

which was the conventional wisdom 10 years back. Some think it is 4 percent, others 5 percent. But no one really has any hard information. They are all guessing. For the politicians the subject is for the moment too hot to touch. Unemployment at 6 percent is too high and they want to get it down. They do not think beyond that.

Government advisers, however, make the point that with the turn-around in the economy, unemployment could start coming down very quickly indeed, with serious labor shortages appearing very soon. In these circumstances the Arbitration Commission would become irrelevant, as skilled workers at least would be able to negotiate large wage increases by direct bargaining. For a while that would be healthy for the economy, remedying the stultifying effects of several years of misguided compression of the wage structure by the commission.

It makes a great deal of difference whether the labor boom starts when unemployment gets down to 5 percent or 4 percent. Perhaps you can even go safely below 4 percent? At present it is an indecent and unthinkable issue. Once it starts to be discussed, and higher economic activity is no longer seen as the panacea for mopping up unemployment, attention will be able to be directed towards the issues involved in structural unemployment.

The politicians always like to believe they can have their cake and eat it. They pose as magicians able to achieve incompatible or conflicting national objectives. Once they are forced to contend with structural unemployment they may have to recognise the trade-offs. If, for example, they want to maintain a highly egalitarian wage structure, then they will be stuck with a most inequalitarian distribution of employment. Given the very unequal distribution of skills and work motivations, a wage structure which fails to reflect the very differing work value of different people must deny a lot of them work. In the same way a generous dole level must raise the unemployment level above what it otherwise would be. The politicians and bureaucrats often cultivate the delusion that administrative crackdowns will enable them to have generous dole levels and lower unemployment together but people can beat the bureaucrats any day. Crackdowns on dole bludging have always proved futile in the past and seem likely to continue futile in the future. They are just a gimmick to avoid facing up to the real trade-off.

That the problems of over-full employment are already being discussed is at least a sign that things may be moving in the right direction.

AUS COUNCIL

THE VICIOUS WORLD OF STUDENT POLITICS

By MALCOLM TURNBULL

THE FLY-KILLING machine glowed blue above the conference hall. Grrr, bzzt, rattle, rattle. A careless fly was incinerated. An outraged delegate leapt to his feet: "Comrade chair, the wanton annihilation of flies is a disgraceful insult to the vegetarians at this council." Hurried words on the podium. Click as the fly-killing machine is turned off.

The unhappy vegetarian provided a rare undergraduate note at the 42nd annual council of the Australian Union of Students. The rest of the delegates were a study in the earnest political personality. The bog Irish pudginess of the right-wing students from the Democratic Clubs, the Trotskyites, some of them complete with Leon Trotsky beards and steel rimmed spectacles, the Maoists, confident in their thuggery if not in their ideology, and lost somewhere in the middle the bemused and confused Labor and Liberal party students. In the unreal world of student politics they too are splinter groups.

The AUS council heaved with paranoia. Many delegates refused to talk to "the traitor capitalist Press." One journalist was asked to surrender his tape recorder to the chairman for fear that he would record the delegates' deathless words. Sleepless is a better adjective. The council met for nearly 20 hours a day for 10 days. The debate last Tuesday night on the travel company troubles lasted until 6.30 am. They then adjourned until 9 am.

It was a sterile forum. The longest and most heated debates were those concerned with the alleged misdeeds of AUS officials. The debates on policy were just battles of rhetoric, devoid of ideas. It was hard faced and grim, more like the meeting of corrupt municipal wire pullers than a gathering of the idealist leaders of the nation's intelligentsia.

About 250 delegates plus observers met at Howitt Hall in Monash University, Melbourne. The lengthy meetings were well chaired and interjections were rare. Apart from the occasional whiff of marijuana there was little evidence of the student counter-culture. The delegates seemed more intent on attacking each other and the floor was awash with leaflets defaming

everyone from the NCC on the right to the Maoists on the left.

Much of the real politicking was done in caucuses. These abounded. There were homosexual caucuses, women's caucuses, Labor, Liberal, Trotskyite, Democrat and small and isolated campus caucuses. The AUS council was almost a satire of political life.

