

into a revolutionary force in the continual struggle for limited but ever expanding demands.

Such a programme of unity in action will quickly leave behind the demagogues, doctrinaires and sectarians of the New Left, along with their counterparts in the Old Left, mouthing slogans at each other in some dingy office, while the Real Left, old and new, marches on shoulder to shoulder to victory.

ARTHUR W. RUDKIN

VERBAL VIOLENCE

AS ONE OF THOSE REVILED in Max Teichmann's diatribe on the authors of *The Australian New Left* and *A New Britannia* (ALR No. 30), I should appreciate some space in your journal, not to defend specifically my chapter or those of my co-contributors (How can one respond *intellectually* to tasteless calumnies!), but to say something about the import of Teichmann's incongruity of thought and tone in a wider sense. Unfortunately, his style of virulence is symptomatic of a grave recrudescence afflicting the entire spectrum of Australia's Left, threatening to kill any meaningful revitalisation.

My condemnation of his style does not mean that I am opposed to fragmentation on the Left, or that I wish to gloss over real differences, or that I am unprepared to debate differences openly if that is what some people would like to do. Quite the contrary! But I do demand minimal standards of civility. I cannot understand why we must verbally assassinate one another on the way to our more humane socialist world. In fact, after twelve years commitment to various left-wing struggles, I'm more convinced than ever that rhetorical totalism is not too far removed from physical annihilation, and is definitely not *one* of the roads we are seeking. If we are repulsed by the vituperation and the running amok of a Knopfmacher, why do we resort to the same type of behaviour among ourselves — or even against our right-wing opponents?

My first encounter with this phenomenon of (shall we call it) 'verbal violence', and the realisation of what it can lead to, occurred in the United States when I was working as the regional director of the New England Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy — better known as SANE. This was back in the still very frigid Cold War years of 1960 and 1961, when SANE was being torn asunder by investigations from Senator Thomas Dodd's Internal Security Subcommittee. As we were hauled before his Committee, tensions mounted within SANE, terrible rifts developing along ideological, personality, and policy lines. We may have loved peace and mankind, but we sure hated each other. I can recall one fatal meeting where the invective became so heated that some of the more sincere haters actually exchanged blows and shoves (a scene repeated, in only slightly milder form, at last year's May Moratorium in Brisbane). If the comrades in SANE (one word this time) had been carrying nuclear bombs, one wonders if they would have ended up throwing them at each other. It was as if the words — "Kill, kill, kill for peace!" — popularised in the song by the Fugs, were really intended for us.

Why tell this little tale — a searing experience for one individual? Because I see its contradictions and their consequences reflected in the ambivalence of

the Teichmann style. As a person presumably dedicated to socialism, I assume he is interested in exposing what he regards as the authoritarian features and argumentative weaknesses in some of the New Left writing (a legitimate exercise to be sure), yet in the process he lapses into abuses of analysis and name-calling that reveal in himself the very qualities he is deploring. Not only does he commit wholesale verbal violence that discredits his academic competence, but he invites retaliatory gestures of hate from those against whom he has railed. Like civil war, the ideological fratricide of the Left, when it commences, usually turns out to be the most vicious of political conflicts.

All of this, of course, rests upon the assumption that Teichmann is a socialist or strives for socialist objectives. Many on the New Left would no doubt disqualify him as a 'true socialist' because of non-revolutionary credentials. Thus the verbal violence would begin its escalation. He might rejoin by calling us 'pseudo-socialists' — at least McQueen and his followers who he has typed as "left authoritarian misanthropes", with a final pronouncement of "Left Fascist", heading for the "New Siberia". The rest of us, particularly Osmond, O'Brien, and myself, he has lumbered with the epithet of "Utopian Socialism", pejoratively defined — when applied to us — to mean membership in "a lonely hearts society" or in a "dilettantes' association", "shortening the path to temporary intellectual eminence", wanting to "storm the toilet blocks" of the universities, purveyors of "Studies from a Dying Sub-Culture", motivated to cite eminent left scholars "as evidence of wide reading and radical respectability" and "as bromides to sedate the critical reader", and so on, and so on. We are even guilty of a "particular narcissistic form" of radicalism that "constitutes a branch of social-climbing". Whow!

