

Peter Cross, 'A Pillar of Support from Beginning to End': Alexander Macdonald, FOCO, and Student-Worker Solidarity

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The political history of Queensland's trade union movement extends far beyond its links to the ALP. This paper will examine the brief period of close co-operation between the Queensland union movement as represented by the Queensland Trades and Labour Council (TLC), and the left-wing student movement of the 1960s. This relationship was fraught with tension. This paper will analyse the pivotal role which TLC General-Secretary Alexander Macdonald played in overcoming these tensions. It covers both Macdonald's role in facilitating TLC's industrial action in 1967 in support of student protests, and his more controversial support of the Foco Club. In doing so, this paper will argue that Macdonald's strong support of worker-student co-operation can be partially explained by his links to the Communist Party of Australia (CPA).

Alexander Macdonald's public life was dominated by his involvement with progressive left wing politics, most notably the Communist and trade union movements. Understanding this dual role is crucial to understanding why and how he built an alliance with the student left. Born in Scotland in 1910, he immigrated to Australia in the 1920s.¹ Lacking a trade and unable to find work, he drifted towards radical politics and became an active Communist.² By 1936 he had been elected to the Queensland state committee of the CPA.³ Simultaneously entered the trade union movement by joining the Ironworkers

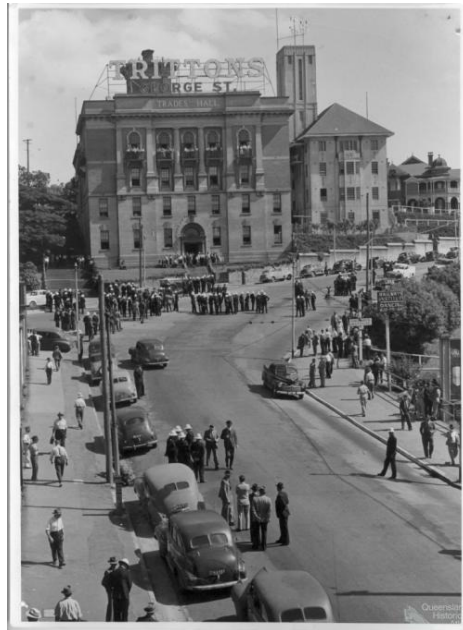


Photo of Old Trade Hall
(<http://www.qhatlas.com.au/photograph/trades-hall-brisbane>)

¹ Molly Macdonald, interview with Cecily Cameron, March 13, 1984, in "Cecily Cameron papers", UQFL 439, Box 10, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

² Hugh Hamilton, "A tribute to Alex Macdonald 1910-1969", speech to Brisbane Labour History Association, reprinted in *Alex Macdonald 1910-1969* (Brisbane: Brisbane Labour History Association, 2010), 14, 18.

³ Cecily Cameron and Greg Mallory, "Alexander Macdonald", *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry, reprinted in *ibid.*, 6-8.

Union and became its Secretary.⁴ By the early 1950s Macdonald had become deeply involved in the TLC. Now known as the QCU, this was a peak union council affiliated with approximately 40 unions.⁵ During this period the TLC only covered approximately a third of Queensland unionists as the enormous Australian Workers Union was not affiliated with it. However, it was still one of the most influential union bodies due to the influence it wielded within the ALP from 1957 to the late 1980s.⁶

In 1952, Macdonald replaced Communist Mick Healy as Secretary of the TLC. In doing so he joined a core of committed Communists within the TLC. This group (including Hugh Hamilton, Jack Hanson and Gerry Dawson) drew its strength from unions such as the Builders Workers Industrial Union.⁷ The Communist influence within the TLC Executive reflected broader Communist influence over unionists, with approximately 15 per cent of union members being connected to the CPA in 1969.⁸ Within the TLC Executive, Communists like Macdonald vied for influence with TLC members, such as President Jack Egerton who were more aligned to the ALP.⁹ It is important to understand this tension when examining how relations between the TLC and the student movement soured.

