

Radical and student press

9. Ratbags, revolutionaries and free speech: The Queensland radical press in 1968

ABSTRACT

Australian governments have made continuing attempts to restrict the public's right to know. This article looks back to 1968 when radical Queensland university students challenged state government restrictions on freedom of speech, assembly and information. They did so by using then new offset press technology to create alternatives to a mainstream press monopoly. In a world without internet, community radio and television, or even mobile phones, leaflets and small newspapers were the primary media for such minority groups wishing to spread their critiques to the wider community. The article examines the radical newsletter's themes including freedom of speech, civil liberties, Australian racism, press ownership and the anti-war movement. It includes references to Queensland produced cartoons and posters. It was produced with material from the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland.

ALAN KNIGHT

Central Queensland University

The Society for Democratic Action is known as an extremist organization but the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists of hate or love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or the extension of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary's hill three men were crucified for the same crime – the crime of extremism. Two were extremists for amorality, and this fell below their environment. The other, Jesus Christ, was

THE PUBLIC RIGHT TO KNOW

an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and therefore rose above his environment. Martin Luther King, as cited by *Impact*

Introduction

1 968 WAS a year when the western world seemed to be on the brink of revolution, when established opinions of the left and right were shaken by a series of political cataclysms brought to a global audience by television and mainstream media. In Vietnam, the North Vietnamese forces launched the Tet offensive demolishing US propaganda that Washington was winning the war. In France, anarchist and left communist students and workers took control of the streets of Paris and challenged the national government. In Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union rolled in the tanks to overthrow a reformist communist regime. In the United States, clashes between anti war activists and Chicago police, all but overshadowed the Democrat convention called to select a Presidential successor to Lyndon Baines Johnson.

Anything seemed possible. Across the world these events sparked sympathetic demonstrations by students who thought their revolutions might also be around the corner.

In a world without Internet, community radio and television, or even mobile phones, leaflets and small newspapers were the primary media for such minority groups wishing to spread their message to the wider community. This paper looks back to Brisbane in 1968, when an 'underground' press challenged a conservative government and a complacent mass media

In doing so, it focuses on the Society for Democratic Action and its key publications, *Student Guerrilla* and its short-lived newspaper, *Brisbane Line*.

Society Democratic Action (SDA)

The sixties protest movement in Queensland began with a group of 'intellectually puzzled' Catholic students who had been discussing the reforms of Vatican Two at a series of forums at Queensland University. They were engaged in a liberal critique of 'the knowledge industry' (Dan O'Neill, 'The Growth of the Radical Movement'), and had begun to form links with an emerging anti war movement.

The Society for Democratic Action which they created, grew out of the organisation of the Vietnam Action Committee and the New Left ideas of the American Students for a Democratic Society.

In the August vacation [1966], the crossing of the initials of SDS with VAC led to the new name of the group –SDA- Society for Democratic Action. Along with the new name went an intensified desire to embrace a whole range of social issues in a new social movement committed to radical alternatives. SDA was to be involved in action on Vietnam, conscription, education from primary to university level, civil liberties, aborigines, conservation of natural resources, local government and other topics (Dan O’Neill, 1969).

The year 1967 was a period of growing activism for SDA, beginning with a counter orientation program featuring lecturers Dan O’Neill and Peter Wertheim, marked by Brian Laver’s unsuccessful bid for the Students Union presidency and climaxing with a civil liberties march by 4000 students through Brisbane streets. The year which followed (1968) was one which saw demonstrations backed by substantial organisation. SDA had acquired a headquarters, a cultural club, FOCO, a printing press and a membership of more than 200. Activist Mitch Thompson said the movement was being funded by stock market speculation.

SDA dissolved in April 1969.¹ Writing later that year, Dan O’Neill said that, ‘the main feature of all this activity was a new awareness of students that the mass media are not responsible agencies of free information, communication and argument in our society’.

Freedom of speech

If this pamphlet that you are now reading was handed to you in any street in Brisbane, the person so handing it to you would be committing an offence, and be liable to arrest, unless he/she had a permit from the police authorising him/her to distribute such matter. Incredible! Almost! But nevertheless such is the law in Queensland (Tony Bowen: ‘The Press, the Protest Movement and the Propagation of Minority Ideas’).

