CHAPTER 6

THE NSW/BLF LINKS WITH WIDER SOCIAL MOVEMENTS 1971-1974

Introduction

Meredith Burgmann, a student intellectual who became involved with the NSW/BLF during the early seventies,\(^1\) referred to the ‘accessibility’ of the NSW/BLF leadership to ‘everyone who came in contact with them’ and observed:-

> It seemed that there was no social movement in Sydney in the early seventies in which the N.S.W. B.L.F. were not active. In many ways the B.L.F. became the centre of radical activity during the vacuum which occurred after the Vietnam and Springbok campaigns. For many students it was their one and only experience of a real ‘worker-student alliance’.\(^2\)

In his book outlining the Green Bans era, Jack Mundey commented on how, by 1972, the NSW/BLF office was “becoming a sort of Mecca for people involved in a whole spectrum of social movements”.\(^3\)

This chapter describes the links between the NSW/BLF and three of those social movements - the Student movement, the Women’s Liberation movement, and the Resident Action Groups (the NSW/BLF ‘Green Bans’) - and analyses the effect of those links on the objectives and the operations of the union.

The Student Movement

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\(^2\) Ibid

\(^3\) Ibid
A demonstration by University students in May 1964 outside the United States Consulate in Sydney reflected an emerging radicalism and their increased activist interest in social and political issues. Later that year, in response to student riots, the Berkeley University Faculty in America, passed a ‘freedom of speech’ policy which was “used to safeguard ‘unrestrained advocacy’ of acts of violence, illegal demonstrations, interference with troop trains, obscene speech and action”.4

Those events, to varying degrees, were to become a regular feature in Universities throughout the Western world during the 1960s. For example, in 1968, violent demonstrations and riots occurred at Columbia University, at the Sorbonne, and at West Berlin’s Free University. The ‘student revolt’ was a progression of the developing rebellion to the dominating conformism of Western society; a rebellion that often attracted police intervention, some of which was brutal:-

Thus the successors of the Beatniks, the Hippies, on the Columbia campus and at the Chicago convention of the Democratic party, began with sit-ins, flowers, and ended with the conviction that the police brutality used against them was part of the omnipresent politics.5

In Australia, the student ‘movement’ joined workers in their 1969 protest against the gaoling of O’Shea. The students continued their association with workers in protesting (with many from all sections of society) against the war in Vietnam and against the 1971 Australian tour by the South African Springboks Rugby team. There was wide spread union involvement in those protests and such involvement was generally pursued by union leaders as an adjunct to their trade union responsibilities.6 On the other hand, the involvement of the NSW/BLF leadership in, and its relationship with, the ‘protest movement’ was such that the ‘protest movement’ virtually became an integral part of that union’s structure and of its

3 Jack Mundey, Green Bans & Beyond, Angus & Robertson, Australia, 1981, p.71
6 “A sordid national brawl”, Sydney Morning Herald, 2 July 1971, p.6
(Bob Hawke, as ACTU President, used the 1971 ALP Federal Conference in Launceston, Tasmania as a forum to announce union decisions on boycotting the Springboks tour)
‘raisons d’etre’. In this way the NSW/BLF leadership became not only a participant in the protests that were part of the changes in society but, this thesis suggests, also allowed their union to become a component of that change.

-- social movements are conventionally regarded as part of the subject matter of collective behaviour, but they might just as well be viewed as an aspect of social change.7

Marx, in viewing the contradictions in society from the dialectical movement approach, reduced such ‘contradictions’ to the issues of ‘poverty versus wealth’ and the ‘proletariat’ versus the ‘bourgeoisie’.8 Peter Sedgwick of the University of York, in referring to a suggestion that the economic contradiction in capitalist societies had in the main been overcome by the securing of growth, concluded that the major contradiction in society was the confrontation between the holders of authority and their subjects.9 Challenging authority was a major factor in the protests of the 1960s and early 1970s. There were of course many other factors that drew people to the protests of that era: - the general discontent being expressed throughout society;10 the “much-discussed ‘crisis of identity’”,11 or merely the “Sheer exposure of the bankruptcy of a prevailing belief, or the illegitimacy and stupidity of an authority figure ---”.12 Many in society developed a ‘protest’ consciousness in much the same way that building tradesmen of the nineteenth century had developed a ‘craft’ consciousness. Whatever the reasons behind student rebelliousness in Australia, the CPA was quick to recognise the value of activist students to its ‘coalition of the left’, which it proposed should include:-