Macdonald's time as TLC Secretary was distinguished by two characteristics. The first was the universal respect he enjoyed from his colleagues. Macdonald's time as General-Secretary was distinguished by the professional respect and personal affection in which he was held. This stemmed from his amiable disposition – Ted Bacon described him as 'One of the calmest, most patient and good-natured men conceivable'¹⁰ – and his skill at negotiating compromise within the TLC Executive. Macdonald's negotiating prowess was never inhibited by his own attachment to Communism. Bob Hawke noted shortly after Macdonald's death, he "not once" tried to "ram it down the throats" of his colleagues¹¹, and he was consequently (in George Britten's words) 'liked by everyone – from the Left, the Right, the Centre or anywhere else'.¹² Furthermore, within both the TLC and CPA, respect

⁴ Ted Bacon, interview with Cecily Cameron, June 8, 1984, in "Cecily Cameron papers", UQFL 439, Box 10, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

⁵ Cameron and Mallory, "Alexander Macdonald".

⁶ John Shields, Ray Markey and Bradon Ellem (eds), *Peak unions in Australia: origins, power, purpose, agency* (Annandale: Federation Press, 2004), 104, 112-114.

⁷ Alistair Davidson, *A short history of the Communist Party of Australia* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1969), 142; Justus M. Van Der Koef, "The Communist Party of Australia today", *Studies in Comparative Communism*, no. 3-4 (1970): 69-70.

⁸ Davidson, *A short history*, 158.

⁹ Brian Laver, interview with Cecily Cameron, June 6, 1988, in "Cecily Cameron papers", UQFL 439, Box 10, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

¹⁰ "Ted Bacon's oration 21/8/1969", page 1 in "Communist Party of Australia papers", UQFL 234, Box 19, Fryer Library, University of Queensland; Hamilton "A tribute to Alex Macdonald", 15; George Britten, interview with Louise Ryan and Danielle Miller, January 17, 2013, *Queensland Speaks*, www.queenslandspeaks.com.au.

¹¹ Robert Hawke, "Address by Mr Bob Hawke to Queensland Trades and Labour Council, held in Brisbane on 3.9.69", September 3, 1969, page 1 in "Trades and Labour Council Records", UQFL 118, Box 90, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

¹² George Britten, interview with Louise Ryan and Danielle Miller, January 17, 2013.

for this ability was often coupled to genuine affection for Macdonald. Even the ALP-aligned Egerton displayed intense loyalty to him.¹³ The second characteristic was his conviction that the union movement should be an advocate for progressive political causes. Macdonald founded the TLC's Equal Pay Committee, was a vice-president of the Peace Committee, and was an early "beacon for Aboriginal rights".¹⁴ In pursuing these goals Macdonald was willing to work with forces outside the TLC. As his obituary in *Tribune* noted, his life was spent striving 'to unite all sections of the labour movement around common progressive issues'.¹⁵ Although it is difficult to comprehensively explain why this was the case, Diane Zetlin (a student radical who worked with Macdonald in the 1960s) speculates that he 'was keenly aware that the labour movement needed to have some kind of vital engagement'¹⁶ with the community, which it lacked in the 1960s. This marriage of universal respect and a concern with broader political issues was essential to Macdonald's successful support of the student movement, as discussed below.

The Queensland student left formed independently of any political party or union body during the 1960s. This was a period of intense political activism on university campuses across the globe. Across Australia, university students were becoming politicised by their opposition to conscription and to the Vietnam War, leading to the emergence of groups such as the Vietnam Action Committee at the University of Queensland.¹⁷ It was out of these anti-war groups that a broader student activism movement was able to grow.¹⁸ This movement, strongly influenced by the American New Left, was concerned with humanism, political liberty and a political economy founded on self-management.¹⁹ Students such as Mitch Thompson and Brian Laver, and academics such as Dan O'Neill were inspired to found Students for Democratic Action (SDA) in April 1966.²⁰ These activists organised large-scale marches against conscription throughout 1967.²¹ The Nicklin government responded with bureaucratic suppression via the State *Traffic Act* and police violence.²² This further outraged student activists. By the end of 1966 the student left had become equally committed to protesting

¹³ Ted Bacon, interview with Cecily Cameron, June 8, 1984.

¹⁴ Hamilton, "A tribute to Alex Macdonald", 15.

¹⁵ Ted Bacon, "Alexander Macdonald", *Tribune*, October 2, 1969.

¹⁶ Diane Zetlin, interview with the author and Danielle Miller, February 2, 2013, *Queensland Speaks*, www.queenslandspeaks.com.au.