Accompanying the epigrams and epithets, a spate of smears are spewed forth as a substitute for analysis. Peter O'Brien gets tarred with the Nazi brush, because he has stated that "there is a need of iconoclastic and symbolic acts, and the need to inject the maximum amount of cultural and social tension into the society". To which Teichmann reminds his readers: "These, of course, were the Nazi tactics, before *their* revolution. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery . . ." Here is truly a place to apply one of the syllogisms that Teichmann has so unfairly invoked against McQueen.

I am scalded "for pouring cold water on coalition strategies (requires an ability to get on with people)", when I have been very careful to qualify and specify my rejection of alliance formation. Attentive reading, though, does not seem to be a Teichmann *forte*. What he does to McQueen is really frightening, but I'll *not* pursue those transgressions of reality, since McQueen is more than capable of defending himself (if he thinks it worthwhile). I am concerned, however, at a patently false charge directed at my integrity. Giving me the totalitarian treatment, Teichmann claims that I "speak of the need to penetrate various organisations with a view to taking them over by stealth. This" — he continues — "one remembers, was the old-style CP scenario. Who are the cynics and manipulators now?" Since I say nothing remotely suggesting manipulation, it might be interesting to see exactly what I do say about the 'why' and 'how' of penetrating organisations. In a passage leading up to the section on the "Transformation of Existing Institutions", the following *is* stated:

The revolutionary goal becomes the actual life style of the revolutionists. Since they envisage a life which focuses on experiencing their humaneness,

their political activity (to borrow a description from Richard Farson) "will be experiential, rather than utilitarian, and the purpose of life will not be to use themselves for ulterior goals, but to experience themselves, not to use others, but to experience others, not to use their environment, but to experience it in the fullness of its possibilities for richness and beauty". Thus confrontation — while directed towards the overthrow of institutional arrangements and modes of thinking — does not include the annihilation of persons. The practising and realisation of the vision must go on simultaneously with the confrontation. The two are inextricably linked. Persons cannot be sacrificed as things. One cannot postpone the revolution to man until after the revolution for man has been achieved.

While one can endure puerile and tedious epithets like "Anatole France Lemmings' League" and "the Barber's Cat Self-Improvement Society" simply because they are puerile and tedious, the blatant desecration of truth in conjunction with the assailing of one's character is something else again.

If the Teichmann piece is a paradigm case of verbal violence — the above representing only a small sampling — some of the tracts and remarks pouring out of other sections of the Australian Left are also afflicted with the disorder. A Qld. Peace Committee official and a prominent trade unionist, for example, told a public meeting that Brian Laver had swung over to the DLP, as is often the wont of former radicals, because he was opposed to the amalgamation of the metal trade unions. Then, there is the Humphrey McQueen campaign against Dr. Cairns. At the Anti-War Conference in February he delivered a paper in which he charged Cairns with issuing a "call for neo-capitalism" and with conducting a "public campaign on Vietnam (that) is part of his entire counter-revolutionary project". His case was constructed from a series of selective quotations taken out of context and situation, and sometimes linked by innuendo to the reactionary statements of other people*. While McQueen's tone lacks Teichmann's shrillness and intemperance, this merely makes the contents more convincing to those unable to check the original sources. Conspiratorial reports circulate that Cairns is a 'neo-capitalist', a 'counter-revolutionist', even a 'warmonger'. In Melbourne a pamphlet issued by *Tocsin* adds some more isolated quotes of Cairns' to the original list. And in Brisbane we hear there is documented proof that Cairns is playing a counter-revolutionary role in the Anti-War movement.

It's not that people spreading this verbal violence are always acting out of malice or insincerity — who can deem their motives — but we must stop it somewhere. And if not through the responsibility of each individual, where then?

RALPH V. SUMMY

COMMUNIST ACTIVITY AND LABOR PARTY CHANGE

IT SEEMS TO ME that John Sedy in his article on "Socialism and the ALP Left" in your March number makes the mistake of trying to analyse the ALP without taking into account the influence that can and must be exerted upon it by a much strengthened Communist Party applying united front policies.

* A slightly revised version of McQueen's original paper will appear in a forthcoming issue of *Arena*, which will also contain an extensive reply to the charges he levels at Cairns.