War on Peace
Menzies, the Cold War and the 1953 Convention on Peace and War

PHILLIP DEERY

In the early 1950s the imminence and inevitability of a third world war was widely accepted. America had lost its atomic monopoly, Russia promoted itself as the defender of world peace against the war-mongering West and Korea had turned the Cold War hot. In Australia, the Menzies government prepared the country for combat while the fledgling peace movement mobilised public opinion against war. This article will examine the contrasting reactions of both government and peace movement to the threat of war through the prism of the 1953 Convention on War and Peace, an event that has been overlooked by historians. The article will also analyse and evaluate Menzies’ political assault on the Convention: the context, the rationale and the consequences.

ON 1 JULY 1949, in the Melbourne home of Reverend Victor James, a Unitarian Church minister, the Australian Peace Council was born. Also present were two other ‘peace parsons’, Reverend Frank Hartley and Reverend Alf Dickie.1 Its first initiative was innocuous: it launched an essay competition for all school children, aged twelve to sixteen, on ‘Why I Want World Peace’. The winning entry received a five-guinea prize.2 The Australian Peace Council’s next initiative was more auspicious. It organised an immensely popular four day Peace Congress in Melbourne in April 1950. The Dean of Canterbury, Dr Hewlett Johnson, nicknamed the ‘Red Dean’ by the British press for his pro-Soviet views, spoke at the Exhibition Buildings and over twelve thousand people attended.3 One who was there wrote, soon after, that the Peace Congress:

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2 Records of the Victorian Peace Council (hereafter VPC), University of Melbourne Archives (hereafter UMA), 80/172, Box 6, File 2 (‘Peace Congress 1950’).
3 See Peace: The Journal of the Australian Peace Council 1, no. 1 (April 1950); National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA), (NSW Branch), SP 368/1, 7/32/4; NAA A5954/69, 2127/1; Sun, 20 April 1950, 13; Hewlett Johnson, Searching for Light: An Autobiography (London: Michael Joseph, 1968), 277–8. In 1951, when Johnson received the Stalin Peace Prize, he told an audience in Moscow that Stalin was the ‘greatest man in the world’ and the ‘greatest fighter for peace’. NAA A1838/1, 69/1/1/16 Pt.3.
was a magnificent experience. I’ve never been to anything like it—and the old Dean is a most wonderful man. He just exudes strength and goodness—and he made a great impression on everyone who heard him. It certainly gave a Peace Movement a fillip here …

The size of the audience was indicative of the depth of its fears. This was a generation for whom war, as Allan Bullock noted, was not a remote hypothesis but a recent and terrible experience. This was a time when the bolts of the Iron Curtain had slammed shut and when the world was dividing into two armed camps, each haunted by the growing spectre of atomic annihilation.

Five months after the Peace Congress, on 20 September 1950, the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, delivered a solemn national radio broadcast. It was full of foreboding. Within three years, he stated, Australia would be involved in a third world war. The Korean war, now three months old, was merely a foretaste—an instance, he said, of international communism testing the strength of the West. In two further broadcasts, on 22 and 25 September, he again spoke of impending global conflict and the urgent need to prepare the country for war. That same month, in one of the most momentous decisions of the Cold War, he agreed—secretly and without any consultation with his Cabinet—to the British request to test atomic bombs in Australia. War preparations commenced four months later when he established the top-secret National Security Resources Board, whose task was to mobilise, coordinate and integrate all public and private sectors of the economy. This would enable the implementation of a vast defence and development programme. It would also lay the foundations of a national security state—essential if World War III, now believed imminent, was to be fought effectively. Over the next three years these two developments—a left-wing movement working, strenuously, for peace and a conservative government

4 Letter from Amirah Turner, Richmond, to Stephen and Nita Murray-Smith, Prague, 14 June 1950. Stephen Murray-Smith papers, State Library of Victoria (hereafter SLV), MSS 8272, Box 273/1–2, Correspondence 1949–50. This was confirmed by Bernie Taft who was also present: he was ‘terribly impressed’ with the ‘Red Dean’ whose speech and appearance he still ‘vividly remembers’. Similarly, he believed his visit to Melbourne provided a ‘rallying point’ for the embryonic peace movement. Conversation with Bernie Taft, 30 October 2001.


