5. Opening doors for Chile: Strategic individuals and networks

Steve Cooper doesn’t fit the present-day image of a man involved in radical politics. He didn’t in 1973 either.

He was forty-five years old with a gentle disposition and gentlemanly manners. A full moustache offset a receding hairline, and conservative clothes didn’t give away his passionate interest in workers’ democracy.

It was that interest which led him to Chile in 1973.¹ Chilean political parties, Cooper reasoned, were free and the Allende Government was extending workers’ democracy and participation.² What was going on in Chile was a ‘revolution in democracy’, said Cooper, and he thought that if the situation remained untampered with, ‘it could possibly lead to a more socialist type of society’.³ He took a break from work and used money he had recently inherited to travel to Chile. While there he attended an international conference on multinational companies as an observer for the Amalgamated Metal Workers’ Union (AMWU) of Australia as well as the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) collective of unions of Sydney. He stayed in Chile for three months, moving around Santiago and getting to know workers and the situation on the ground.⁴

Steve Cooper was concerned about imperialism, which was one of the dominant themes at the time in the Australian left—a concern that was part of a tradition of conspiracy theories in the Australian labour movement.⁵ In a report on the conference published in the Tribune, Cooper wrote that ‘three of the most formidable forces in the world, the sovereign national state, the trade union movement, and the international socialist movement’, were the natural enemies of imperialism and multinationals.⁶ The way to combat multinationals, he continued,
was through workers’ control. International workers of the world should control international organisations; Cooper called them ‘transnational socialist enterprises’, which would challenge multinationals.7

Also attending the conference on multinationals in Chile was Glen Moorhead, federal secretary of the Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen (AFULE).8 Moorhead came from within the Socialist Party’s sphere of influence and spoke with the confidence of someone who believed he was the true representative of the Australian working class. On one occasion he told delegates: ‘Although Australia is in the same hemisphere as Chile and together with New Zealand, Chile is our nearest eastern neighbour, there is no contact between the trade unions of our two countries. That situation is rectified from this moment.’9

The rhetoric of solidarity among workers, united across borders, against multinationals and imperialism, dominated the discussion at the conference in 1973. This sort of rhetoric was the most common of the expressions of leftist internationalist sentiment in Australia. It appears, however, Moorhead did not know about, or didn’t want to acknowledge, the contact that had occurred with unionists aligned with the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) over the previous years.

The two Australian participants were from different camps: Moorhead was aligned with the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA); Cooper was an Australian Labor Party (ALP) member, though his sympathies lay further to the left. The Cold War lingered and the conference suffered the usual problems of tension between the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the WFTU. The ICFTU did not send delegates, because they refused to be on the same platform as anyone from the WFTU.10 Similarly, politics got in the way of a British delegation as the only invitation sent was to the (relatively conservative) TUC, which of course declined, resulting in no participation from that country. The summit was like a microcosm of the problems of the solidarity movement that it preceded: it was grand on rhetoric, rife with factional tensions and, often as not, peopled by faddists.

Despite the conference’s shortcomings, when Steve Cooper returned to Australia, he immediately started agitating for Chile solidarity.11

More than the liberation movements elsewhere, the Chilean case was particularly pertinent to Australians due to the similarities between the countries. Chile

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7 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 They did, however, send representatives from their trade sections. Cooper, ‘Fighting the Transnational Companies’.
11 He continued agitating for many years: AMWU St George Branch to CSCP, 26-5-1975, Papers of GMM; Hamer, The Politics of Electoral Pressure.
and Australia both had long parliamentary and democratic traditions, were not recently colonised and their economies were dominated by mining and primary production. Most importantly, Allende and his UP Government had been democratically elected.12

When the coup occurred in September 1973, the reaction of the left in Australia was immediate and incredulous. Even though, as Mavis Robertson remembered, the Australian Government ‘never really, even at the worst of times, felt comfortable with the Junta’,13 in October 1973, the Whitlam Government recognised the new Government of Chile.14 Senator Arthur Gietzelt (a member of the ALP with a close relationship to the CPA) publicly declared on the television program *This Day Tonight* that he would use a petition through the Labor caucus to reverse the recognition of Chile.15 Whitlam ordered that no minister put his name to it. Steve Cooper remembered that Whitlam’s attitude was unhelpfully blunt: ‘the Chinese have recognised it Comrade.’16

Politicians responded to their conscience, or as a result of their support for socialist internationalism, or both. Well-known MP Tom Uren was one of the ministers who contravened Whitlam’s order and wrote to the prime minister to explain: ‘There are times when I must act as an individual and this is one of those occasions.’17 Fifty-seven members of the ALP caucus signed the petition.18

The Deputy Prime Minister, Lance Barnard, said the Australian Government’s recognition of the military government of Chile did not imply approval of their policies. On this flimsy premise, the Australian Government did not withdraw its

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12 Interview with Andrew Hewett (Chile, peace and student activist, Australia), 23 September 2005 [hereinafter Hewett Interview, 2005], Notes in possession of author.
13 Interview with Mavis Robertson (feminist, peace, anti-Vietnam War, Chile and CPA activist, Australia), 6 February 2009 [hereinafter Robertson Interview, 2009], copy in possession of author.
14 This occurred in spite of the ALP’s affiliation to the Socialist International, of which the Chilean Radical Party was also a member. In hindsight the recognition was ironic, as in 1975 the Whitlam Government was ousted by a constitutional coup. Even before that, many people were comparing Allende and Whitlam. ‘Libs Look to Junta: The Chilean Connection’, *Tribune* [Australia], 3 December 1975.
15 Forty-four members of the Labor caucus, including eight cabinet ministers, sent a telegram to the Chilean Ambassador in Australia, revealing their commitment to help the Chilean people regain their freedom from the illegal new government. Other ministers, such as Tom Uren, were also very public in their condemnation of the military coup. Tom Uren, *Straight Left* (Milsoms Point, NSW: Random House Australia, 1994), 230; Rt Hon. Billy Snedden, ‘Whitlam Government: Want of Confidence Motion: 23 October 1973’, in *Hansard Parliamentary Debates (House of Representatives)*, vol. 86 (1973), 2482–8; Bramble, *Trade Unionism in Australia*, 21.
16 Steve Cooper, Notes from a conversation with Ann Jones, Billy Martin (AMWU organiser, Chile activist 1980s) and Pat Johnson (AMWU organiser of the present), 21 May 2007 [hereinafter Cooper et al. Conversation, 2007], notes in possession of author.
17 Uren, *Straight Left*, 230. The ALP NSW State Council also denounced the decision. This was possibly Mulvihill’s influence. ‘Govt. Told: “Don’t Recognise Chile”‘, *Tribune* [Australia], 9–15 October 1973.
Prime Minister Whitlam was ‘saddened’ as a democrat and a socialist by the coup, but in government it was business as usual.\textsuperscript{21} The ‘que sera, sera’ attitude was not shared by the workers of Australia. The Australian Railways Union (ARU), Miners Federation, Waterside Workers’ Federation of Australia (WWFA), AMWU and Plumbers and Gasfitters Employees’ Union all condemned the ‘bloody-handed military Junta’,\textsuperscript{22} and the Australian Government’s recognition of it, via telegrams sent directly to Whitlam. This is the first hint of the reservoir of goodwill, informed partially through ideological and humanitarian concerns, that could be and was accessed by the Chile solidarity cause.