Questions about freedom of speech were interwoven with other protest issues known as civil liberties. The New Left produced leaflets to promote demonstrations, cultural activities and its ideas. New Left members who distributed leaflets outside the safe haven of the campus were subject to arrest. The arrests prompted further demonstrations, which in turn resulted in even more arrests. Many members of the New Left believed the mainstream media largely ignored views that seriously questioned Government policies. SDA Activist,

THE PUBLIC RIGHT TO KNOW

Tony Bowen complained about how difficult it was to even get a dissenting letter published in Brisbane's only morning daily newspaper, *The Courier Mail*. "The aim of press men is not to discover the truth," Bowen claimed.

This is not to infer that pressmen of every grade are not people of integrity. They are basically no more dishonest than the rest of us, but it is time that we get rid of the poppycock concerning the press, and exposed it for what it is...overprotected by an entanglement of myths. (Tony Bowen: 'The Press, the Protest Movement and the Propagation of Minority Ideas')

He observed that the *Courier Mail* masthead quoted the American President Thomas Jefferson who was a noted exponent of freedom of speech. Yet the *Courier Mail* enjoyed a near monopoly and, according to Bowen, its publisher, Queensland Newspapers, appeared uninterested in the ideas of intellectuals who may have actually read Jefferson.

Identifying contradictions between Australian democratic rhetoric and Queensland government practice was a constant theme in radical publications of the period. Bowen wrote that western democracy was supposed to be founded on freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom to disseminate ideas and the protection of minorities. The American Revolution had assumed a free market of ideas. But where could Queensland minority groups express their opinions?

Bowen:

For the person holding minority views, it is obviously very difficult for him to gain access to the public through the mass media, even if the controllers of the mass media had the most liberal of wills, which without being paranoid in any sense, they clearly have not. The press etc. are in fact societal instrumentalities. They are on the side of the Government, they believe in the status quo. They will criticise the Government over such momentous issues as parking facilities in Brisbane, but they will not, and in fairness, cannot publish objective articles on topics such as socialism or overseas investment in Australia, or press, radio, TV monopolies or oligopolies. They are in fact part of the group that are doing very well out of the position as it is. Only a fool or an idealist would wish to change it. (Bowen: 'Democracy and the Pamphlet Issue')

The free press ain't free

SDA's most effective activity over the past 18 months has been the distribution of leaflets and pamphlets to various sections of the community, particularly the University, the Teacher Training Colleges and the Tech College. One of the reasons we have been so successful with this has been the very high quality of the printing of our leaflets. People are more likely to read a well printed leaflet than they are to read a mere roneoed shee (Matthew Lambourne: 1968).

SDA sought to disseminate its non-mainstream views by deploying the best available small press technology to produce its publications. Previously, Queensland left groups had relied on a roneo system which used paper stencils to create text only, small circulation leaflets. Books and booklets had been produced by hot lead presses operated by the Australian Communist Party or commercial operators. Roneoed leaflets could be produced almost immediately, but were poor quality and could not use cartoons or photographs. Conventionally printed publications were slow and expensive to create, and could be subjected to political intervention by the printers.

SDA acquired its own Multilith 1250 flat bed printer, which used aluminium plates. Text was produced by 'the very best, an IBM Ball typewriter'. Mitch Thompson sought to pay for the typewriter by calling on all SDA members to contribute \$2 each.

We don't have the printing resources of the Establishment press. But we have one advantage – no-one can censor what we print (Fund raising leaflet, 1968).

Impact was SDA's first major attempt at a broad audience publication. An offset press printed, stapled, news magazine, *Impact* was produced in 1967. It sold on the streets of Brisbane for five cents a copy or was available by subscription for \$2 a year. Unions were asked to bulk buy copies at discounted rates.

Impact Number 6, an eight-page edition carried a front page, black and white photograph of an aboriginal man and called for a Yes vote in the referendum which subsequently granted citizenship rights to Australian indigenous peoples. In *Impact's* editorial, Brian Laver wrote that a Yes vote would only be the beginning, because 'aborigines will only be equal citizens on paper'.

THE PUBLIC RIGHT TO KNOW

I believe a great number of Australians are racially prejudiced. Many such people will vote Yes on Saturday because it is the respectable thing to do. Many Australian newspapers that talk in the racist terminology of the 'yellow' peril will also be urging a yes vote because it is respectable. (Laver. *Impact* p 2).

Laver presciently wrote that 'racial prejudice has gone underground temporarily', predicting that the battle against job discrimination, poverty and poor education for aborigines would not get the same support from 'respectable' middle class Australians.