6 See, for example, leaflet What are YOU doing to Work for Peace? Save ME from ATOMIC WAR, [Melbourne, 1950], Ian Turner papers, Noel Butlin Archives Centre, ANU, P2/4/17. Ban-the-Bomb petitions received widespread support (see Keith McEwan, Once a Jolly Comrade (Brisbane: Jacaranda, 1966), 21 partly due to the successful detonation of an atom bomb by the Soviet Union only six months before which made the spectre more tangible.


9 L.J. Louis, Menzies’ Cold War: A Reinterpretation (Melbourne: Red Rag Publications, 2001), chapters 2–4. Similarly, David Lowe commented: ‘A third world war, starting with aerial and atomic attacks, was not only an anticipated possibility, but it was the basis on which military and economic planning should proceed’, Menzies and the ‘Great World Struggle’: Australia’s Cold War (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1999), 9.
preparing, secretly, for war—converged. With the 1953 Australian Convention on Peace and War, they collided.

The Convention and the debates it provoked provide a sharp insight into the polarising impact of Cold War. This article will use the Convention as a case study of the character of anti-communism in the 1950s. It will argue that, despite the successful efforts of the organisers to ensure that the Convention was not communist-controlled—and I will suggest that it was neither inspired nor manipulated by the Communist Party of Australia (CPA)—the climate of virulent anti-communism prevented the Menzies’ government and the security services from perceiving distinctions. Within the moral myopia of the Cold War, any peace activity was seen as subversive. Nuances and ambiguities simply did not exist. The 1953 Convention was a clear exception to the usual pattern of CPA control over the peace movement in the 1950s, but the prevailing political environment necessarily linked peace with communism. Pacifist clergymen who opposed the Korean War or the development of nuclear weapons were therefore tarred with the communist brush. There could be no such thing as legitimate opposition to government policy on war and peace. On these issues, as we shall see, conservative anti-communism decreed that all critics—whether or not they were communist—must be silenced. The second aim is rectify a significant historiographical oversight. Notwithstanding a comprehensive if partisan discussion of the Convention by one of its organisers, and a vast amount of relevant archival material, the event has been largely overlooked not only by historians of the post-war period but, more surprisingly, by historians of the peace movement. The one exception is a brief discussion in a broad-ranging chapter on peace activities throughout the 1950s. Thirdly, I will attempt to illustrate how fractured

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11 VPC records, UMA, 80:172, Box 6; Murray-Smith papers, SLV, MSS 8272, Box 282/2–1 (‘Peace Convention material 1953’); Friends’ Peace Committee (Victoria) papers, SLV, MS 11196, Box 2742/5. See also NAA A462/4, 211/2/23; A1838, 1542/591; A6122, 1270–1274 (volumes 1–5).
were the early to mid 1950s; the article will reveal this period to contain severe sectarian, cultural and ideological fault lines. It will therefore contribute to and supplement an emerging historiography\textsuperscript{14} that contests the received wisdom of the 1950s as years of ‘suburban stability and security’, a period of ‘complacency, conformity [and] a kind of cosy comfortableness’.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Prelude}

Between the Melbourne Peace Congress in April 1950 and the Convention on Peace and War in September 1953, the peace movement was vibrant and energetic. It generated sufficient support to send Australian delegates to the Second World Peace Congress in Warsaw in November 1950, to a youth peace festival in Berlin in October 1951, to the Asia and Pacific Peace Conference in Peking in September 1952, and to the Congress of Peoples for Peace in Vienna in January 1953. It also organised a massive Carnival for Peace and Friendship in Sydney in March 1952. Each of these activities was preceded by innumerable public meetings to popularise as well as to fund-raise, each involved vast amounts of printed propaganda material and organisational effort, and each was challenged, attacked or undermined by the Menzies government.

