our own lives the self-activity and co-operation

¹¹ Greg George and Brian Laver, "Beyond the Illusions of the Left," in *The Sources of Hope*, ed. Ross Fitzgerald (Sydney Peragom Press, 1979), p. 242.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ For instance, Cardan, "Modern Capitalism and Revolution," p. 99.

¹⁴ Paul Cardan, "The Fate of Marxism," (London: Solidarity). SMG distributed this pamphlet. "A.S.I.O File of John Lawrence Jiggins," p. 66.

¹⁵ Cardan, "The Meaning of Socialism," pp. 12-14.

without which we would ... be whimpering through the bars of our cages'.¹⁶ They supported 'human liberation' rather than national liberation struggles, critiquing the hierarchical structure of organisations such as the NLF.¹⁷ Rather than seeing a vanguard party with a leadership role as of paramount importance, they emphasised workers' 'constant subjective struggle'.¹⁸ They sought to assist rather than lead class struggles.¹⁹

The main impact of Solidarity and SouB was this mostly intellectual critique. However, SMG had a more activist orientation. This took a different form from 'activism-as-usual' - they argued that rallying had degenerated from an experiment in participatory democracy to mere ritual.²⁰ By focusing on a single overarching issue, marches also neglected to analyse how capital affected all 'aspects of social life'.²¹ Instead, SMG members threw themselves into agitation in the institutions in which they studied or worked. Around a hundred different leaflets were distributed in these places.²²

SMG's activism was fuelled by its size. With a substantial membership, it was able to both articulate and, to some degree, implement, ultra-left politics. However, some context is necessary to emphasise the significance of this point. Post-war, ultra-left groupings have been

¹⁶ White Collar Cell - Self-Management Group, "Somehow We Got Your Address," in *Personal Collection of Frank Jordan*. This was a circular letter sent to prospective SMG members.

¹⁷ Self-Management Group, "Human Liberation Not National Liberation....Why a Communist Wouldn't Support the P.R.G," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library); ———, "The Middle East-the Self-Management Group View," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library); SMG (Griffith Cell), "Why Libertarians Support the Struggle of the Timorese People," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

¹⁸ Self-Management Group, "Preface to Working-Class Consciousness," (Brisbane: Self-Management Group, 1972).

¹⁹ ———, "Workers' Council Democracy Not Parliamentary"; Solidarity, "Working-Class Consciousness," (Brisbane: Self-Management Group, 1972).

²⁰ Self-Management Group, "Popular Fronts and the S.M.G."

²¹ ———, "Marches in the Present Situation Are Useless," in *Personal Collection of Janita Cunnington*.

²² "Self-Management Group Ephemera," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library). Also, "Political - Socialist Party of Australia, Libertarian Social Alliance, International Socialists, Self Management Group, Socialist Labor Party, Socialist Workers Party, Workers Party : ephemera material" (State Library of Queensland) and, for instance, *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*, *Personal Collection of Grahame Garner* and *Personal Collection of Frank Jordan*.

numerically marginal in Australia and worldwide.²³ The only previous historical account of an Australian (non-anarchist) ultra-leftist is Steve Wright's tale of the 'revolutionary odyssey' of Jim Dawson, the key figure in the forties Melbourne journal the *Southern Advocate for Workers' Councils*.²⁴ While important for being the only English speaking journal of council communism, the *Southern Advocate's* marginality is indicated by how 'its readership literally started dying out', with pieces encouraging subscribers to donate generously in their wills.²⁵

In the early seventies a myriad of ultra-left groupuscles, all bearing some ideological similarity to SMG, arose in Australia. In Sydney, which had a tradition of free-thinking libertarianism and European migrant anarchism,²⁶ these included the Anarchist Horde, the Rebel Worker Group and the anarcho-syndicalist group Kronstadt.²⁷ The anarchist owned space 'Nestor's Cellar' was a popular location for political meetings - as well as offering plentiful supplies of LSD.²⁸ In 1972 in Melbourne, anarchists formed Australia's first free

²³ There is little written on the global history of the post-war ultra-left. One article that touches upon this theme is Loren Goldner, "Review of Christophe Bourseiller. L'histoire Generale De 'L'ultra-Gauche'," <http://home.earthlink.net/~lrgoldner/bourseiller.html>. Accessed 6/09/2010. Perhaps the largest groups were in Italy, Georgy Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonisation of Everyday Life* (Oakland: AK Press, 2006), pp. 23-24. A general portrait can be derived from writings focusing on individual groups, such as Franklin Rosemont and Charles Radcliffe, eds., *Dancin' in the Streets! Anarchists, IWWs, Surrealists, Situationists & Provos in the 1960s as recorded in the pages of The Rebel Worker and Heatwave* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2005); David Goodway, ed. *For Workers' Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2004); Root & Branch, ed. *Root & Branch: The Rise of the Workers' Movements* (Greenwich: Fawcett Cress, 1975).

²⁴ Steve Wright, "Left Communism in Australia: J.A Dawson and the Southern Advocate for Workers' Councils," *Thesis Eleven* (1980), <http://www.left-dis.nl/uk/dawson.htm>. Accessed on 5/07/2010. A comprehensive bibliography of Australian anarchist history is Michael Vaux, "Bibliography of Anarchism & Syndicalism in Australia," <http://www.takver.com/history/biblio.htm>. Accessed on 13/07/2010. However, the vast majority of these works concern the early twentieth or late nineteenth centuries. In 1986 Verity Burgmann concluded that contemporary anarchism was essentially dead. Verity Burgmann, "One Hundred Years of Anarchism in Australia," *Arena*, no. 74 (1986): p. 114.

²⁵ Wright, "Left Communism in Australia: J.A Dawson and the Southern Advocate for Workers' Councils."

²⁶ John Englehart, "Anarchism in Sydney 1975-1981," (1982), <http://www.takver.com/history/sydney/syd7581.htm>. Accessed on 3/04/2010. On libertarianism, Anne Coombs, *Sex and Anarchy: The Life and Death of the Sydney Push* (Ringwood: Penguin Books Australia, 1996).

²⁷ Russell, "Today the Students, Tomorrow the Workers! Radical Student Politics and the Australian Labour Movement, 1960-1972", pp. 345-46.

²⁸ Terry Irving and Rowan Cahill, *Radical Sydney: Places, Portraits and Unruly Episodes* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2010), pp. 292-97.

legal aid service out of the Collingwood Free Store, a shop that encouraged 'mutual aid and co-operation' through a common storehouse in which people would leave unwanted possessions while others took what goods they needed.²⁹ However, the Free Store soon closed and activists recollect that the Sydney and Melbourne milieu was considerably smaller and less organised than the Brisbane scene.³⁰

SMG began from similarly marginal origins, starting with a core of about eight people.³¹ But from 1971 - 1973 it grew rapidly, reaching a point in which two - three hundred people were associated with it.³² As a result of this growth, ASIO noted that SMG had 'developed a maturity and crystallisation of purpose'.³³ ASIO commented that its 'policy of Self-Management/Workers' Control ... has a distinct appeal to all sections of the Community, in this present day and age'.³⁴

Tony Kneipp's 1976 pamphlet *Popular Fronts, United Fronts and Going It Alone*, written around SMG's dissolution, is the only account of its early growth.³⁵ Kneipp argues that they attracted libertarians who had been involved in movements but were not organised amongst themselves.³⁶ Their 'principled stance' over the final Vietnam Moratorium and the

²⁹ Takver, "Carnival Anarchism in Melbourne, 1970-1975,"

http://www.takver.com/history/melb/carnival1970_75.htm#legal. Accessed on 15/09/2010.

³⁰ Ibid. Interview with Greg George No. 1; Interview with John Jiggins No. 2.

³¹ On the initial numbers of SMG, when it was still called RSP, "A.S.I.O File of Esme Garner, Volume 5," p. 110.

³² Derived from interviews including; Interview with Brian Laver No. 1; Interview with John Jiggins No. 1; Interview with Greg George No. 1; Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 1.

³³ "A.S.I.O File of Esme Garner, Volume 6," p. 38.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Tony Kneipp, "Popular Fronts, United Fronts and Going It Alone," in *Revolutionary Socialist Party Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

³⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

anti-racist strike around the July 1971 Springbok Tour helped garner support.³⁷ They argued for the need to raise demands around self-management.³⁸

However, the Springbok Tour actions were Brisbane's last mass mobilisations for several years.³⁹ Dan O'Neill recounts that, by 1973, 'everything had gone to shit'.⁴⁰ In the early seventies O'Neill went to Versailles in France to attend an anti-war conference. At this stage he felt there was still a vibrant radical movement. But when he returned to Brisbane the 'whole thing had collapsed'.⁴¹ O'Neill moved to Sydney for several years because he was so disheartened by the reduced level of activism.⁴² SMG was thus 'left like a shag on the rock'.⁴³ Worse, SMG became isolated within the remaining left. Other radicals blamed them for the movement's demise because of their reluctance to organise marches.⁴⁴ ASIO files from 1972 record members worrying about disruption to their activism from other leftists.⁴⁵

The Cells and a Politics of Everyday Life

In this context, SMG moved from primarily writing material for other radicals to more general propaganda.⁴⁶ In 1972, they shifted from working as a united group to a system based around cells.⁴⁷ The cells comprised members at 'points of production', being the institutions in which activists studied or worked.⁴⁸ This was partly a practical decision stemming from size

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ On the Springbok strike, Revolutionary Socialist Party, "We Will Fight in the Refectory, We Will Fight in the Administration, We Will Fight in the Departments, but What For???", in Dan O'Neill Collection (Fryer Library, Box 5). On revolutionary demands in the Moratorium, "A.S.I.O File of Esme Garner, Volume 5," p. 119.

³⁹ Kneipp, "Popular Fronts, United Fronts and Going it Alone," p. 1.

⁴⁰ Interview with Dan O'Neill.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Kneipp, "Popular Fronts, United Fronts and Going It Alone," p. 1.

⁴⁴ Ibid. On their isolation, also "Radical Censorship."

⁴⁵ "A.S.I.O File of John Lawrence Jiggins," p. 77.

⁴⁶ Kneipp, "Popular Fronts, United Fronts and Going It Alone," p. 2.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Self-Management Group, "Introduction to the Self-Management Group." Also ———, "Internal Democracy," in *Personal Collection of Frank Jordan*, p. 5.

and convenience.⁴⁹ However, the cell structure also allowed SMG to critique oppression at 'the level it existed', that is, in the everyday.⁵⁰ For Frank Jordan, 'the cell structure was fantastic ... it prevents bureaucratic degeneration, the focus on workplaces reminds people of their own oppression ... it discourages you from being a boss over other workers'.⁵¹ The cells made decisions autonomously, and then reported back on their activity to general meetings.⁵² General meetings were held whenever a cell felt the need for one. They determined membership and dealt with anything else that affected the SMG as a whole.⁵³

The 144 page ASIO file compiled on SMG member John Jiggins expresses some dismay at the rapid proliferation of cells.⁵⁴ By 1973, cells existed at the two Brisbane universities, in hospitals, industrial workplaces, high schools, training colleges and in white-collar jobs.⁵⁵ With this growth, the SMG achieved some influence outside Brisbane.⁵⁶ They liaised with 'class anarchists' in Sydney, and a Melbourne Self-Management Group was established in July 1973.⁵⁷ Their views affected some Adelaide activists.⁵⁸ Later, they influenced Sydney radicals like Peter McGregor, a well-known anti-war and anti-apartheid agitator.⁵⁹ A Western Australian SMG was formed in October 1974.⁶⁰

⁴⁹ "Popular Fronts, United Fronts and Going It Alone," p. 2.

⁵⁰ Self-Management Group, "Teacher's College - the Politics of Oppression!," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*.

⁵¹ Interview with Frank Jordan, February 17, 2010.

⁵² White Collar Cell - Self-Management Group, "Somehow We Got Your Address."

⁵³ Ibid. Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 1.

⁵⁴ "A.S.I.O File of John Lawrence Jiggins," p. 95.

⁵⁵ "Self-Management Group Leaflets Chronology," in *Personal Collection of Greg George*; Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 2, April 21, 2009.

⁵⁶ "A.S.I.O File of Esme Garner, Volume 6," p. 39.

⁵⁷ Ibid. On the Melbourne Self-Management Group, "Meeting at Boulogne Sur Mer," in *Personal Collection of Frank Jordan*, p. 8. Also "Peter Kearney Correspondence to S.M.G from Melbourne," in *Personal Collection of Frank Jordan*.

⁵⁸ "Peter Kearney Correspondence to S.M.G from Melbourne."

⁵⁹ Jon Breslin, "Preliminary Discussion Meeting for National Libertarian Conference," in *Personal Collection of Frank Jordan*, p. 1; Peter McGregor, *Cultural Battles: The Meaning of the Vietnam-USA War* (Brunswick: Scam Publications, 1998), pp. 15-16. On McGregor's life, Tony Stephens, "A Radical Activist to the Very End", <http://www.smh.com.au/news/obituaries/a-radical-activist-to-the-very-end/2008/01/22/1200764259941.html>. Accessed on 12/09/2010.

From around March 9, 1972, SMG began a classroom campaign in universities and colleges.⁶¹ ASIO was impressed. They commented that SMG's:

... confrontation with the University, Teachers Training Colleges, etc., continues to be carried on, with impunity, and is achieving success ... It is an indication of the increasing and developing maturity of this group, that they can cover colleges situated all over Brisbane, as well as ... University classrooms.⁶²

This campaign focused on the 'social relationships' that define peoples' daily existence. These relationships were considered to be essentially hierarchical, between 'order-givers' and 'order-takers', and were embedded in all of society's institutions.⁶³ They needed to be challenged. Universities had a large concentration of people, 'relative freedom of action' for radicals and a number of SMG members, making them a logical place to start.⁶⁴ They were prolific leafleters, despite having to manually use a roneo machine to duplicate copies.⁶⁵ The leaflets were vigorously distributed, and although they were very text heavy, activists recollect that students would engage with them.⁶⁶ They focused on 'the politics ... of ... day-to-day existence, not the usual connotation of "politics" '.⁶⁷ Propaganda agitated against the alienation experienced in students' lives. The April 17, 1972, leaflet *The Moment of Decision* commented:

... most of us would have had the experience of not going to a lecture because it is so boring, tedious, only to feel just as alienated on not going because we felt that we really should have gone anyway ... Learning for most students takes on the aspect of doing just enough work to pass exams ... Writing an essay becomes not a creative exercise, but the

⁶⁰ "Notice of Western Australian S.M.G General Meeting," (Perth Libertarian Library).