¹⁷ Alan Anderson, "Alex Macdonald 1910-1969", Brisbane Labour History Association pamphlet (2010), 11.

¹⁸ Dan O'Neill, "The growth of the radical movement", *Semper Floreat*, March 17, 1969, 9.

¹⁹ Rowan Cahill, *Notes on the New Left in Australia* (Sydney: Australian Marxist Research Foundation, 1969), 3.

²⁰ O'Neill, "The growth of the radical movement", 12.

²¹ Jon Piccini, "'Up the new channels': student activism in Brisbane during Australia's sixties", *Crossroads* vol. 5, no. 2 (2011): 80.

²² "Ephemera relating to the right to march and civil liberties", VFV 638, Item VF6 '68, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

for civil liberties as a natural outgrowth of the anti-war movement. Therefore, the mid-1960s saw the emergence of a highly active student protest movement.

There were two main reasons why young students chose to join groups such as the SDA, rather than working through the ALP, the TLC or the CPA. The first was the undeniable class distinction between the children of the middle class (who could afford a tertiary education) and the working class members of more established leftist organisations. The second was the broader disconnection between the Old Left and youth in general. As Jon Piccini has noted, the TLC's youth programs were deeply flawed, being dominated by staid events (such as Miss Union competitions) that held little appeal for members of the 1960s counter-culture.²³ The CPA's Eureka Youth League, whose 'programmatically dogmaticism' had made it 'an object of mild derision, at best, in youth circles'²⁴ was no better. This problem was compounded by the fact that many young activists saw both unions and Communists as being too willing to compromise with non-left forces.²⁵ Even within the union movement, young people often had to struggle against general disinterest in youth issues, which were rarely raised at Trade Union Congress before 1965. For example, Alan Anderson (then a young delegate for the Plumbers' Union) recalled being verbally abused by Egerton when he suggested that unions needed to do more to engage with young workers (revealingly, Macdonald was in contrast highly supportive of young delegates).²⁶ In this environment, it was natural that young students would choose to form their own organisations rather than work through traditional left channels.

Despite this undeniable distance between young students and trade unionists, from 1966 onwards the two groups began to work together. The student movement first attracted real attention from the TLC after it focussed its energies on securing civil liberties. Indeed, in 1967 the SDA would describe the trade unions as being their 'most responsive ally'.²⁷ This support began at the 1966 Trade Union Congress, when union representatives 'congratulate[d] ... the students and staff of Queensland University who are continually campaigning for civil liberties'.²⁸ This was soon followed by industrial action in favour of the SDA's civil rights protest. For example, on 14 September 1967 the TLC held a four hour stop work meeting in protest at the 'shocking' police brutality against

²³ Jon Piccini, "'A group of misguided, way out individuals': the Old Left and the student movement in Brisbane 1966-70", *Queensland Journal of Labour History*, no. 12 (2011): 21.

²⁴ Van Der Koef, "The Communist Party of Australia today", 79.

²⁵ Rex Mortimer, "Communists and the Australian Left", *New Left Review*, no.46 (1967): 47.

²⁶ Alan Anderson, "Speech – Alex Macdonald memorial lecture 2009", speech to Brisbane Labour History Association, reprinted in *Alex Macdonald 1910-1969* (Brisbane: Brisbane Labour History Association, 2010), 11.

²⁷ "Open letter from dissenting dogs", *Student Guerilla*, no. 21, reprinted in Greg Mallory (ed.), *A Left compilation: a selection of political material from S.D.A., the Labor Club and FOCO between 1967-1969* (1992).

²⁸ "Trade Union Congress 1966 executive summary", page 12 in "Trades and Labour Council Records", UQFL 118, Box 90, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

students participating in a march six days before.²⁹ As the minutes of the TLC Executive record, ‘the overall feeling of the Executive was that it was necessary to take some positive steps’ in support of student civil liberties.³⁰ This meeting was attended by over 3000 people, and helped cement student-TLC solidarity. Subsequently, several members of the SDA (including Laver and Thompson) participated in the 1967 postal strike and were arrested for handing out union leaflets.³¹ Macdonald’s role in supporting the stop-work meeting was important, but not critical. Although records of the TLC’s internal deliberations are unclear on this point, it seems that Egerton initiated this protest (thereby belying his previously derisive attitude towards youth and later criticism of the student movement) citing the intermittent “urging” by affiliated unions to take a firmer stance in favour of students.³² However, the *Courier-Mail* reported that there were still ‘sharp divisions’ in some unions over the validity of the stop-work meeting, indicating that support from a figure as senior as Macdonald would have been helpful.³³ Anderson likewise describes this decision as a ‘bold stand’ by Macdonald.³⁴ Hence, Macdonald’s support would have been useful, but would not have been as critical as the support he provided to the Foco Club (described below).