10 Stephen Spender, *Op Cit*, p.172
11 Ibid, p.29
12 Peter Sedgwick, *Op Cit*, p.55
---communists, the growing left within the Labor Party, union militants, students, intellectuals, anarchists, libertarians, ----.13

The CPA therefore, while capitalising on the adventurous activities of its members among the leadership of the NSW/BLF, also sought to exploit any achievable alliance between student radicalism and activists from other sections of society. The CPA however had to compete for the hearts of student activists with the ‘direct action’ appeal of Trotskyism14 and the undisciplined confrontationist character of anarchism,15 and the NSW/BLF proved an ideal vehicle to accommodate those two approaches to protest-action. As discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis, the NSW/BLF was used as the testing vehicle, and vanguard flag-bearer, of the CPA and its ultra-left policies - policies and actions which were regarded by the majority of union leaders as “adventurism and ‘one-outism’”.16

The policies and activities of the NSW/BLF leadership isolated them from their peers within the trade union movement. Similarly, the vague confrontationist objectives and the undisciplined vociferous behaviour, of those student activists with extreme left-wing views, were not representative of students generally,17 the majority of whom were not interested in the various interpretations of Marxist thought, but in the “protection of fundamental and humanitarian liberties”.18 The New-Left student activists therefore achieved no class consciousness with their peers. Jupp suggested that the interest of those student activists in Trotskyism and anarchism may also be evidence of a search for leaders commenting that: -

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13 Statement of Aims, Methods and Organization, adopted by the 22nd Congress CPA, March 1970, p.25
14 For an outline on the Trotskyist groups in Australia during the early 1970s and their attraction among the 'radicalising' youth - See:- Denis Freney, “Trotskyist trends”, Australian Left Review, May 1972, pp.12-17
15 Professor Hanson of Leeds University suggests that the student radical is essentially a libertarian whose ideals have a strong anarchistic flavour. A.H. Hanson, “Some Literature on Student Revolt”, in Bernard Crick and William A. Robson, Op Cit, p.133
16 The most vocal criticism came from the leadership of the BWIU in the publication, Six Turbulent Years, published by the Building Industry Branch of the Socialist Party of Australia. This publication, while obviously motivated by ‘political competitiveness’ did reflect views that were widely expressed throughout the union movement - Diary Notes.
18 Ibid, p.84
-- Dubchek attracted little support among youth because of his strict adherence to conformist methods of resistance and protest.\textsuperscript{19}

Mundey through his public promotion of violence,\textsuperscript{20} and Bob Pringle - the NSW/BLF President - through his involvement in a wide range of social protests, displayed leadership profiles that would have appealed to young radicals. Pringle, for example, was arrested during a Vietnam Moratorium march in September 1970,\textsuperscript{21} and arrested for attempting to cut down the goal-posts at the Sydney Cricket Ground prior to a Springboks rugby match in 1971.\textsuperscript{22} Further, the predominantly young activists among the NSW/BLF officials, and within its Rank and File Committee, provided an attractive and accessible group to student activists seeking a ‘class’ of fellow (ideological) travellers. This thesis therefore suggests that the NSW/BLF leadership, its Rank and File Committee, and activist students (and others with sectional interests who became partisan of the union) created a class of hard-core protesters - which joined, and supported, those who ‘protested’ for, or against, the various social issues of that time. In identifying the NSW/BLF-student alliance as a class, this thesis agrees with Edward Thompson who asserted that any definition of ‘class’ can only be “drawn from the intentional, subjective world of social actors”.\textsuperscript{23}

The number of splinter activist Trotskyist groups that emerged during that era did not comprise great numbers of participants,\textsuperscript{24} but their existence, and the activities of their members, further destabilised the already fractured relationships within the building unions. Literature produced by some of these groups was regarded with suspicion and viewed as the product of mischievous members of either the Gallagher or Mundey factions.\textsuperscript{25} For example, in the midst of the troublesome period that immediately followed the handing down by Justice