In a subsequent article, an Australian Christian complained of mainstream church leaders who supported the Vietnam War effort. Bill Willkie wrote that he was opposed to totalitarianism of any sort; irrespective whether it was promoted by fascist, communist or democratic governments. If violence and arrests were employed to suppress him and his group, he and his friends would indeed be militant. 'Some of the more courageous of us will be prepared to go to jail,' Willkie wrote.

Nearly all of the remaining material in this issue had been reprinted from elsewhere, and dealt with questions of liberal conscience rather than what might be considered radical themes. There was an eyewitness report from the American peace activist and conscientious objector, Dave Dellinger, about his visit to North Vietnam. The report questioned American involvement in the war on humanitarian grounds, and included an imagined conversation with a 17-year-old napalm victim.

Illustrations were of poor quality, although curiously much of Page 5 was given over to what appeared to be a photograph of the British cockney actor Michael Caine, embracing a semi naked woman. The photo was accompanied by a poem:

There's time for laughing and there's time for crying
— a time for growing and a time for dying:
for hoping for despair for peace for longing
a night for silence and a day for
singing but more than all (as all your more than eyes tell me)
there is a time for timelessness.

While apparently more serious in tone, *Impact* could be seen as a forerunner of later student radical publications, offering a mix of anti war sentiment, anti

racism, popular culture, selected foreign press clippings and calls for solidarity with the unions.

Student guerrilla

To be radical means to go to the root of the problem, and the root of the problem is man himself.

Karl Marx, as cited by *Student Guerrilla*

Student Guerrilla was aimed directly at students at University of Queensland where the radical movement was strongest. It dealt with issues including civil liberties, opposition to the war in Vietnam, university politics, radical theory, conscription and racism. Many articles were anonymous. Bylined authors included English lecturer Dan O'Neill, *Brisbane Line* editor David Nadel, Brian and his then wife Janita Laver and Tony Bowen. Reprinted articles were attributed to the liberal theorist C. Wright Mills and libertarian psychologist Eric Fromm, and the US presidential candidate, Robert Kennedy. There were also references to the black American civil rights activist, Martin Luther King.

It was a double sided, offset printed leaflet, primarily distributed by hand on the Saint Lucia campus of Queensland University. The leaflet frequently contained four to six short articles, cartoons, photographs, and advertisements for upcoming demonstrations and SDA's cultural club, Foco.

This study examined 22 issues of *Student Guerrilla*, published between March 19 and October 16, 1968. Lead articles, their authors and themes were identified. *Student Guerrilla* campaigned against the Queensland Traffic Act, which had been used against students distributing leaflets in support of a postal strike. It demanded a withdrawal of charges, an apology to the people of

THE PUBLIC RIGHT TO KNOW

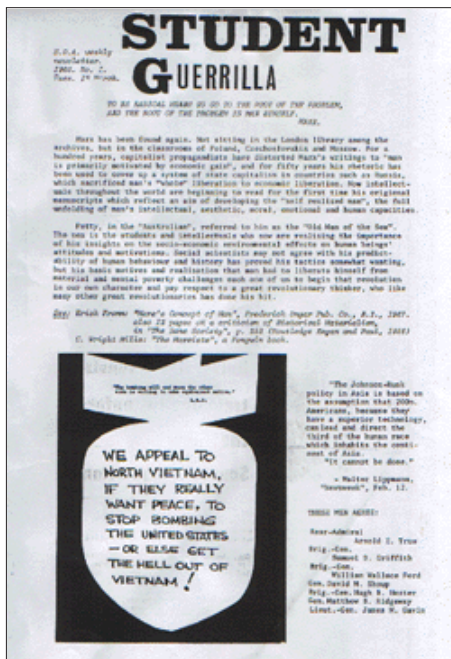
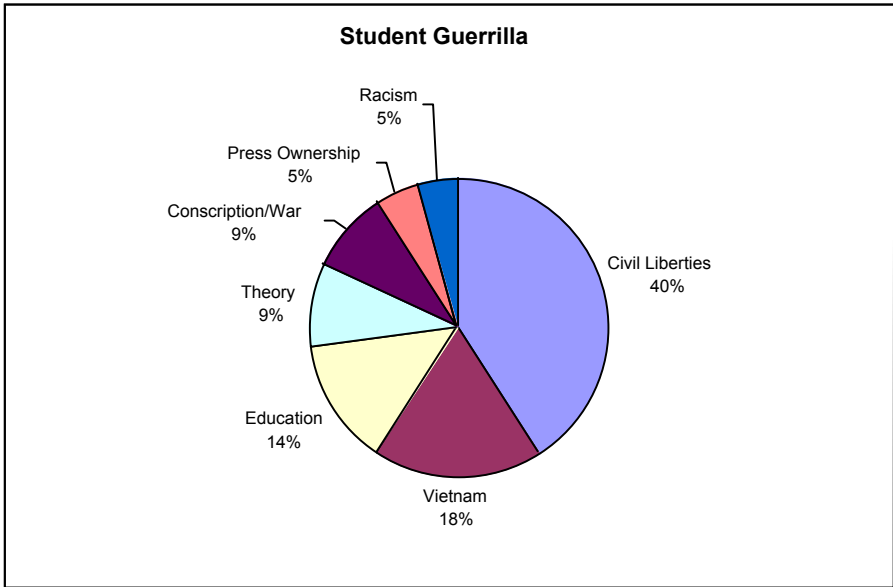