The TLC’s support in this period can be partly explained by the common aims of the union and student movements. For instance, a number of its more left-wing member unions had, like the student left, been outspoken critics of Australian involvement in Vietnam since the early 1960s.³⁵ The TLC was so sympathetic to the anti-war movement that it criticised the Australian Council of Trade Unions for being insufficiently supportive.³⁶ More broadly, the TLC saw an affinity between the student’s civil liberty campaign and their own struggle for industrial liberty.³⁷ For example, in the special meeting that led to the approval of the September 1967 stop-work meeting, they seem to have been persuaded by Ralph Summy’s appeal that ‘the struggle for a better life was bound up with the struggle for civil liberties’.³⁸ As Macdonald himself noted in 1968, to the TLC ‘industrial and civil

²⁹ John Egerton, “Report on civil liberties 22/9/1967”, page 4 in “Dan O’Neill papers”, UQFL 132, Box 4, Folder 3, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

³⁰ “TLC minutes Tuesday 12/9/1967”, page 3 in “Trades and Labour Council papers”, UQFL 118, Box 8, Parcel 29, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

³¹ “Trade Union Congress 1968 Executive Report”, page 50 in “Trades and Labour Council Records”, UQFL 118, Box 90, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

³² Egerton, “Report on civil liberties”, 4.

³³ “Who will stop work? Unions have problems on today’s rally”, *Courier-Mail*, September 14, 1967, cited in Piccini, “A group of misguided, way out individuals”, 21.

³⁴ Anderson, “Speech – Alex Macdonald memorial lecture 2009”, 12.

³⁵ Diane Elizabeth Kirkby, *Voices from the ships: Australia’s seafarers and their union* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2000), 46-47.

³⁶ “TLC minutes Tuesday 20/9/1966”, in “Trades and Labour Council Records”, UQFL 118, Box 8, Parcel 29, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

³⁷ “Open Letter from Dissenting Dogs”.

³⁸ “TLC minutes Tuesday 12/9/67”, 2.

liberties were inseparable'.³⁹ Likewise, the SDA perceived the union movement's long struggle for industrial liberties and the right to march to be evidence of its *bona fides* on civil liberties.⁴⁰

Therefore, over the issue of civil liberties the 'Old and New Left' found 'a common enemy in the form of Queensland's repression of protest'.⁴¹ Consequently, the perceived nexus between these two struggles offers a powerful explanation for early TLC support for student protests.

It is therefore tempting to attribute this period of co-operation merely to a felicitous convergence of interests between the two movements. However, this explanation fails to acknowledge the vacillating indifference and hostility which existed towards students within the TLC. While it was officially keen to see greater student-union cooperation, young unionists and activists both recall consistent apathy and suspicion towards groups such as the SDA.⁴² Again, this distrust had a definite class dimension, as members of the TLC 'boys' club' (such as Egerton) "thought there was nothing to be gained from mixing with privileged middle class students".⁴³ In addition, some former SDA activists believe that it was engendered by the students' radical politics, which even in a militant union council attracted distrust from 'right-wing ALP' types.⁴⁴ In the minds of many trade unionists, however laudable the student left's goals were, they remained "a lot of long-haired no-hopers, probably inundated with drugs".⁴⁵

A good example of this distrust was Macdonald's decision at the end of 1967 to hire Brian Laver to work as a research assistant in the Trades Hall.⁴⁶ In doing so he stepped from supporting student groups to actually allowing them to work within the TLC. This decision was precipitated by Laver's involvement in the October 1967 marches, which prompted Ralph Summy to suggest he should be employed there.⁴⁷ This was a significant decision because it brought the union and student leaders into far closer contact with one another. Zetlin expressed her doubt as to whether their later collaboration over the Foco Club would have been possible had Macdonald not created this 'nexus' by hiring Laver, calling it an 'extraordinarily farsighted ... move'.⁴⁸ It was also significant because it demonstrated the opposition within the TLC to forming working relationships with students.