\textsuperscript{19} James Jupp, “The Discontents of Youth”, in Bernard Crick and William A. Robson, \textit{Op Cit}, p.70
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 9 July 1971.
\textsuperscript{23} Peter Sedgwick, \textit{Op Cit}, p.52
\textsuperscript{24} Denis Freney, \textit{Op Cit}, p.12
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Diary Notes}
Sheehy of his May 1971 Decision in the Accident Pay Case, an undated pamphlet attacked the BWIU and NSW/BLF leaderships.\textsuperscript{26} The attack on the NSW/BLF was focused on its attempted expulsion of members involved in the brawl at the NSW Labor Council meeting. A leaflet produced apparently by yet another splinter group, attacked Hawke for an alleged deal detrimental to the interests of the South Australian Branch of the ABLF and concluded with the words: “The Revolutionary Working Class together with the Revolutionary Students want a Socialist Australia”.\textsuperscript{27} The only value to this thesis in quoting such documents is in their reference to the worker-student alliance as a movement separate to, and apart from, the NSW/BLF rather than as a relationship that had developed within its structure. The conflict between the ‘protest’ objectives, of the Students and of some of the activists within the NSW/BLF leadership and Rank and File Committee, and the need of the NSW/BLF to conclude an ‘economic’ campaign was an issue which undermined or complicated some of the settlements.\textsuperscript{28}

This thesis concludes that the worker-student alliance did become a movement which exerted great influence on the attitudes and operations of the NSW/BLF leadership. Also to become part of the NSW/BLF policy-making structure was a section of the developing Women’s Liberation Movement.

The Women’s Movement

Juliet Mitchell suggested that the ‘growing consciousness of (students and youth) permitted’ those within the Women’s Liberation Movement to realise the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[26] R. Buckdale (for Worker-Student Alliance), \textit{The Sell out of the Working Class is still on}, Redfern, undated (1971).
\item[27] The Revolutionary Alliance of Workers and Students, \textit{Message to all Union Officials}, Undated, (1971).
\item[28] The first occasion on which this worker-student ‘protest’ factor was regarded by MBA/NSW members as undermining the settlement of a dispute was following the Sheehy J. ‘Accident Pay’ Decision leading to the Labour Council brawl. MBA/NSW “Report on the activities of the Industrial Relations Committee for the period ending 3/6/71”, \textit{Minutes}, 8 June 1971.
\end{footnotes}
extent of their ‘economic poverty’. Women and students, Mitchell suggested, identified that ‘the gap between the deprivation they suffered and glory they were supposed to enjoy was sufficiently startling for them to challenge both’. The introduction of women into the ranks of the NSW/BLF, Burgmann suggests, was accidental. In March 1971 four young women were cleaning a completed floor on a building site and their subsequent membership of the NSW/BLF was achieved by representatives of that union as a successful demarcation exercise. The women would no doubt have been influenced by pure economic motives due to the higher rates prescribed for such work by the Builders’ Labourers’ Award. The subsequent strike by builders’ labourers to secure payment of the women’s wages when their employer became insolvent was, again as Burgmann suggests, the pursuit of a basic union principle (wage protection) and not related to any support for their right as women to work in the industry. In light of the publicity that those events attracted, and the ‘flavour of the month’ character of women’s demands for equality, the subsequent NSW/BLF promotion of the rights of women to work in the industry was hardly surprising. The NSW/BLF leadership was, after all, a prime example of selective interactionism, with union policies being deeply affected by those of the CPA and by the radicalism and protests expressed in the wider community.

Jack Mundey, however, suggested that the issue of ‘women builders’ labourers’ had first emerged in the 1960s when Norm Gallagher “ruled that there

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30 Ibid, p.22
31 Meredith Burgmann, *Op Cit*, p.317
32 Many large building projects are progressively ‘handed over’ to the client as each floor of the building is completed. The work associated with cleaning a building under construction was covered by the NSW/BLF, however, the cleaning of completed floors (regarded as no longer being part of the building site) was often performed by members of the Miscellaneous Workers Union - a situation normally challenged by the NSW/BLF.
33 Meredith Burgmann, *Op Cit*, p.318
34 “Interactionism” being a term to explain the effect on industrial relations behaviour of events that occurred within a community.
were to be absolutely no women on building sites”;35 a rule which was adopted by the NSW/BLF. According to Mundey, he had that rule ‘overturned’ in 1966.36

The basic objective of the Women’s Liberation Movement was radical, fundamental change - but the question of how?, and when?, continues to be debated. One view is that the struggle for women’s liberation has always been intertwined with the liberation struggles in countries seeking national liberation.