Figure 1: A *Student Guerrilla* front page.

Graph 1: Breakdown of articles in *Student Guerrilla*



Queensland for ‘the repression of the free flow of ideas’, and a change to the legislation. (Issue 11, June 13) The Government did not respond. However, on June 20, *SG* reported that, ‘the Traffic Superintendent verbally accepted the application for a permit for a march of 4,000 students through the centre of the city’. *SG* persisted with its demand however that the legislation be amended. It requested that the previous charges be dropped and future charges withheld (Issue 13, June 25). Issue 14 stressed the need for co-operation between students and the trades unions.

We suggest the unions’ bona fides with respect to civil liberties is substantiated in 100 years of struggle on similar issues on the right of powerless institutions to dissent. Their struggle for civil and industrial liberty is highlighted, especially with the repression in the 1890s, the 1912 Brisbane strike, the shootings of union protestors of Townsville in 1918, the smashing of the unemployment marches of the 1930s, the jailing of the strike leader in 1948, the Nicklin emergency legislation of 1965 at Mount Isa, has been one fought without allies. In these engagements, the combined weight of the mass media smeared their case for

social justice and inculcated in Queensland Society a Pavlovian reaction to the word 'trade unionism' (*Student Guerrilla*, No 14, 4 July 1968).

SG Number 15 predicted a long struggle for civil liberties in Queensland. 'Cabinet has not even responded to the small, even pitiful, although very relevant student demands,' it said. Dan O'Neill later wrote that a legal challenge against the law had been dropped because of the cost. Australia had an institutional, attitudinal and legal bias against powerless minorities. 'Those who are economically or socially advantaged can communicate their ideas (often of an astounding banality and stupidity) in any number of ways,' O'Neill said.

Queensland is run by a political oligarchy that favours economic opportunists. Its society is saturated with complacency, ignorance, philistinism and success worship. The obstinate denial of freedom, social justice and educational development continues with scarcely a blush from the leaders in public life. All the more reason why students should deepen their analysis to link up with various aspects of the malaise, strengthen their commitment to change, forge links with others presently oppressed by the status quo. We must widen the movement to include teachers, other students, nurses, workers aborigines, pensioners and others who are now lost in the labyrinthine maze of 'normal channels' (*Student Guerrilla*, No 17, 25 July 1968).

David Nadel claimed that governments had in fact declared an 'open season on dissent', to counter the growing strength of the movement which had contributed to the 'swing in public opinion against the war [in Vietnam]'. Nadel, then a member of the Maoist oriented Monash Labor Club, believed the Australian governments would only tolerate dissent as long as it had been ineffective (*SG*, Issue 16).

In Issue 18, Nadel claimed that SDA had been forced to leave its George Street headquarters because of police pressure. Police were subsequently trying to force the radicals from their new HQ at the Cellar near Roma Street, he said. 'Not even the Queensland Government is silly enough to believe that the groups around the Cellar could overthrow his his (sic) Government, what frightens them is that more and more people are telling the truth, filtering through the curtain of false information presented by the blanket coverages of the pro-establishment mass media,' Nadel wrote.

The Vietnam War protests

The year 1968 was seen as a turning point for the protests against the war between Vietnam and the United States. In January, North Vietnam launched the Tet offensive, which brought their troops into the heart of the southern capital, Saigon. The television reportage of US embassy guards attempting to eject National Liberation Front guerrillas from the US embassy undermined previous US claims that the war was almost won.