⁶¹ This date is from "Self-Management Group Leaflets Chronology".

⁶² "A.S.I.O File of John Lawrence Jiggins," p. 81.

⁶³ Self-Management Group (Uni Cell), "We Call on People in This University Who Are Subject to the Orders of Others to Consider," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library). On the critique of social relationships, also Self-Management Group, "Workers' Council Democracy Not Parliamentary".

⁶⁴ Self-Management Group, "Federation of Australian Anarchists Bulletin," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972-1977* (Fryer Library, F2460), p. 6.

⁶⁵ Interview with Greg George No. 1; Interview with John Jiggins No. 1; Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1.

⁶⁶ Interview with Tony Kneipp, April 23, 2009; Interview with Greg George No. 2, April 21, 2009.

⁶⁷ Self-Management Group Q.I.T Cell, "Alienation Everywhere - and Only We Can Fight It," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

collection of various fragments with just enough organisation to make it look as though there is some unity in it ... Learning becomes a process of deception, and even self-deception when people come to believe that this succession of devices really is learning.⁶⁸

The classroom campaign made use of inventive tactics. A particularly original approach was a strategy of trying to turn lectures into political discussions. Activists would barge into a class and propose that it not be another 'boring lecture'.⁶⁹ Instead it should be a 'discussion on some aspect of human liberation',⁷⁰ such as the democratisation of universities.⁷¹ They would ask for a vote over whether students wanted to have one, leaving if they lost.⁷² This was deliberately confrontational, intended to force students to make 'a decision about their powerlessness where they submit to it'.⁷³

Most of the time students voted for classes to continue but SMG did win occasionally.⁷⁴ There were also embarrassing failures. Peter Kearney recalled how engineering students, after the UQ cell had gone to a number of their classes, stockpiled blocks of wood and threw them at members.⁷⁵ Tony Kneipp remembered a hilarious story of an Arts student who, when SMG members told her class 'not to be sheep', shouted 'we have a right to be sheep if we want to be'.⁷⁶ Even this type of failure, though, forced some kind of democratic participation - if only through affirming existing hierarchical relationships. They abandoned this tactic by 1975, feeling that it was too exhausting and would be much more

⁶⁸ Self-Management Group, "The Moment of Decision," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

⁶⁹ ———, "Federation of Australian Anarchists Bulletin," p. 6.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Interview with Greg George No. 1.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ ———, "Introduction to the Self-Management Group."

⁷⁴ Interview with Greg George No. 2.

⁷⁵ Interview with Peter Kearney.

⁷⁶ Interview with Tony Kneipp.

effective as part of a mass movement.⁷⁷ More positively, it meant that members' ability at speaking to an audience improved, reducing reliance on talented orators like Laver.⁷⁸

Several example of success were recorded by ASIO. On June 9, 1972, Janita Cunnington and John Jiggins conducted 'a 1.5 hour discussion' in an Architecture class.⁷⁹ On July 31, 1972, the SMG spoke on 'Self-Managed Education' at a forum at Kelvin Grove Training College after a leaflet received a 'tremendous' response.⁸⁰ The forum was 'excellent', with around fifty people.⁸¹ Their leaflet declared:

... the student is rapidly conditioned into accepting every irrational and bureaucratic order. Those who fail to comply are expelled or leave voluntarily. There are no facilities made for creativity or free thinking. The student is constantly told to value the opinions of so-called "experts" ... Their role is to comply.⁸²

SMG members Lee Beames and Frank Jordan both believe that these attempts to connect 'the personal to the political' formed one of their most effective strategies.⁸³ One text republished by SMG was Solidarity's *The Irrational in Politics*, which, in contrast to the 'traditional left', emphasised the need to understand how structures of oppression functioned in everyday life. Capitalist ideology needed to be challenged on this terrain as well.⁸⁴ John Jiggins argued that this critique was 'the leaflets' real strength ... everyone else tended to always talk about Vietnam, with SMG we were always talking about everyday life, the point of production and the problems that were going on there'.⁸⁵

In 1972 and 1973 the SMG cells built up a profile at UQ and the Queensland Institute of Technology (QIT). Articles by them appeared in both campus newspapers, *Semper Floreat*

⁷⁷ ———, "Federation of Australian Anarchists Bulletin," p. 7.

⁷⁸ "A.S.I.O File of John Lawrence Jiggins," p. 89.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁸¹ "A.S.I.O File of Greg George, Volume 1," p. 89.

⁸² ———, "Latent Fascism," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*.

⁸³ Interview with Lee Beames, February 25, 2010; Interview with Frank Jordan.

⁸⁴ Solidarity, "The Irrational in Politics."

⁸⁵ Interview with John Jiggins No. 2.

and *UNIT*.⁸⁶ They were a reference point.⁸⁷ Most notably, Ian Rintoul, a 'long-haired subversive'⁸⁸ and a QIT SMG activist, featured several times in *UNIT*'s 1972 *Day by Dreary Day* column. Rintoul's celebrity status suggests that SMG had developed a substantial presence.⁸⁹ One piece asked 'has fame spoilt Ian Rintoul?'⁹⁰ Another reported on his adventures in leafleting public servants outside Brisbane's Australia House. Rintoul was told to stop leafleting by 'old Mr Asslick', an army officer who worked there. The officer roared 'I'm a major in the Australian army and I'm telling you to leave'. To this, Rintoul replied 'well I'm a private in the people's army and I'm telling you to fuck off.'⁹¹

On November 3, 1972, a High School Cell was established.⁹² The high school cells eventually included students and teachers at Brisbane Grammar School, Christian Brothers School, Cavendish Road, Nashville and Kelvin High Schools.⁹³ They also agitated about issues related to daily life.⁹⁴ A November 20 pamphlet argued that in school:

... we are guided to the supreme achievement ... Junior, Senior, or ultimately a university pass. Then we are ready for the dog-eat-dog world of job competition ... What we learn is

⁸⁶ Self-Management Group, "Drug Abuse," *Semper Floreat*, June, 1973, p. 2; ———, "As We See It," p. 10; ———, "The Meaning of Socialism," *UNIT*, March, 1972, p. 6; ———, "As We See It," *UNIT*, June, 1972, p. 5; ———, "Five Variations of the Piss-Off," *UNIT*, September, 1972, p. 17; ———, "Love, Sex and Liberation," *UNIT*, October, 1972, p. 8; ———, "Towards a Self-Managed Society," *Semper Floreat*, April, 1973, p. 15; ———, "S.M.G on Liberation," *Semper Floreat*, April, 1973, pp. 15-16.

⁸⁷ "Letters: Self-Management?," *Semper Floreat*, June, 1973, p. 2; Graham Grassie, "S.M.G: A Left Wing Critique," *Semper Floreat*, Vol 43 No. 11, 1973, p. 3, p. 9; Sue Taylor, "Few Minds Are Left," *Semper Floreat*, August 30, 1973, p. 2.

⁸⁸ Dick Walding, "Day by Dreary Day," *UNIT*, October, 1972, p. 16.

⁸⁹ Also on QIT, Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 2. QIT leaflets include Self-Management Group, "A Bureaucrat by Any Other Name Would Smell," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*; Self-Management Group (Q.I.T Cell), "Politics at Q.I.T - Suppression by Agreement," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*; Self-Management Group (Q.I.T Cell), "To Be or Not to Be," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*.

⁹⁰ Dick Walding, "Day by Dreary Day," *UNIT*, October, 1972, p. 16.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18. Another *UNIT* article is Dick Walding, "Day by Dreary Day", *UNIT*, September, 1972, p. 15.

⁹² "A.S.I.O file of Greg George, Volume 1," p. 119.

⁹³ Interview with John Minns, March 19, 2010; Self-Management Group B.G.S Cell, "B.G.S: Power and Reformism," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library); Interview with Drew Hutton No. 2, February 23, 2010; Interview with Barbara Hart, February 24, 2010; Interview with Tony Sheather No. 1.

⁹⁴ For instance, Self-Management Group B.G.S Cell, "B.G.S: Power and Reformism."

not for personal fulfilment but for practical use on the job or for training people in performing meaningless tasks.⁹⁵

They were met with a warm reception from students.⁹⁶ In November 1972, some high-schoolers began self-organising, handing out SMG material to their classmates and helping write leaflets.⁹⁷ The leaflets were condemned in parliament and Police Minister Hodges declared that 'action would be taken to prevent further distribution'.⁹⁸ This was not just bluster as leafleting was illegal in Queensland.⁹⁹ Undeterred, Greg George recalled:

Several carloads of us would get to a school during recess or lunchtime ... the kids loved it. They'd rush out of the classrooms. We'd hand out the leaflets bamm bamm bamm and then we'd leave before we got caught.¹⁰⁰

The white-collar cell again stressed the politics of daily life. They produced a brilliant leaflet, *Boredom at the Office*, in May 1973. It began:

It's nine o'clock. Once again I'm at my utterly boring, monotonous job. My eyes wander to the grey-haired man near me. This office has drained thirty precious years of his life. I can expect the same.¹⁰¹

'The response to it was electric' recalled Ian Rintoul.¹⁰² Despite this success, the white-collar group struggled to build up a consistent presence.¹⁰³ They lacked the experience that other militants had.¹⁰⁴ It was the smallest SMG cell.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁵ Students for Self-Management, "The Education System - Who Is It For?," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

⁹⁶ "A.S.I.O File of Greg George, Volume 1," p. 113.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁹⁸ "Action on Leaflets," *Courier Mail*, November 23, 1972. In *Personal Collection of Greg George*.

⁹⁹ On an earlier crack-down on high school leafleting, Fitzgerald, *From 1915 to the Early 1980s: A History of Queensland*, p. 564.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Greg George No. 1.

¹⁰¹ Self-Management Group, "Boredom at the Office," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*.

¹⁰² Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 2

¹⁰³ Interview with Frank Jordan.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with John Jiggins No. 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* Interview with Frank Jordan.

The Red and Black, Revolutionary Fervour and the Transnational Ultra-Left

SMG ran the Red and Black Bookshop (R & B), which was set up by SDA but inherited by them.¹⁰⁶ The R & B was a 'lively centre of discussion', strategically located in the Elizabeth Arcade in the heart of Brisbane.¹⁰⁷ Greg George and Lee Beames, who helped run the store for several years, recalled how ordinary people would come in from their jobs, buy books and have extensive conversations with store workers.¹⁰⁸ As a leaflet is only a 'one-way form of communication', this dialogue complemented SMG's other propaganda tactics.¹⁰⁹ In 1972 the R & B was raided for selling *The Little Red Schoolbook*.¹¹⁰ Esme Garner, an SMG worker in the R & B at the time, recalled that people who were browsing the store when the police arrived spontaneously put all the shop's books in their bags.¹¹¹ They returned them afterwards, having saved them from confiscation. This gesture suggests some level of community support.¹¹²

Above all, SMG's practice was characterised by a revolutionary fervour. This was manifest in the constant use of slogans like 'For a Society based on Workers' Councils' and 'For Freedom, Equality and a Society based on Human Needs'. Nearly all of their leaflets were signed with these sayings.¹¹³ Another was titled *Don't Think of Self-Management as a*

¹⁰⁶ On SDA and the R & B, Connie Healy, "Radical Bookshops," in *Radical Brisbane: An Unruly History*, ed. Raymond Evans and Carole Ferrier (Carlton North: The Vulgar Press, 2004), pp. 204-05.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 1. The R & B is described as a 'lively centre of discussion' in "Popular Fronts, United Fronts and Going It Alone," p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Greg George No. 1; Interview with Lee Beames.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Frank Jordan.

¹¹⁰ *The Little Red Schoolbook*, an advice book covering contraception, sex, and education, was banned in Queensland. "Banned: Board Chief Refuses to Say Why," *Courier Mail*, April 15, 1972, p. 1.

¹¹¹ "Three on Little Red Book Charges," *The Australian*, July 26, 1972. In "A.S.I.O File of Esme Garner, Volume 6," p. 56.

¹¹² Interview with Esme Garner, April 19, 2009. Parts of this story are in Self-Management Group, "Censorship and Self-Management," in *Personal Collection of Janita Cunningham*. Garner does not remember if any books were stolen.

¹¹³ "Self-Management Group Ephemera."

Way of Running This Society.¹¹⁴ Self-management was a utopian aspiration in which people could escape the world's boredom, hierarchy and alienation and create another society in which they had control over their lives.¹¹⁵ While SMG clearly believed that revolution was a concrete possibility, Brian Laver argues today that they were also 'part of the general forces which collectively led to Bjelke-Petersen's defeat'.¹¹⁶ Louis Althusser has developed the powerful metaphor of 'bending the stick' which helps to highlight the relationship between revolutionary agitation that tries to speak the truth and victories that immediately improve people's lives. For Althusser, this kind of forthright radicalism can create a counterforce that shifts politics leftward. When militants see that 'the stick is bent in the wrong way (that society is more conservative than they want) ... it is necessary, to grasp it and bend it durably in the opposite direction'.¹¹⁷ Although after one bends it the stick does partially come back, the force of bending it can provoke people into thinking about the nature of power and have effect. For SMG, a key part of such 'bending of the stick' was their radical vision of democracy.

SMG's political programme, *Workers' Council Democracy Not Parliamentary* outlined what a directly democratic society might look like.¹¹⁸ Workers' councils would meet in general assemblies and make decisions about how workplaces were run.¹¹⁹ Revocable delegates, following specific instructions from the general assemblies, would co-ordinate regional and national production.¹²⁰ Community councils, operating on similar principles,

¹¹⁴ ———, "Don't Think of Self Management as a Way of Running This Society," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Brian Laver No. 3.

¹¹⁷ Louis Althusser, "It Is Simple to Be a Marxist in Philosophy," in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and Other Essays* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 210.

¹¹⁸ Self-Management Group, "Workers' Council Democracy Not Parliamentary."

