A long shadow hangs over Queensland's usually sunny skies — the shadow of harsh and systematic government repression of the workers and the people. It is a shadow that could envelop all of Australia unless the ordinary people act together to dispel it.

Rights taken for granted in most parts of Australia have been denied in Queensland, epitomised in tragi-comedy at the time of writing by the arrest of thirteen Christians for singing hymns in a park on the Sabbath.

A one-man band government — acting in collusion with the joint mining interests which gain most from the exploitation of Queensland's rich mineral resources — is tightening a noose around Queensland democracy.

For long, the Queensland government directed its spite and vindictiveness most of all against social minorities. All the while preparing itself for, and conditioning the public to accept, wholesale attacks on the trade union and labor movement.
The stage was set with repressive amendments to the Conciliation and Arbitration act late in 1976. Next came the prosecution of union officials under an ancient part of the Criminal Code.

Then, civil prosecution of unions for damages arising out of industrial dispute. Now, the phoney 'Right to Work' legislation — Joh's plan for wrecking unions.

There are many public figures who have referred to Queensland as a Police State. Others have suggested that the actions taken by the government, by the Premier of Queensland, are leading to a form of creeping fascism. The latest to make such comments was the leader of the Australian Democrats, Senator-elect Don Chipp. He said:

"I am not paranoid about a police state, but Queensland is coming perilously close to one.

Mr. Chipp gave 10 stages of how Queensland was approaching Germany of the 1920s and '30s. They ranged from gaining power with a minority group, through gerrymandering the electorate with the help of the coalition, to passing laws designed to provoke chaos and incite violence.

Mr. H. Tarlo, Professor of Law, University of Queensland, referring to Mr. Chipp's comments, and the situation generally, had this to say in a letter to the press on April 24, 1978:

Mr. Don Chipp (Courier Mail, April 18) is right about the Premier's demeaning of Queensland.

Whatever truth there may have been about this boast in years gone by, it is unfortunate that recently he has been, as Mr. Chipp puts it, 'isolating you from the rest of Australia by his outrageous conduct.

Professor Tarlo went on to say:

The dangers inherent in this style of leadership are obvious. One hesitates to use labels in the way that the Premier does, but if level-headed conservatives are 'Communists', it may not be too far off the mark to describe the Premier's actions as tending towards that brand of right-wing extremism known as 'fascism'.

In trying to find a solution to the problem he promoted the following:

The main hope of the people of Queensland is that the Liberal Members of Parliament, including Cabinet Ministers (if they can forego their 'perks' for a short while) will withdraw their support from the Premier and the Coalition.

It is a great pity that the opportunity of reforming the gerrymandered electoral system, by a temporary alliance of Liberal and A.L.P. members, was lost at the time when the present coalition government was in the process of negotiation. This gerrymander is the root cause of our troubles.

However, it may even now not be too late to save Queensland from the disaster which may befall it if Mr. Bjelke-Petersen is allowed to proceed to his logical conclusion.

The Premier of our state is also well known for his comments on political, social, economic and moral issues. In fact, many of his quotations are quite well known. On uranium, the Premier, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, has this to say:

What's the man in the street got to do with it?

or —

We won't be able to sit on uranium firstly because it would not be right and secondly because it would be wrong.

On the economy —

The 40 hour week has given the opportunity to many to while away their time in hotels.

On women —

My pilot is a woman and some of my ministers' secretaries are women — we're right across the board in this regard.

On Aborigines —

When I get accused of this one (prejudice against Aborigines) I like to say to the accuser, and usually he has long hair, 'You're just the sort of man I'm looking for, dedicated, keen, devoted to the cause.
I wonder if you'd mind if I moved a family of Aboriginals to a house in your street.

On education —

Someone in the Education Department does not seem to know what the government wants children to be taught.

On flying and fatherhood —

Right before they (his children) went to school they'd fly around the State and even down to Brisbane with me, strapped alongside my little single-engined aeroplane.

Joh's single-handed government and the things that have happened in Queensland in recent years, led Hugh Lunn the author of JOH to state the following in the opening paragraph of the preface of his book:

Once upon a time an academic said to me: 'In thirty years people will wonder what happened in Queensland in the seventies. It will all sound like a fairy tale — a man ruling with 19 per cent of the vote, a state politician whose manoeuvres removed a federal government.'