³⁹ "Trade Union Congress 1968 executive report", page 50 in "Trades and Labour Council Records", UQFL 118, Box 90, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

⁴⁰ *Student Guerilla* 1968 (unknown edition), reprinted in Mallory (ed.), *A Left Compilation*.

⁴¹ Piccini, "A group of misguided, way out individuals", 22.

⁴² Anderson, "Speech – Alex Macdonald memorial lecture 2009", 11.

⁴³ Diane Zetlin, interview with the author and Danielle Miller, February 2, 2013.

⁴⁴ Brian Laver, interview with Andrew Stafford, November 6, 2001, in "Andrew Stafford papers", UQFL 440, Box 2, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

⁴⁵ Alan Anderson, interview with Jan Ryal, 2002, in "Material relating to the Foco Club", F3598, Folder 2, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

⁴⁶ Brian Laver, interview with Andrew Stafford, November 6, 2001.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Diane Zetlin, interview with the author and Danielle Miller, February 2, 2013.

Anderson again characterised the hiring of Laver as a move which forced Macdonald (with the support of Communist sympathetic unions such as the BWIU) to confront more conservative elements in the TLC, most notably ALP-aligned members such as Egerton.⁴⁹ While these members were not opposed to the aims of the student left, they were unwilling to go as far as Macdonald in allowing a potentially disreputable student leader to work within the walls of Trades Hall.



Extract from Foco's newsletter, typifying the irreverent mixture of radical politics and art which characterised the Club
(<http://www.qhatlas.com.au/photograph/foco-newsletters-1968>)

It is therefore important to distinguish the TLC's ideological support for the aims of the student left from the distrust and prejudice many unionists harboured towards students themselves. It is in reconciling these two attitudes that Macdonald's importance becomes more apparent. His decision to employ Laver was a pre-cursor of a much more ambitious student-union initiative: the Foco Club. The club was conceived by the SDA as a space in which anyone, but particularly young students and young workers, could express themselves politically and culturally.⁵⁰ It took its name from the Spanish word for "camp", referring to Che Guevara's Cuban training camps.⁵¹ What was remarkable about Foco, however, was that it operated out of the TLC's premises at Trades Hall, while being jointly run by a combination of student activists, young unionists and the Eureka Youth League. It was therefore a three-way venture between the student left, the union movement and the Communist movement. Moreover, it was

remarkably successful, attracting regular crowds of 500 people every Sunday night until its closure in June 1969.⁵² Those who attended were not only exposed to avant-garde culture but also to radical leftist literature and ideas (disseminated most stridently by the student left). As such, Foco can be considered a triumph of student-union co-operation in the cause of promoting political awareness.

⁴⁹ Brian Laver, interview With Cecily Cameron, June 6, 1988.

⁵⁰ Foco opening night poster, 1968, in "Foco Club Ephemera" FVF207, item F14.1, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

⁵¹ Brian Laver, interview with Cecily Cameron, June 6, 1988.

⁵² "Trade Union Congress 1968 executive report", 59.

Macdonald's vital role in the venture was emphasised by many of the people involved in Foco. In Anderson's estimation, 'much of the success of Foco can be attributed to Alex', as he remained 'a pillar of support from beginning to end'.⁵³ Macdonald's support took three forms. Firstly, he worked very hard to defend Foco's activities to his colleagues, despite the fact that (as Hamilton reflects) the venture no doubt cost him support amongst the more ALP-aligned members.⁵⁴ These members did not want to associate the TLC with the radical left politics that suffused Foco.⁵⁵ So strong was the opposition that Macdonald's widow Molly Macdonald recalls him dispiritedly remarking that 'if the [TLC] kick me out I wouldn't be surprised'.⁵⁶ Zetlin likewise recounts the consistent hostility from some TLC members, to the extent that after every Foco event the student leaders had a 'debriefing' with Macdonald 'to go through the list of complaints which had been registered' about their activities.⁵⁷ Macdonald's immense esteem within the labour movement, coupled with his excellent negotiating abilities, can be seen in the way he convinced his colleagues to accept Foco's use of the Hall. In this regard he was undoubtedly aided by the fact that Egerton and a large number of other TLC officials were unable to attend the meeting at which it was resolved to give Foco the use of the Hall.⁵⁸ More generally, Macdonald's efforts to support Foco may very well have been enhanced by the fact that Egerton was frequently overseas during this period.⁵⁹ He also made use of the Communist faction within the TLC.⁶⁰ As Laver infers, it was Macdonald's CPA links that enabled him to 'do a deal' within the ALP to allow the project to proceed.⁶¹ The Trades Hall was a crucial factor in Foco's success, because the TLC's political prominence meant that Queensland's notoriously violent police were reluctant to raid it.⁶² This protection was illustrated by the fact that the only Foco meeting held outside the Trades Hall was immediately dispersed by police.⁶³