The participation of women in the national liberation struggle also begins to transform the consciousness of men about women’s capacities and role. In the process of struggling against their own exploitation and oppression, men become more sensitised to the oppression of women, more conscious of the necessity to combat it, ------.37

Others see no solution, for women, out of a socialist revolution:

Goodbye, goodbye. The hell with the simplistic notion that automatic freedom for women - or non-white peoples - will come about ZAP! with the advent of a socialist revolution. Bullshit. Two evils pre-date capitalism and have been clearly able to survive and post-date capitalism: sexism and racism.38

In August 1971 the first national Women’s Movement Conference focused on the issues of ‘Women and Work: Women in the Trade Unions’,39 which coincided with the Congress of the ACTU at which Stella Nord spoke on behalf of the Women’s Conference.40 The effect of Stella Nord (a member of the NSW/BLF)41 and of other CPA feminists, on the CPA policies came to light in

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35 Jack Mundey (1981), Op Cit, p.46
36 Ibid
37 Nita Keig, Women’s Liberation and the Socialist Revolution, “one of the draft resolutions under discussion in the Fourth International in the period leading up to its World Congress in 1979”, Pathfinder Press, Sydney, 1979, p.52
40 The Australian, 31 August 1971, p.1
41 “Women's Lib at the B.L.F”, Tribune, 17 March 1973, p.2
1972 when the Party adopted a policy of support for Women’s Liberation and for other protest groups.\textsuperscript{42}

While the higher rates paid in the male occupation of builders’ labourer was an obvious attraction to many women who gained employment on building sites, the involvement of others was purely from the perspective of their Women’s Liberation role. A case in point was the involvement in May 1974 of Dr. Roslyn Joan Harrison, a 1971 graduate in Medicine and Surgery,\textsuperscript{43} whom the NSW/BLF insisted be employed as First Aid Officer on a project in Pitt Street, Sydney, instead of the Company’s preferred applicant.\textsuperscript{44} Dr Harrison had heard of the position through Janne Reed,\textsuperscript{45} a feminist/ builders’ labourer.\textsuperscript{46} During the last week of the five week strike over the issue, the NSW/BLF agreed to the other applicant being appointed the first-aid officer conditional upon Dr Harrison being appointed ‘assistant first-aid officer’. The company made the following counter-offer which was accepted:

That Miss Harrison be employed by the Company as a builders’ labourer and that she would carry out the duties of a builders’ labourer - these duties to be decided by the Company as they see fit and would not be subject to any agreement. Miss Harrison would not be provided with any alternative amenities (thereby providing her with equality) and that she would receive the loading in the award for a first-aid officer in addition to her wage as she may be required by the Company to act as a relief first-aid officer should the first-aid officer be absent from the site.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{42} The Left Challenge for the 70s, A Policy Statement Adopted by the 23rd Congress of the Communist Party of Australia, April 1972, Sydney, 1972.


\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, pp.28-29

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, p.19

\textsuperscript{46} (The entry of women into the building industry was fostered, and actively supported, by a network of women activists. Mundey referred to how, out of the struggles to secure jobs for women on building sites, there emerged a number of women militants. “They included Stella Nord, an experienced activist of many years’ standing, Lyn and Wendy Syme, Rhonda Ellis, and Denise Bishop.” See - Jack Mundey (1981), Op Cit, p.46)

\textsuperscript{47} J.R. Elder, Report to Chairman - (MBA/NSW) Industrial Relations Committee, 2 July 1974.
The reference to the non-provision of alternative amenities was not as unusual as the above, and rather spiteful, comment may indicate. The fact that female and male builders’ labourers shared amenities on many, if not all, sites was a source of complaint (sometimes wistful) from various members of on-site management.