For decades in Queensland the country vote was a Labor vote. The impact of technological change altered this and it led to the dominance of the Country Party (now known as the National Party) which took the place of Labor and won the support of the country dweller in the country towns.

Queensland has a notorious gerrymander and this is not a new phenomenon to Queensland either. The gerrymander has been used to keep government in office, whether Labor or the National-Liberal Party coalition. The gerrymander helped keep the Labor government in office until the time of the split in 1957, when the breakaway Queensland Labor Party was formed.

This is how the present government in Queensland operates. Joh Bjelke-Petersen and his National Party colleagues with 27.2 per cent of the votes have 35 seats. The Liberal Party with 25.5 per cent of the votes has 24 seats, and the Australian Labor Party with 42.8 per cent of the votes has 23 seats.

Due to the gerrymander, one vote west of the Dividing Range is worth nearly three in Brisbane and the provincial cities. As Denis Butler said in his controversial Courier Mail article in August 1976:

San ity doesn't count when 25 per cent of the votes gets 50 per cent of the seats and God's on your side.

Before the 1974 elections, the National Party ruled with only 19 per cent of the votes and could do so even now with as few as 17 per cent of the votes.

In explaining the Bjelke-Petersen phenomenon, firstly it must be conceded that Queensland has a large, traditionally rightwing country and provincial town population. The decentralised nature of the state reinforces this. Ten of Australia's 24 most populous cities are in Queensland and the Queensland population living outside Brisbane is greater than the population of either South Australia or Western Australia.

Bjelke-Petersen has wilfully stimulated base reaction and acted as a mouthpiece for it.

His words sound as if they come from an ignorant and inarticulate man. (I personally think he has both these qualities.) However, he also has animal cunning and has proved beyond doubt that he is a stayer and a survivor of many challenges. He has the largest public relations force of any government in the country. Cabinet has the services of 54 salaried journalists.

The Joh Bjelke-Petersen phenomenon is not new in Queensland — in fact it goes back many decades. Personalities like Joh Bjelke-Petersen have always been part of the political scene and men of his ilk have had top positions in government, the Public Service, institutions of the state and, for that matter, in the trade unions.

Are Joh Bjelke-Petersen's political attitudes and actions so different from those of people like Vincent Gair, Katter Senior, Walsh, the Treasurer in the Labor government in the '50s (who lent support to Vince Gair and the Queensland Labor Party and then became an independent), "Bombshell" Barnes of Bundaberg, Tom Aitkens and many others? Similar men with similar philosophies were Commissioner Bishof and Commissioner Bauer. One could go on and on.

So Joh Bjelke-Petersen is not an entirely new phenomenon. He just seems worse than the others. The shade of difference is that Joh
Bjelke-Petersen has made a deliberate attempt to present an image of a strong upholder of State rights, populist conservative prejudice and God-fearing which appeals to a substantial section of the people in the community, both town and country, but particularly to people in the isolated country areas, of whom there are many in Queensland.

In the past decade, various issues have confronted the trade unions, the labor movement and the democratic rights movement in Queensland.

The campaign against the war in Viet Nam which brought about a re-assessment by many in the community, brought a questioning of the values of society. It also saw repressive measures by the institutions of power to counter opposition to the war.

Here we saw another Queensland first - the use of the law and order Riot Squad armed with batons 2ft 4 ins. in length to deal with those who dared to demonstrate on Queensland soil against Australia’s involvement in the Viet Nam war.

Then there was the State of Emergency during the Springbok tour, aimed against people who wanted to come together and express their opposition to racism and apartheid.

The trade unions and the anti-war movement, on both these issues, were later proved right and they are now respected matters of concern to none other than the Prime Minister, Mr. Fraser — who has caught up with the stand that was taken by people like myself and others in the trade union and peace movements some ten years ago.

Bjelke-Petersen has made many threats in recent years to bring down a State of Emergency as part of his union-bashing campaign when unions are in dispute.

Then there was that blot on the consciences of all decent Queenslanders, indeed, all decent Australians, in the search and destroy incident at Cedar Bay and the subsequent cover-up by the government of the actions of the police involved.