In the early 1970s the left in Australia was coming to terms with a freshly split communist party. Those more faithful to the line of the Soviet Union had split off to form the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA) in 1971. Those left behind retained the title ‘CPA’ and found themselves able to express and explore a new, self-determinist ideology. The alternative ideology that emerged was labelled ‘eurocommunism’ and it was closely intertwined with the idea of extending political action to support social movements (such as that opposed to the Vietnam War). Political pluralism and the renunciation of the Leninist party state were central characteristics of eurocommunism but it was the adherence of eurocommunists to the democratic process of the bourgeois state that was an obvious departure from other socialist strategies.\textsuperscript{23} Eurocommunists in particular believed in a broad-front approach and were attentive to the UP experience in Chile for that reason, as well as its attempt to travel the peaceful or parliamentary road.\textsuperscript{24}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} The decision, he went on to say, was based on whether the Government was in full control of the country’s territories. ‘Chile Recognised but not Approved’, \textit{The Australian}, 12 October 1973, 10.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Gustavo Martín Montenegro, ‘La Campaña de Solidaridad con Chile en Australia 1973–1990: Un estudio histórico sobre el movimiento de solidaridad australiano durante la dictadura militar en Chile’ (Masters diss., University of New South Wales, 1994), 107.
\item \textsuperscript{21} \textit{Minister of Foreign Affairs to Scott (AMWU South Australian Branch Secretary), 21 November 1973, AMWU: South Australian State Council, N131/211, NBAC: ANU, Canberra; Recent events in Chile, 000010659, Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney, Sydney.}
\item \textsuperscript{22} ‘Govt. Told: “Don’t Recognise Chile”’.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Eurocommunism did spring, of course, from a Leninist tradition. Thompson, \textit{The Left in History}, 159.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 182; Chun, \textit{The British New Left}, 114. It has been observed by Peter Shipley that revolutionaries are routinely guided by examples in other countries as well as by historical traditions, and this in part explains the fascination with Chile. Shipley, \textit{Revolutionaries in Modern Britain}, 17.
\end{itemize}
The tactic of broad alliance meant that eurocommunists moved their focus outward from the organised labour movement, though as we shall see, never forgot them.\footnote{Chun, \textit{The British New Left}, 108. This occurred in the first wave of the new left in Britain, according to Chun, as they believed trade unions were not revolutionary. Ibid., 73.} The communist split meant the CPA was able to push to the forefront in many trade unions and concurrently express its ideology of the new left.\footnote{Ibid., 26.}

The 1960s and 1970s saw radical left trade unions in Australia starting to defy what the Burgmanns called the ‘caricatures of trade unions as bastions of homophobia, machismo, racism, ethnocentrism and ecological irresponsibility’ as the new left ideas permeated their ranks.\footnote{Meredith Burgmann and Verity Burgmann, \textit{Green Bans, Red Union: Environmental Activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers’ Federation} (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1994), 121–2.} Steve Cooper’s journey to Chile and subsequent actions are perhaps a case in point. The radical unions embraced new left concerns and became centres of activism on social issues from Aboriginal rights to the environmental impact of development.\footnote{It is important to remember, however, that most Australians joined trade unions not because of this, but for the protection and improvement of their working and economic conditions. Deery, ‘Union Aims and Methods’, 62.} The growth in social activism outside the industrial sphere of the unions, and outside the orthodox objectives of a Marxist party by the CPA, locked radical unions and the party into a mutually reinforcing relationship.\footnote{Burgmann and Burgmann, \textit{Green Bans, Red Union}, 26.} Union support of the Chile movement in the 1970s came from all sectors of the left, but consistent support for the Chile solidarity committees, for much of the early 1970s at least, came from the self-determinist sector of the left including the unions. The solidarity committees formed the core of the movement.

That is not to say, however, that the SPA and Socialist Workers’ Party or others ignored the plight of Chileans. While many felt that the downfall of Allende justified their positions on non-cooperation with social democrats and their commitment to armed struggle, no-one rejoiced at the brutal military coup d’état. Almost all political parties of the left played some part in events over the history of the solidarity movement. Andrew Ferguson, an activist involved in the movement, remembered that ‘the interests of political parties did on occasions create tension. But with good will and focus on the incredible task of building solidarity, we would just overcome the tensions (that some personalities were probably more focused on than others).’\footnote{Interview with Andrew Ferguson (student, Chile activist, unionist, Australia), 27 February 2009 [hereinafter Ferguson Interview, 2009], copy in possession of author.}

In reality, this happened to differing degrees. The incompatible ideological positions of the CPA and SPA provided competition for ownership of issues and
also drove the participation of key activists. The SPA was dismissive of new left radicalism at first, which left the door ajar for CPA influence in some unions as well as in social movements.\(^{31}\) As we shall see, however, this was rapidly contested.

The Australian political arena was small in the 1970s, and the diminutive size of groups caused them to be less cohesive.\(^{32}\) There were less political party and union employees than in Britain and there was also a history of less reliance on manifestos in political parties. As Albert Metin noted of Australian labour in 1901: it was *le socialisme sans doctrines*.\(^{33}\) Furthermore, there was less official communication between organisations and sometimes between members of separate organisations, instead replaced with friendly networks. Size meant that members were more flexible and less likely to stick loyally to their particular party line. Rather, they tended to act according to their consciences, as demonstrated by the previously described actions of Tom Uren. As Walker noted in 1952, Australian socialism was not revolutionary or ruthless, but motivated more by the ‘good sense and goodwill of men’, a notion supported in this research: political parties engaged in more political squabbling than in planning for a transition to socialism, but individuals found ways to work together notwithstanding.\(^{34}\) Stephen Deery concurred with these observations, stating that Australian socialists, especially those within the trade union movement, represented ‘more a moral dynamic and a set of ideals rather than a blueprint for a new economic and social order’.\(^{35}\) Prominent activist in the Chilean movement Mavis Robertson remembered that Australians ‘did things because they knew they were right, they didn’t do things because they were told to do them’.\(^{36}\) It could be said the collectivist convictions of the left fuelled actions based on goodwill.