Whatever motives encouraged participation in, and support for, the NSW/BLF ‘women in industry’ programme - and there was most likely a combination of a variety of motives - not all builders’ labourers supported “the union’s policy for women”.48 There was, in particular, resentment by many males of the women’s success in getting the cream (easy) jobs of nipper which were very limited in number. By June 1973 there were clear signs of a downturn in the industry and there was growing resentment among builders’ labourers at the grassroots level at the perceived situation of “women taking jobs away from men”.49 The NSW/BLF support for Women’s Lib, while having limited real impact on the industry, provided the union with some early experiments in ‘Union Hall Hire’ and ‘Worker Control’.

The Green Bans

To explain how his union was psychologically able to involve itself in an activist role in environmental protection, Jack Mundey referred to the new philosophy that emerged when the rank and file (later to become the Rank and File Committee) gained control of the NSW/BLF:

From the early sixties we were very involved against the war in Vietnam. Many of our members were arrested in the huge moratorium marches and other actions against that war. The union was to be in the forefront in the fight in support of Aboriginal Land Rights and against racism wherever it manifested itself. ---- We were the first building union in Australia to compel the employers to employ women. --- (When) Jeremy Fisher was kicked out of the Robert Menzies College at Macquarie University solely because he was a homosexual -- (we) forced the authorities to reinstate (him). (Strike action by builders’ labourers on Sydney University building

49 Ibid
works helped reverse a University decision by which) Elizabeth Jacka and Jean Curthoys were prevented from running a Women Social Liberation Course. ------ I cite these wider political and social actions to demonstrate the heightened awareness of the union. When, therefore, the Green Ban requests began to arrive, the union became actively responsive.”

The involvement of the NSW/BLF in the environmental movement was not the result of some grand strategy. As Mundey observed: “It (the Kelly’s Bush campaign) landed on our doorstep in June 1971 and was totally unexpected.”

Green bans were not imposed in support of traditional ‘industrial relations’ objectives, nor were they pursued within the framework of Marxist ‘bourgeoisie/proletariat’ theory. The green bans emerged out of an alliance between the NSW/BLF and sections of society who saw themselves disadvantaged by proposed development. The green ban campaign challenged the decisions, and therefore the authority, of statutory bodies that approved certain development. The imposition of green bans also challenged the power of those who owned the property concerned, and who wished to develop it. The green bans ‘syndrome’ was, in some ways, an extension of the general ‘society versus authority’ struggle of the time - a challenge against what Mills described as the ‘power elite’.

Many in society who were drawn to the NSW/BLF green ban ‘protest’ were influenced by what Sedgwick described as “the illegitimacy and stupidity of an authority figure”. The ‘authority figure’ in that instance was the State Planning Authority (SPA) which administered the NSW Government’s responsibilities to town (and city) planning. Mundey described the SPA as “remote and elitist”. Mundey went on to detail the result of the SPA remoteness and elitism:

There was no avenue for public participation in the planning process. There was an air of hopelessness as residents, environmentalists and other citizen

50 Jack Mundey, “From Red to Green: Citizen-Worker Alliance”, in Drew Hutton (ed), Green Politics in Australia, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1987, pp.110-111
51 Jack Mundey (1981), Op Cit, p.79
organisations fought to have some say in the political and planning decisions. For instance, Resident Action Groups had sprung up all over New South Wales in the late sixties and an umbrella organisation, the ‘Coalition of Residents Action Groups’ (CRAG) had begun to coordinate citizen protest against the New South Wales Government. The green bans signalled a shift in power within Australia’s pluralist society:

political power is watered down into a ‘pluralist’ multiplicity of new decision centres, between which equilibrium is automatically realised by the concertation of the various power groupings, pressure groups or de-facto powers representing the economic forces of an integrated society.

This provides a broad functionalist framework with which to understand the creation of Resident Action Groups. The initial involvement of the NSW/BLF, in the problems facing those threatened by proposed development, was due to its potential value to the ultra-left objectives that had been adopted by Jack Mundey, the communist. In 1974 Mundey referred to “….. the potentially revolutionary character of ecological action”, having frankly admitted some two years previously “I’m not a reformist - I’m a militant communist.”

Marx viewed the Capitalist as the owner of the means of production who appropriates the products and turns them into commodities. In the building industry the first means of production is either land on which to erect a new building, an existing building to renovate, or an existing building to demolish and replace.