The state government’s attack on the ABC TDT program because it dared to show the facts and question publicly the ethics of the Queensland police force and the responsibility of the minister concerned with the search and destroy operation at Cedar Bay and the cover-up that happened subsequent to that - burning of the reports, the extradition of one of the main witnesses to Western Australian, the outright lies told by Police Minister Newbery and the Premier.
November 1976 saw the sacking of three teachers in North Queensland for having pot in their possession and the vindictiveness, the arrogance, the brutality and hypocrisy that accompanied the government’s attack against the three young people, the Teachers’ Union and the trade union movement generally.

It was at that time that Ray Costello, secretary of the Teachers’ Union warned the Queensland and Australian people of the development of creeping fascism in Queensland and urged them to stand up and be counted and to take counter-action against the policies of the government, to support the Teachers’ Union in their struggle against double penalties and the hypocrisy of the government in its attitude to the use of marihuana.

Then there was the sacking of Police Commissioner Whitrod and the appointment of Terry Lewis.

Joh Bjelke-Petersen then decided it was time to get stuck into the unions.

There was the Zaphir case and the ultimate conviction of Ted Zaphir, organiser for the Storemen and Packers’ Union, by the use of the Criminal Code. The implications of this were enormous. Zaphir was charged with “threatening to cause detriment”. When applied to the sensitive area of industrial relations this can be so widely interpreted that any employee, union delegate or official who threatens to strike or to organise a strike or a ban can be so charged.

In this sense, the Zaphir case decision threatens the entire basis of trade union activity in Queensland.

September ’77 saw the government-influenced police provocation at the trade union rally called to express solidarity with Ted Zaphir and to voice opposition against the amendments to the Arbitration Act and the use of the Crimes Act.

The 6,000 trade unionists gathered at the Roma Street Forum were surrounded by 1,000 police daring the unionists to challenge the new right to march legislation by staging a march. The government was bitterly disappointed. The rally was a tremendous success and displayed a high degree of responsibility and discipline by those responsible for organising the demonstration and by the rank and file.

We also have the attitude of the Premier, obviously supported by his government, that the “police can do no wrong”.

Numerous cases of police brutality and of police operating outside a normal code of ethics have been proved but Joh Bjelke-Petersen comes to their defence and the inquiries are either squashed or excuses are made for the police. They are white-washed and exonerated.

What of the Inspector of Police who bashed a young student on the head?

Joh Bjelke-Petersen prevented Police Commissioner Whitrod from conducting an inquiry. Instead of being disciplined, the Inspector was promoted and in the Queen’s New Year Honors list, he received the Queen’s Medal.

More recently we have the banning of street marches. On September 4, the weekend before the Zaphir trial, from the vastness of his Kingaroy property, Bjelke-Petersen off-handedly announced: 

Don’t bother applying for a permit. You won’t get one. That’s government policy now.

The Premier was addressing himself to the broad spectrum of people organising an anti-uranium rally and march on October 22, as part of a national mobilisation against the mining and export of Australian uranium.

The rally took place. There was an attempt to march resulting in approximately 500 arrests.

The revelation that Bjelke-Petersen determined government policy surprised no one. His declaration from his Kingaroy home was law in three days.

Then there is the proposed “Right to Work” legislation which poses a danger and threat to the whole trade union movement, greater than any other issue it has confronted in Queensland.

When one goes deeper into the activities of the government and the undemocratic nature of the government, one can cite further issues such as interference in the Education Department, the banning of MACOS and SEMP, the education programs for high schools, programs used by educationalists in every other state in Australia and also used by the private schools’ system in Queensland, but banned
for use in government schools.

Recently, we saw the Premier manipulate Cabinet to spend $200 million more of the public purse for the establishment of the new power house at Tarong rather than Millmerran. The collective knowledge of the experts of the various government departments commissioned to bring forth recommendations on where the power house should be built was rejected by Joh Bjelke-Petersen and his "Running Dog" Conzinc Riotinto, who never for one moment thought of it being anywhere else than Tarong .... and Tarong is where it is to be.

One just begins to think that he has gone to his limits when all of a sudden another front is opened.

This time it was Aurukun and Mornington Island — the sacking of the Uniting Church administration on the Aboriginal reserves, and the announcement by the Queensland Aboriginal and Island Affairs Minister, Mr. Charles Porter, of the take-over of the affairs of the reserves.

Then there was the subsequent altercation with the Federal government, where their "pussyfooting" once again gave Joh a victory at the expense of the rights of the Aboriginal people.