The steadfast support from select trade unions formed the base of the Australian solidarity movement. The beginning of the Chilean dictatorship coincided with growth in participatory democracy and mass meetings as well as rank-and-file political activity in Australian unions.\(^{37}\) For many unions, the Chile movement was not their first or their only involvement with international causes at the time, and in this regard Chile solidarity followed precedents set by previous

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31 Bramble, *Trade Unionism in Australia*, 53.
32 Observation of Mavis Robertson.
34 Ibid., 235. E. V. Elliott of the SUA confirmed this view when he wrote ‘sometimes we have as many quarrels among the left-wing as we do with the right-wing’. Political parties also fought for dominance in unions through the union elections, yet ironically in doing so they were actually fighting the apolitical nature of the majority of Australian workers rather than taking steps towards revolution. E. V. Elliott, ‘Chile: No Trade with Junta: Support the Resistance’, *Seamen’s Journal* (July–August 1977).
35 Deery, ‘Union Aims and Methods’, 62. This is supported by Bramble, *Trade Unionism in Australia*, 86, 87.
36 Robertson Interview, 2009.
37 Bramble, *Trade Unionism in Australia*, 38, 47, 49.
international campaigns. Unions had previously been involved in the solidarity drive for the Indonesian War of Independence, the Spanish Civil War, and against apartheid, the Greek military junta and the Vietnam War. The involvement in these campaigns was manifested in a manner similar to some actions for Chile: demonstrations, resolutions, boycotts and donations. The Chile solidarity movement was, however, the first sustained Australian union involvement in a Latin American campaign, and would go on to be one of the longest union commitments to an international solidarity movement.

Despite the small number of activists on the Australian left, there was no shortage of solidarity groups with official-sounding names that formed in the years following the coup. The movement across Australia was constructed of overlapping and sometimes conflicting groups. The acronym list quickly becomes unmanageable, and the visual map an immense organogram or an ‘alphabet soup’, as activist Barry Carr put it. The multiplication of groups in the movement was partly due to the scattered cities across the Australian continent, each tending to function independently of the others, and the distance between them meant there was no national united front as in Britain.

It is perhaps easy to envisage the movement as movements at a State level, because the States functioned differently and worked separately for much of the time. In some ways, this mirrors the political structure of Australia: the States function separately, but within a federation. It was also true more generally of left political parties, whose regional factions and internal coups were legendary.

One further layer of complication of the Chile solidarity committees in Australia was their transient nature. Many committees and groupings did not survive the duration of the dictatorship, and most committees went through squalls and lulls in activity. Moreover, many changed their name, or were not clear at any one time exactly what their name was let alone its correct translation. The written record that was left in the wake of the multiple committees can be misleading. Some committees may have had a membership of fewer than 10, with little political influence and less mobilising power. If, however, they had access to a photocopier or a connection to the media, their influence may be overestimated. It is also important to keep in mind that while the map of

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38 For example, the maritime boycott of goods to and from Chile was preceded by a boycott of the export of pig iron to Japan. Margo Beasley, Wharfies: A History of the WWFA (Sydney: Hallstead Press, 1996); Brian Fitzpatrick and Rowan Cahill, Seamen's Union of Australia, 1872–1972: A History (Sydney: Seamen's Union of Australia, 1981); Rupert Lockwood, Black Armada (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1975).


40 Interview with Barry Carr (Chile activist, academic, Australia), 5 March 2009 [hereinafter Carr Interview, 2009], copy in possession of author.
committees is complex, some participants confess to knowing only of their own committee. Within each city there were sometimes multiple committees, each drawing on their own idiosyncratic support network.\footnote{While the State and local structures functioned quite separately, they did not exist in a vacuum: they often corresponded with each other, and received news from all over the world via travellers, friends, circulars and radical press. They each produced and reproduced pamphlets that made their way around the country and they also cooperated on some of the major events (Chapter Six). In the late 1970s there were attempts at a more assimilated approach to national solidarity. Notwithstanding efforts and intents, national-level integration remained generally cooperative but mostly symbolic. Solidarity with Chile, June/July Newsletter, 1979, Papers of GMM; Robertson to ‘friends’ re: Inti illimani, Chile Solidarity (1976–1978), Papers of Barry Carr; ‘Stepping Up Chile Solidarity’, Socialist, 20 July 1977; Robertson Interview, 2009; Solidarity with Chile, Information Bulletin, December, 1978, Papers of GMM.}

The archival sources available for the reconstruction of Chile solidarity are inconsistent; often the only hints at the existence of committees in some places are a couple of publications or mentions of protests in newspapers.\footnote{Montenegro reported that a fire at Casa Chile led to lost records. Montenegro, ‘La Campaña de Solidaridad con Chile en Australia 1973–1990’, 211. The CSCP records were accidentally disposed of by a family member of an activist.} Tracking each group’s complete history would be almost impossible. This chapter, then, gives an impression of the character of the Australian Chile solidarity movement, by way of a more in-depth description of some of the groups and individuals who played an important part in the events of subsequent chapters. These are all focused on Sydney.\footnote{A decision almost entirely based on source availability.}

This does not suggest a scale of importance, interest or complexity. The choice of emphasis on Sydney is due to four factors. First, the committee which was established in Sydney was more embedded in trade unions than in other Australian cities and thus has yielded more complex relations to be explored. Second, the trade union which gave it most support in the period 1973–78, the AMWU, kept excellent records that are now available to researchers. Third, the location of the AMWU, Seamen’s Union of Australia (SUA) and WWFA national offices in Sydney influenced formal union involvement in the Committee for Solidarity with the Chilean People (CSCP) (Sydney), which, due to the nature of the archived collections, is more quantifiable than in other cities. Finally, the green bans of the NSW Builders Labourers’ Federation (NSWBLF) had been running for some years by the time of the coup in Chile, which promoted an atmosphere of social participation in many Sydney-based unions.\footnote{Burgmann and Burgmann, Green Bans, Red Union, 124, 125.} This impetus and ambience contributed to the pool of goodwill and led to strong cross-institutional involvement in the Chile movement.

The reservoir of goodwill that existed towards humanitarian and left issues was created in part from ideology. It was accessed by the Chile movement in Australia not only via organisational links, but by personal networks that
crossed ideological lines and party loyalties. Strategic individuals with access to multiple organisations and levels of the labour movement were the ones who enabled the movement to function as it did. The reservoir of goodwill was not bottomless, however, and this chapter demonstrates how the factionalisation of the Chilean arrivals contributed negatively to the continuation of the movement.

In Sydney the post-coup Chile solidarity movement started with a stroke of luck. By chance, and thanks in part to the work of Steve Cooper, the CPA Sydney District Committee had already resolved to sponsor a demonstration in solidarity with Chile. It happened to be the day the Chilean coup occurred. Within hours of the military action in Chile, Sydney activists were on the street. After hearing the news while in a meeting, various members of the WWFA executive attended. Ominously, while there, WWFA organiser Tasnor Bull got into a fight with some Maoists who were, he wrote in his autobiography, already partaking in the dissection of the failings of the UP Government and blaming Allende’s death and the coup on the UP’s inability to arm the people. Hundreds of activists attended the demonstration, and with the workers’ delegates present, the Tribune said the crowd was representative of hundreds of thousands of Australians.

The speakers included many prominent union officials and radical activists: Laurie Aarons (CPA), Laurie Carmichael (AMWU), Leo Lenane (WWFA), Joe Owens (Builders Labourers), Frank O’Sullivan (Building Workers’ Industrial Union: BWIU), Brian McGahen (Young Communist Movement), Bill Brown (SPA), Malcolm Price (Communist League) and Mike Jones (Socialist Youth Alliance). It was a broad front, and they were united in their shock and anger.