AUS has not had a good year. Eleven campuses have seceded, leaving only 63 universities, colleges of advanced education and other tertiary institutions affiliated. These secessions combined with the court challenges brought against AUS by Liberal students have slashed the annual income of the AUS from \$700,000 in 1977 to about \$400,000 in 1978. If the court cases continue to be successful AUS will be destroyed unless State governments amend the Acts of parliament constituting the universities and colleges.

AUS is currently funded by a \$2.50 a head levy on each student whose Students' Representative Council is affiliated with AUS. The \$2.50 is collected compulsorily from students along with other fees for student organisations by the university authorities at the beginning of each year.

As one of the leading Maoists at the conference remarked: "AUS is in imminent danger of going from a skeleton to a corpse." And if it does, there will be precious few mourners at the graveside.

Not many student mourners, that is. The real power in student politics is being exercised from outside the universities and colleges. The various communist groupings, the National Civic Council, the politicians and the judges are the ones who are really concerned. The simple statistic that less than 10 percent of students bothered to vote for their campus delegation to the AUS council is eloquent testimony of the monumental apathy.

When the Maoists at the council called for a general student mobilisation to combat the court attacks on the AUS with mass rallies, occupations and marches, a moderate ALP delegate from Macquarie University, Stuart Clarke, said: "We can't get more than 60 students on to the streets of Sydney to support a rise in their own allowances.



AUS council in session: much ado about almost nothing

How could we mount a mass mobilisation?"

Ironically enough, politicking within AUS has increased this year in direct proportion to the declining interest shown by the 250,000 rank-and-file students it is supposed to represent. As the youthful, and not so youthful, student leaders harangue each other, more and more compulsorily enrolled students are turning off.

But if so few of its members are even slightly interested in AUS or the various Students' Representative Councils in the universities and colleges themselves, why bother to struggle for its control? One reason can be found among a very dedicated group of right-wing students who are members of the Democratic Clubs. Formed originally as the campus wing of the DLP, the Democratic Clubs' mostly Catholic membership are given considerable support from the National Civic Council led by B. A. Santamaria. Paid organisers operate on the major campuses in all States. Printing and advice on tactics is provided by the NCC too.

I asked Santamaria why his organisation was so interested in student politics. He replied: "If you regard Australia as having nothing in common with Western Europe, then AUS is undoubtedly a waste of time. But if you see Australia as part of the Western pattern of political structures and conflict then I think you must take a different view.

"In both Italy and France the communists use the universities as their main recruiting ground. In both countries the extreme left hold a monopoly of power and opinion. In doing so, they have changed the university from a centre of liberal discussion and debate to a stronghold of anti-democratic totalitarian propaganda.

"In any allocation of our priorities I would say the most important is and always has been the trade union movement. Twenty years ago the

universities would not have ranked at all. Today they are third after the unions and the media, which we consider to be overwhelmingly biased in a left liberal direction."

Because of their conservative stance on moral issues, particularly drugs and abortion, the Democrat Clubs have traditionally been limited to their Catholic constituency. Only three or four years ago they were regarded as being just as extreme as the communists by most students. Now they are winning some popular support.

They have done particularly well in Queensland. Much of their success is due to the efforts of 36-year-old John Herzog. A former soldier, airlines officer, and industrial officer with the shipping company John Bourke Ltd, Herzog has just finished a BA at Queensland University. He now intends to do an LLB.

Herzog denies he is involved with the NCC, but he is the stereotype NCC campus organiser — an older student with an industrial relations background. In the last year Herzog and his

supporters have won control of most of the Queensland campuses including Queensland University. A nominee of theirs, Geoff Purcell, has been elected the AUS regional organiser for the State.

Herzog is a dedicated organiser for his beliefs. He says: "I come from Germany, I spent my first four years under the Nazi and then the Russians occupied our part of the country. All that happened was that the color of the armbands changed. We were fortunate to fly out of Berlin in 1951."

The leading light of the right-wingers in NSW is twenty-year-old Tony Abbott. He has written a number of articles on AUS in the *Australian* and his Press coverage has accordingly given him a stature his rather boisterous and immature rhetoric doesn't really deserve.

Abbott who is doing second-year Economics/Law at Sydney University is the president of the Democratic Club and also controls the Liberal Club which the Democrats infiltrated and took over a few years ago. He admits his connections with the NCC quite openly: "Well, the NCC doesn't have members, you know, but if they did, I'd be one. Our aim is to turn AUS from a political body into a services and education lobby. But I don't think we will ever get the numbers to do that, so we will have to at least emasculate it as a political body."