In imposing Green Bans, Mundey exercised control over the Builder or Developer by usurping their right, to make decisions concerning their means of

54 Jack Mundey (1987), Op Cit, p.109
55 Ibid
58 The Australian, 22 May, 1972. (This thesis does not challenge Mundey's later dedication to the 'Green' movement - it merely points to the opportunities it initially provided Mundey the CPA member, and Mundey the ultra-left union leader)
production, and transferring that right into the hands of Resident Action Groups. Mr Justice Smithers in his Reasons for Judgement observed:

..... As a town planner - the (NSW/BLF) hardly purports to do justice as between local residents groups on the one hand and developers on the other.---- So often the (NSW/BLF) offers itself as completely at the disposal of the local resident groups. That such a group wants a ban is enough for the (NSW/BLF) to impose one. It is as though the (NSW/BLF) converts the expression “Have gun will travel” to “Have power will ban”.

The list of works that were prevented from commencing by NSW/BLF imposed Green Bans is now part of history and, as Justice Smithers concluded: “the merits of any of the bans are irrelevant”. His Honour did observe, however, that “a competent town planning authority itself might possibly have approved of some of them.”

Despite the involvement of the National Trust in the approval of construction plans, the green ban remained on the development project of F.W. Theeman. The subject of that green ban (houses in Victoria Street, Kings Cross) became a commune of protest reflecting anarchism, ultra-leftism and the more radical elements of the youth and feminist movements. Former tenants and squatters (many seeking ‘alternative lifestyles’) were encouraged by the Victoria Street Resident Action Group (VRAG) to move into the houses that were to be demolished in preparation for new development works.

Mundey had placed a Green Ban on the area until redevelopment plans had been approved by the National Trust. When the green ban was not lifted following such approval of the redevelopment plans, Frank Theeman accused Mundey of breaking his word. Mundey replied “Yes, we had to go along with the residents, they were not satisfied with the plan.” Attempts by the developer to seek a

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60 Commonwealth Arbitration Reports, Volume 158, 1974, p.1065
61 Ibid
62 Ibid
63 VRAG, Save Victoria Street, 1 page roneo, Undated, (Just prior to 12 June 1973)
compromise with the VRAG ‘residents’ degenerated into acrimonious disputes.

A member of the VRAG was quoted:

We’re willing to compromise anytime, so long as there is low-rent housing, no car parks, no expressways, no high-rise development, no more commercial development and no fucking up of appearance of the area.\(^{65}\)

The street became the forum/centre for protesters with its own publication which conveyed news of street inhabitants and of forthcoming social events, and vilified the Theemans.\(^{66}\)

The entire 1973 Foundation Day edition of *Tharunka* was dedicated to ‘community action’ reporting on some seventy three Resident Action Groups. Despite the dedication of the many supporters of Resident Action Groups, the real power continued to lie in the hands of the NSW/BLF:

the situation remains that Resident Action Groups have virtually no power except for direct civil disobedience, that the Builders Labourers Federation green ban is what actually prevents the developers from carrying out their intentions, ... \(^{67}\)

That observation is interesting in that it indicates the widely held belief that the actions of the NSW/BLF were not examples of civil disobedience - that somehow their representation of those who perform certain occupations gave the NSW/BLF leadership the right to determine whether works requiring such occupational activity could proceed. Mr Justice Smithers made it clear that no such right existed:

If one looks at various green bans in the light of their purpose as expressed by the New South Wales Branch of the Federation. ....... It is obvious that none of these purposes are objects for which this organization was formed nor are they incidental to or consequential thereon in any relevant sense. They do not further the interest of the organization or of its members considered as builders’ labourers.”\(^{68}\)

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\(^{65}\) Wendy Bacon, “The Squatters of Victoria Street”, *Nation Review*, 6-12 July 1973, p.1166

\(^{66}\) For example: *Street Sheet*, 17 July 1973.