Directly after this protest a group of interested people went to the old boiler makers’ building in Castlereagh Street and formed an ad-hoc committee. This was the first of a string of gatherings that spanned the months after the coup, leading to the establishment of the official committee. There was much to discuss at these meetings: solidarity, the pros and cons of the peaceful road and possible support for the resistance. Accordingly, attendance was high. Soon after the initial gathering, 300 people attended a meeting at the Trades Hall in Goulburn Street, Sydney. The meeting was supported and arranged by members of the Association for International Cooperation and Disarmament, whose encouragement of Chile solidarity was unwavering and extremely important in

45 For example: Cooper, ‘Fighting the Transnational Companies’; ‘Solidarity with Chile’, Tribune [Australia], 4–10 September 1973.
47 Ibid.
49 Robertson Interview, 2009.
50 ‘Solidarity Meetings with Chilean Workers’, Tribune [Australia], 2–8 October 1973.
the early stages of post-coup solidarity. Professor Ted Wheelwright, a member of the faculty at Sydney University, spoke, and joining him was Tas Bull of the WWFA and Steve Cooper.

Two days after the meeting sponsored by the Association for International Cooperation and Disarmament (AICD), 60 people attended a meeting at which David Holmes of the Socialist Workers’ League (SWL) and Denis Freney of the Sydney District Committee CPA debated the lessons of the coup. Holmes said the failure of the Chilean experiment was due to Stalinist betrayal. He blamed Allende and the UP for keeping the working class in the capitalist framework. Freney was more delicate, but did note that the only thing that was certain was that a neutral military never stayed neutral when workers won control.

The debate embodied a delineation in the Chile movement, which occurred from the very first protest with Tas Bull’s fisticuffs. It is a dangerous simplification to divide the Australian left between pro and contra armed struggle, or pro-Soviet as opposed to pro-eurocommunism. The division was fuzzy in reality, but the difference in analysis of the Chilean situation nevertheless exacerbated tension within the committee as it attempted to sustain a broad front. From the very first an obvious pattern emerged: many Australian activists used the Chilean situation as a pawn in the wider internecine struggle. Activists could selectively adopt facts to support their arguments for or against a popular front, for or against a revolutionary strategy. Chile could be used to garner local political capital.

Ownership of the Chile issue, and perhaps by proxy the campaign committee, certainly influenced the actions of factionalised individuals; but it was not the only motivation: much of the time, key individuals just got on with the business of solidarity.

The Committee of Solidarity with the Chilean People (CSCP) was formed at a meeting on 18 October 1973 that had been called to discuss solidarity options.

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51 The building that the Association for International Cooperation and Disarmament (AICD) was based in was actually owned by the AMWU, which had absorbed the building after their recent amalgamation with the Boilermakers. It was on Castlereagh Street in Sydney and was a nucleus of solidarity and peace organisations. The organisations were all roughly aligned underneath the CPA eurocommunist line. In this way, the AMWU provided immediate infrastructure, space and photocopying to the Chile movement, and more specifically to one of the committees that emerged out of it.

52 Wheelwright was also involved in the AICD. See: Association for International Co-operation and Disarmament (Sydney), The Asian Revolution and Australia (Sydney: Times Press, 1969); Interview with James Levy (academic, Chile activist), 12 March 2009 [hereinafter Levy Interview, 2009], copy in possession of author; ‘Solidarity with the Chilean People’, Tribune [Australia], 18–24 September 1973, 12; Shane Bentley, ‘Tas Bull (1932–2003)’, Green Left, 18 June 2003. Professor Wheelwright had been in Chile before the coup as well as Steve Cooper. Robertson Interview, 2009.

53 ‘Solidarity Meetings with Chilean Workers’.

54 CSCP refers to the Sydney committee unless otherwise noted. Reported in the Tribune as ‘Sydney Committee for Chilean Democracy’, ‘Sydney Committee for Chile’, Tribune [Australia], 23–29 October 1973, 2.

55 Other organisations which aided, or formed around, Chile solidarity included the Latin America Centre and Antorcha in Sydney.
The CSCP philosophy was summed up in the sentence: ‘We will support the Chilean people by all means at our disposal, until democracy is once more restored and the monstrous Junta has answered for its bloody crimes.’\textsuperscript{56}

This was a statement that, in theory at least, the whole Australian left could embrace. There were 30 unionists present and of the six people elected to the steering committee, four had a primary affiliation to a union. The committee included Dr James Levy, a Latin American studies specialist from the University of New South Wales; Ken McLeod of the AICD; Laurie Steen of the SUA; Jack Baker of the Postal Clerks and Telegraphists’ Union; and the AMWU had two prominent members on the committee, James Baird and Greg Harrison.\textsuperscript{57}

A demonstration was proposed for 5 November, which was close to the third anniversary of Allende’s inauguration as president; however, the unionists on the committee voted against it. They argued that stop-work meetings and other union meetings were more productive than a demonstration.\textsuperscript{58} The domination of trade union representatives in the Chile solidarity movement could initially be perceived as controlling and powerful.

This was, however, not necessarily the case as ongoing individual trade unionist involvement was mostly of an ad-hoc nature and sometimes in an unofficial capacity. The committee elected at that first meeting was intended to appear representative, and for that reason included several strategic representatives of unions and/or political parties. There was an understanding, however, that a working group (mostly different people to those on the official committee in the initial months) would undertake the day-to-day decisions and work.\textsuperscript{59} Those in that key group of workers were predominantly CPA sympathisers for the first five years of the campaign.

It is possible to divide the main activities of the CSCP into categories: publications, protests, government and parliamentary lobbying, aid to refugees, music concerts and cultural activities.\textsuperscript{60} This range of activities was undertaken in a fairly impromptu manner (not planned long term), with the aim of keeping Chile in the minds of Australians and prolonging the consensus of the moral superiority of opposition to the dictatorship that appeared after the coup.

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{NSW Committee for Solidarity with the Chilean People, November 1 1973}, WWFA: Federal Office, N114/932, NBAC: ANU, Canberra; ‘Sydney Committee for Chile’.
\textsuperscript{58} They also argued that the demonstration would be wasted as media attention would be on the Melbourne Cup and the Watergate scandal. It is also possible that the date was offensive to any Maoists or SPA party members who may have been on the committee as they thought Allende or his broad front was the cause of Chile’s problems. \textit{NSW Committee for Solidarity with the Chilean People, November 1 1973}.
\textsuperscript{59} Robertson Interview, 2009.
\textsuperscript{60} These activities are explored in more detail in the next chapter.
The mobilisation of a united front for Chile was a delicate affair. It involved the activation of networks based around political affiliation or acquaintance. The CPA/independent left bias of the activists in the working group enabled the CSCP to draw on the support of unions/unionists aligned to a similar view. But even across factional differences, activists on the CSCP did not have to try to motivate unionists, because, as Mavis Robertson said, people knew it was right to support solidarity. Letters were sent to trade unions, and most unions responded positively to requests for money or notional support. Robertson’s network of CPA and peace contacts facilitated more substantial union support in the form of attendance at events, speakers or delegates’ support. Unions were opportunistic, and would express solidarity when provided with an opportunity to do so.