In addition to these major events, a plethora of activities was also undertaken: newspaper advertisements, letters to the editor, receptions, petition signing, art exhibitions, dances, fairs, forums. For example, in the first six months of 1953, the Victorian Peace Council or its affiliate, the Peace Quest Forum, organised the following: a delegation to Canberra to request the Menzies government to press for a ceasefire in Korea; a three-day citizens’ conference on peace and disarmament in the Assembly Hall in Collins Street; a Big Gala Peace Ball in North Melbourne Town Hall; a ‘clemency vigil’ outside the US Consulate protesting against the imminent execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg; screenings at numerous suburban and rural Town Halls and churches of the Joris Ivens film \textit{Peace Will Win};\textsuperscript{16} a well-attended ceasefire rally on the Yarra Bank; and weekly lunch-hour forums in the Assembly Hall. Speakers at these weekly forums included the Olympics athletics coach Percy Cerrutty, on ‘Youth for Battlefields or Playing Fields’; the historian, Norman Harper, on ‘Should the United Nations

\textsuperscript{14} In particular, John Murphy, \textit{Imagining the Fifties: Private Sentiment and Political Culture in Menzies’ Australia} (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press/Pluto Press, 2000).


\textsuperscript{16} Ivens’ films, particularly \textit{The Spanish Earth} (1937), \textit{Power and the Land} (1941) and \textit{Indonesia Calling} (1948) were already known to left-wing audiences in Australia. His support for Indonesian independence deprived him of his Dutch passport and in the 1950s he lived in Eastern Europe.
be Re-organised?'; the scientist, Jack Legge, on 'Science: War or Peace?'; and the Reverend Alan Walker on 'Peace and the Hydrogen Bomb'.

The range and frequency of these activities was symptomatic of the increasingly broad front that the peace movement was attempting to capture. They also provided a strong organisational base for planning the September Convention on Peace and War. The Convention was the brainchild of Reverend Allan D. Brand, a Methodist Minister of Glebe and president of the New South Wales Peace Council. He returned from the Vienna Peace Congress in early 1953 convinced ‘that instead of leaving it to governments, the people themselves, through open discussion of many viewpoints, could begin to determine vital policies and events’. He and a group of ten clergymen, mostly Protestant, drew up a statement summarised by its concluding sentence: ‘Peace cannot wait—it must be won’. Peace would triumph when negotiation displaced war in the settlement of international disputes. This position was confirmed, it seemed, by the cessation, through negotiation, of the three year-old Korean war in July. An executive committee, consisting mostly of Anglican and Protestant clergymen was formed, the first of eight Convention Bulletins was published, halls were booked, invitations issued, sponsors secured, and an intensive publicity campaign commenced. With three thousand delegates anticipated, expectations were high and aims were grandiose: to ‘demonstrate the desire of the Australian people for peace’ and to ‘challenge the government to frame policies that strengthen peace’.

The response by the Government will be discussed later but from the outset a major obstacle confronting those preparing for the Convention was the virtual blackout imposed by the media. The organisers were denied the normal channels of publicity: the press, radio and advertising space on trains, trams, ferries and buses. This was neither a unique nor recent phenomenon and, to many activists on the Left, quite predictable. But it ambushed Protestant

17 See various issues of Working for Peace in Personal papers of Reverend Alf Dickie, UMA, 83:81, Box 2/19. Further details of these activities can be found in the Friends' Peace Committee papers, SLV, MS 11196, Box 2742/3. See also Hartley, The Truth Shall Prevail, 71.

18 On the same trip Reverend Brand travelled behind the ‘iron curtain’; see his I Preached Peace in U.S.S.R. and China, NSW Peace Council, Sydney [1953]. In Cold War parlance, therefore, he was a ‘pink parson’.

19 See statement accompanied by letter, dated 1 May 1953, from Reverend A. Brand to unnamed invitees, NAA A1533/34, 53/266

20 See leaflet Truce in Korea Affects You. So Does the Australian Convention on Peace and War, Sydney [August 1953].

21 See leaflet This is to Invite Your Interest in an Australian Convention on Peace and War (Sydney [July 1953]) and numerous advertising flyers, brochures and leaflets in Murray-Smith papers, SLV, MSS 8272, Box 282/2-1 (‘Peace Convention material 1953’). Sponsors included academics such as Professors W. Macmahon Ball, Manning Clark, A.D. Hope, G.V. Portus, Ian Maxwell, Brian Lewis; Dr Geoffrey Serle and Dr Lloyd Churchward and Mr J.F. Cairns. Macmahon Ball’s name was given prominence in 1953. He ceased being a pacifist in 1938 (see Carolyn Rasmussen, The Lesser Evil? Opposition to War and Fascism in Australia, 1920-1941 (Melbourne: History Department, University of Melbourne, 1992), 120) but by 1959, his attitude to the peace movement had significantly altered (see Fred Wells, The Peace Racket (Sydney [1964]), 16–7).
clergymen unaccustomed to the heavy hand of censorship. As an indignant Reverend J.F. Long, wrote: ‘there is no justification for [this] Press blanket ... [that] has prevented the public from knowing what is going on.’