Tony Bowen wrote that, 'the war in Vietnam is at a crucial stage, crucial not so much from the viewpoint of its barbarity, but rather from the crisis of conscience which has been steadily building up in the west concerning it' (SG 5).

Student Guerrilla's opposition to Australian involvement in the Vietnam war largely relied on historical argument rather than the more emotive references to and photographs of atrocities often favoured by the Australian Communist Party literature.²

There were questions about the credibility of US claims of an unprovoked attack on US forces in what was known as the Gulf of Tonkin incident.³ *Student Guerrilla* Number Six quoted the American investigative journalist I F Stone, who claimed that Washington had sought to 'create some kind of incident, to justify the expansion of the conflict already decided upon'. The US Government was suffering from a 'credibility gap', between its stated rhetoric and its actions (SG 3).

The critique of liberal figures in authority extended to include Queensland University itself where the Vice Chancellor, Sir Fred Schonnell was depicted as a remote figure (SG 19). The decision by the Student Union president, Robert Wensley, to make Sir Fred an honorary life member of the Students Union, at a time when students were unrepresented in the university administration, was criticised.

We are after a change, from a tertiary system designed to spur productivity in the interests of the existing state of the economy and existing social hierarchies. We are after changes in discipline, the reversal of authoritarianism, the decentralisation of power within universities. None of this is possible without confrontation of the existing power structures of universities, without more student and staff representation on the Senates and other governing bodies of universities ('Better dead than Fred', *Student Guerrilla*, Number 19).

Dan O'Neill, a UQ lecturer in English, wrote that few would 'think much of the stereotyped, generalised vague and perfunctory sympathy' Sir Fred expressed for student radicals in the 1968 report to Queensland Parliament. O'Neill accused Schonnell of having little interest explaining his policies to staff or even meeting students. 'For it is just this kind of attitude, with its mixture of indifference, paternalism and something not inaccurately described as smearing his hardest critics, that leads to situations demanding direct action,' O'Neill wrote (*SG 22*).

Respectable students

Conservative students such as Bob Allen were concerned that the activities of the radical students reflected badly on what former US Vice President; Spiro Agnew called the silent majority. He claimed that the 'authorities' were reasonable men who might be willing to negotiate. Writing in *Rash-wot you get from SDA*, Allen said that 'much more can achieved (sic) by inviting the minister concerned to have a drink or a dinner with the pressure group leaders and discuss the issue *sensibly*'. Allen conceded in the same document that while most New Left members were 'well below the drinking age'; they should still try to practice 'political maturity'.

...The majority of the demonstrators are thoroughly immature, *easily exploitable*, and are psychological deviants to the extent, that while most young people rebel, none but the fringe elements make it an obsession, a disease, a bigoted passion so anti-social as to ruin their characters altogether. (Allen: *Rash*)

In 'Don't disgrace your Uni', Allen wrote that there was no grievance with the police or Government. 'Civil liberties is just a baseless emotional call cry that attracts the rabble,' he said. 'It is just a string of trouble stirring and pieces of exhibitionism,' Allen wrote.

Every two months there is a demonstration, mostly illegal – and the people in them are full time professional agitators, working on a regular pattern of organised disruption. And I for one am not going to stand for it any longer. I am utterly sick and tired of having the name of this University brought into disrepute and disgrace by a small group of irresponsible ratbags... It is time decent and respectable students told this group where to get off (Allen: 'Don't disgrace your Uni').

THE PUBLIC RIGHT TO KNOW

Stupid Gorilla, which appeared early in 1969, aped *Student Guerrilla* in style and content. It featured an original cartoon of Brian Laver leading chained monkeys. It repeated simple appeals to students to refuse to become involved in demonstrations. It claimed that SDA, which it described as an ‘extremist treacherous group’ wanted students to be the ‘shock troops’ of revolutionary socialism. ‘It’s up to you to decide if you want to be one of their manipulated puppets,’ it said.

TO THEM – PATRIOTISM IS A SIN ON TV

ON TV. Laver stated he did not like patriotism.

TO THEM – INTERNATIONALISM IS THE GOAL AS IT IS FOR THE COMMUNISTS.