Unions within the SPA sphere of influence, such as sections of the WWFA, SUA, BWIU and Firemen and Deckhands, were utilised by the campaign to a lesser extent in the first years. Men such as Tas Bull within the WWFA would be more naturally sympathetic to approaches from CPA activists. By contrast, Don Henderson’s SPA-based network enabled him to mobilise within the Firemen and Deckhands, the BWIU or the SUA. The SPA-aligned unions did take actions separate from the CSCP, and also sent their own representatives to international conferences as a none-too-subtle political gesture. Unions such as the NSWBLF, with its predominantly Maoist leadership and tendency to follow the Beijing line (anti-Allende), were even less likely to cooperate with the CSCP.

It is important in the following chapters, then, to make a distinction between actions initiated by the committee, actions affiliated loosely to the committee and actions completely separate from the committee. As was the case with British solidarity, the Sydney committee did not control or have a hand in all solidarity activities. Certainly, many activities stemmed from the progressive trade unions. What impact the committee did have was due mainly to two factors: first, the moral consensus and pool of goodwill based in the ideology of left politics in Australia, and second, the mobilising power of strategic individuals from within the committee or connected to it.

One of the most important activists in Sydney was Mavis Robertson. Robertson was in Moscow at the time of the coup, at a conference of the World Congress of Peace Forces. When she returned, she very quickly took stock of what was occurring in the CPA regarding Chile and she publicly challenged the oversimplification of the situation facing the Chilean left.61 She was immediately a leading voice of solidarity.

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Robertson was born in 1930 and her Irish mother was undoubtedly an influence on her development. She attributed the founding of her desire to support the underdog to her mother, who always ‘had her eye on all the little countries’. After joining the Eureka Youth League as a young woman, Robertson soon started writing for the CPA. It was through this organisation that she collected pencils for Cuba in 1960–61, her first engagement with activism with a Latin American theme.

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62 Her maiden name was Moten.
63 Interview with Mavis Robertson (feminist, peace, CPA and Chile activist, Australia), 31 January 2005 [hereinafter Robertson Interview, 2005], copy in possession of author.
Robertson had always been against violence. She believed that any result born of violence was negative, as the act of violence itself distorted the outcome. In the split of the CPA in 1971, Robertson was firmly within the democratic strand of the party, which retained the title CPA.65 An active feminist, Robertson worked many hours for that cause and she was also involved in the anti-apartheid campaign, Vietnam solidarity and the peace and disarmament movements. She was a vocal and prominent member of the CPA until it disbanded.

By the time of her involvement with the Sydney Chile movement, Robertson was a mature woman, married with two children. Her husband, Alex Robertson, was also a CPA member and was editor of the Tribune for 12 years.66 The long involvement of Robertson and her husband with peace and disarmament was also shared by many prominent left activists such as Laurie Aarons, Bob Gould, Jim Cairns, Denis Freney, Don Hewett and Ken McLeod. The network of peace activists which stretched from business owners to parliamentarians was an invaluable resource for Robertson’s career in activism and as a strategic individual in the Chile movement. Her husband’s early death in 1974 caused the only gap in Robertson’s participation in the campaign before she moved on to other single-issue campaigns in the 1980s.67

The peace movement was a common denominator between Steve Cooper and Robertson as well as their involvement in the Eureka Youth League as youngsters.68 Both were interested in a peaceful transition to socialism, and they had undoubtedly crossed paths at many meetings over the years. Robertson credits Cooper with the initiative of setting up the pre-coup solidarity organisation, which stemmed from his trip to Chile in early 1973. His experience in Chile and his absolute commitment to the cause gave him standing as a Chile expert in the early years of solidarity. Cooper was an ALP member in the 1970s, but his sympathies lay further to the left than the mainstream party.69 He published articles in the Tribune and talked at many CPA meetings, including a special one-day conference called ‘The Politics of the Chilean Revolution’.70 His passion, however, didn’t equal bravado. He was a ‘quiet, self effacing figure’, remembered Mavis Robertson.71

65 She remained a member of the CPA until 1980.
69 Cooper Interview, 2005.
70 ‘Australian Communists Look at Chile Events’, Tribune [Australia], 6–12 November 1973.
71 Robertson Interview, 2005.
While Cooper was writing, organising and agitating behind the scenes and Robertson was pulling on her network of contacts, the campaign’s figurehead was Senator Anthony Mulvihill.\(^{72}\) Mulvihill was a life member of the Australian Railways Union, who had started his career as a shop steward at the Chullora railway yards. In the 1960s he was assistant general secretary of the NSW branch of the ALP, where he became known for representing the centre-aligned Catholics.\(^{73}\) Ron Dyer, in Mulvihill’s obituary in 2001, described his position within the ALP: ‘Mulvihill was always regarded as a member of the right wing of the ALP, now known as Centre Unity, but he described himself as a progressive centre liner.’\(^{74}\)

A keen environmentalist, Mulvihill was involved in conservation campaigns and in the green movement that fought for responsible planning in Sydney. Moreover, Mulvihill was committed to immigrant workers and immigrant issues and his interest and advocacy for Chilean immigrants started immediately after the coup.\(^{75}\) He promised to help clear up Chilean issues if he secured the chairmanship of the Commonwealth Immigration Advisory Council.\(^{76}\)

Mulvihill brought this experience and an extensive network as well as the resources and legitimacy that came with the title of senator along with him when he acted for the CSCP. Using Mulvihill as a figurehead was a similar ploy to that used by the British Chile Solidarity Campaign with high-profile unionist Alex Kitson. He may not have been a chief organiser, but having a senator’s name on the top of the campaign letterhead certainly did no harm. In practical terms, the association meant that Mulvihill was automatically receptive and active when the CSCP approached him on specific issues. For example, the senator issued various requests for explanation to the Government in 1975 about the issue of immigration. On top of this, Mulvihill’s centre-right alignment within the ALP suggested the Sydney committee was a coalition rather than a cause dominated by radicals. It gave authority to the campaign’s assertions of being a broad front. This perception made it easier and more acceptable for less politically radical people to participate in the movement.\(^{77}\) Senator Mulvihill’s relative alignment to the right was not a problem for the working group.\(^{78}\) Robertson had a history of working in united fronts on single issues.\(^{79}\) Robertson remembered that she

\(^{72}\) Solidaridad con Chile: Committee for Solidarity with the Chilean People, September 20, 1979; The Trades and Labour Council of the ACT, Z147 box 57, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.

\(^{73}\) Nonetheless, he was not always steadfastly centre. Uren, Straight Left, 83, 98.

\(^{74}\) Ron Dyer, ‘Death of Former Senator James Anthony Mulvihill’, NSW Parliament Legislative Council (8 March 2001), 12449.

\(^{75}\) ‘Govt. Told: “Don’t Recognise Chile”’, 2.

\(^{76}\) Letter from J. A. Mulvihill to C. Fitzgibbon, August 1975, WWFA: Federal Office, N114/932, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.

\(^{77}\) This was a similar effect as the NUM delegation report from Britain, whose less-radical delegation members reinforced the more radical movement.