Abbott was educated at St Ignatius College, in Sydney, and is a practising Catholic. He personifies the political problems of the Democrats. While he can win support from students because of the shocking state of affairs in AUS, he cannot take the next step and take control himself because of his conservative moral views. Abbott is opposed to any legalisation of homosexuality and generally presents an old-fashioned DLP image. The students may be more conservative than they were a few years ago, but they have not swung back to the right as much as that.

The communists and other extreme left-wingers have always been active



B. A. Santamaria: NCC student activity is necessary

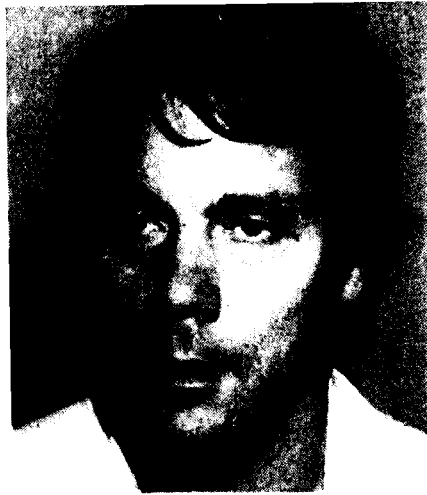
among the students. Their liberal views on moral and social issues win them support from students who would not be in favor of their political leanings generally. The extreme left are very fractionalised. The major groups are the Trotskyite Socialist Youth Alliance, the Maoists who run a front organisation called Students for Australian Independence, the mainstream Communist Party of Australia and countless fellow travellers who waver between these groups.

In 1977 the Trotskyites were in charge. They filled most of the major positions with their supporters and their principal opposition came not from the right wing but from the Maoists. This year the SYA was reduced to about 10 solid votes on the AUS council, the CPA to 10 also, the Maoists about 20, the NCC about 30, the Liberals 10 and the ALP about 40. The rest of the 250 delegates are waverers, most of them supporting the ALP. Last year these uncommitted delegates, largely from the smaller campuses, were backing the Trotskyites.

Even this year, the council has been overwhelmingly left wing. The motions passed are slightly less strident than they have been in the past but they are still denouncing most of our South-East Asian neighbors, the Fraser Government, assessment by exams, the traitor monopoly capitalist Press and so on. The student newspapers on the campuses are still overwhelmingly left wing, non-left speakers like Eysenck can still be shouted down. Why? Why is the Liberal Party one of the smallest factions on the council when we know at least 40 percent of students vote for it in general elections?

Gregor McAuley is the manager of AUS Student Travel. He was also president of AUS in 1970 and 1971. He told me: "Student politics has been drifting to the left ever since 1966. The opposition to the Vietnam war and national service were the crucial factors. The Liberals on the campuses lost all credibility because they became apologists for policies like national service that were overwhelmingly unpopular with the students. It is only now, as those years slip into history, that the right is rising again."

Stuart Clarke from Macquarie University is a member of the ALP. He says: "Students identifying with the mainstream political parties, like the ALP or the Liberal Party, tend to get involved in their own branches and party conferences rather than play about in student politics. If you are interested in a political career, for instance, it is obviously better to spend your time working in your local branches than meddling in the SRC. But the minority groups, the crazies on the left and the



John Herzog: coming to the aid of the right

NCC, have no support in the community, so they have to work in student politics. It's the only outlet they've got."

Both the left and the right regard the ALP and Liberal students (who huddle uncomfortably in the centre) as "careerists" without any real dedication to their cause within AUS. Santamaria says: "It would be nice to leave the opposition to the communists to the Labor and Liberal students. But they're not stayers. If everyone but the communists were solely interested in getting their professional degrees and getting out, then the left would have a complete monopoly of student politics."