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

would make decisions about the neighbourhoods in which people lived.¹²¹ Importantly, SMG stressed that these ideas were secondary to concepts developed by the mass self-organisation of people that would occur in any revolution.¹²² However, speculating about a utopian future helped emphasise the rejection of hierarchies and encouraged a break from activism within the co-ordinates of liberal capitalism. Over twenty thousand copies of *Workers' Council Democracy* were distributed.¹²³ SMG also attacked social democratic organisations that they saw as only offering a nicer form of exploitation. Such honest revolutionary politics has been a rarity in the Australian left.¹²⁴

Their agitation in high schools reflected these beliefs. In 1973, they distributed the broadsheet *Self-Management and the High Schools* to nearly every Brisbane school.¹²⁵ It was illustrated by wonderful cartoons and included a 'self-management survey'.¹²⁶ In one cartoon students declared that they wanted 'to control our own education - to work co-operatively with other students and teachers'.¹²⁷ The 'self-management survey', asked students eight questions about conditions at their school. It offered an option 'c' in which schools were 'ripe for revolutionary action'.¹²⁸ In one of the 'c' answers the principal resigned 'urging

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ "Wither the S.M.G?," in *Personal Collection of Tony Kneipp*.

¹²⁴ For instance, one study of the left that excludes sixties and seventies radicals because of their marginality, let alone including the ultra-left, is Patrick O'Brien, *The Saviours: An Intellectual History of the Left in Australia* (Richmond: Drummond, 1976), p. xiv. Ex-SMG members argued that the outline of a directly democratic society was a new concept for the Australian left, Libertarian Socialist Organisation, "Politics of Human Liberation: Revolution Reassessed" (Fryer Library, HX970. P64 1980), p. 6.

¹²⁵ White Collar Cell - Self-Management Group, "Somehow We Got Your Address."

¹²⁶ Self-Management Group, "Self-Management and the High Schools," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.



collective decision-making by all'.¹²⁹ Liberal managerial strategies that attempted to 'manipulate people rather than demand that all orders be obeyed' were mocked.¹³⁰ A set of answers were devoted to schools where these tactics were employed.¹³¹ They did have 'limited co-operation' with the reformist Council for Democracy in Schools, but this was considered unproductive by SMG.¹³²

While demands for 'collective decision making' were not met, Drew Hutton claims that they were nearly able to establish 'dual power' at some schools, with SMG cells wielding considerable influence.¹³³ It is difficult to assess the exact relationship between the two but the pressure created by SMG's revolutionary enthusiasm perhaps forced schools to improve conditions. At Hutton's school, Nashville High, he was appointed to two syllabus committees, and more progressive courses were introduced.¹³⁴ At Cavendish Road, where there were several members, Barbara Hart recalls that they were able to organise mass meetings around issues of dress and authoritarianism. In her own class Hart tried to put her ideas into practice.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² ———, "Federation of Australian Anarchists Bulletin," p. 8.

¹³³ Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1. Also, ———, "Federation of Australian Anarchists Bulletin," p. 8.

¹³⁴ Interview with Drew Hutton No. 2.

She would not send schoolchildren to the principal's office and encouraged non-sexist behaviour.¹³⁵

These themes of radical democracy and opposition to reformism were echoed in the practice of the health and industrial cells. The health cell comprised about eight members and produced leaflets detailing how a 'self-managed hospital' would be run.¹³⁶ They critiqued what they called the 'mystification' surrounding doctors' role in hospitals, giving them an elite status compared to other health workers.¹³⁷ Instead they argued that all health workers contributed important skills and that each worker should have 'equal decision-making power' in running a hospital.¹³⁸ Moreover, they attacked nationalisation of health care for concentrating power 'in the hands of a few people in Canberra'.¹³⁹ SMG industrial workers would attend union meetings and call for discussion, encouraging greater democracy. Grahame Garner, a key militant who worked at the Evans Deakins (E.D) docks, remembers that 'the union leaders would get up, put forward a motion and ask for a vote, and then they'd ask any questions. Well I'd say let's have a debate'.¹⁴⁰ Besides E.D, SMG had industrial members at the meatworks, the Cairncross State Dock and who worked as builders' labourers and metal workers.¹⁴¹ Drew Hutton recalls that SMG 'gave the unions nearly as much stick as

¹³⁵ Interview with Barbara Hart.

¹³⁶ On numbers, Interview with Joan Rooke, April 21, 2009. Self-Management Group, "Health Care in a Self-Managed Society," in *Political - Socialist Party of Australia, Libertarian Social Alliance, International Socialists, Self Management Group, Socialist Labor Party, Socialist Workers Party, Workers Party : ephemera material* (State Library of Queensland). Similar leaflets are Self-Management Group (Medical Workers), "Hospitals and Self-Management," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library); ———, "Medical Education," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

¹³⁷ Self-Management Group (Medical Workers), "Hospitals and Self-Management."

¹³⁸ S.M.G Health Workers, "Why???", in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

¹³⁹ Self-Management Group (Medical Workers), "Hospitals and Self-Management"

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Grahame Garner, April 19, 2009.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. A builders labourer in association with the Brisbane Self-Management Group, "Joseph Windsor," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library); Self-Management Workers in the Metal Industry, "Out of the Frying Pan: Common Problems of Workers at E.D's and State Dock," in *Personal Collection of Grahame Garner*; Self-Management Group, "No More Jockeys - Let the Horses Rule!," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*; Blacklisted Metal Worker, "Bosses Blacklist (Who Calls the Tune?)," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

the bosses'.¹⁴² The unions were deemed to be 'as essential to capitalism as the Commonwealth Bank' and were critiqued for being like managers, providing a compliant workforce.¹⁴³

ASIO described the E.D docks as a 'hot bed of industrial intrigue'.¹⁴⁴ SMG was involved in slow-downs and work stoppages and agitated for workers' self-management.¹⁴⁵ In April 1972, E.D managing director L.T Knevitt complained that SMG's emergence had led to a huge increase in stoppages.¹⁴⁶ That most SMG members were students or working elsewhere was an advantage. Joe Toscano and Ian Rintoul recall, with other members, distributing scores of leaflets in the mornings before work started. If SMG dockworkers had done this they could be dismissed.¹⁴⁷ On April 2, 1973, Evans Deakins decided to shut the shipyards down, unless they were heavily subsidised by the federal government.¹⁴⁸ Their profit rate was deteriorating and they wanted to curb worker militancy.¹⁴⁹ The unions and the rank-and-file shop committee pleaded for the dock's nationalisation.¹⁵⁰ Typically, SMG argued for self-management of the shipyard instead.¹⁵¹ They ultimately lost this campaign.¹⁵²

¹⁴² Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1.

¹⁴³ Self-Management Group, "S.M.G on the Trade Unions," in *Personal Collection of Grahame Garner*. Also on this stance are, A Revolutionary Metal Worker, "Workers' Self-Management or the Management of Bosses and Bureaucrats?," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*; Self-Management Group - Industrial Section, "Workers' Self-Management or Trade Unions & the A.L.P.," in *Personal Collection of Grahame Garner*.

¹⁴⁴ "A.S.I.O File of Esme Garner, Volume 6," p. 16.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Grahame Garner; Metal Worker Comrades of the Self-Management Group, "Workers' Self-Management for E.D's Shipyards," in *Personal Collection of Janita Cunnington*; Worker Comrades in the Self-Management Group, "E.D Solidarity - What a Shambles!!," in *Personal Collection of Grahame Garner*.

¹⁴⁶ "New Group a Force in Shipyard Stops," *Courier Mail*, April 6, 1972, p. 14.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Joe Toscano, April 9, 2009; Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 1.

¹⁴⁸ Evans Deakins Industries, "To All Employees," in *Robert Walker Papers-Documents relating to worker militancy in the Brisbane shipbuilding industry, 1969-1974* (Fryer Library, F3447).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ "Unions Say Take Over (Newspaper Clipping)," in *Robert Walker Papers-Documents relating to worker militancy in the Brisbane shipbuilding industry, 1969-1974*; Rank-and-File Committee, "Is Evans Deakin's a Sinking Shipyard?," in *Robert Walker Papers-Documents relating to worker militancy in the Brisbane shipbuilding industry, 1969-1974* (Fryer Library); "Govt. Asked for Shipping Orders (Newspaper Clipping)," in *Robert Walker Papers-Documents relating to worker militancy in the Brisbane shipbuilding industry, 1969-1974* (Fryer Library).

¹⁵¹ Self-Management Group, "E.D Worker's Last Stand," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

¹⁵² Interview with Brian Laver No. 1.

Although the dock remained open, there were retrenchments. By November 26, 1973, 135 workers, of 750, had lost their jobs.¹⁵³

Despite this array of local agitations, SMG's practice was informed by a transnational network of the ultra-left. Letters from Solidarity were read out at meetings.¹⁵⁴ Grahame Garner communicated with the Philadelphia Solidarity group.¹⁵⁵ Closer to home, they corresponded with the unfortunately named Revolutionary Committee of the Communist Party of New Zealand (Expelled), which was similarly influenced by Solidarity and Socialisme Ou Barbarie.¹⁵⁶ Two delegates represented SMG at an international ultra-left conference in Boulogne sur Mer in France from April 14 - 15, 1974.¹⁵⁷ Organisations from Britain, France, Germany and Belgium were present.¹⁵⁸ Frank Jordan, a SMG delegate, recalls that it established some long-term ties.¹⁵⁹

These links were less ephemeral than international connections in the late sixties. This had advantages and disadvantages.¹⁶⁰ Concrete ideas and experiences could be shared and discussed. However, an ideology or theorist could assume an inflated importance, marginalising other perspectives. Janita Cunnington recalled that in SMG, Cornelius Castoriadis's work became 'holy writ'.¹⁶¹ Despite this assessment, members were influenced by theorists like Erich Fromm and Wilhelm Reich.¹⁶² SMG's *Internal Democracy* statement encouraged members to go beyond the Solidarity pamphlets in which Castoriadis was

¹⁵³ "Ship Order Likely, but Men to Go (Newspaper Clipping)," in *Robert Walker Papers-Documents relating to worker militancy in the Brisbane shipbuilding industry, 1969-1974* (Fryer Library).

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Brian Laver No. 1; "A.S.I.O File of Esme Garner, Volume 5," p. 121.

¹⁵⁵ "A.S.I.O File of Esme Garner, Volume 6," p. 85.

¹⁵⁶ E-Mail Correspondence with Toby Boraman, April 25, 2010.

¹⁵⁷ "Meeting at Boulogne Sur Mer."

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Frank Jordan.

¹⁶⁰ On earlier links developing through cultural processes and informal exchange, Richard Ivan Jobs, "Youth Movements: Travel, Protest and Europe in 1968," pp. 376-404.

¹⁶¹ Janita Cunnington's Response to Self-Management Group Questionnaire.

¹⁶² On Fromm, Self-Management Group, "Traditional Leftism or Libertarian Communism," in *Personal Collection of Tony Kneipp* (1977), pp. 12-14. On Reich, Solidarity, "The Irrational in Politics."

frequently reprinted.¹⁶³ The cell structure was an innovation of SMG that Solidarity disagreed with.¹⁶⁴ Although there had to be a certain level of agreement with their programme, SMG encouraged diversity by allowing members to argue different positions in meetings and produce leaflets independently.¹⁶⁵

1974 struggles for reform

1974 saw victories for SMG around civil liberties and exam reform. While several members leafleted the Church of England Grammar School in November 1973, one activist got into an argument with a teacher. The school called police. Most members escaped easily, but when Greg George and two others tried to get away, the police rammed their car. Although they escaped from this they were eventually stopped at a roadblock.¹⁶⁶ George recalls how he was:

... taken back to Wollongabba Police Station ... I know Special Branch was there because one of them came in ... After this I was taken out to my car and they made a big show of searching it ... One of them opened the door of my car and showed me a vial of pethidine. I said straight away 'It's a plant!' I mean you'd have to be pretty dumb to go out leafleting in Queensland, knowing you could be picked up by the cops at any time, and have dangerous drugs in your car! ... Then they ... charged me with possession of a dangerous drug.¹⁶⁷

While George was the only person targeted by the drug plant, a large number of other offences were brought against the three activists, including malicious damage and assault.¹⁶⁸

SMG hired a school friend of Brian Laver's, Angus Innes, a skilful lawyer.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ Self-Management Group, "Internal Democracy," p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ "Some Effects," in *Personal Collection of Janita Cunnington*, p. 6.

¹⁶⁵ ———, "Internal Democracy," pp. 2-3.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Greg George No. 1. Aspects of this story are recounted in ———, "Police Frame-Ups Mock Our Civil Liberties!," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

¹⁶⁷ Greg George quoted in John Jiggins, "Marijuana Australiana: Cannabis Use, Popular Culture and the Americanisation of Drugs Policy" (PHD Thesis, Queensland University of Technology, 2004), p. 73.

¹⁶⁸ Self-Management Group, "Police Frame-Ups Mock Our Civil Liberties!"; ———, "No More Police Frame-Ups-Begin Resistance Now," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Janita Cunnington, February 24, 2010; White Collar Cell - Self-Management Group, "Somehow We Got Your Address."

All three of them were acquitted in a 1974 trial.¹⁷⁰ For the malicious damage charge, it was clear that the police had rammed George's car.¹⁷¹ The drug possession charge was undermined by medical evidence as George had gone to a doctor straight after his arrest, who found no sign of illegal injections.¹⁷² SMG also attributed the acquittal to their 'extensive political campaign', which provided needed financial and personal support, as well as Innes's legal talents.¹⁷³ It was an important victory: in the Bjelke-Petersen era of police repression George recalls that he was the first person to beat Special Branch when they brought a case to trial.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the need to show solidarity with the arrestees consumed much of SMG activists' energy in 1974.¹⁷⁵

Despite this effort, the UQ cell initiated a 1974 campaign against high workload and assessment levels. This included a demand to abolish the semester system. SMG members believed that UQ had deliberately introduced semesters so students had continuous assessments and no time for activism.¹⁷⁶ Tony Kneipp argued that SMG's earlier campaigning at UQ opened a space for broader struggles.¹⁷⁷ They won allies and a movement sprang up.¹⁷⁸ The campaign culminated in a debate on October 2, in the Mayne Hall, between activists and

¹⁷⁰ That the trial was in 1974 is indicated by White Collar Cell - Self-Management Group, "Somehow We Got Your Address"; "A.S.I.O File of Greg George, Volume 1," p. 138.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Greg George No. 1.