\(^{67}\) Sasha Soldstow, “and they all lived together in a little crooked house”, *Tharunka*, Foundation Day Edition, 2 August 1973, p.21

\(^{68}\) *Commonwealth Arbitration Reports*, Volume 158, (1974) at p.1063
Justice Smithers also commented “...the Federation may claim it wears the mantle of Sir Galahad .... whatever mantle is assumed ugly and menacing features are apparent.” 69 That observation was made in light of the sworn evidence concerning the attitude displayed and the tactics employed by the NSW/BLF leadership in pressing some of their green bans. Michael Theeman was one who provided such sworn evidence. Theeman was advised by one of his staff that, during the confrontation over the Victoria Street green ban on 3 January 1974, Bob Pringle (NSW/BLF President) had advised him: We’ve taken photos of all you lot and we are going to stick them up all over the city. From then on you won’t be safe in Sydney”. 70 Shortly afterwards a poster stating “Not wanted in Victoria Street or anywhere - Theeman’s Scabs - authorised by the VRAG and BLF”, and displaying photographs of Michael Theeman and his employees, appeared on buildings around Sydney. 71

On 5 April 1974, Joe Owens and a number of other people invaded a party, to raise funds to send a singer overseas, at Frank Theeman’s home. They handed out yellow cards, which read “Victoria Street Action Group - will call again”, released a ‘stink’ bomb and sabotaged toilets by stuffing them with pamphlets. A crowd of VRAG and BLF supporters remained outside the house yelling out abuse such as ‘Theeman’s Scabs” and slashing and deflating tyres on guests’ cars. 72

Ian Kiernan of IBK Constructions (he was later known for his “Clean-up Australia” campaigns) had attracted no opposition from the Darlinghurst Resident Action Group to his project in Squizzy Taylor Square and commenced work. The NSW/BLF placed a green ban on the area. He was instructed to stop work by Tony Hadfield a NSW/BLF organiser who, in answer to Mr. Kiernan’s protests said:

Do you want to take us on you mug?...We’ll tear down any steel you put up and close all your other jobs...I believe in complete

69 Ibid, p.1061
71 Ibid
72 Frank William Theeman, Op Cit.
anarchy...there is a green ban on the site until the people’s plan is formed.”73

In October 1973, a large group of NSW/BLF officials and other activists interrupted demolition work on a corrugated iron building in Playfair Street at the Rocks and then proceeded to the offices of the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority (created by the NSW Government to develop the Rocks area over which the NSW/BLF had placed a green ban). Colonel Owen Magee, the Chairman of the Authority, agreed to meet a delegation led by Joe Owens as a large number of the activists “were attempting to break into the office”. The group continued their ‘break-in’ attempts during and after the meeting with the delegation “many of them were drunk and some urinated in the street”. The office staff were in “great fear and the female office staff were bursting into tears”.74 The work at the Playfair site continued, and on 24 October 1973 a number of NSW/BLF activists were arrested for attempting to stop the job. The following day Mundey telephoned Colonel Magee and, when Magee refused to cease the work, said: “You are a pig headed bastard. If you go on you will need the whole New South Wales Police Force to help you. The ban is still on”.75

The MBA/NSW had attempted to secure a certificate under s.33 of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act, 1904 which would enable it to pursue proceedings before the Australian Industrial Court to have the union fined under s.119 of the Act. The attempt was unsuccessful due to the, then, still fairly recent O’Shea Case and to Judge Aird’s indecision over the Centennial Park green ban when he wondered:

whether one should treat this matter solely on its industrial merits...or the extent to which it is proper for the Commission to take into account the much broader issues that exist...76

75 Ibid
76 Transcript of Proceedings, in Macan Construction Pty. Limited and the Australian Building Construction Employees and Builders Labourers Federation, C.No.2482 of 1973, (re: Home Units,
The Judge decided to take into account those much broader issues, and allowed intervention by local residents whom the NSW/BLF insisted had direct interest in the matter.\(^77\) This initiative clouded the response of the Federal Commission to the green bans issue. The green ban activities of the NSW/BLF attracted the anger of various conservative forces, including the MBA/N SW. It also further isolated the NSW/BLF from the general trade union movement. The NSW/BWIU complained:

In the initial stage of the environment struggle, very valuable action by individual unions pioneered the struggle, but as wider consciousness started to be aroused, it became their working class duty to broaden and deepen the movement. The NSW BLF leaders not only did not do this, but they opposed it.--- Instead of seeing this as an issue to build a broad movement, it was made an issue to boost personal egos (\textit{sic}) and the political stocks of the CPA.\(^78\)

