

# COMMENT

## URANIUM AND AUSTRALIAN POLITICS

In less than a year the movement against uranium mining has snowballed to become the biggest mass campaign since the Vietnam Moratoriums of 1970-71. It has the potential to grow even larger than that significant movement and will have a similar impact on Australian politics. Its potential effects are very large, due to popular understanding of the gravity of the issues involved and because the debate touches on many questions fundamental to capitalism and the future course of advanced industrial society.

The campaign is very much a people's one. There are groups in all major cities and in many localities and regions, including those where it is normally difficult to organise activity about anything. Even quite conservative sections, for example in country areas, are showing interest, awareness and commitment. There is a deal of evidence that ordinary people are well aware of the technical and political issues involved. The grass roots nature of the movement and its wide support has made its mark on the labor movement. Principled stands by leaders like Tom Uren and Ralph Taylor (Australian Railways' Union Federal Secretary) have influenced mass opinion, together with the work of the campaign. But it is mass opinion which has, in turn, clinched decisions such as that of the Perth Labor Party Federal Conference.

Support for the anti-nuclear power campaign in Australia, on such a scale, is at first glance surprising. No nuclear power plants have been built here and as yet there are no known plans to build any, despite pushing by the nuclear lobby. Therefore opposition has not grown from resident actions against proposed power stations, as in other countries, but rather from a general awareness of the hazards involved in the world-wide trend to a nuclear society. Not only that, but Australia also stands to make money out of uranium mining, although many are aware that much of the profit will go to the overseas headquarters of multinational companies.

The Australian response is therefore a very conscious one against the dangers faced by

humanity if the thoughtless rush to massive nuclear power industry proceeds.

The growth of the movement and of broad support for it have now reached such a point that conservative governments, mining interests and reactionary forces generally can no longer afford to ignore it. The issue is now right at the centre of Australian politics and in many respects it is the one on which the Fraser government is most vulnerable. More clearly than on some other issues, people see that the interests of different social groups are at stake. They see that a central question is whether economic gains and huge profits for a few should outweigh considerations of the environment and long-term welfare of humanity. This, and the Labor Party decision, have given a class content to the political confrontation even though there are divisions within the working class on the issue.

The Australian movement is part of a large international movement which is also growing at a tremendous rate. Across Western Europe, North America and Japan, tens of thousands are demonstrating, often militantly, against building of new nuclear power stations and extension of the industry. The movement in West Germany claims millions of supporters and its activists number more than the combined membership of all political parties.

As the movement grows, the outlines of the future nuclear society take shape. In France, hundreds of riot police armed with tear gas and riot gear defend the site of a proposed plant against 25,000 protesters. At White Bay in Sydney, more police than protesters guard shipments of yellowcake as, in scenes out of 2001, they are moved in to the accompaniment of flashing blue lights on the police vehicles. The vicious police attack on the White Bay demonstrators as they were about to disperse shows what is to come if the nuclear society really gets under way.

On the other side, forces are mobilising in defence of vested interests. The immediate interests are enormous: it is estimated that the profits from mining Australia's uranium amount to 15-20 billion dollars, and it is said that chairman of Pancontinental, Tony Grey, stands to make 2 billion personally if all goes well. Then there are the indirect interests of not allowing challenge to the private profit ethic nor to capitalism's commitment to nuclear

power.

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December 1962. Docker argues that Andersonianism is no longer a living tradition. In fact, rather than dying as Docker argues, it has been transformed and absorbed to form a formidable weapon in the arsenal of bourgeois ideology in Australia as well as a backbone for literary and cinematic production.

10. For Anderson "true art" is not only a world of neutral and free observation of life in the raw but also an "innocent eye", thoroughly anti-moralistic. (See 'Art and Morality', *ibid*, p.265). It returns us to that golden clime and happy kingdom before the beginning of time and history when virtue was in its natural state.
11. See 'The Servile State' in *Studies in Empirical Philosophy*, p.331.
12. For a discussion of the characteristics of the free-thinking "producer" (individualist), see 'The Servile State', pp.331, 334, 339.
13. For a discussion of the characteristics of the "consumer" (the masses) see *ibid*, p. 331.
14. *Ibid*, p. 338.
15. For an illuminating discussion of this, the lynch pin of Andersonian aesthetic practice, see J. Docker, 1974, pp. 140-143.
16. The reviews of this film all took note of the fact that it was the beginnings of a new and solid Australian cinema, a change of direction from the 'sexual saga' movies of Petersen, etc.: See M. Morris in *The Digger*, January 14-February 11, 1975; J Flaus in *Cinema Papers*, December 1974; P. McGuinness in *National Times*, November 18-23, 1974. What they are silent about is that the version of Australian history the film presents is not only old but rancid in its old age, the new marching song of an old tune.
17. See B. Harcourt "The Push" in *National Times*. February 3-8, 1975.
18. For an elaborate and systematic analysis of this see T. Rowse: 'Liberalism and Hancock's Australia', *Arena* 44-45, 1976 and 'Review of Australian Cultural Elites', *ALR* No. 46, 1975.
19. T. Rowse, 1976, pp.89-93.
20. A. Ashboit (1966), quoted by Docker, 1974, pp.106-7.

21. F. Eggleton (1932) quoted by Rowse, 1976.
22. It is to be noted, however, that even these shots effect ambivalent meanings. S. Dermondy in *Nation Review*, May 26-June 1, 1977, has also noted this ambivalence.
23. For a discussion of this thesis in regard to recent cinematic production, see M. Foucault 'Film and Popular Memory: An Interview', *Radical Philosophy* II, Summer 1975.
24. The naturalist form casts its thematic material in terms of immediate appearance, i.e. inter-subjective relations, giving it the quality of the spontaneity of lived experience. Contradictions are dissolved by being displaced into problems about Human Nature, e.g. Kev's lack of will resolves the conflicts presented for resolution by the narrative. This cinematic formulation of working class life, by disallowing the presentation of contradiction, transforms the narrative into a Fate, everything being the inevitable result of the working of the special type of Human Nature possessed by the working class. However, there is never any indication of forces which mould this Nature, driving the characters to live their lives the way they do. They simply act without commentary, gesture without reason, in a monotony of predictable ritual. The only conclusion possible is that the forces lie outside understanding and knowledge. The working class of the film are the way they are not for any comprehensible reason. They are simply like that - a seductive and agnostic cover for the film's moralistic arguments.
25. Consumption of commodities as a Virtue as opposed to the old and now near dead Protestant Ethic of Thrift is a recent phenomena (in its generalised sense) of monopoly capitalism. An excellent study of this feature of capitalist economic ideology is provided by K. Rowley in 'Ideology in the Electric Age: A Critique of Altman' in *The Australian New Left* edited by R. Gordon, Melbourne, 1970.
26. Personalisation and individualisation are the logical effect of the way the narrative formulates working class life by means of the psychology of its central protagonist.

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Hence the trend in recent weeks to talk of violence, attacks on basic rights of dissent and protest, and threats of a 'law and order' election. The conservative forces are worried and aim to scare people off the streets and stop them actively voicing their views. The conservatives also hope to blackmail the labor movement away from principled support for a moratorium.

These tactics may have some effect,

especially when seized on by pro-mining elements within the labor movement who use them as an excuse for watering down existing policies. But it can confidently be predicted that they will not prevent further growth of the movement. As with Vietnam, the confrontation over uranium will, in the long run, discredit conservative and reactionary policies and bring defeats for those who espouse them.

**B.A.,  
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