It's difficult to discern the ideals that motivate the left-wingers at the council. Certainly the Trotskyites and the Maoists are full of ideology, but the many "non-aligned" left-wingers are hard to pin down. Few of them can justify their position with anything other than cliches. One suspects they are simply enjoying the rhetoric. Gregor McAuley waves indulgently at the hall of delegates: "Very few of them retain their radicalism after they become teachers and public servants." The students were radical enough, however,



Peter Costello: a rare AUS bird — a moderate

to vote to sack McAuley from his position as travel manager of AUS. Because the travel company itself, AUS Student Travel, is now run by trustees under a scheme of arrangement, this does not affect his position as manager of the company.

The moderates between the NCC and the communists have not been half hearted in their work this year. Some of them have been bashed for their views. ALP member Michael Danby, from Melbourne University, was beaten up by a group of Maoists, and Peter Costello from Monash University was attacked by an anarchist. Costello says: "I've been twice elected president of the Monash students' union and during 1977 we were the strongest campus for reform of AUS. A general meeting of students sacked the editors of *Lot's Wife*, the student paper, on August 3. The editors were extreme left-wingers and supported the AUS leadership.

"When we got back to university after the vacation, Red Bingham, a supporter of the sacked editors, forced me into my office, closed the door and assaulted me. He bruised my ribs, fractured my hand and then kicked me. When his case came up in December he was convicted and fined \$150."

Red Bingham was at the AUS council. A big, red-haired man, he has been at university for seven years getting a three-year degree. He told me: "By beating up Costello, I wanted to expose the entire bourgeois morality on which his existence rested. I wanted to expose his faith in the bourgeois law courts, the bourgeois traitor Press and the resurgent fascists in Canberra. As Frederick Douglas said, 'Assassination is the penetrable point of the tyrant.' Costello had denied us our voice through *Lot's Wife*, he was a fascist." Bingham was, until recently, a member of the CMF where he learnt how to defend himself and attack others in "preparation for the revolution."

Bingham has behaved violently at the university before. Costello said: "At one stage we were concerned about speeding on campus and so we set up an amphotometer to test people's speeding. Bingham saw it, thought it was the police and smashed the amphotometer. He also knocked over a student. The university was too frightened to charge him with assault. The university authorities are more frightened of violence than we are. After Bingham attacked me 800 students demanded he be expelled, but the Vice-Chancellor wouldn't act. In the old days the Vice-Chancellors were disciplinarians, now they are spineless and it is the students who are demanding, but not getting, protection from these thugs."

The Maoists are a curious group.

Their adult inspiration is the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) whose principal luminaries are Melbourne barrister Ted Hill and the Builders' Laborers' Norm Gallagher. At last year's AUS council the Maoists, whose student front organisation is Students for Australian Independence, got a lot of support for their pet projects, particularly the various liberation causes they support in South-East Asia. The Overseas Student Service which was accused of siphoning money to the Malaysian Communist Party received a record donation of \$38,000.

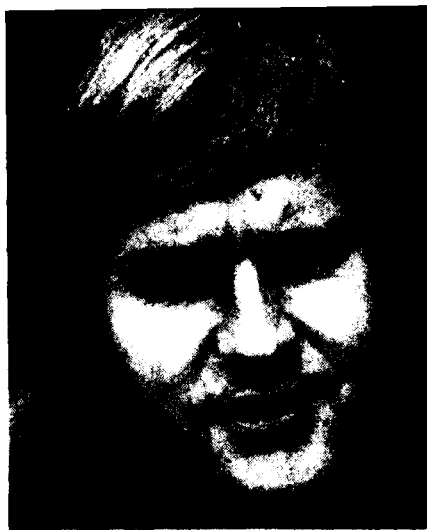
They did not succeed in winning many of the executive positions, however and they waged an unremitting campaign of violence against the executive officers during the year. The AUS president, Peter O'Connor, was threatened with a screwdriver held to his throat, his office door was smashed with a sledge-hammer and executive meetings were continually interrupted by Maoist thugs.

Most of the Maoist speakers at the council were not even students. The AUS council traditionally allows anyone present to speak and many superannuated student politicians took advantage of this.

The Maoists had no joy at this council at all. A Maoist motion calling for a mass mobilisation to fight the conservative attacks on AUS with direct action was overwhelmingly defeated. The Maoist-led Overseas Student Service was also censured both for its campaign of vilification and violence against the AUS executive and for its alleged misapplication of an \$8500 Foreign Affairs Department grant. The Maoists are clearly a declining force in student affairs, principally because of their fondness for thuggery.