The "fly in the ointment" was no other than Joh's old pal, Conzinc Riotinto, the "under the surface" issue at Aurukun being the control of the rich bauxite deposits for which CRA has the mining lease. In the midst of the battle for the control of Aboriginal land, state rights versus centralised government, implications about Queensland seceding .... just as a diversion, Joh's cops, Hogan's Heroes, Inspector Hogan, Special Branch chief, arrested clergymen for humming in the streets on the Sabbath.

The Telegraph of April 10, 1978, reported the incident above as follows:

News of the arrests made national and international news this morning and tightened the pressure of all Queensland parliamentarians to force the government to reverse its tough attitude against the marches of dissent.

The news reports told Australians and overseas listeners that the clergymen had been ordered by police to stop singing hymns in Adelaide Street, City, and later in Queens Park, George Street.

The police also told the protesters to stop humming the hymns and then stop whistling.

The three clergymen were arrested on charges of having failed to obey a police direction and with having resisted arrest.

Free enterprise cashed in on this tragic event and marketed a new perfume in Queensland called .... "JOH" .... (to stop you humming in the streets).

There is a danger of Queensland creeping into fascism by default and the ineffectiveness of the trade unions' and the labor movement's opposition to this state of affairs is worrying.

I must qualify this by saying that the stance of the Liberal Party has considerably aided Bjelke-Petersen in his rise to absolute power and his use of dictatorial and undemocratic legislation.

On the ban on the right to march issue, differences have surfaced - many in the Liberal Party. The president and secretary of the Queensland Branch of the Liberal Party are opposed to the law banning marches. They want an appeal to a magistrate instead of to the commissioner of Police.

However, their outspoken criticism and opposition has prompted Joh to respond in the same way as he responded to the Bishops and other leading churchmen on the same issue .... They're all a bunch of Commos.

When a former Miss Australia (Mrs. Bonner) an ardent anti-uranium supporter asked him questions about civil liberties during the state elections in November last year, in particular about the November 22 rally, his reply was:

If you fly with the crows you get shot with the crows.

The Courier Mail of April 17, 1978 reported that the Premier (Mr. Bjelke-Petersen) attacked the Liberal Party state president (Mrs. McComb) and state director (Mr. Leggoe) over the right to march issue. He accused them of "hoodwinking" Queenslanders and allying themselves with the Communist Party to give Brisbane's streets back to the mob. He said:
The Liberal executive has burnt its fingers badly in the march issue.

It is the supreme irony that the Liberal Party executive has proved the Communist Party’s best ally in attempts to give Brisbane’s streets back to the mob.

And Mr. Knox, the Deputy Premier, in his reply to the criticism stated:

There can be no inference drawn that the views of Liberal Party officials are in any way connected with those of the Communist Party.

For long the Liberals in Queensland have regarded Joh Bjelke-Petersen as a fool who would soon bring himself undone. They have been prepared to sit back and accept the fringe benefits.

Some in their ranks realised that this was a mistaken stand to take but their realisation came too late. Other than for one or two skirmishes, the Liberal Party generally gives whole-hearted support to Bjelke-Petersen’s leadership.

Catherine West, a long respected academic of the Liberal Party, at the Sherrington Memorial Lecture in 1976 said the following about her Queensland colleagues:

In Queensland the Liberals have often seemed to suffer from what you would call the oppressed minority syndrome. Entrapped within the coalition, the minority party has displayed a kind of love-hate relationship with its dominating partner.

On the one hand the Liberals have resented the Country (now National) Party and wished to be free of it. On the other hand they have too readily allowed their political reference point to be the National Party rather than themselves.

In other words, politics in both wings of the Queensland Liberal Party has been far too much taken up with being pro- or anti-National Party rather than being pro-Liberal.

Now to the happenings since Bjelke-Petersen proclaimed the ban on political marches.

This period has seen the emergence of an organised campaign for the right to march, the formation of the Civil Liberties Co-ordinating Committee and the attempts to march have displayed courage and dedication by thousands of young people who have been in the forefront of the campaign.

There have been more than 1,200 arrests, tens of thousands of dollars in bail and fines.

The situation is the same right throughout Queensland. Public forums expressing dissent are spied on by Special Branch cops while the presence of uniformed police intimidate those present and prevent others (because of the fear of going on the Special Branch dossier) from joining in.