The Victorian Convention Committee devised various means of breaking the ‘conspiracy of silence’. First, it solicited donations for the specific purpose of buying substantial space in the *Age, Argus and Herald* to advertise both the Convention on Peace and War and the preparatory meetings in Melbourne’s Assembly Hall. These were held on 7 August, 15 August and 11 September. Second, it communicated with ‘all ministers of religion, doctors, lawyers and other professional and business men’ in particular localities, requested that one or some of them convene a local meeting, and arranged a Committee member to address such a meeting. Third, it compiled mailing lists of people ‘of the widest possible character and high standing’, drawn from ‘all religious, political and other affiliations’. Members of the Committee then interviewed or, more often, wrote to these people seeking their assistance. Sometimes the plea fell on deaf ears so at least one circular contained a tone of desperation: ‘Please do what you can, and please—please—PLEASE do it immediately.’

For ten weeks the Convention committee and a large swag of volunteers prepared for those five days in September. The organisers desired an ecumenical gathering. They desired ‘to bring together all lines of thought, to discover what basis of agreement is possible’. The programme was structured so that sectional domination by any of the participating organisations would be prevented. Individual participants, each paying £1 registration fee, would have full speaking, voting and/or abstention rights. In addition, a broad range of ‘special sections’ was planned. They embraced women, youth, trade unionists, scientists, and people from Churches, business and cultural pursuits. As one the Convention committee members stated: ‘We will be a very mixed bunch of people. If anybody goes to [the Convention] with an axe to grind, than I am sorry for him.

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22 Murray-Smith papers, SLV, MS 8272 Box 282/2–1, correspondence, 17 August 1953. An example of this ‘silence barrier’ occurred when Reverend Dr A.H. Wood made an ‘important announcement’ regarding the imminent Convention on Peace and War which he then sent to the editors of all Melbourne daily newspapers. No part of his statement was published and his repeated requests for interviews with the editors were not met. Minutes of meeting, Victorian Committee, Convention on Peace and War, 1 August 1953, Murray-Smith papers, SLV, MS 8272 Box 282/2–1. (For Wood’s announcement see flyer ‘The Most Important Meeting Yet’, in Records of the Friends’ Peace Committee (Victoria), SLV, MS 11196, Box 2742/5.) A similar pattern emerged in Sydney. The *Sydney Morning Herald* even refused to carry an advertisement for the final rally on 30 September in the Leichhardt Stadium.

21 Murray-Smith papers, SLV, MS 8272 Box 282/2–1, circular, 17 August 1953; Minutes, Executive Committee meeting, 8 August and 15 August 1953, Murray-Smith papers, SLV, MS 8272 Box 282/2–1.

24 Murray-Smith papers, ibid, Minutes of Full Committee meeting, 18 August 1953; circular, 15 August 1953. Emphasis in original.


26 This was incorporated into one of the slogans of the Convention: ‘Representation of all; domination by none’.

27 See *The Peacemaker*, August 1953, 3.
He is going to find himself out of touch. For this Convention will belong to the people who attend and to the people of Australia. Thus, the Convention was to be inclusive of opinion, broad in representation and ecclesiastical in emphasis.

The Convention

The Australian Convention on Peace and War commenced at 10.00 a.m. on Saturday 26 September. The venue, the Sydney Town Hall, was draped with the Australian flag and a huge banner reading ‘Negotiation Must Replace War’. The first keynote speaker was Rev Eric Owen, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria and chairman of the Convention’s Victorian Committee. During his opening address, Owen stated:

This is a historic moment in the life of Australia. We must recognise that we are all Australians prepared to bridge the divisions in the cause of peace. We are here to find our own common humanity. If war came along tomorrow unity would be our keynote. We have to capture that spirit in the service of peace, and show the people of Australia that we have found this communion with each other, this sense of being one people in one God, one people in the eyes of eternity.