¹⁷² Jiggins, "Marijuana Australiana: Cannabis Use, Popular Culture and the Americanisation of Drugs Policy", p. 73.

¹⁷³ White Collar Cell - Self-Management Group, "Somehow We Got Your Address." S.M.G minutes refer to the need for donations for legal fees. "Minutes of January 31 S.M.G General Meeting," in *Personal Collection of Frank Jordan*.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Greg George No. 1.

¹⁷⁵ White Collar Cell - Self-Management Group, "Somehow We Got Your Address."

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Greg George No. 1; Interview with John Jiggins No. 1; Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1; Interview with Tony Kneipp; Self-Management Group, "The Poverty of Student Life," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

¹⁷⁷ Kneipp, "Popular Fronts, United Fronts and Going It Alone," p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. Also, Self-Management Group, "The Semester System. Action to Ease Work and Assessment Loads," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library); "Student Control of Workloads, Staff/Student Control of Courses No Failure of Any Students," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library); ———, "What Are We Doing with Our Lives!," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*.

the University administration.¹⁷⁹ Ian Rintoul recalls that around two thousand students were present.¹⁸⁰

The semester system remained, but SMG won some victories: compulsory, three hour exams were abolished, students could make a choice between exams and a final essay, and take-home exams were introduced.¹⁸¹ They broke down their isolation from the left through working with other activists in this campaign.¹⁸² SMG saw this struggle as about winning reforms, but also hoped to encourage others to question fundamental elements of capitalism.¹⁸³ In a time when the radical movement was declining in strength, this continuation of activism was some achievement. Drew Hutton, reflecting on SMG today, notes that 'lots of people passed through it (SMG) ... they'd be essential to activism for many years later'.¹⁸⁴

'If only we do the work'¹⁸⁵: the weaknesses of the SMG

However, an uncritical assessment of the SMG's practice would hinder my attempt to draw upon the history of radicalism to strengthen struggles in the present. Sean Scalmer has observed that major protests are regularly reported as being the largest demonstration since the Vietnam Moratorium - even if they are actually bigger.¹⁸⁶ This kind of nostalgic remembrance obscures the power of contemporary movements. Similarly, a sole focus on the SMG's strengths would carry the danger of making it appear to be part of a glorious (and

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 2. Also, Self-Management Group, "What Are We Doing with Our Lives!"; "Debate on the University," in *Werner Schlick Collection* (Fryer Library).

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 2.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Self-Management Group, "Federation of Australian Anarchists Bulletin," p. 7.

¹⁸³ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with John Minns.

¹⁸⁶ Sean Scalmer, *Dissent Events: Protest, the Media and the Political Gimmick in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002), pp. 143-44. A piece on UQ that critiques this nostalgic tendency is Jon Piccini, "The University Regiment Stands on Liberated Ground!: Contested Understandings of the Vietnam War on the University of Queensland."

long-gone) radical past, a standard today's activists cannot hope to match. One therefore needs to carefully evaluate their mistakes.

One of these was idealism. Although many leaflets written by the cells did pay close attention to the material circumstances of daily life, the group's relentless promulgation of self-management was bound up with an idealist practice. Self-management became abstracted. In a Marxist sense, idealism means prioritising 'Great Ideas' over examining the specific nature of conditions in which people live.¹⁸⁷ In capitalist society we are encouraged to understand our lives outside of these material conditions: there is a discourse that 'you can do anything if you put your mind to it' - regardless of access to resources determined by class.¹⁸⁸ Because of the prevalence of these discourses, even the most 'radical' thinkers can slip back into idealism.¹⁸⁹ One danger of this practice is isolation, caused by ignoring the real circumstances of peoples' lives.

In November 1973, SMG began a letterboxing campaign of the leaflet *Equal Wages - Equal Power* around a prices and incomes referendum initiated by the Whitlam government.¹⁹⁰ This was one early campaign that highlights SMG's slippage into idealism. 165, 000 copies, an enormous amount, were distributed around Brisbane.¹⁹¹ *Equal Wages - Equal Power* was a double-sided A4 leaflet that, although well-written, focused on describing the 'Great Idea' of Self-Management. One member even recalls Ian Rintoul justifying the scale of this type of activity by commenting that they only needed to 'do the work!'¹⁹² It was revolution by mass leaflet distribution. Within SMG, the discussion paper *Some Effects* noted

¹⁸⁷ For instance, Karl Marx, "Idealism and Materialism," (1845), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>. Accessed on 12/06/2010.

¹⁸⁸ A critique of this 'individualisation' within capitalism is The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), pp. 29-34.

¹⁸⁹ On, for instance, the early Marx's slippage into idealism, Louis Althusser, "For Marx," (1962), <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1965/introduction.htm>. Accessed on 12/06/2010.

¹⁹⁰ Self-Management Group, "Equal Wages - Equal Power."

¹⁹¹ White Collar Cell - Self-Management Group, "Somehow We Got Your Address."

¹⁹² Interview with John Minns.

that 'a major weakness' of the leaflet was that 'there was very little that a person could actually do after reading it'.¹⁹³ Reflecting today, Rintoul is highly critical of the campaign. He recalled that, despite a huge effort, 'we only got 3 replies!'¹⁹⁴

This idealism saw SMG prioritise building itself as a group, at the expense of working with others and putting its beliefs into practice. *Some Effects* criticised a section of SMG that saw the purpose of revolutionary organisations as 'to survive until there is a massive crisis in the system', instead of practically applying ideas of self-management.¹⁹⁵ Perhaps reflecting critiques of what they see as left-sectarianism in the present, activists who became Marxists were particularly critical of a tendency to dismiss other organisations.¹⁹⁶ John Minns, now an 'eclectic Marxist', remembers it as 'the most sectarian group I've ever been in'.¹⁹⁷ SMG promoted their success in making it 'impossible for Marxist groups to work effectively on campus'.¹⁹⁸ Drew Hutton, now a prominent Greens activist, criticises the time spent opposing the Marxist-Leninist sects. Hutton reflects that when the groups were so small this was 'self-indulgent and pointless'.¹⁹⁹

Idealism also made participating in struggles against racial and gender oppression difficult. As issues of war and imperialism faded from prominence, these movements became increasingly significant.²⁰⁰ The SMG's revolutionary emphasis led to critiques of them. They condemned what they called 'white sycophancy' - uncritically supporting the ideas of black

¹⁹³ "Some Effects," p. 1.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 2.

¹⁹⁵ "Some Effects," p. 5.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 1; Interview with Carole Ferrier, January 20, 2010; Interview with Peter Kearney.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with John Minns. A disagreement with the Trotskyist Communist League is seen in Communist League, "What About Thugs and Fascists?," in *Personal Collection of Frank Jordan*.

¹⁹⁸ White Collar Cell - Self-Management Group, "Somehow We Got Your Address."

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Drew Hutton No. 2.

²⁰⁰ For instance, on the shift towards anti-racist struggles, Hastings, *It Can't Happen Here: A Political History of Australian Student Activism*, p. 63. On feminism, Robin Gerster and Jan Bassett, *Seizures of Youth: 'The Sixties' and Australia* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1991), pp. 182-83.

militants regardless of their political content. They argued that Aboriginal activists should critique capitalism and struggle for 'libertarian socialist aims'.²⁰¹

However, this insistence on critique led to a December 1972 confrontation between SMG and Denis Walker, a Black Power leader in Brisbane.²⁰² Following an argument with a member in the R & B, Walker cut Frank Jordan's face with a pair of scissors.²⁰³ After being confronted about this later, Walker and ten supporters stormed into the R & B and intimidated the workers.²⁰⁴ In response, SMG distributed thousands of copies of a leaflet titled 'Solidarity with Thugs and Fascists', which condemned Walker.²⁰⁵

ASIO paid close attention to the clash with Walker.²⁰⁶ Their files highlight how seriously SMG took the incident. Activists were considered to be 'very edgy'²⁰⁷ and Brian Laver was recorded calling it a source of 'extraordinary tension'.²⁰⁸ SMG attempted to mobilise support, asking friendly activists to assist them against Walker.²⁰⁹ In the aftermath, a SMG Defence Committee was formed, armed with old, rusty shotguns.²¹⁰ It is difficult to know whether this confrontation could have been avoided but it was clearly a traumatic event, and a distraction from SMG's regular agitation. The experience made it difficult in ensuing years for SMG to show solidarity with black power causes, such as the 1974

²⁰¹ Self-Management Group, "Introduction to Black Separatism - White Sycophancy," (Brisbane: Self-Management Group, 1972), p. 2. Also, Self-Management Group, "Race, Power, Oppression: Black-White Attitudes in Australia," (Brisbane: Self-Management Group, 1972); Earl Price, "Black Separatism - White Sycophancy," (Brisbane: Self-Management Group, 1972).

²⁰² Self-Management Group, "Solidarity with Thugs and Fascists?," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

²⁰³ Interview with Frank Jordan.

²⁰⁴ ———, "Solidarity with Thugs and Fascists??"

²⁰⁵ Ibid. ———, "Solidarity with Thugs and Fascists? Part Two," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

²⁰⁶ "A.S.I.O File of John Lawrence Jiggins," pp. 104-08; "A.S.I.O File of Esme Garner, Volume 6," pp. 76-77, p. 81, pp. 86-89, p. 93, pp. 97-98; "A.S.I.O File of Greg George, Volume 1," pp. 121-22, pp. 128-30.

²⁰⁷ "A.S.I.O File of Esme Garner, Volume 6," p. 97.

²⁰⁸ "A.S.I.O File of Greg George, Volume 1," p. 130.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 128.

²¹⁰ Interview with Brian Laver No. 1; Interview with Julie Kearney, February 23, 2010.

establishment of a Black Embassy in King George Square and a campaign against the 1971 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act.²¹¹

SMG member Janita Cunnington remembers that working with feminist groups was difficult.²¹² Idealism was a problem again. Cunnington noted that 'for the SMG equal power was most important, whereas feminists focused on the destruction of patriarchy ... As equal power was the crux of revolutionary politics, therefore feminism was seen as non revolutionary'.²¹³ This difficulty was exacerbated by the Brisbane left's sexism. Tony Kneipp wrote that terms of 'endearment' for female radicals included 'the People's Ann' and 'the People's Liz'.²¹⁴ SMG leaflets suggest some attempt to overcome this. They were interested in examining personal relationships and making them less hierarchical.²¹⁵ In 1974, they wrote a pamphlet demanding the repeal of abortion laws, and argued for 'free, safe contraception, free, community-controlled child-care centres (and) ... the communalisation of housework'.²¹⁶

Despite this, members recall experiencing sexism in SMG.²¹⁷ The small, armed Defence Committee created a perception of a clique of macho men 'playing with guns'.²¹⁸ This played out most seriously in relation to membership. In SMG, one had to undergo an interview with a committee before becoming a full member.²¹⁹ As the committee was predominantly male, Barbara Hart recalled that:

²¹¹ These campaigns are referred to in "Special Broadsheet No. 5, " *The Militant*, May 29, 1974, p. 4; "Act Confrontation," *Militant*, June 17, 1974, p. 5. I only found one other SMG leaflet on racism after 1972, Self-Management Group, "Revolution or Reform," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

²¹² For instance, "A.S.I.O File of Esme Garner Volume 6," p. 64. Interview with Janita Cunnington.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Kneipp, "Popular Fronts, United Fronts and Going It Alone," p. 1. The prevalent sexism is described in Narelle Kelly, "The Revolutionary as a Male Chauvinist," *Semper Floreat*, April 12, 1971, p. 6.

²¹⁵ "The Politics of Personal Relationships," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library). Interview with Brian Laver No. 3.

²¹⁶ Self-Management Group Qld. Uni Cell, "Abortion Reform - Do We Want It?," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

²¹⁷ Interview with Barbara Hart; Interview with Julie Kearney. Some men critiqued 'sexual conservatism' too. Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 2; Interview with John Minns.

²¹⁸ Interview with Julie Kearney.

²¹⁹ Interview with Brian Laver No. 1.

It was very difficult for women to get in. You had to get in through a man ... We used to joke that every woman in it was the partner of a man (in SMG) ... Eventually something happened and they let other people join.²²⁰

This 'semi-clandestine'²²¹ structure was critiqued more broadly by Hart.²²² General meetings were only open to full members, which fostered some division between a leadership and 'rank and file' in the cells.²²³ This policy was for 'security', to prevent police infiltration.²²⁴

Queensland activists did experience much police intimidation.²²⁵ Grahame Garner, whose home was used for SMG meetings, recalls that there was usually a police car outside.

Police would approach members and say 'hi'.²²⁶

Despite these precautions, police were able to gather much information on SMG. The R & B was under electronic surveillance and phone conversations were intercepted.²²⁷ SMG was infiltrated by ASIO in 1972, though not afterwards.²²⁸ Some members believe that the Queensland Special Branch had an agent in the group.²²⁹ While understandable, there was little to be gained from 'security' that created a hierarchy and confined membership, when the group could be spied on extensively.

²²⁰ Interview with Barbara Hart; Interview with Julie Kearney; Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 2.

²²¹ Interview with Brian Laver No. 1.

²²² Interview with Barbara Hart.

²²³ This was argued strongly in the later "Homage to Catatonia," in *Personal Collection of Tony Kneipp*, p. 2.

²²⁴ White Collar Cell - Self-Management Group, "Somehow We Got Your Address."

²²⁵ For instance, Fitzgerald, *From 1915 to the Early 1980s: A History of Queensland*, pp. 241-48.

²²⁶ Interview with Grahame Garner.

²²⁷ "A.S.I.O File of Esme Garner, Volume 6"; "A.S.I.O File of John Lawrence Jiggins"; "A.S.I.O file of Greg George, Volume 1."

²²⁸ "A.S.I.O File of Greg George, Volume 1," p. 152.

²²⁹ Interview with Frank Jordan; Interview with John Jiggins No. 2. One reason that ex-SMG activists believe this is because Dan Van Blarcom, a member of the group who was previously in the (Nazi) National Socialist Party, has publically claimed that he was spying on the Nazis for a security agency. SMG activists assumed that he was spying on them too. Kevin Meade, "Anarchist Dan 'Admitted' His Nazi Past", *The Australian*, February 3, 2004. *Personal Collection of Frank Jordan*.