SO IF YOU WANT TO BE UN-AUSTRALIAN, YOU CAN BECOME ONE OF THE ‘STUPID GORILLAS’ (*Stupid Gorilla*)

New Light, produced by the Democratic Club – itself of the right wing Democratic Labor Party, took a more measured opposition to the radical students. In May 1969, it reported on the ‘structural disintegration of SDA’ and reported that ‘Intellectual capability is the necessity now’. The magazine went on to say that, ‘This may have some relevance for those presently committed, but SDA seeks to perpetuate itself on campus, and this ‘consolidation’ will not recruit new members into the ranks of an ‘intellectual’ society, from the ranks of the freshers who have not received their emotional commitment, through trial by fire protest politics,’ *New Light* wrote.

The leaflet drew a line between ‘structuralists’ who sought reform and revolutionaries who saw the university as a convenient base.

Whatever fantasy or disguises it adopts, revolutionism in action has come down to a practical question: how is the revolutionary elite to substitute its wishes for those of the majority? Of course the revolutionist will now say that the majority are in any case only conforming to the decisions of some other ‘minority’! The practical problems remains; how is the revolutionary elite to prevent the majority from conforming as *they wish* to the decisions of that ‘other minority’? (*New Light*, Vol. 2 , No. 4).

Brisbane Line

Brisbane Line was designed to be a weekly nationally distributed news magazine, produced jointly by SDA and the Young Socialists League (Com-

munist Party Youth). It appeared on ten two sided sheets, which had to be hand stapled together. Articles were typed on the IBM typewriter, cut into strips and glued onto layout sheets to create plates. Produced in A3 size at the new SDA headquarters at the Cellar, it stretched the little press to its technical limits.

An editor, David Nadel, was imported from Melbourne.⁴ Nadel said later that the paper was created with little consultation with those who were supposed to fund it. He said the first thing the printer (Matthew Lambourne) knew of his appointment was when he was asked to pick up Nadel's bags at the station:

No one had really thought about the implications of producing a paper with the technical equipment we had, or with the staff we had. The staff was initially basically me and a typist who was the typist for everything else, SDA Foco, YSL and whatever volunteers I could get together. None of them were guaranteed either. So it was a matter of I, really as much as anything, recruited quite a lot of them and some of the people who were already keen others were people I recruited from people I was introduced to around from SDA and YSL. So basically, it was appallingly badly planned. It was an idea in Brian's head [Brian Laver] and like all of Brian's ideas he assumed because he thought it was a good idea, (a) everyone else would, and (b) it would work, neither of which was in fact the case (Nadel: 2002).

Nadel said the politics in Brisbane were different from Melbourne, a "funny mixture of liberalism, anarchism and of course the YSL were the youth group of the communist party".

Brisbane Line's first editorial called for a radical reconstruction of Australian society; 'That means not only big business and its representatives, the Liberal Party, but also the other parliamentary parties and (such as the ARM and the CPA [Communist Party of Australia]).' The editorial said:

Though the tone of the paper is perhaps closer to the kind of viewpoint so far presented in Australia almost exclusively by university students, many of our writers and staff are non-students and we hope many of our readers will be the same. Our line up will include all those opposed to Australia's right wing bourgeois establishment and that ought to include workers as well as students. It can be a long line or a short line, depending whether there are enough people in Australia who wish to read our line on society (*Brisbane Line*, 22 August 1968, p 2).

THE PUBLIC RIGHT TO KNOW

This study examined the three editions of *Brisbane Line*, which appeared between August 22 and September 5, 1968. The paper was jointly produced by SDA and the Communist Party of Australia sub group, Young Socialists League and was headquartered in the Cellar near Roma Street in Brisbane.

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia had an immediate impact on editorial content (25 per cent of all major articles). Issue One featured a lift out supporting Czech demonstrators and advising readers to 'hoard your petrol'. Over half of Issue Two was devoted to the invasion, which it said showed that the 'American monopolists do not have a monopoly on aggression'.

Every article published in this paper is critical of the Soviet Union, yet our criticisms are very different from the criticisms of the capitalist press and the parliamentary representatives of capitalism. *The Line* does not believe the attacks on actions of the Soviet Union can be expanded into attacks on communism in general. The actions of the Soviet Union are not those of a Marxist state. In fact they show that the Soviet Union is less communistic than bureaucratic, and more Russian than anything else (*Brisbane Line* 29 August 1968, p 2)

Coverage of the Soviet Invasion included a lengthy interview with Queensland University lecturer, Philip Richardson who had been a tourist in Prague at the time. Issue Three included reprints of Czech communist newspapers (in Czech) together with English translations.