Secondly, Macdonald supported Foco by remaining continuously engaged with it, unlike many of his colleagues. Writing a few months after Foco's expulsion from the Trades Hall in June 1969, Anderson

⁵³ Alan Anderson, interview with Jan Ryal, 2002.

⁵⁴ Hamilton, "A tribute to Alex Macdonald", 16.

⁵⁵ Diane Zetlin, interview with the author and Danielle Miller, February 2, 2013.

⁵⁶ Molly Macdonald, Interview with Cecily Cameron, May 13, 1984.

⁵⁷ Diane Zetlin, interview with the author and Danielle Miller, February 2, 2013.

⁵⁸ "TLC minutes Wednesday 7/2/1968", page 6 in "Trades and Labour Council papers", UQFL 118, Box 8, Parcel 30, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

⁵⁹ Brian Laver, interview with Cecily Cameron, June 6, 1988.

⁶⁰ Brian Laver, interview with Andrew Stafford, November 6, 2001.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Alan Anderson, interview with Jan Ryal, 2002.

⁶³ Ibid.

noted how few union officials ever attended, having remained 'indifferent all the way through'.⁶⁴ In contrast, Macdonald visited almost every week.⁶⁵

Finally, Macdonald defended Foco from controversy, in stark contrast to most of his colleagues. The most notable instance of this was the accusations levelled by Liberal Party MP Don Cameron in 1968 under parliamentary privilege that Foco was a front for drug dealers and prostitution.⁶⁶ These allegations had an enormous impact on public opinion, even mildly shocking older members of the Communist Party.⁶⁷ Foco attendance began to decline as more and more parents refused to allow their children to attend.⁶⁸ Even more damagingly, Cameron alleged that the Club was close to 'the nerve centre of the ALP in Queensland'.⁶⁹ While no one in the TLC seriously believed these accusations, some members (perhaps partly concerned about the resulting impact on the Labor Party's reputation) were unwilling to vigorously defend Foco from this 'political smear'.⁷⁰ For instance, in June 1969 Egerton voiced some public criticism of Foco.⁷¹ In contrast, Macdonald, unlike the majority of his colleagues, not only publicly denied the validity of the allegations but personally convinced Police Commissioner Bischoff of their falsity.⁷² Consequently, by securing the Trades Hall, providing his ongoing support and publicly defending it, Macdonald was an integral part of Foco's success.

It is necessary to examine the historical context surrounding Macdonald's actions in order to understand them. As mentioned above, he was naturally collaborative when it came to progressive issues which he felt strongly about. An additional explanation that has not been previously explored is the influence that Macdonald's allegiance to the CPA had on his support for student-TLC solidarity. Since 1964, the CPA had undergone a national change in platform under the leadership of Laurie Aarons.⁷³ Reversing his party's previous hostility towards the New Left, Aarons declared that 'united action with other sections of the community's common objectives' was essential.⁷⁴ By 1969, the CPA

⁶⁴ Alan Anderson, "The Foco story", *Tribune*, September 2, 1970, 8.

⁶⁵ Ted Bacon, interview with Cecily Cameron, June 8, 1984.

⁶⁶ "Drugs, Women Claim on Foco", *Courier-Mail*, September 13, 1968.

⁶⁷ Alan Anderson, interview with Jan Ryal, 2002.

⁶⁸ Frank Nielsen, "'Australia's most evil and repugnant nightspot': The Foco Club ... personal recollections", *Brisbane Discussion Circle* (2012), accessed January 15, 2013, www.crafters-circle.com/PDF/FOCO.pdf.