Other activists similarly critiqued Brian Laver for exerting too strong an influence on SMG when it was supposed to be a non-hierarchical group.²³⁰ While it is hard to substantiate the exact level of Laver's influence, the number of critiques of him gives this argument some credence. One account from the time describes how two activists visiting Brisbane began talking to members about concerns that Laver dominated SMG. Laver promptly:

... rocked in ... answering at least 70% of the questions asked by the two people ... when there were at least ten or fifteen other people in the room anyone of whom could have answered these questions.²³¹

SMG tried to avoid the traditional left's mistakes and generate a new approach. But it was unable to escape some problems, like idealism and disempowering internal hierarchies, which have historically affected the left.²³² It also replicated recurrent mistakes of the ultra-left, particularly the tendency to criticise Leninism instead of focusing on its own agitations.²³³ These issues stemmed from the nature of SMG's own ideas, when it abstracted self-management, and the particular context that it faced.

The problems that contemporary radicals face will reflect the very different times. But perhaps an awareness of the difficulties encountered by SMG might serve as a cautionary tale. In particular, issues of sexism and internal democracy suggest that simply calling a group non-hierarchical is not enough to actually make this true. These problems reflect the

²³⁰ Interview with Tony Kneipp; Interview with Barbara Hart; Interview with Julie Kearney; Interview with John Jiggins No. 1.

²³¹ "Wither the S.M.G?," in *Personal Collection of Tony Kneipp*, p. 8. Another critique on these lines is Kneipp, "Popular Fronts, United Fronts and Going It Alone," p. 5.

²³² For instance, Ricardo Blaug, "Blind Hierarchism and Radical Organizational Forms," *New Political Science* 22, no. 3 (2000): pp. 379-95. One critique of idealism, in this case by left theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, is Michael Rustin, "Absolute Voluntarism: Critique of a Post-Marxist Concept of Hegemony," *New German Critique*, no. 43 (1988): pp. 146-73. A critique of Proudhon's idealism is Karl Marx, *Capital Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), pp. 178-179.

²³³ For instance referred to in Dave Eden, "Treasonous Minds: Capital & Universities, the Ideology of the Intellectual and the Desire for Mutiny," *Ephemera* 5, no. 4 (2005): p. 581. One contemporary example of this mistake is Trotwatch, "Trotspotting: Everything You Wanted to Know About Sects but Were Afraid to Ask," <http://libcom.org/blog/trotspotting-everything-you-always-wanted-know-about-sects-were-afraid-ask-18092009>. Accessed on 7/06/2010.

social relations that pervade the world outside any organisation. Rather than thinking that particular structures will create a perfectly democratic group, it might be useful to conceptualise struggle against hierarchies as an ongoing process.²³⁴ SMG's slippage into idealism also provides hints as to what basis a materialist politics might start from today. Rather than being centred around an ideal or a particular 'line' a materialist practice could understand politics as constantly subject to change. Instead of simply shaping politics ourselves we are caught in its movements, and try and contribute to struggles when possible.²³⁵

Despite its limitations, SMG's achievements in escaping the orthodox left and establishing an independent practice should not be overlooked. Key themes were its revolutionary fervour, stress on democracy and agitation against hierarchies and alienation in everyday life. Its agitations may have helped to 'bend the stick' and shift politics leftwards.²³⁶ For Brian Laver, still on the far left and a social anarchist today, one of SMG's successes was that it confirmed the feasibility of left-libertarian organisation.²³⁷ Though this judgement is clearly affected by Laver's current politics, SMG's size and presence in diverse areas of study and work does suggest that ultra-left ideas should not be dismissed as the adventurist fancy of an isolated few.²³⁸ However, by 1976 and 1977, the organisation was turning in on itself. A series of wide-ranging critiques of SMG were written. Yet the process of critique was not an

²³⁴ On this argument, see Tadzio Mueller, "Empowering Anarchy: Power, Hegemony, and Anarchist Strategy " *Anarchist Studies* 11, no. 2 (2003): pp. 26-53. Also, Uri Gordon, *Anarchy Alive! Anti-Authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), pp. 47-77.

²³⁵ For some ideas around this approach, Mark Gawne, "Beginning Politics from the Middle,"(2010), <http://readingcapitalsydney.wordpress.com/2010/08/09/beginning-politics-from-the-middle/>. Accessed on 2/09/2010.

²³⁶ Althusser, "It Is Simple to Be a Marxist in Philosophy," p. 210.

²³⁷ Interview with Brian Laver No. 3.

²³⁸ One piece associating the ultra-left with adventurism and isolation is Peter Camejo, "Liberalism, Ultra-Leftism and Mass Action," (1970), <http://links.org.au/node/625>. Accessed on 11/09/2010.

entirely destructive one. The debates and experiences that were part of this process helped encourage the invention of new forms of struggle.

'This is abstentionism!' Split, Renewal and Transformation, 1975 - 1984

A revolutionary defeat is in fact always divided into a negative part (deaths, imprisonments, betrayals, loss of strength, fragmentation), which is often very obvious at the time, and a positive part, which usually takes a long time to emerge (a tactical and strategic reckoning, a change of action models, the invention of new forms of organisation).¹

Alain Badiou.

As the SMG's strength waned, the industrial militant Grahame Garner wrote a two-page leaflet in late 1976 on the reasons for this decline.² Garner argued that as 'the glamour and excitement' of the radical upheaval of the late sixties and seventies faded 'with the reverse so the rifts began to appear'.³ Throughout this chapter I similarly explore the ebbing away of revolutionary optimism, and its effects on organisation and struggle.

1977 saw SMG's dissolution into three groups: the Libertarian Socialist Organisation (LSO), the Self-Management Organisation (SMO) and the Marxist Tendency. This chapter traces the evolution of the split. While SMG was involved in some interesting activism from 1975 - 1977, the split was catalysed by the organisation's weaknesses, such as around gender politics and idealism. With the revolutionary enthusiasm of the early seventies fading, the importance of weaknesses was magnified. They caused rifts between members. Activists were unable to reconcile the organisation's past with the material and political realities of the present.

In 1977, writings by members of all factions highlight the difficulty of revolutionary practice in a *different time*. An SMO supporter commented that no 'clear progress' had

¹ Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 9.

² Grahame Garner, "Some Time Ago I Enjoyed Telling a Section of S.M.G to Get Stuffed," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library, F2460).

³ *Ibid.*

resulted in 'apathy and demoralisation'.⁴ The Marxist Tendency thought that activists had been conditioned by a 'maximalist' student movement, which put forward the most radical possible demands.⁵ LSO members acknowledged the 'decline of mass movements and the disillusionment of the left'.⁶ This frustration caused different understandings of praxis to emerge. Reflecting on the SMG's dissolution today, Drew Hutton opined that the lack of revolutionary change caused some members to think that 'we've got the ideology wrong' and become Marxists.⁷ SMG activists debated questions around class, feminism and idealism.⁸ They discussed 'abstentionism', that is, not participating in social movements, as well as how to reduce internal hierarchies.

Splits can be part of caricatures of the left, highlighting an inability to tolerate difference. The chapter will instead argue that the SMG's split, while resulting in fragmentation, allowed former members to clarify their views and develop politics that, in the changed context, were more effective. The chapter then follows the emergence of an ecological subjectivity amongst ex-members. This occurred not because of the sudden discovery of green politics, but from the particular experiences of activists and material developments both internationally and locally, which had been coalescing for the past decade.

1975: Strategies for Renewal

1975 was a period of transition for the SMG. The end of the civil liberties campaign around Greg George's trial, the assessment struggle at UQ and exhaustion from the *Equal Wages - Equal Power* leafleting necessitated a shift in focus.⁹ This need for change was

⁴ Tony Kneipp, "Sexual Conservatism in the S.M.G.," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library), p. 7.

⁵ "Their Politics and Ours," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library), p. 5.

⁶ "Why the Split," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library), p. 3.

⁷ Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1.

⁸ For instance in Sue Bissett, "All Power to the Imagination," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library); "Their Politics and Ours."

⁹ On their exhaustion, White Collar Cell - Self-Management Group, "Somehow We Got Your Address."

exacerbated by a numerical decline in the group, reflecting the broader dissolution of the radical movement.¹⁰ In this context, SMG tried to construct alliances amongst the libertarian/anarchist milieu. A conference, aimed at forming a Federation of Australian Anarchists, planned for Sydney in January 1975 was ideal for these purposes. A SMG delegation was sent.¹¹ The conference was attended by over 250 people, making it 'a watershed in ... Australian Anarchism'.¹²

The conference had both positive and negative aspects for the SMG. Members saw the 'lifestylism' of some libertarians as anathema, feeling that for them a radical identity was more important than organisational structures.¹³ In turn, SMG activists were accused of authoritarianism and derided as 'anarcho-Spartacists'¹⁴ and even 'anarchists with briefcases'.¹⁵ This condescending epithet arose from a presentation in which one of them produced literature from a briefcase, whilst being dressed in business clothes.¹⁶ However, others received their emphasis on organisation more favourably.¹⁷ The conference sparked an interest in anarchism in the SMG.¹⁸ Greg George penned a wide-ranging essay, *A Critical Examination of Anarchism*, indicating a deep engagement.¹⁹ Anarchism was seen as another part of the SMG's libertarian heritage and helped to reaffirm some members' revolutionary

¹⁰ On this general dissolution, Melbourne Revolutionary Marxists, "A Call for the Revolutionary Regroupment of the Australian Left," (Fryer Library, 1975). On the reduced size of SMG, Interview with Tony Sheather No. 1.

¹¹ Interview with Peter Kearney.

¹² Englehart, "Anarchism in Sydney 1975-1981."

¹³ Interview with Peter Kearney.

¹⁴ Ibid. The Spartacists are a tiny Leninist sect, known for their dogmatism and unending critiques of the 'betrayals' of other left groups.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Interview with Janita Cunnington.

¹⁷ "Report from the Sydney Libertarian/Anarchist Conference," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library).

¹⁸ Interview with Barbara Hart; Interview with Greg George No. 3, January 25, 2010.

¹⁹ Greg George, "A Critical Examination of Anarchism," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

politics. In Brisbane, they began to hold meetings open to anarchists who were not members.²⁰

From March 1976, the SMG produced the *Libertarian*, a bimonthly newspaper.²¹ It aimed to 'give coherence and a stronger radical identity to the group', as opposed to the decentralised cells.²² It was intended to be SMG's 'main avenue of contact' with the broader community.²³ Three issues were published. The *Libertarian* attempted to analyse international events more thoroughly, with pieces on Eurocommunism, Angola, the 1976 Portuguese Revolution and the Timorese struggle for liberation.²⁴ An internationally significant article, 'You Can't Blow up a Social Relationship', critiqued 'guerrillaism', which saw armed struggle as the key revolutionary strategy. It argued that revolution was primarily about an egalitarian *movement* rather than violent confrontation with the state.²⁵ Though this reflects his later activism in the Greens Party, which lists non-violence as one of its core beliefs, the article's author, Greg George, saw it as one of SMG's most significant accomplishments.²⁶ For George, it prevented an escalation of hyper-militancy in the SMG and more broadly in the radical movement.²⁷ George and Drew Hutton eventually seized SMG's small supply of weapons and buried them.²⁸ Longer bulletins were produced by the cells, such as two copies of *Libertarian Education* and an issue of *The Grail*, by the health

²⁰ "Meeting of All Libertarians for December 5th," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library).

²¹ "The Libertarian No. 1-3," (Jura Books).

²² Interview with Tony Sheather No. 1.

²³ "Minutes from May 7th 1976," in *Personal Collection of Frank Jordan*.

²⁴ "Angola," *Libertarian*, March, 1976; ———, "Parties of the Outstretched Hand," *Libertarian*, September-October 1976; "Timor-a Libertarian Viewpoint," *Libertarian*, May-June, 1976; "A Portugese Council Communist Speaks," *Libertarian*, May-June, 1976.

²⁵ Greg George, "You Can't Blow up a Social Relationship: The Case against Terrorism," *Libertarian*, May-June, 1976. The article was eventually republished in a pamphlet abroad - "You Can't Blow up a Social Relationship" (See Sharp Press: San Francisco, 1990).

²⁶ Interview with Greg George No. 1. On the Greens' support for non-violence, "About the Greens," <http://greens.org.au/our-story>. Accessed on 19/09/2010.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.* Interview with Julie Kearney.

cell.²⁹ There was a health care campaign in this period around Medibank: over ten thousand copies of an agitational broadsheet were distributed.³⁰ A substantial cell was built up at Griffith University, which had opened in 1975. It has been estimated to include thirty - fifty members.³¹ Libertarian articles by activists in the cell were published in the student newspaper *Griffiti*.³²

Beginnings of The Split

The first tensions in the SMG were over differences around gender politics. From late 1974, autonomous meetings of SMG women were held in Brisbane's Botanic Gardens.³³ Sue Bissett wrote in 1977 that these unearthed 'testimonies to various ways in which women were ignored, taken unseriously ... discouraged from exploring their potential'.³⁴ Perhaps due to the women's meetings, two lengthy papers on gender were written in September 1975. They reflect markedly different views. Tony Kneipp wrote *Sexual Conservatism in the SMG* and Janita Cunnington authored *A Critical Examination of Feminism*.³⁵

Cunnington's paper, although promising to be a sophisticated inquiry into the 'effects and ... principles' of feminism, promoted exclusive, heterosexual relationships as preferable. It critiqued an 'I-love-everybody syndrome' that 'is a promiscuity of the soul'.³⁶ While

²⁹ "Libertarian Education No. 1," (Zapata's Library); "Libertarian Education No.2," (Jura Books); "The Grail," in *Personal Collection of Barbara Hart*.

³⁰ "Tactical and Social Meeting," in *Personal Collection of Frank Jordan*. For leaflets around Medibank, S.M.G Health Workers, "The Dismantling of Medibank," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library); ———, "Medibank - a Libertarian Viewpoint," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*; ———, "Our Pain Is Their Profit!," in *Personal Collection of Ian Rintoul*.

³¹ Interview with Brian Laver No. 1. On the substantial size of the Griffith cell, Garner, "Sometime Ago I Enjoyed Telling a Section of S.M.G to Get Stuffed."

³² "Education??" *Griffiti*, 1977; Lee Birmingham and June Crowley, "Libertarian Views," *Griffiti*, 1976. *Griffiti* is undated besides the year.