Marxist influences can be seen throughout *Brisbane Line*. Reporting on the Vietnam war (15 per cent of all the major articles) focussed on the communist controlled Vietnamese Government rather than the New Left opposition to the war. Issue Three contained a full page pin up of the otherwise obscure Nguyen Huu Tho, the President of the communist controlled National Liberation Front. Racism was seen through the eyes of the Black Panther Party rather than from the more moderate viewpoints of Australian indigenes. Most original articles were written by the editor.

Culture was reported (13 per cent of articles) but with an approach which seemed curiously dated for a period of such rapid social change. It was as if a beatnik had wandered into a Beatles concert. At the time, FOCO, had been promoting progressive Australian Rock bands such as the Wild Cherries, the Coloured Balls and Max Merrit and the Meteors which might have had more in common with contemporary youth culture. Even though FOCO had initially

helped make up the *Brisbane Line* editor's salary, there was little written about its progressive cultural activities.

Instead, *Brisbane Line* carried a long interview with the even then passé folk group, Peter Paul and Mary. The folksingers had supported antiwar Democrat presidential candidate, Eugene McCarthy and were seen to be 'political'. Their interviewer, FOCO manager Bob Daley had introduced himself to the trio as a member of the underground press.

Daley: How does the New Left affect you?

Mary Travers: 'It worries me,' she said, 'that these "kids" (again) have nothing to replace the present day system with. All they can provide is anarchy which is only transitional. What follows after anarchy can be worse. It can be bad depending on who grabs the reins. I'm really suspicious of them (*Brisbane Line*. 29 August 1968, p11).

Radical street theatre which was already being deployed at demonstrations, was ignored. Instead, there was a lengthy article about little theatre, which questioned whether theatre was indeed dead. There was also a rather conventional review of the play *America Hurrah*, which had not been performed at that time in Brisbane. Australia was described as Lotus Land. 'At least in America then, despite the degeneration of social community which provoked the play into existence, there is sufficient respect for the freedom of culture and the arts to keep the censors in check,' the review noted.

Civil Liberties was a relatively minor issue in *Brisbane Line* (9 per cent of articles). In seeking to take a national view, *BL* often neglected the more extreme circumstances existing in Queensland which had been frequently reported in *Student Guerrilla*.⁵ All police were not bad, Nadel said. '...There are bastards on the [police] force, but without doubt many police are good men obeying bad orders,' he wrote in the lead story in Issue One. The same issue carried 'Longbottom gets the Arse'; a light hearted account of a confrontation between Special Branch Detective Longbottom and Sydney University students. Issue Two featured a long report on Wilfred Burchett, the pro Communist Australian foreign correspondent who had been denied a new passport by the Australian Government and was therefore unable to return home.

Issue Three reported on a constable who confiscated 21 copies of *Brisbane Line*, even though as a registered publication it was quite legally sold on Brisbane streets. The article questioned whether police ignorance of the law

THE PUBLIC RIGHT TO KNOW

was an excuse for them to break it; ‘Does this justify my punching your fat head, because I don’t realise there is a law which disallows my doing that?’ the article asked.

Brisbane Line lasted for only three editions. In a letter to subscribers, David Nadel said that the printing press was unsuitable for making ‘the impossible, possible’. There had been inadequate consultation, resulting in FOCO, the radical youth club, ceasing to pay *Brisbane Line* salaries. Had anyone done any research, they would have realised the whole project was premature, Nadel wrote.

The original aim was to produce an underground newspaper. This was absurd. American underground newspapers sell mostly to the American underground communities and about half their news relates to the underground community. There is no such thing as an underground community in Australia, let alone Brisbane. At the same time as planning an underground newspaper, the original founders of the *Line* desired a socialist paper. This could have been possible in Melbourne and Sydney (where sales have been very good) but it was out of the question in Brisbane; the Brisbane Socialist community is far too small and politically underdeveloped to support such a paper (David Nadel, 1968.)

Conclusion

The student left saw their leaflets as a practical expression of free speech. Illustrations such as cartoons were widely used, apparently with little reference to copyright. The small offset press allowed them to quickly produce visually complex publications for a broad range of authors. These publications could be produced in sufficient quantity to service a large and diverse Queensland University campus.

However, the technology was insufficient to maintain a newspaper. The employment of an editor on *Brisbane Line* appeared to narrow, rather than widen, the sources used. This approach reflected the news paper’s intention to act as voice for radical socialism. Since there seemed to be a very small audience for such views, the *Line* was very short indeed.