To refer to one simple action by a young dentist residing in Bundaberg, a town 350 kilometres north of Brisbane .... This young man was concerned at the denial of civil liberties in Queensland so he applied for a permit for one person to march in a deserted bush street at 2.30 a.m. He was refused. He later did walk that street .... He and his dog at 3 a.m. in the morning .... accompanied by a car load of cops.

One car load of cops, though, fades into insignificance when one considers the police presence at recent demonstrations and public meetings in Queensland.

Just to talk about a march brings forth hundreds of police as has been the case on Brisbane’s two university campuses.

There are estimates that it has cost the Queensland government approximately one-quarter of a million dollars to maintain the police presence at public rallies since this seven months’ old law.

At the recent National Anti-Uranium mobilisation, on April 1, the report in the Sunday Mail of April 2, 1978 was as follows:

One-third of the Queensland police force spent yesterday, April Fool’s Day, in pouring rain at an anti-uranium demonstration in Brisbane.

There were an estimated 800 police in Brisbane and another 200 at Warwick, the Gold Coast, Toowoomba and Nambour.

Yesterday’s police exercise will cost a minimum of $30,000 wages, without transport, dry cleaning, and food. Some police came from as far away as Maryborough.
Following a recent vigil at the Hamilton Container Depot where uranium was being shipped out of Australia, the following security plan was drawn up for the Port of Brisbane as reported in the Sunday Mail of April 2, 1978:

Police have drawn up a tight security plan for uranium ore ships visiting the Port of Brisbane.

The plan makes it virtually impossible for anti-uranium demonstrators to get anywhere near the ships, by land or water.

Until a few weeks ago it would have been relatively easy for extremists to interfere with a ship's passage up and down the river, or to daub anti-uranium slogans on berthed ships.

But the new security plan, devised after an anti-uranium demonstration at Hamilton container terminal on March 6, will ensure the ships are under constant surveillance from the moment they enter the river.

Water police will stop every private craft near the shipping channel when an ore ship is arriving or leaving and ask the occupants' business.

Two 80 km/h Sharkcut launches will escort each ship up and down the river, keeping private craft well clear.

In addition, police will search the wharf area and the area on the opposite bank before any uranium ship ties up.

In March a small boat passed the area and was pounced on. Sergeant Munn of the Water Police said of the incident:

'It got our adrenalin going, but it turned out to be a bloke testing a boat he had just bought.

He thought it would be a quiet time to test his boat and he got quite a surprise when the spotlights hit him.'

Following the Special Federal Unions Conference held in February this year, the trade union movement has virtually opted out of the struggle against the exporting of uranium.

As for the opening up of new mines ..., the ACTU executive recommendation endorsed by a Special Unions Conference (and endorsed by the majority of state Trades and Labor Councils), when stripped of the "gobbledegook" gives the pale green light to go ahead and open up new mines.

The example given regarding security measures at the Hamilton Container Depot should be given serious thought by all in the trade union movement. This action is only the beginning of the draconian measures that will be taken by governments of the future if Australia develops along the lines of a nuclear technological society.

Such a society will bring with it a massive security system that will impinge on people's privacy and civil rights. The ban on street marches is a clear warning of this. The struggle against uranium mining and uranium export is synonymous with the struggle for civil rights. It is for these reasons that I strongly believe that the Australian trade union movement made the wrong decision when it gave the OK for the export of uranium and a pale green light for the opening up of new mines, and they they must get back into the struggle.

The situation is getting worse, not better. The Queensland government has been clear and systematic in its curtailment of rights and the suppression of opposition. It has moved in stages: first making the police force the open instrument of the ruling party, appreciating well which side its bread was buttered. The next stage was to step up the attack on minorities and dissenters around emotive labels and issues — hippies, drugs, dole bludgers. Then the main thrust of the attack was shifted to the mass labor movement and the trade unions.

Suppression of opposition has one universal feature everywhere — once started it develops its own logic and momentum. One restriction leads to another, each requiring more penalties and more police powers to enforce it.

Strengthening of police powers was foreshadowed in the Criminal Law Inquiry Report, new industrial legislation was promised in the election platforms of the coalition parties. And given the character of the government's methods and objectives, the restrictions on the right to protest marches may well reveal themselves as merely the first step towards a more draconian muzzling of opposition.

The democratic movement must ask itself how further steps in this direction can be prevented.