³³ Interview with Barbara Hart.

³⁴ Bissett, "All Power to the Imagination," p. 5.

³⁵ Kneipp, "Sexual Conservatism in the S.M.G." Janita Cunnington, "A Critical Examination of Feminism," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library). The date is from "Agenda for September 19th 1975 General Meeting," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library).

³⁶ "A Critical Examination of Feminism," p. 11.

heterosexuality represented 'a bonding of differences', homosexuality meant that 'the limits have been set far closer to oneself'.³⁷ This provoked outrage amongst SMG members.³⁸ In contrast, Kneipp described the social taboos governing male and female conduct, and their importance to the maintenance of a sexist culture.³⁹ He argued against the essentialist idea of women being 'equal but different' that he thought had prevalence.⁴⁰ The SMG would improve its practice if it 'took women seriously as a revolutionary force' and 'applied our egalitarianism more consistently to women as well as men'.⁴¹

The first recorded debate over feminism occurred in the SMG general meeting of January 31, 1976.⁴² John Minns and Tony Kneipp argued 'for working with feminists, against hierarchy of human relationships, against "conservative" attitudes in SMG'.⁴³ The meeting did not resolve any issues.⁴⁴ These debates took place while there were increasing ideological divisions amongst feminists. 'Femocrats', who worked in the public service, were opposed to 'anarchist, individualist and revolutionary' activists organised in grassroots networks.⁴⁵ Many of them argued that bureaucratisation meant co-option by the state.⁴⁶ This conflict gave the debate in the SMG greater importance. Julie Kearney joined the group in 1975. She recalls that she was:

... a revolutionary feminist, highly politicised by the women's movement and in search of an organisation (inherently lacking in the nature of the women's movement) through which to work for the overthrow of capitalism and patriarchy.⁴⁷

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

³⁸ Interview with John Jiggins No. 2.

³⁹ Kneipp, "Sexual Conservatism in the S.M.G," p. 1.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 8; "Minutes of January 31 S.M.G General Meeting." Sue Bissett similarly critiqued Cunningham's views, Kneipp, "Popular Fronts, United Fronts and Going It Alone," p. 8.

⁴² "Minutes of January 31 S.M.G General Meeting."

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: A History of Australian Feminism* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1999), p. 254.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Burgmann, *Power and Protest: Movements for Change in Australian Society*, p. 115.

⁴⁷ Julie Kearney's Response to Self-Management Group Questionnaire, February 24, 2010.

In this context, like Kearney, many politicised women contacted SMG.⁴⁸ Within the group, arguments were made for forming community cells that could recognise the importance of unpaid domestic labour outside of 'points of production' and would 'affirm the politics of revolutionary feminism'.⁴⁹ This potential increased the significance of disagreements around gender politics. Julie Kearney recalled that, shortly after joining, she became outraged at some members' 'ignorance' of feminist theory.⁵⁰ Kearney authored a paper, *A Handy Guide to Contemporary Feminism*, which helped galvanise tensions.⁵¹ She recalls that this piece led to the Marxist Tendency's development within SMG.⁵²

The Marxist Tendency articulated its own theoretical viewpoint and had different ideas about activist practice. Besides Kearney's paper, another important event in its genesis was Gough Whitlam's dismissal in 1975. The dismissal led to Brisbane's first large protests since the 1971 Springbok Tour.⁵³ Rallies of one thousand and three thousand were held in the days immediately after Whitlam's sacking.⁵⁴ Ian Rintoul, who was a member of the Tendency, recalls that SMG missed an opportunity to intervene effectively in a mass movement. One SMG slogan at the rallies was 'Revolutionaries to the rear, this is not your day!'⁵⁵ They emphasised 'countering the slogans of the ALP students'.⁵⁶ Such 'maximalism'

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "Key Points in the Formation of a Community Cell," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library). A more theoretical discussion informing these points is "A Contribution to the Pre-Conference Debate in Relation to a Libertarian Communist Self-Management of Community," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library).

⁵⁰ Interview with Julie Kearney.

⁵¹ "A Handy Guide to Contemporary Feminism," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library).

⁵² Interview with Julie Kearney. On the importance of gender politics in the tendency's formation, "Their Politics and Ours," p. 1.

⁵³ Kneipp, "Popular Fronts, United Fronts and Going It Alone," p. 1.

⁵⁴ Phil Griffiths, "Strike Fraser Out! The Labour Campaign against the Blocking of Supply and the Sacking of the Whitlam Government, October-December 1975," <http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/interventions/>. Accessed on 13/05/2010.

⁵⁵ Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 2. Also, "Traditional Leftism or Libertarian Communism," p. 27.

⁵⁶ "Decisions from Tactical Meeting," in *Personal Collection of Frank Jordan*.

was thought to exclude co-operation with 'wider forces in society'.⁵⁷ SMG did argue that the ALP was preferable to the Liberals, but this was considered insufficient.⁵⁸

This critique was increasingly applied to all areas of the SMG's practice. The Marxists argued that it had become 'idealist', distancing itself from promising struggles.⁵⁹ Since the mid-seventies the industrial cell's membership had decreased significantly.⁶⁰ Members of the Tendency believed that, with revolutionary optimism fading, the cell's withering critique of unions was now only based on an abstract support for self-management. Instead, they argued that the SMG should critically support unionism and nationalisation, while stressing rank-and-file participation.⁶¹ This disagreement about 'maximalism' led to dramatic arguments in meetings. Peter Kearney recalled that in one he slammed his fist down on a table and shouted 'This is abstentionism!'⁶²

On October 22, 1976, Sue Bissett wrote a feminist critique of the SMG from within a libertarian framework.⁶³ This was triggered by disagreement over a proposal for a Women's Bookshop Collective (WBC) to operate the Red and Black.⁶⁴ Some SMG members argued that the R & B's deteriorating financial state made it impossible for any collective to run it.⁶⁵ Others saw this as an excuse for sexism.⁶⁶ The WBC was not entirely composed of full SMG

⁵⁷ Interview with Peter Kearney.

⁵⁸ Brian Laver, "Ideas for S.M.G Activity in Response to Whitlam Sacking," in *Personal Collection of Frank Jordan*; "Vote Labor to Survive - Make Revolution and Live," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library); "Labor by Necessity - Self-Management by Choice," in *Self-Management Group Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

⁵⁹ John Minns, "Social Methodology, Class and S.M.G Politics," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library), pp. 4-5.

⁶⁰ "Some Effects," p. 1.

⁶¹ "Capitalism, Class and Strategy for the Struggle in Production," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library), pp. 4-6.

⁶² Interview with Peter Kearney.

⁶³ Bissett, "All Power to the Imagination."

⁶⁴ Janice Frewin, "Women's Bookshop Statement," in *Personal Collection of John Jiggins*.

⁶⁵ "The S.M.G Funds Are at a Low Ebb," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library); Interview with Frank Jordan. Also "Minutes from May 7th 1976."

⁶⁶ Frewin, "Women's Bookshop Statement"; Annete Theodore, "Statement from the Womens Bookshop Collective," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972-1977* (Fryer Library); "Wither the S.M.G?," pp. 10-11.

members, which was another source of tension. As attendance at general meetings was restricted to full members, there was extensive debate over whether four non-SMG activists in the WBC could attend an October 11, 1976, meeting scheduled to discuss it.⁶⁷ Although the women were allowed to participate, the meeting minutes, written by Tony Kneipp, expressed outrage at the 'sexual prejudices' on display.⁶⁸ Kneipp argued that, as all four women's politics were close to left-libertarianism, even needing to discuss whether they could attend reflected serious problems in SMG.⁶⁹ Bissett's paper similarly stressed that, in a changed context where social movement activists were increasingly sympathetic to libertarianism, SMG should co-operate more with 'grassroots struggles', such as by 'militant ecologists and people involved in education'.⁷⁰

In 1977, three more extensive papers were written by this faction's members.⁷¹ They argued for an organisation that was as non-hierarchical as possible. They claimed that Laver and his supporters had begun to use the regulations around membership to prevent people who might agree with them from fully joining SMG.⁷² Laver and activists like Greg George countered by arguing that this faction was 'lifestylist' and disorganised.⁷³ From these disagreements the SMG dissolved midway through 1977.⁷⁴ The Marxist Tendency soon

⁶⁷ "Minutes from the October 11th General Meeting," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

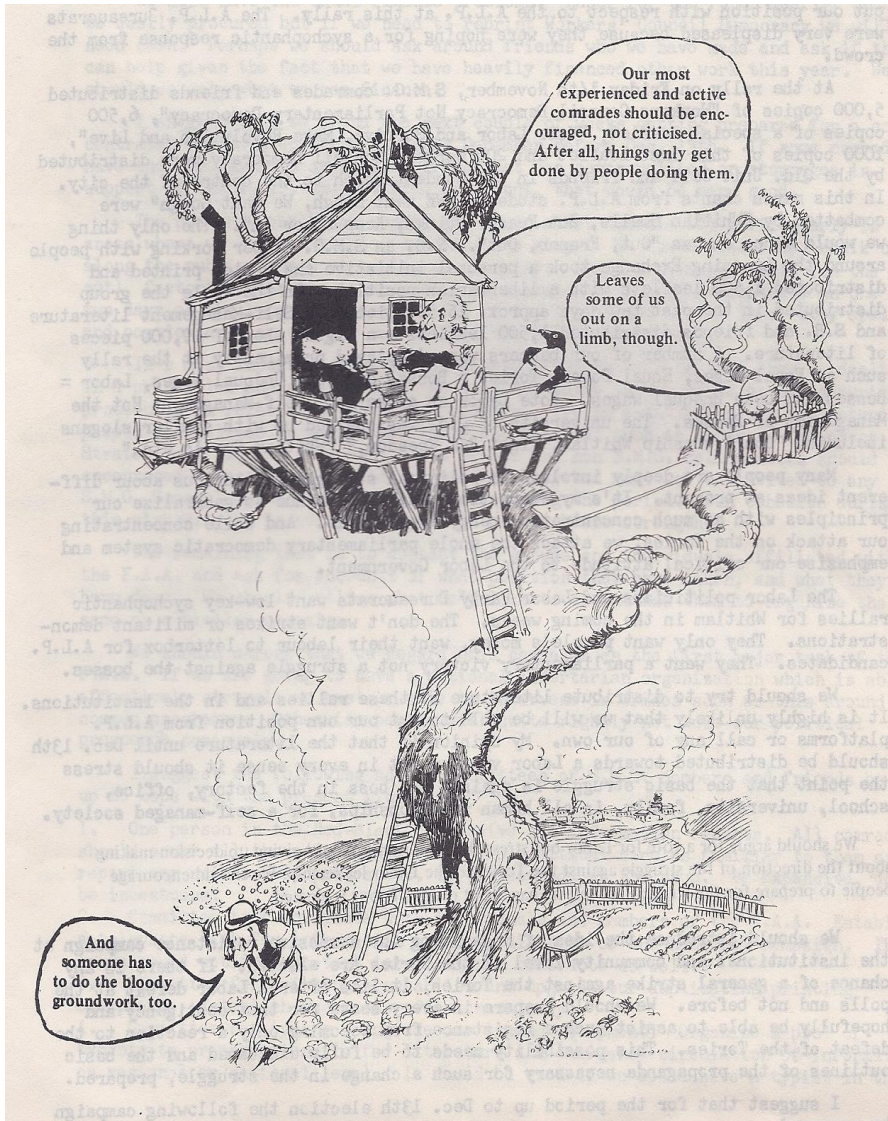
⁷⁰ Bissett, "All Power to the Imagination," p. 2.

⁷¹ "Crisis in Leadership or Crisis of Leadership," in *Personal Collection of Tony Kneipp*; "Wither the S.M.G?"; "Homage to Catatonia."

⁷² "Wither the S.M.G?," p. 12.

⁷³ Interview with Greg George No. 1; Interview with Tony Sheather No. 1; Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1

⁷⁴ Libertarian Socialist Organisation, "Circular Letter on Self-Management Group Dissolution," in *Libertarian Socialist Organisation Ephemera* (Fryer Library, FVF192).



From "Wither the S.M.G?" On internal hierarchies in the group. In *Personal Collection of Tony Kneipp*.

comprised the bulk of the International Socialists (IS) in Brisbane.⁷⁵ Laver, George, Drew Hutton and their supporters left the SMG and regrouped as the Libertarian Socialist Organisation (LSO).⁷⁶ Those who remained formed the Self-Management Organisation (SMO).⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 1.

⁷⁶ Interview with Greg George No. 1.

⁷⁷ Interview with Tony Kneipp.

Renewal after the split

Thirty years on, Drew Hutton commented humorously to me of these events that, 'when there's a war in the mafia, you go to the mattresses. When there's a split in a political group you go to the type-writers.'⁷⁸ Hutton's joke has a contradictory significance. While it does accurately emphasise how voluminous the documents around the SMG's dissolution were, it also reinforces the perception of splits in activist organisations as absurd.⁷⁹ This caricature is associated with a psychological portrait of left-wing activists as immature rebels without a cause.⁸⁰ Such a view is heightened in the SMG's case - it split three ways rather than two!

Nevertheless, some aspects of the split did weaken the Brisbane left. All the new groups were numerically smaller than the SMG, and never grew close to the same size again. Some activists, such as Grahame and Esme Garner, were disillusioned by the split, and did not join any of them.⁸¹ However, the disagreements and debates helped activists develop a new practice. They became involved in civil liberties campaigns and environmental activism. New political approaches included an emphasis on activism within social movements, organising in the community outside of cells at 'points of production' and a merging of ecology with anti-capitalism. These tactics made sense in the changed context.

The IS were heavily involved in the 'Right to March' struggle, which erupted in September 1977 in response to Bjelke-Petersen's attempt to ban protest.⁸² Some of their

⁷⁸ Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1.

⁷⁹ This caricature is discussed in Dolan Cummings, "In Defence of 'Radicalisation'," *The Spiked Review of Books* (2007), http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php/site/reviewofbooks_article/3855/. Accessed on 21/08/2010.

⁸⁰ For instance, Louis Feuer, *The Conflict of Generations: The Character and Significance of Student Movements* (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

⁸¹ Interview with Grahame Garner; Interview with Esme Garner, April 19, 2009.