Notes

¹ What had begun as a protest movement, dissolved into elements which pursued revolutionary or radical aims. (Mitch Thompson: SDA Dissolves)

² *Student Guerrilla* Number 15 ironically noted a letter from the Customs Department

explaining that the publication, *American Crimes in Vietnam*, had been seized under Regulation 4(A) of the Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations on the grounds of 'undue horror and violence'.

- ³ North Vietnamese patrol boats were said to have attacked US Navy vessels, providing Washington with a rationale for bombing Hanoi.
- ⁴ 'When they decided to produce the paper they offered the editor [sic] to Ray Hammond who was the editor of the *National U*. He looked at the finances, saw that it was completely poorly planned and recommended Humphrey McQueen, who had other things to do with his life. Humphrey suggested to Darc Cassidy, you may know as John Cassidy of the ABC at the time. Cassidy was asked to have a look at it, and he [couldn't] leave the ABC for this and he offered it to me. At the time I was working as a cab driver. Darc warned me that it couldn't possibly last I was offered the salary of \$50 a week. I got up there, there were fights over the money, my salary, I think I volunteered, it was reduced to \$40. Then because I desperately needed some sort of graphic artist, and to get it I then volunteered to reduce my salary another \$10' (David Nadel: 2002)
- ⁵ A point conceded by David Nadel in 2002: 'The first day I arrived in Brisbane, Mitch drives me back to his house, and we are stopped by police. We hadn't done anything wrong ... There was a much higher level of police intervention in Queensland in the 60s and 70s than there was anywhere else. We had the whole force of the state down on us at Monash but we had provoked them in a way in that the people of Brisbane hadn't.'

References

Interviews:

Nadel, David. Telephone IV Melbourne/Rockhampton. 28 August.2002.

Thompson, Mitch. Telephone IV Sydney/Rockhampton 3 September 2002

Articles:

O'Neill, Dan, The Growth of the Radical Movement, *Semper Floreat*, Vol. 39. No 2. 1969, pp9/14.

RSSA Manifesto on Self Management, *Semper Floreat*, Vol. 40. No 2. 1970, pp12/17.

Brisbane Line:

Brisbane Line, Volume One Number One, 22 August 1968, Action Printers, Brisbane.

Brisbane Line, Volume One Number Two, 29 August 1968, Action Printers, Brisbane.

Brisbane Line, Volume One Number Three, 5 September 1968, Action Printers, Brisbane.

Leaflets:

O'Neill, Dan, 'The free university'. Undated. Unsourced.

O'Neill, Dan. Wertheim, Peter. 'Liberty is Indivisible'. Undated. Unsourced.

O'Neill, Mick, Thompson, Mitch. *The free Press ain't free*. Undated.

Thompson, Peter. *Repression?* PO Box 90, Brisbane Univeristy (sic). 2 April 1969.

Radical News, Vol. 1. No 1. January 1968

Letters etc:

Nadel, David. Letter to subscribers, distributors and contributors. 25 September 1968.

THE PUBLIC RIGHT TO KNOW

PO Box 332, North Quay, Brisbane.

Norman, Helen, O'Neill, Maria, O'Neill, Michael, Why hang around SDA?, December 1968.

Lambourne, Matthew. Letter to SDA members. PO Box 90, Brisbane Univeristy (sic). 22 March 1968.

Thompson, Mitch. SDA Dissolves. PO Box 90, Brisbane Univeristy (sic), 28 April 1969.

Student Guerrilla:

Student Guerrilla, No 1, 19 March 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 2, 26 March 68, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 3, 2 April 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 4, 9 April 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 5, 16 April 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 6, 23 April 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 7, 30 April 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 8, 8 May 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 9, 28 May 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 10, 5 June 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 11, 13 June 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 12, 19 June 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 13, 25 June 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 14, July 4 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 15, 10 July 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 16, 18 July 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 17, 25 July 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 18, 2 July (8) 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 19, 26 September 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 20, 3 October 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 21, 14 October 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Student Guerrilla, No 22, 16 October 1968, Society for Democratic Action, Brisbane

Dr Alan Knight is Professor of Journalism and Media Studies at Central Queensland University, Rockhampton, Australia. This article was presented at the third Public Right to Know (PR2K3) conference at the University of Technology, Sydney, 17-19 October 2003.

a.knight@cqu.edu.au