Apart from the Maoists there are three distinct lines of attack by critics of AUS. The NCC-backed Democrats want the union to be de-politicised and turned into a simple services union. They also want it to be voluntary. The president of the Macquarie University Democrat Club, Cathy Harrold (daughter of former DLP MLA Kevin Harrold) said: "We would like to see no policy at all on international affairs. It's disgraceful that these extremists can claim to represent 250,000 students. Less than 10 percent even vote for AUS elections. If we represent anyone it is the apathetic majority who resent all this extremist, revolutionary, homosexual garbage."

The Australian Liberal Students' Federation is committed to much the same ideals but has adopted a different and so far more effective plan of attack. There are court challenges to AUS in three States and the ACT. Michael Farrell is suing in NSW, Robert Clarke



Gregor McCauley: manager of AUS Travel, subject of much discussion

has successfully sued in Victoria but is facing an appeal, Nick Xenophou is suing in Adelaide and Michael Yabsley is suing in the ACT. All these cases are following the success of Robert Clarke before Mr Justice Kaye of the Supreme Court of Victoria. One other case, brought by Melbourne student, John Bell, has been settled.

The West Australian Government has legislated to make it impossible for student union fees to be used for AUS. However the University of WA and the WA Institute of Technology students' guilds will remain in AUS paying the \$2.50 a head fees from accumulated surpluses. These surpluses will eventually be exhausted and AUS will have to recruit its WA membership voluntarily.

So far as the other State Governments are concerned AUS is fortunate in that the Kaye decision applies to all student organisations. Kaye held that Melbourne University could not compulsorily collect a fee to fund the University Union, which provides recreational and restaurant facilities, the Sports Union, the SRC and the AUS. Legislation will certainly be introduced to fund the unions. However, there is considerable doubt that the State governments will choose to continue compulsory membership of AUS. Even in NSW and South Australia where there are Labor governments, the Opposition control the Legislative Councils and are committed to voluntary unionism.

The Liberal students are dismayed at the attitude of the Federal Minister for Education, Senator Carrick. Carrick told a group of Liberal students in Adelaide recently that they should abandon their court cases and try to take over AUS by democratic means. Liberal litigant Michael Yabsley says: "Why should we have to take over a union we don't even want to be members of?"

The Labor students, on the other hand, do not believe in voluntary unionism. They are committed to retaining compulsory student membership in AUS and simply want direct

election by the students of AUS officials. At the moment the officials are elected by the annual council. They want to take over the union themselves and moderate its stance.

It is hard to justify a compulsory AUS. It is not an industrial union in the sense that it wins better wages and conditions for its members. It had lobbied for student allowances and so forth, but there is no evidence to suggest that it was the crucial factor in winning them. Many of its policies on education, for example, would not be supported by most students. AUS is opposed to competitive assessment and prefers non-competitive non-assessment where all students are equal. This anti-elitist policy is hardly likely to endear itself to the majority of students who are trying their hardest to get a good degree and a good job.

An across-the-board devaluation of academic standards, which is the inevitable result of this non-competitive trend, will only serve to make a university degree a worthless piece of paper. Many would suggest that it already is. This lack of grading between students means the employer cannot tell which degree is better than the other and so he will be obliged to choose between the students who went to the older "better" universities and private schools and the students from new universities and State schools. The choice will inevitably be made in favor of the middle-class, privileged student at the expense of the proletarian student the revolutionaries of AUS claim to support.

Santamaria is quite right in saying that extreme leftist domination of campus politics prevents any real debate. The way in which left-wingers consistently disrupt lectures by visiting conservatives is eloquent testimony to their hatred of democracy. Worse still, the compulsory student union means that the leadership have no incentive to be responsible. It doesn't matter if they have alienated all the students, they will still get their money.

Everywhere on Australian campuses there is massive distrust and contempt for student politics. Instead of interesting students in politics, the universities are alienating them from it. The student who learns to despise the ranting demagogues on his campus will despise the politicians in Canberra as well. Alienated from politics, he becomes an uninterested cynic and vacates the stage to the ratbags he despises.

If student political bodies, like the SRCs and AUS, had to compete for student support they would have to prove their worth in the market place. As it is, they are simply expensive playthings for extremist groups who are rightly denied support anywhere else.

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