⁸² On this campaign, Jeff Rickertt, "Right to March Movement", in *Radical Brisbane: An Unruly History*, ed. Carole Ferrier and Raymond Evans (Carlton North: The Vulgar Press, 2004), pp. 291-98; Tom O'Lincoln, "Marching Down Marx Street: The International Socialists in Australia 1972-1992," <http://redsites.alphalink.com.au/marching.rtf>. Accessed on 13/07/2010.

members worked almost full-time on the campaign.⁸³ The type of politics that they argued for within the movement was informed by the SMG's debates. Following John Minns's and Peter Kearney's arguments in *Their Politics and Ours*, a paper explaining the reasons for the Marxists' resignation from SMG, they attempted to avoid being 'sectarian and abstentionist'.⁸⁴ They emphasised spruiking workplace meetings and tried to build connections with left-wing unions and the TLC.⁸⁵ They successfully argued for civil disobedience, opposed to the stance of larger groups like the CPA.⁸⁶ Bjelke-Peterson singled out the IS, condemning founding member Carole Ferrier as an 'extremist, revolutionary type of individual'.⁸⁷ Through the civil liberties movement, the Brisbane IS branch grew to around thirty people.⁸⁸

The early IS tried to participate in as many different campaigns as possible.⁸⁹ They were reluctant to build their own organisation, and instead threw themselves into activism, attempting to 'work alongside people in common struggle'.⁹⁰ Similarly, this followed their rejection of what they perceived as the SMG's aloofness from struggle.⁹¹ The IS's activism around civil liberties helped build some support for campaigning around abortion.⁹²

The SMO was more 'amorphous' and was based around a shared interest in cultural activities.⁹³ It was explicitly anarchist, reflecting the SMG's growing interest in anarchism towards the end of its existence.⁹⁴ Some members became involved in projects like the

⁸³ Interview with John Minns.

⁸⁴ "Their Politics and Ours," p. 4.

⁸⁵ Judy McVey, "It Was Thirty Years Ago Today," *The Barricade Bugle* (2007), http://www.australiandisruptive.net/downloads/Barricade_Bugle_colour.indd.pdf.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ O'Lincoln, "Marching Down Marx Street: The International Socialists in Australia 1972-1992."

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ian Rintoul, "Whither the Propaganda Perspective?," <http://www.solidarity.net.au/theory/propaganda-perspective/>. Accessed on 6/09/2010.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ On this rejection, "Their Politics and Ours," p. 4.

⁹² McVey, "It Was Thirty Years Ago Today."

⁹³ Interview with Barbara Hart.

⁹⁴ Interview with Lee Beames; Self-Management Organisation, "Notes on the Role of an Anarchist Organisation," in *Self-Management Group Papers 1972 - 1977* (Fryer Library).

Learning Exchange in West End. The premise of the Exchange was simple: you wrote down a skill or item that you possessed or needed and anyone could either request help or grant it.⁹⁵ According to Barbara Hart, this process of mutual aid helped politicise both participants and organisers.⁹⁶ Furthermore, it was effective on a local level in helping undermine divisions between activists and the broader community. Greek socialists, migrants and working class people around West End were involved.⁹⁷

Others were involved in grassroots organising against nuclear power and uranium from the late seventies, informed by their support for greater participation in social movements during the split.⁹⁸ Two members were active in Friends of the Earth Brisbane.⁹⁹ SMO added some flair to the civil liberties movement, organising an action provocatively billed as a 'Rally for the Right to Say Fuck!'¹⁰⁰ In purely organisational terms, SMO was less cohesive than the other tendencies. It collapsed in 1980 following a personal dispute between two key members.¹⁰¹ Members were later involved in projects such as the Prisoners Action Group, anti-gentrification organising in West End and campaigns for the legalisation of marijuana.¹⁰²

Of all the new groups, LSO saw the SMG's political legacy most positively.¹⁰³ It had about a dozen core members.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, LSO acknowledged the need to change the

⁹⁵ Interview with Barbara Hart.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid. Self-Management Organisation, "Self-Managed Society Is the Only Nuclear Shelter," in *Self-Management Organisation Ephemera* (Fryer Library); ———, "Nuclear Friction," in *Self-Management Organisation Ephemera* (Fryer Library). On the Australian anti-uranium movement, Brian Martin, "Australian Anti-Uranium Movement", *Alternatives* 10, no. 4 (1982): pp. 26-35.

⁹⁹ Interview with John Jiggins No. 2; Interview with Frank Jordan.

¹⁰⁰ "Rally for the Right to Say Fuck!," in *Personal Collection of John Jiggins*.

¹⁰¹ Interview with John Jiggins No. 2; Interview with Barbara Hart.

¹⁰² Interview with Barbara Hart; Interview with John Jiggins No. 1.

¹⁰³ "We Need a Full Statement on the Role of the Revolutionary Libertarian Organisation," in *Personal Collection of Janita Cunningham*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Tony Sheather No. 1.

SMG's practice. Instead of cells at points of production, there was a new emphasis on community struggles.¹⁰⁵ This move was reflected in their programme, which argued that:

Community co-operatives, rank and file groups, decentralised ecology and anti-militarist movements, movements for women's and gay liberation ... are all part of an embryonic movement which is challenging the centralised, hierarchical, competitive and oppressive ethos ... and which contain the promise of a new democracy.¹⁰⁶

Monthly meetings of *Club Libertaire*, a discussion forum, were initiated.¹⁰⁷ Up to thirty - forty people, associated with the libertarian milieu, attended.¹⁰⁸

Like SMO, the LSO had some environmental focus. They developed an anti-capitalist ecological politics in response to the growth of the anti-uranium movement.¹⁰⁹ Expanding on the SMG's utopian aspirations, they tried to link up left critiques of capitalism's disregard for the environment with ideas about decentralised, democratic energy systems that could replace existing arrangements. An alliance was established around these ideas from 1978 - 1979, including activists from Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide.¹¹⁰ One of their poster's bore the slogan 'Leave Uranium in the Ground and Build Self-Managed Energy Systems', another 'Leave Uranium in the Ground and Bury Capitalism with it!'¹¹¹ Frank Jordan recalled

¹⁰⁵ On the move towards 'community struggles' compared to SMG, see 'The Role of a Revolutionary Organisation' in Libertarian Socialist Organisation, "Politics of Human Liberation: Revolution Reassessed," pp. 23-37.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ "Club Libertaire Newsletter with Invitation Card," in *Libertarian Socialist Organisation Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Tony Sheather No. 1; Interview with Drew Hutton No. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Libertarian Socialist Organisation, "Energy and Society," in *Libertarian Socialist Organisation Ephemera* (Fryer Library); ———, "Alternatives to Nuclear Tyranny," in *Libertarian Socialist Organisation Ephemera* (Fryer Library); ———, "Leave Uranium in the Ground and Bury Capitalism with It," in *Libertarian Socialist Organisation Ephemera* (Fryer Library); ———, "Leave Uranium in the Ground and Build Self-Managed Energy Systems," in *Libertarian Socialist Organisation Ephemera* (Fryer Library); ———, "Fission or Freedom," in *Libertarian Socialist Organisation Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

¹¹⁰ Joe Toscano, "Libertarian Socialist Alliance for Self-Managed Energy Systems," http://www.takver.com/history/libsoc_uranium.htm. Accessed on 11/08/2010.

¹¹¹ "Leave Uranium in the Ground and Bury Capitalism with It!," in *Libertarian Socialist Organisation Ephemera* (Fryer Library); "Leave Uranium in the Ground and Build Self-Managed Energy Systems," in *Libertarian Socialist Organisation Ephemera* (Fryer Library).

that this critique was an original stance on the left, noting that 'the Marxists weren't really interested in ecology'.¹¹²

LSO members began some intellectual projects, feeling that the nature of SMG's dissolution meant they needed to clarify their political views.¹¹³ They penned a fifty two page booklet explaining their ideas.¹¹⁴ George and Laver wrote an essay, 'Beyond the Illusions of the Left', that was their most comprehensive critique of traditional leftism.¹¹⁵ In 1979, they helped establish People for Direct Democracy (PDD), a coalition of libertarians that allowed LSO to co-operate better with activists who had comparable but different beliefs. Up to fifty - sixty people attended meetings.¹¹⁶ Members campaigned against militarism in the War Resisters League from the early eighties.¹¹⁷ This increased focus on social movements and alliance-building, shared by all the new groups, reflected a desire to work through political differences with other activists and learn from the times when SMG had been isolated. The need for this strategy was exacerbated by the weakness of explicitly revolutionary formations whilst movements around ecology and civil liberties flourished.¹¹⁸

'Pragmatic Radicalism': the shift towards ecology and the Greens¹¹⁹

Yet for some activists this 'movementism' gradually turned into a support for reformism. SMG's most substantial successor is the Queensland section of the Greens. The Brisbane Greens, the second Australian Greens party, was formed in November 1984 out of

¹¹² Interview with Frank Jordan.

¹¹³ "We Need a Full Statement on the Role of the Revolutionary Libertarian Organisation," p. 1.

¹¹⁴ Libertarian Socialist Organisation, "Politics of Human Liberation: Revolution Reassessed."

¹¹⁵ George and Laver, "Beyond the Illusions of the Left," pp. 211-43.

¹¹⁶ On People for Direct Democracy, Interview with Drew Hutton No. 2; Interview with Greg George No. 3.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1.

¹¹⁸ The difference between the 'small Brisbane left' and the thriving 1977 civil liberties movement is noted in Tom O'Lincoln, *Years of Rage: Social Conflict in the Fraser Era* (Bookmarks Australia: Melbourne, 1993), <http://www.anu.edu.polsci/mar/interventions/years/8bjelke.htm>. Accessed on 13/07/2010.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Greg George No. 2.

the remnants of the LSO.¹²⁰ Over the last twenty years, Drew Hutton has been a perennial Greens electoral candidate, while Greg George has been a long-time party activist.¹²¹

Despite some tendency to fetishise the role of key leaders like Bob Brown in the Greens' emergence, this shift resulted from activists' lived experience and the material context.¹²² One early precursor was a 1973 - 1974 campaign in the Brisbane suburb of Bowen Hills. The campaign opposed the construction of a freeway through Bowen Hills and involved the occupation of housing planned for demolition.¹²³ While the squatters were evicted, the freeway plans were eventually scrapped.¹²⁴ Though SMG was not involved, Hutton was impressed.¹²⁵ He told Greg George that it was 'fantastic!'¹²⁶ It highlighted the potential of community struggles, as well as connecting environmental concerns with immediate problems of housing.¹²⁷ It anticipated the Greens' interest in *urban environmentalism*.¹²⁸

In the early seventies the Naderite Public Interest Research Group produced *The State of Queensland*, a sixty page pamphlet that lambasted the Queensland government's production of pollution.¹²⁹ A large meeting of students attended a presentation of PIRG's findings at UQ.¹³⁰ Like the politics of the Bowen Hills campaign, *The State of Queensland* articulated an environmentalism that was linked to urban communities, instead of around

¹²⁰ Interview with Greg George No. 3; Interview with Drew Hutton No. 2.

¹²¹ Interview with Greg George No. 1.

¹²² An example of the fetishisation of Brown's role is James Norman, *Bob Brown: Gentle Revolutionary* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2004).

¹²³ Peter Gray and Gary Lane, "The Battle for Bowen Hills," (Crowsfoot Films, 1982).

¹²⁴ Interview with Greg George No. 3.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ See "Brisbane Freeway Protest and Compensation Committee Ephemera," (Fryer Library, FVF65). Also, Patrick Mullins, "The struggle against Brisbane's freeways, 1966-1974: An Australian case study of urban development, residential life and urban politics" (PHD Thesis, The University of Queensland, 1979), pp. 301-317.

¹²⁸ Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1.

¹²⁹ Public Interest Research Group, "The State of Queensland," (Brisbane: Public Interest Research Group, 1972).

¹³⁰ Interview with Greg George No. 3.

remote forest activism.¹³¹ This was much more attractive to leftists such as Hutton and George.¹³² Janita Cunnington, also an early Greens member, remembers the experience of engaging with environmental ideas. She recalls that:

SMGers were primed by familiarity with predictions of nuclear catastrophe to worry about what rampant capitalism was doing to the earth. For years many of us had been interested in back-to-the-earth ideas ... We read *Mother Earth News* and various environmental books, including, of course, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful*. Ralph Nader's teachings on ecology began to reach us, and we were receptive.¹³³

LSO members began working with Brisbane's Christian anarchists. In the February 1982 issue of *Social Alternatives*¹³⁴ - edited by George and Hutton and themed around anarchism - there is a lengthy paper on Christianity and anarchism, by Ciaron O'Reilly, an activist in the local Catholic Worker community.¹³⁵ The Brisbane Greens' ideas about non-violence came from co-operation with these Christian anarchists.¹³⁶

Catholic Worker activists and other left-libertarians, including LSO members, established the Committee of Fifty in 1982.¹³⁷ It campaigned for shopping malls to allow free expression such as soap-boxing or busking, which Bjelke-Petersen's Traffic Act forbade.¹³⁸ The Committee of Fifty's main strategy was to create 'a liberated zone for free expression'.¹³⁹ Practically, this meant that they would go to the Queen Street Mall every week and hold a

¹³¹ Public Interest Research Group, "The State of Queensland."

¹³² Interview with Greg George No. 3.

¹³³ Janita Cunnington's Response to Self-Management Group Questionnaire .

¹³⁴ "Anarchy or Chaos," *Social Alternatives* (February, 1982).

¹³⁵ Ciaron O'Reilly, "The Anarchist Implications of Christian Discipleship," *Social Alternatives* (February, 1982): pp. 9-12.

¹³⁶ Interview with Greg George No. 3.

¹³⁷ ———, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: A Campaign for Free Expression in Queensland," pp. 1-4. Interview with Greg George No. 1.

¹³⁸ "Permit Schermit," *Mutual Aid* (Nov-Dec, 1983): p. 13. Available in Zapata's Library.