\(^{78}\) Robertson Interview, 2009.

and Mulvihill ‘had worked in the past and we worked again in other things, and he knew that I was of the left and I knew that he was of the right, but we were interested in an issue and we worked together’.\(^\text{80}\)

Not all political differences resulted in such peaceful working conditions. Chileans entering Australia found it hard to understand how such a man could lead the campaign.\(^\text{81}\) They were themselves heavily divided and with their arrival the sectarian spectrum in Sydney became confusing and crowded.

Despite the interest on the part of Australian political parties to ‘secure a presence amongst the immigrant community’,\(^\text{82}\) any dissection of the UP Government or ‘programmatic debate’ that was raised was hastily put aside, for fear of damaging the real aim of the campaign, which was to express unified solidarity.\(^\text{83}\) In fact, the debate ‘would inevitably be brought up again and again’, said Barry Carr, ‘partly through Chileans, but … that was a particularly sensitive issue’.\(^\text{84}\)

The Chileans did not initially understand that there were two Marxist parties in Australia. Describing divergent political views worked against the ethos of the unified solidarity movement. This realisation created ‘some awkwardness’, remembered Barry Carr.\(^\text{85}\) The dominant groups within the Chilean community, the communists and socialists, could not sit easily with the principal party which was active and supportive of the committee, the CPA, whose eurocommunist identity was seen as a betrayal of Moscow.\(^\text{86}\) According to Carr, it was a ‘permanent source of tension in Melbourne’\(^\text{87}\) and this awkwardness was expressed through creation of the committees whose memberships were closed to anyone but Chileans.\(^\text{88}\)

In October 1974 the Comite Chileno de Liberación (Free Chile Committee Sydney) was established with two of the three Martin Montenegro brothers on its executive. It was a Chilean immigrant committee, which focused, according to Gustavo Martin Montenegro, on the needs of the Chilean community;\(^\text{89}\) but not all Chileans joined it. Many overflowed into the CSCP or joined both. In

\(^{80}\) Robertson Interview, 2009.
\(^{81}\) Ibid.
\(^{82}\) Carr Interview, 2009.
\(^{83}\) Against political exclusionism: For a United Front Against the Repression in Chile—Spartacist League, Plumbers and Gasfitters Employees Union of Australia: Federal Office, N133/158, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.
\(^{84}\) Carr Interview, 2009.
\(^{85}\) Ibid.
\(^{86}\) Ibid.
\(^{87}\) Ibid.
\(^{88}\) While committees closed to anyone but Chileans were created in Sydney also, they were not as long lasting as the Melbourne committees. The Free Chile Committee (Melbourne) and the Support Committee for the Chilean Resistance were groups for Chileans only. To the workers, students and people of Australia, Papers of GMM.
\(^{89}\) The division between ‘Australian’ and ‘Chilean’, or perhaps ‘local’ and ‘expat’, committees also happened in Melbourne. Montenegro, ‘La Campaña de Solidaridad con Chile en Australia 1973–1990’, 88, 89.
Sydney the separation between local and expatriate communities definitely contributed to the growing complexity of the solidarity situation, possibly to the detriment of the campaign. In fact, sectarian behaviour in the political scene around the CSCP increased as Chileans continued to arrive.

The separate Chilean committee exemplified an emerging problem within the Chile movement: the separate aims of the Australians and the Chileans. Chilean arrivals in Australia had a difficult time separating their own internal political objectives and ambitions from the Australian Chile solidarity movement. They could not imagine that the solidarity movement was a movement for the expression of Australian sentiments. The CSCP became property over which Chilean political groupings tried to maintain authority. Robertson concluded: ‘They came as a highly politicised grouping with their own political loyalties, expressed in the formation in Australia of party groups.’\(^90\) Additionally, the collapse of the popular front in Chile made many of them feel they would never be able to work together again despite visiting Chilean leaders implored them to do so.\(^91\) The expatriate Chilean attitude collided with the push of CPA activists for broad-front solidarity.

This disjuncture between the nationalities had a profound long-term effect on the movement. Whereas the stated aim of many Australians was to support a ‘free Chile’ (and later to agitate on human rights issues), Chileans agitated for a particular type of free Chile, with a particular type of ruling party or political system. Often, in practice, they agitated to gain control of the committee or privileged positions in exile to the detriment of the movement.

The establishment of Chilean political groups in exile occurred all over the world, and Australia was no exception. An Australia-wide UP network was set up, with the national office in Sydney; but the UP itself was made up of separate parties and within them came the sectarian politics that were always strong in Chile, and perhaps enhanced by the traumatic coup and dictatorship.\(^92\)

The UP’s constituent units caused trouble due to the lack of clear organisation and cooperation between individuals on the ground in Australia. But the lack of UP control over the constituent groups in Australia did not mean the Chilean

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\(^90\) Carr Interview, 2009.

\(^91\) Robertson Interview, 2009; \(\text{Programme Results—Chilean Trade Union Delegation to Australia, 11–20 September 1975, Amalgamated Metal Workers’ and Shipwrights Union (Aust.) (AMWSU), E262/137, NBAC: ANU, Canberra.}\)

population was disorganised. Robertson explains: ‘Amongst that small band of disorganised Chileans, if you have a small core that is organised, it is pretty clear that they start to get their own way, and that was starting to be reflected in the committee.’

The organised group to which she referred was the Chilean Communist Party. Support for the Soviet Union was ingrained in the party and Chilean communists could simply not understand the new left’s rejection of the Soviet Union. Many Chilean Communist Party members were shocked to find the CPAs eurocommunist agenda, and felt a natural alignment with members of the SPA. Some Chilean communists accused CPA members of not being ‘true communists’. The Chilean Communist Party did not suffer as many splits as other Chilean parties in exile. It was always an orthodox party, and many of its leaders were exiled to the USSR. The party benefited from this consistent relationship.

Other political groupings had more trouble finding partnerships with Australian parties. The Chilean political party Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR: Movement of the Revolutionary Left) also established itself, but had trouble finding mass support due to their insistence on armed struggle, which ruled out potential support from the CPA, ALP and any moderate groupings. The MIR was always an awkward force in Australia, remembered Barry Carr, because it had a small number of the very active Chileans affiliated to it so suffered from strong vocal chords in a weak body.

The Chilean socialists also formed in Australia, despite their international organisation moving in and out of alignment with the UP in exile and suffering internal splits. Factional politics within the Chilean community ran deep and were sometimes bitter. As Andrew Ferguson remembered, ‘they replicated the divisions and tendencies from Chile in the solidarity movement. So it was a polemical, tedious exercise.’

Robertson remembered being conscious of the unrelated aims of the Chileans and Australians:

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93 Robertson Interview, 2009.
94 Angell, Politics and the Labour Movement in Chile; Robertson Interview, 2005.
95 Robertson Interview, 2005.
97 This is noted by Montenegro (‘La Campaña de Solidaridad con Chile en Australia 1973–1990’, 42), and also in anecdotal conversations with Chilean community members with the author.
98 Carr Interview, 2009.
100 Ferguson Interview, 2009.
Basically, it did not interest me as to the stance that they were going to take on various things. What really interested me was that we didn’t get so imbedded in what they wanted to do to the detriment of what we were capable of doing as Australians in Australia.101

It was hard for Australians to understand the different groups, the differences between groups as well as the differences within groups. Robertson remembered trying to work out where the MIR stood, where the Socialist Party [of Chile] in its various computations stood, where [stood] the communists in their various computations, never mind the little radicals this that and the other and the Christian something or others, the smaller your group was, the less likely it was to be cohesive anyway.