While the NSW/BLF received the lion’s share of recognition and attracted the brunt of any criticism over the green bans, it is useful to note that the NSW/FEDFA was very much involved in the campaign:

As the union that carried out demolition work, they (the NSW/BLF) were able to readily wield their key industrial power to prevent the demolition of many historic buildings as well as (\textit{sic}) peoples homes and property. They, along with the FEDFA, played a major role in respect of the Kelly’s Bush and the struggle around the Rocks.\(^79\)

In fact, Roddewig suggests there is some doubt “whether the vote by the BLF marked the birth of the ‘green ban’ movement or whether the FEDFA had already voted to refuse to operate its bulldozers on Kelly’s Bush when the BLF entered the

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\(^77\) The residents included Professor N. Runcie, Dr.K. Trevillian, Professor F.W. Ayscough and the author, Patrick White.

\(^78\) Building Industry Branch of the Socialist Party of Australia, \textit{Op Cit}. p.15

\(^79\) Ibid, p.13
Roddewig, however, did not dispute the role that the NSW/BLF played to make environmental work bans popular.\footnote{Richard J Roddewig, \textit{GREEN BANS: The Birth of Australian Environmental Politics}, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1978, p.11}

Mundey commented that, despite the announcement of his intended resignation as NSW/BLF secretary, “some developers continued to regard me as the all-powerful figure in the whole green bans movement”.\footnote{Ibid}

The MBA/NSW had some difficulty in producing articulate policies concerning the green bans issue due to the public support for many of the objectives of the campaign. That uncertainty was exacerbated by the iconoclast label attached to many of those developments under green bans.

While the MBA/NSW was in a quandary during the early stages of the green bans era, the penchant for violence of many activists provided the association with a useful platform on which to challenge those bans.

It was the ‘worker control’ characteristics of the green bans movement that the MBA/NSW most feared, and that issue is addressed in the next chapter which describes “the rocky road to de-registration” during the years 1972 to 1974.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The CPA, through its proposed ‘coalition of the left’, looked to enrolling the support of activists within the trade union movement and from the various protest movements throughout society.

The NSW/BLF became a rallying point for many of the protest movements. It developed alliances with student activists, and provided a power base for sections of the Women’s Liberation Movement. Through its links with those social movements, the NSW/BLF created a class of hard-core protesters which enabled it to further test the ultra-left policies of the CPA.

\footnote{Ibid}
\footnote{Jack Mundey (1981), \textit{Op Cit}, p.114}
The objectives pursued by the NSW/BLF in conjunction with its associates within protest movements, on some occasions, inhibited its ability to settle an ‘economic’ campaign it conducted on behalf of its membership.

There developed, within the NSW/BLF, a group of hard-core women activists whose promotion of the employment of women in the building industry did not receive unanimous support from the grass roots membership of the union. There was particular resentment to the success of women in winning NSW/BLF support for their applications to fill the ‘cream’ positions of Nipper on the building sites.

Although its promotion of Women’s Liberation Movement objectives provided the NSW/BLF with some experiments in ‘worker control’ and ‘union hall hire’, the venture had no lasting impact on the structure of the industry.

There was, however, widespread community support for the NSW/BLF green bans, and those campaigns provided the union with a large number of new allies - the ubiquitous Resident Action Groups.

While most building unions had, in some way, been involved in the environmental protests of the time, the NSW/BLF was more successful in its intervention due to the strategic position it occupied at the early stages of the building (or demolition) process. Further, the NSW/BWIU accused the NSW/BLF of continuing its ‘one-out’ approach in its green ban activities.

Thus, while gaining support from outside the union movement, its green bans policies further isolated the NSW/BLF from other building unions.

The public endorsement of some of the objectives, and subjects, of green bans had placed the MBA/NSW in a quandary. The MBA/NSW was opposed to green bans due to its ‘worker control’ characteristics, but had no wish to be regarded as iconoclasts.

The emergence of violence in support of some of those green bans provided the association with reasons, clearly unrelated to environmental considerations, for opposing the NSW/BLF bans without being labelled iconoclasts.