¹³⁹ "People for Free Expression Ephemera" (Fryer Library), FVF294. Also, Interview with Greg George No. 3; Interview with Drew Hutton No. 2.

speak out or some other action.¹⁴⁰ In a 1984 *National Times* interview, Hutton remembered that:

I chained myself to a tree in the Mall and spoke to about 1,000 people for half an hour. We won that campaign. They didn't withdraw the legislation, but they do allow people to mime, break-dance and speak in the Mall now.¹⁴¹

Ciaron O'Reilly argues that this was the first concrete victory won by the Queensland civil liberties movement.¹⁴² Such 'community-based' politics, where activists participated in 'real campaigns' that could win victories, helped lead to the Greens.¹⁴³ In late 1983, Greg George, desiring more campaigning of this style, proposed that LSO disband. Most members agreed.¹⁴⁴

Hutton and George briefly campaigned for the Nuclear Disarmament Party in 1984.¹⁴⁵ Its electoral success left a deep impression. George recalls that within days they had decided to form a Greens Party that contested elections.¹⁴⁶ Today, Hutton argues that 'anarchist ideals are great ... but what matters is how you achieve social change'. For Hutton this means that one must engage with the state rather than just oppose it.¹⁴⁷ George coined the term 'pragmatic radicalism' to describe their ideas.¹⁴⁸ Hutton's new perspective was 'value-based' rather than ideological.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁰ O'Reilly, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: A Campaign for Free Expression in Queensland," pp. 18-21.

¹⁴¹ "Drew Hutton Interview," *National Times*, 1984 in *Biographical cuttings of Drew Hutton* (National Library of Australia).

¹⁴² ———, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: A Campaign for Free Expression in Queensland," p. 29. This may not be an entirely fair assessment given the 'Right to March' movement's success in forcing the state government to back off in its attempt to ban protest. See Rickertt, "Right to March Movement," p. 298.

¹⁴³ Interview with Greg George No. 3.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1.

¹⁴⁹ Lee Duffield, "Personal Stories: Drew Hutton," *Queensland Review* 14, no. 1 (2007): p. 70.

The German Greens were a source of inspiration.¹⁵⁰ They won 5.3% of the national vote in the 1983 elections, and held thousands of positions throughout Germany.¹⁵¹ Hutton remembers photocopying several hundred copies of their manifesto when he discovered it.¹⁵² The manifesto was about a hundred pages long so this was a gargantuan task.¹⁵³ Brian Laver, who remained wedded to a revolutionary outlook, was, despite this difference, similarly informed by the environmental milieu. He and his supporters expanded on LSO's anti-capitalist ecological politics. The influence of American eco-anarchist Murray Bookchin further helped to merge radical ecology with a more general anti-capitalism.¹⁵⁴ The Institute for Social Ecology, a community centre that incorporated a bookshop, was established.¹⁵⁵

These shifts in subjectivity emerged from activists' lived experience over a decade, entwined with a particular set of material circumstances. Similarly the SMG's split was a result of weaknesses that became more significant as the material context changed - in this case, as hopes for revolution began to recede. By 1984 the position of Hutton and George, who had been prominent members of the libertarian left, bore resemblance to the ideology of UQ activists in 1966. The Greens articulated a politics of values,¹⁵⁶ while a 'conscience left' had been grouped around Society for Democratic Action.¹⁵⁷ However, the Greens had no ambiguity about their relationship with the state, informed by the debates of the seventies and eighties. They saw themselves as guided by a 'pragmatic radicalism' that prioritised electoral

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Drew Hutton No. 2; Interview with Greg George No. 3.

¹⁵¹ Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968*, p. 209.

¹⁵² Interview with Drew Hutton No. 2.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Brian Laver No. 1.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ On Green values, Drew Hutton, "What Is Green Politics?," in *Green Politics in Australia*, ed. Drew Hutton (North Ryde: Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1987), pp. 17-18.

¹⁵⁷ Greg George, "Student and Staff Activism: Radical Politics and the University of Queensland," http://www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/radical_politics/Staff_and_student_activism_short_version.pdf.

politics, working within parliament and did not challenge the existence of capitalism. SDA's activism was always much more extra-parliamentary in nature.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ On 'pragmatic radicalism', see Interview with Drew Hutton No. 1

Conclusion

I go two steps closer, she moves two steps away. I walk ten steps and the horizon runs ten steps ahead. What good is utopia for? That's what: it's good for walking.¹

Eduardo Galeano.

Emancipatory politics always consists in making seem possible that which, from within the situation, is declared impossible.²

Alain Badiou

Given this transformation into the Greens, what then is the legacy of the SMG? When I interviewed Tony Kneipp about the group, his response was faintly puzzled: he wondered why anyone would be interested in the 'ghost of the SMG'.³ It was an organisation which had 'long disappeared from Brisbane without a trace'.⁴ In our conversation, Kneipp commented that members' sexual exploits were perhaps 'the most interesting thing' about the SMG.⁵

However, there are other perspectives to take into account. While melancholic feelings about the possibilities for radicalism today were widespread, everyone I interviewed has remained politically progressive. This is an interesting finding, given the focus on the world's Keith Windschuttles, who have switched from the left to the neo-conservative right.⁶ Through highlighting how once committed radicals have changed their ideas markedly, this suggests that conservatism is embedded within present society and that activism is futile. Instead, my series of interviews indicate that this emphasis is false, and that sixties and seventies activists have not just 'sold out'.

¹ Eduardo Galeano, "Window on Utopia," in *Walking Words* (New York: W.W Norton, 1995), p. 326.

² Alain Badiou, *Ethics* (London: Verso, 2001), p. 121.

³ Interview with Tony Kneipp.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ On this focus, Julie Stephens, "Up against the Wall Revisionists!," *Arena Magazine* (June/July, 1994): p. 24.

Moreover, ten people, out of a total of twenty three, have maintained revolutionary ideas.⁷ In 2008, Tony Sheather eloquently critiqued the Greens' aim to only 'modify capitalist excess'.⁸ He argued:

For those, increasingly numerous, who have experienced the ambiguities of a 'beneficent' state and 'restrained' capitalism, this is neither radical nor sufficient. For me, youthful ideals are now concrete, even urgent, needs and desires ... Social radicalism is principled not pragmatic. It may be flawed but not diluted.⁹

This large percentage of revolutionaries runs counter to arguments by leftists from the period for progressive politics, but within a liberal democratic paradigm.¹⁰ This approach is even a selling-point. In an italicised quote on the back cover of his autobiography, Denis Freney (a long time activist in both the Trotskyist milieu and the CPA) comments:

Was I still a revolutionary? ... I had long given up that there would be some sort of repeat of the Russian Revolution in Australia. It now seemed ridiculous that I'd even contemplated that possibility.¹¹

Mark Aarons' meticulously researched *The Family File*, a study of his Communist family based on their remarkable compilation of 209 volumes of ASIO files, continues in this tradition.¹² For Aarons, the 'attempt to transplant a foreign revolutionary ideology ... was inevitably doomed to failure'.¹³ The French philosopher Alain Badiou suggests another way of thinking about this question of failure. Badiou asks:

What exactly do we mean when we say that all the socialist experiments that took place ... ended in 'failure'? Was it a complete failure? By which I mean: does it require us to ... renounce the whole problem of emancipation? Or was it merely a relative failure? Was it a

⁷ Interview with Lee Beames; Interview with Brian Laver No. 3; Interview with John Minns; Interview with Tony Sheather No. 2, February 27, 2010; Interview with Barbara Hart; Interview with Dan O' Neill; Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 2; Interview with Joe Toscano; Interview with Grahame Garner; Interview with Esme Garner.

⁸ Tony Sheather, "Social or Pragmatic Radicalism," in *Personal Collection of Tony Sheather*.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ In my research, the best example of this is Drew Hutton, "The Legacy of 1968," unfinished manuscript, 2009. In *Personal Collection of Drew Hutton*.

¹¹ Freney, *A Map of Days: Life on the Left*.

¹² Mark Aarons, *The Family File* (Melbourne: Black Inc, 2010).

¹³ Ibid., p. xvi.

failure because of the form it took or the path it explored? Was it a failure that simply proves that it was not the right way to resolve the initial problem?¹⁴

The Self-Management Group, with its critique of both orthodox Marxism and the New Left, was one attempt to explore a different way of resolving 'the problem of emancipation'.¹⁵ It emphasised the nature of social relationships within capitalism, and suggested new methods of struggling. Certainly, the SMG had flaws and ended in fragmentation. To replicate its practice in an entirely different world would be sorely mistaken. Self-management is now more a slogan of the right than the left.¹⁶ Yet it still may be of use to communicate a sense of its attempt to carry 'the revolutionary flame', as well as the strengths and weaknesses of its practice.¹⁷ In my organising in the Mutiny Collective, one of our prime concerns was that activists constantly had to 'reinvent the wheel'.¹⁸ In our particular milieu there were very few older activists and almost no attempts to write down experiences of struggle. Hopefully my thesis has gone some way to filling this gap.

Throughout this thesis I have followed a materialist, bottom-up approach to activist history. I have explored the role of transnational connections in shaping politics. This approach helps understand the formation of the SMG, the practice of the group and the establishment of the Brisbane Greens. It is opposed to an emphasis on heroic individuals and suggests the collective nature of social change. A focus on materialism suggests a way of doing politics in the present. One might analyse the changed nature of contemporary capitalism and think about practice in relation to these changes, rather than from preconceived ideals. My discussion of the way in which subjectivity can transform, from

¹⁴ Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, p. 6.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ A contemporary critique of capital's association with this 'self-management' is The Invisible Committee, *The Coming Insurrection*, pp. 29-34.

¹⁷ Interview with Lee Beames.

¹⁸ This point is made, in a different context, in Boraman, *Rabble Rousers and Merry Pranksters: A History of Anarchism in Aotearoa/New Zealand from the Mid 1950s to the Early 1980s*, p. vii.

SDA to the SMG to the Greens, suggests that we are not trapped within a fixed political paradigm for eternity.

The SMG's revolutionary politics were a creative response to the conditions they faced. The cell mode of organisation, the focus on points of production and everyday life, and the attempts at confrontations in classrooms were hallmarks. Rather than demanding 'little bits of grace from the rulers', they articulated a desire for revolutionary change.¹⁹ For Ian Rintoul, 'No one else was doing this stuff ... and that's why we had success'.²⁰ Their adventurousness might encourage activists to dream up new forms of organisation and struggle.

In his writing on Cornelius Castoriadis, SMG's favourite theorist, David Ames Curtis has compared the development of political ideas to the way in which innovations occur in jazz.²¹ In a performance, jazz musicians build on styles that have been used in the past but also improvise in new directions. Contemporary Australian radicals might similarly explore new ideas, while building on SMG's utopian desire.²² Governance in Australia relies more on the ideological production of a feeling that *there is no alternative*, than direct state violence. Against such power over thought, a sense of utopia has critical importance.²³ It can stretch the boundaries imposed by liberal democratic ideology, in which details of policy can be challenged, but never the system itself. Eduardo Galeano has pithily described how a vision of utopia is 'good for walking', motivating continued struggle.²⁴

¹⁹ Students for Self-Management, "The Education System - Who Is It For?"

²⁰ Interview with Ian Rintoul No. 2.

²¹ Curtis, ed. *Cornelius Castoriadis Political and Social Writings*, vol. 1, pp. xxviii-xx.

²² One contemporary activist reflection on a 'feeling of being stuck' that might necessitate new thinking is "Reflections on S11 and A.W.O.L," <http://slackbastard.anarchobase.com/?p=20103>. Accessed on 13/09/2010.

²³ On the use of utopia in challenging the 'hyperinclusive logic of neoliberalism', Mark Cote, Richard J. F. Day, and Greig de Peuter, "What Is Utopian Pedagogy," in *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments against Neoliberal Globalization*, ed. Mark Cote, Richard J. F. Day, and Greig de Peuter (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 14-15.

²⁴ Galeano, "Window on Utopia," p. 326.

Utopia can also be a trap. At times the SMG made the mistake of abstracting utopia, of making it an idealism, an 'unconditional impossible demand'²⁵ that isolates a pure group of revolutionaries instead of inspiring struggle. The Marxist tendency, during the split, assailed the SMG's fetishisation of:

... the Self-Expanding Idea of Self-Management. We keep the Idea, we propagate the Idea, we are the Idea (tossed in a stormy sea). All struggle for the S.M.G, is the struggle for the Idea. When struggle is engaged in ... the strategy is to neglect what people are struggling about and advance the maximum, and only programme.²⁶

Yet utopian aspirations can invigorate movements.²⁷ They can shift politics to the left, even if utopia is sometimes more a guide than a destination. For Alain Badiou, 'emancipatory politics' consists of 'making seem possible that which, from within the situation, is declared impossible'.²⁸ Shortly before I completed this thesis, a thirty six year old man, Josefa Rauluni, committed suicide at Villawood Detention Centre, a facility for detaining refugees in Sydney's suburban west, after being threatened with deportation.²⁹ I and twenty others went to Villawood the night of his death in order to show solidarity with the people in the centre. We chanted slogans like 'No Borders, No Nations, Stop the Deportations' and 'Our Passion for Freedom is Stronger than their Prisons'.³⁰ In return, we heard noise being made by the Villawood detainees, some of whom were staging a rooftop protest, and received word that those inside were glad for our support. The Villawood centre's location - not in a remote

²⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 233.

²⁶ "Their Politics and Ours," p. 4.

²⁷ For instance, Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), p. 9.

²⁸ Badiou, *Ethics*, p. 121.

²⁹ Lani Vasek, "Roof Protest Asylum Seekers Set 5pm Deadline," (2010), <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/roof-protest-asylum-seekers-set-5pm-deadline/story-fn59niix-1225927216495>; "Officials Look to End Villawood Protest," *ABC News*, <http://abc.com.au/news/stories/2010/09/20/3016334.htm>. Both accessed on 22/09/2010.

³⁰ On this No Borders politics, in an Australian context, Angela Mitropolous, "A Spectre Is Haunting Left-Nationalism," *Arena Magazine* (2004), <http://archive.blogsome.com/border-disputes>. Accessed on 22/09/2010. In France, "Interview with No Borders in Calais," *Shift Magazine* (2009), <http://shiftmag.co.uk/?p=315>. Accessed on 22/09/2010.

desert, but ten minutes walk from a train station and surrounded by suburban homes - evokes powerfully the way in which such horrors can be *normalised*.³¹ Even though we were small in number, we showed practical solidarity with refugees, while our utopian chants pointed to a world beyond this normality. Such utopian desire was a strength of the SMG, and it might help in opening up possibilities for radicalism today.

³¹ On the naturalisation of horrific features within capitalist society, see, for instance, Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, p. 5.

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