She continued: ‘And every one of the Chilean political factions, you could only meet in a telephone box. I mean there is not enough time in life, actually, to get to the bottom of all these things.’102

Steve Cooper even remembered a group in Chile which believed that life existed on other planets, and that a solidarity connection should be made with them. ‘Intergalactic solidarity’, he called it, laughing.103

Australians found the strength of Chilean party loyalty very unusual.104 Chileans stuck to ‘la linea’ (the party line) so strongly it was cause for tired ridicule among Australian activists. Here we strike at the fundamental problem: the political sensibilities of Australian and Chilean activists differed. Chileans were often found publishing and reciting party manifestos (which were in a constant state of flux themselves). The Australian left saw the passive yet passionate party discipline of the Chileans as being archaic and a cause for paralysis.105 The loyalty and dependence on la linea were exacerbated by the fact that they adhered quite strictly to the formal hierarchy of their chosen political parties, most now re-formed in exile with leaders in France, Italy, Russia or East Germany.106

When a Chilean Communist Party member was charged with what was considered official party business, they expected the Australian political party they were approaching would respect the formal and official nature of their approach and

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101 Robertson Interview, 2009.
102 Ibid.
104 Carr Interview, 2009.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid. Writing in 1994, Montenegro blamed many of the problems and infighting of the Chilean exiled left which arrived in Australia on the Chilean Communist Party, whose adherence to internal party hierarchical structure frustrated other groups. Montenegro was of course not a communist party member but a member of the Christian left. His brother, Guillermo, was a UP committee member. How much of the adherence was due to political culture specifically in the Chilean Communist Party or generally in the Chilean left is unclear. Montenegro, ‘La Campaña de Solidaridad con Chile en Australia 1973–1990’, 90.
their representative legitimacy. In such an ‘official’ capacity, Chileans desired direct access to the upper hierarchy of the Australian left, despite their lack of individual connections or public profile.

Chileans did not acknowledge that much of the time solidarity functioned without any deep action from, or explicit approval of, the Australian political elite. As already described, activism in Australia operated through networks of friends and acquaintances and political allies at a grassroots level. Those who had the amount of time necessary to organise in Chile solidarity were very rarely from the upper hierarchy of the labour movement. Chileans did not understand the Australian political reality—‘and why should they?’ asked Robertson. She continued: ‘some of them wanted to do things in the political processes that were quite inappropriate and, basically, what we tried to do was to find solutions.’

The result of the clashes of political repertoire was a range of mutual misunderstandings. For example: meetings were long. At the beginning of the 1970s they were conducted in English. Even so, Chileans used them as opportunities to air political manifestos and engage in combat with other factions within the expatriate left. Robertson remembered: ‘We would have meetings and they would behave badly, then afterwards they would say “we behaved badly and we shouldn’t have done that” and you know. Because they knew that people were getting frustrated about these sorts of meetings.’

Soon, Chilean factions were assembling before solidarity meetings to discuss tactics. Australians activists were so uncomfortable with the politicking and inability to focus on the ‘big issue’ that, one by one, they gradually ceased attending meetings. Andrew Ferguson said: ‘most Anglos wouldn’t put up with it.’

By 1978, meetings were hours long and often conducted in Spanish, which indicates that very few Australians were present. Ferguson remembered meetings of this period went for three or four hours and there were ‘lots of long

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107 Further, Chileans often wanted to speak directly with parliamentary or union secretaries. Australian activists only wanted to take the high-profile Chileans to meet figures such as Bob Hawke as a constant stream of Chilean refugees was just as likely to erode goodwill as to enhance it. The ACTU was in fact engaged in a sort of rearguard action trying to support the Whitlam Government and the ALP in this period and was as such distracted. Robertson Interview, 2009.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
110 Levy Interview, 2009.
111 Robertson Interview, 2009.
112 Ferguson Interview, 2009.
113 The meetings were ‘[o]verwhelmingly Chileans, with a few people from the Latin American left, and a couple of people from a non Latin American background that were there for political parties on the left in Australia’. Ibid.
winded polemics’. He was not fluent in Spanish, and at first at the meetings he recalled that he ‘understood virtually nothing in terms of the political discussion, except an occasional word, the thumping of the table sort of things ... and the movement in the room, and then at some point somebody would summarise what was going on, and you’d have a feel for it’.115

There were very few Australians who had the patience for this: Chilean politics had ‘worn people down’. The problem of the meetings demonstrates the imperfect fit of the two political repertoires.

The integration of Chileans into the Australian political left was minimal, and very troubled. Many groups could not find an Australian group of similar ideology with whom to integrate, and they found it hard to translate their political vocabulary to suit the Australian political reality. In short, the Chile solidarity movement suffered under the effects of the two sets of disparate sectarian tensions (both the Australian and the Chilean), each pulling internally and between each other.

As a result of these tensions, major change came to the CSCP Sydney organisation in 1978.

It had started as a united-front (though CPA-piloted) organisation, and gradually Chileans (mostly Chilean Communist Party members) started to direct meetings. Soon, those Australians still involved were predominantly aligned with the SPA, and friendly to the Soviet-aligned Chileans.

Steve Cooper, who had worked with the campaign since its inception, recalls that it was around 1978 when the SPA started to take renewed interest in the CSCP. They wished to oppose the revisionists or eurocommunists (such as Robertson), and in turn, support the growing strength of certain Chileans with whom their political alliances had matured.117 In doing so they scored morality points; they were the ‘owners’ of solidarity against the dictatorship. Though Robertson did not think there were any problems within the committee that were made worse by the return of SPA interest, their loose alliance with the Communist Party of Chile would influence events to come.118

‘Suddenly’, remembered Robertson, ‘there was some woman put on the committee whom no one had ever heard of before, and the next thing you know she’s going to some overseas conference’.119
The activists of the first five years were being pushed out.