⁶⁹ "Hansard extract September 12-13, 1968", in "Material relating to the Foco Club", F3598, Folder 1, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

⁷⁰ Diane Zetlin, interview with the author and Danielle Miller, February 2, 2013; Alan Anderson, interview with Jan Ryal, 2002.

⁷¹ "Police query Mr Cameron", *Courier-Mail*, September 14, 1968, in "Material relating to the Foco Club", F3598, Folder 1, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

⁷² Piccini, "'A group of misguided, way out individuals'", 25.

⁷³ Van Der Koef, "The Communist Party of Australia today", 80.

⁷⁴ Laurie Aarons, *Labour Movements at the Crossroads [the way forwards after the 1963 Election]* (Sydney: Current Book Publications, 1964), 38; Davidson, *A Short History*, 150.

was praising the youth movement as “the most spectacular feature of the Australian left movement”.⁷⁵ The most important of these objectives was the anti-Vietnam War struggle, the influence of which on ‘solidifying the relationship with radical youth cannot be overstated’.⁷⁶ It would be presumptuous to conclude that the CPA’s national platform was the sole reason for Macdonald supporting close relationships with students. However, it is notable that the most consistent support for close student-TLC ties came from Communist-aligned TLC members. For instance, Hugh Hamilton was singled out as being particularly helpful in establishing Foco.⁷⁷ Equally, it is significant that the Eureka Youth League contributed large amounts of unpaid volunteer labour to Foco.⁷⁸ Whether this support stemmed from the CPA’s shifts in policy or whether, as Zetlin opines, it also stemmed from a desire by Communists to latch onto the ‘passion and optimism of the student movement, it was a striking feature of student-worker co-operation’.⁷⁹ Therefore, while it is not tenable to attribute Macdonald’s unusually high level of support for Foco solely to his CPA allegiances, it must be understood within a broader pattern of Communist support for students.

Despite Macdonald’s success in establishing Foco, he was unable to prevent the relationship between the two movements deteriorating throughout 1969. The first major dispute came on Labour Day 1969, when around three hundred student activists caused the unionists considerable embarrassment by waving red and black flags and shouting slogans at ALP participants (most notably Federal Opposition leader Gough Whitlam).⁸⁰ In response, Egerton called for the students to be physically thrown out of the march, calling them ‘misguided, way-out individuals ... subjecting Labor leaders to rude and unwarranted personal attack’.⁸¹ This fracas in turn led to Foco’s expulsion from Trades Hall in June 1969.⁸² Although Macdonald publicly claimed that this was a routine result of long-planned renovations, Anderson suggests the conservative trade unionists opportunistically used the students’ actions to eliminate Foco.⁸³ Foco collapsed shortly afterwards.⁸⁴

Alexander Macdonald was a crucial figure in solidifying the alliance between students and workers in the 1960s. He capitalised on the shared goals of the two movements to help promote a system of mutual support. Moreover, he went further than many of his colleagues by helping young activists

⁷⁵ “Queensland 1969 State Conference report, June 14 & 15”, page 4 in “Communist Party of Australia Records”, UQFL 234, Box 26, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

⁷⁶ Van Der Koef, “The Communist Party of Australia today”, 87.

⁷⁷ Brian Laver, interview with Andrew Stafford, November 6, 2001.

⁷⁸ Alan Anderson, interview with Jan Ryal, 2002.

⁷⁹ Diane Zetlin, interview with the author and Danielle Miller, February 2, 2013.

⁸⁰ Frank Nielsen, “Australia’s most evil and repugnant nightspot”.

⁸¹ “Student radicals: ‘Never again’ at Labour Day”, *Courier-Mail*, May 15, 1969.

⁸² “TLC minutes Wednesday 11/6/1969”, page 10 in “Trades and Labour Council Records”, UQFL 118, Box 8, Parcel 30, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

⁸³ Alan Anderson, interview with Jan Ryal, 2002.

⁸⁴ Anderson, “The Foco story”, *Tribune*, September 2, 1970, 8.

gain the use of Trades Hall for Foco. In doing so he enabled a highly successful joint student-worker endeavour. This comparatively high level of support must be situated within the context of Macdonald's links to the CPA. However, despite his best efforts, not even he could prevent this relationship buckling through the tensions between the more conservative elements of the TLC and radical students.

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