Those Australians who left early avoided more personal attacks. Perhaps the most scurrilous of the sectarian interactions were those towards the end of the 1970s, which surrounded Cooper’s exit from the committee.\(^\text{120}\) There was a rumour circulated that Cooper was in fact an agent of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) or the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).\(^\text{121}\) This rumour almost certainly came from Chileans from within the Chilean Communist Party. In 2009, Andrew Ferguson said he could not remember ‘any public discussion at any meeting about Steve being associated with ASIO [Australian Security Intelligence Organisation] or anything like that … I heard suggestions and innuendo about that from some individuals, and I can’t remember who they are, but [that was] when Steve stopped his involvement’.\(^\text{122}\)

The rumour made it impossible for Cooper to continue to work on the committee. He remembered that it was not quite a crude block vote, but he was voted off.\(^\text{123}\) Mavis Robertson recalled a slightly different story: that Cooper just left the committee with no vote being taken. ‘Because why would you stay with people who hate you?’\(^\text{124}\)

This overt piece of factional warfare was a turning point. Almost all the people who had devoted their time to the committee for the first five years left over the next few months.\(^\text{125}\) Robertson was appalled that such an attack would occur on a fellow activist. Even though she was perhaps the most prominent CPA adherent of all of those involved in the CSCP Sydney, she said she was not attacked because ‘I’m tougher. It is perfectly obvious that I am well connected. And, no one would believe rumours like that’.\(^\text{126}\)

Her strategic importance and profile also protected her. Robertson was the general secretary of the CPA and had been working for the Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen’s Association of Australia, yet she was more powerful because of her network of acquaintances.\(^\text{127}\) Her relationship (through the peace movement) with parliamentarians elevated the level of her influence in the hierarchy of the left in Australia. Robertson thought that the rumour

\(^{120}\) Cooper et al. Conversation, 2007.

\(^{121}\) The same thing happened to academic James Levy, who was accused of working for the CIA. He was unable to continue to work with those who would make such offensive remarks.

\(^{122}\) Ferguson Interview, 2009.


\(^{124}\) Robertson Interview, 2009.

\(^{125}\) Ibid.

\(^{126}\) Ibid.

\(^{127}\) Chile Democrático (no. 3 Sydney, Marzo de 1977), Papers of GMM.
was one of those things that made me realise that I needed to start moving on, if that is just what you get for all the things that Steve Cooper did, then I don’t want to be involved with all these people. After all, they are all safe now, they are in Australia.128

While these Australian activists left the committee (though never stopped supporting the movement), another entered, who would be just as influential. Andrew Ferguson had been a member of the ALP since he was fifteen years old. Ferguson’s political pedigree was impeccable. His father was deputy premier of New South Wales and his elder brothers would later become a federal minister and national secretary of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) respectively. When he went to university he became active in student politics, and at a rally in Hyde Park in Sydney in about 1977 he met a man called Tito, who handed him a leaflet on the atrocities occurring in Chile. Ferguson already had an interest in the revolutionary politics of Latin America, particularly those of the more militant left, so the two men had a short conversation. Shortly after, Ferguson visited Tito, whose real name was Hector Perez, at his house in western Sydney.129 While Tito may have started with the objective of recruiting for solidarity work, the two were soon firm friends. It was this friendship that was the deciding factor for Ferguson to become involved in the CSCP.130 He started to attend solidarity meetings.

Soon, with the exit of other Australian activists, Ferguson was taking on more and more work for the campaign. He took over its administration, typing newsletters, making bookings and phone calls and chasing unions for funding. ‘I spent perhaps ten hours a week doing solidarity work’, Ferguson remembered, ‘maybe fifteen. And also, it was a part of my social life, friendships, girlfriends and so on. So it was all involved in the same thing’.131 At a time when many Australian activists were leaving, Ferguson thought he stayed on because his ‘tolerant and patient personality’ enabled him to deal more effectively with the Chileans and their political actions.132 But more than this, the relationships he had struck up were what protected and motivated him, at least in part.

Ferguson’s admiration for and friendship with Tito were coupled with political alignment. While Ferguson had been a member of the ALP since he was a young man, he admitted he was ‘more a member of the [ALP] out of a tactical consideration than a philosophical commitment, and very much from the left’.133

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128 Robertson Interview, 2009.
129 ‘Tito’ was an affectionate name, also used to protect himself and his acquaintances from persecution. Perez was involved in the CUT (Central Unica de Trabajadores, the trades union congress of Chile) organisation in Australia, and was the representative of that organisation in Australia for many years.
130 Ferguson Interview, 2009.
131 Ibid. Ferguson would in fact go on to marry one of the Chilean women.
132 Ibid.
133 Ibid.
After finishing his first university degree, he went to work with the BWIU, which had a long history of communist leaders and during that period was an SPA-aligned union. This meant that Ferguson and Tito (Chilean Communist Party) had an ideological alliance. The fact that Chilean communists propagated the relationship with the SPA, while most Chilean groupings were unable to make such a link with an Australian faction, ‘helped to really give a form to the Chilean communists’, and facilitate their dominance of the committee.134 Solidarity committees, according to theorist Peter Waterman, often identify with a particular leadership claiming to be representative of workers rather than the real workers of the recipient country, and the adoption of the Chilean communists in Sydney in the late 1970s is a case in point.135

The fact that Ferguson professed to be ‘more motivated by the agenda of the radical left, than by humanitarianism’ also suited the aims of the political Chileans. Ferguson was not ‘captive to the political tendency in [his] union’,136 and said that though he was sympathetic to the SPA line, he also understood eurocommunism and had a productive relationship with self-determinists such as Mavis Robertson.

Ferguson was a strategic individual in more ways than just his political beliefs and ability as an interlocutor. Being a Ferguson opened doors. One activist remembered that ‘people would have been very mindful that he was a member of this famous family’. The political pedigree of this individual gave him access to levels within the labour movement higher than his actual standing (when first involved with the CSCP he was in student politics). Ferguson also created what he called a ‘new front of solidarity work’ by taking the Chile issue up inside the Young Labor Party, where he remembered that few people were interested in internationalism.137 Further, his rapidly ascending path within the union made him increasingly useful to the campaign. His involvement also pleased the union hierarchy as it interfaced neatly with the new social focus of the BWIU. Ferguson’s positions in the union and in the CSCP were mutually reinforcing.

Key individuals, such as Ferguson and Robertson, sustained the Chile movement in Sydney. Without their networks the movement would have faded, as Chilean exiles were unable to create the opportunities necessary to harness trade union support and activity. Ferguson admitted: ‘I could open doors into a union that, people who couldn’t speak English could struggle with … they just couldn’t get through the bureaucracy. Mavis could, or I could.’138

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134 Robertson Interview, 2009.
135 Waterman, Globalization, Social Movements and the New Internationalisms, 135.
136 Ferguson Interview, 2009.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
The local factional activity did affect the path of the CSCP in Sydney, but only became explosively destructive when combined with Chilean exile factional activity. The reservoir of goodwill for the newly exiled could not be drawn on indefinitely. Solidarity committees have been prone to ‘self-subordination to the victim’—that is, local activists subordinate their own standards and judgments to those of the victims, as their very victimhood bestows moral authority upon them.\textsuperscript{139} Perhaps for this reason, Chilean parties in exile in Australia got away with so much. It is difficult to theorise and easy to judge the actions of the exiles in this situation. It is important to remember that their disruptiveness may have been an expression of their unease. Their efforts and desires may have been to make what had occurred in Chile mean something: to not let the terror in and the destruction of ‘their Chile’ be forgotten. The Chileans fell into a community of consideration in Australia, although it was not inexhaustible. Despite problems within the campaign, trade union internationalist sentiment being played out through the Chile issue (though often ad hoc and sometimes opportunist) remained quite consistent for the duration of the solidarity movement.

\textsuperscript{139} Waterman, Globalization, Social Movements and the New Internationalisms, 134.
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