According to Geoff Chapman, an observer, his speech was ‘very impressive’ and his ‘sincerity was obvious’. Given that none of the major Sydney newspapers sent a reporter to cover any aspect of the Convention, the report of Chapman, a member of the Melbourne University Students’ Representative Council, gives us a unique account of the five days of the Convention. His report was neither partisan nor sanitised. After attending Sub-Commission A1 (whose brief was to find consensus around the question ‘Are peaceful solutions possible in present war and war-danger areas?’), he commented:

I made known to the Chairman my distress that the speakers seemed one-sided ... Ken Widdowson [sic] told me that the same line was run in his sub-commission. I resolved to formally withdraw the S.R.C. in the morning. However, on further consideration I decided to leave it another day.

28 Murray-Smith papers, SLV, MS 8272 Box 282/2–1, Convention News [nd].
29 *Australian Convention on Peace and War Record* (Sydney [1953]), 4. This was a handsomely-produced sixteen page booklet which was widely distributed after the Convention. According to this Record, Owen’s address on the final day was ‘inspired’ and ‘brought the audience to its feet in prolonged applause’.
31 This was in contrast to, for example, the reports of the Convention in the communist press such as *Challenge*, published by the Eureka Youth League (EYL), a Communist Party ‘front’ organisation. It was not correct for *Tribune* (30 September 1953, 12) to claim that *Trib [sic]* alone has given a faithful account of the Convention.
The following day there was a groundswell of support for a more inclusive and less doctrinaire approach. According to Chapman, ‘had yesterday’s performance continued, I would have been obliged to withdraw’.33 He stayed until the end, taking detailed notes on the debates, addresses and resolutions. He also described how some discussions were ‘heated’ (particularly in relation to the issue of recognition of China) or ‘disorderly’ or ‘nebulous’ and how one unanswered question posed by Dame Mary Gilmore (‘Why are A bombs let off in the desert instead of on the ice caps at the North and South poles?’) left the audience, understandably, ‘puzzled’.34 Such qualitative judgements are absent from the ‘official’ published versions of the Convention.35 His summation of the Convention therefore would appear to have a large measure of authenticity and reliability.

Although the Convention was broadly representative of the Australian community in that delegates came from all states and from many occupations, it was not a genuine cross section of Australian political opinion, for it was obvious that most of the delegates were more or less of left wing sympathy. Right wing views were considered, but there was really no one there to advance them. …

His subsequent remarks are highly pertinent in the light of the allegations made by Menzies, ASIO and other government departments—discussed below—that the Convention was communist inspired, controlled or influenced.

The most striking feature of the Convention was the very sincerity and enthusiasm of those present. During the discussions on the drafts they made really honest efforts to find areas of agreement and to effect compromises … [They] showed good faith and generosity and subdued their personal opinions to find common ground … Everyone was free to say what they liked and had every opportunity to do so … Standard of discussion was on the whole low, and points to a very real need for extended Adult Education facilities … [The Convention] was dominated by no particular group or political party…36

None of these comments is characteristic of meetings organised or conducted by the Communist Party of Australia during its Cold War embrace of ‘high Stalinism’. In fact, stated Chapman, ‘it was very interesting to see a Communist Party member, known for his keen mind and decisive personality, refraining from any constructive part in the proceedings’.37

33 Ibid., 4–5. Ken Widdison also chaired one of the discussion groups; see Youth Forum. Bulletin of the Youth Committee of the Australian Convention on Peace and War, no. 1, November 1953, 5.
34 This was omitted from the CPA report of Gilmore’s speech which focused instead on the prolonged cheering she received. Tribune, 30 September 1953, 3.
35 See, for example Australian Convention on Peace and War Bulletin 8, 4 December 1953, in VSL, MS 11196, 2742/5.
36 Ibid, 11. His comment on the standard of discussion was echoed in a confidential appraisal (‘For Private Circulation Amongst Friends’) by one Quaker, James Newell, who told a meeting of the Society of Friends: ‘the whole discussion, in some commissions at least, tended to be superficial’. Records of the Friends’ Peace Committee (Victoria), SLV, MS 11196, Box 2742/5.
37 Australian Convention on Peace and War Bulletin 8, 4 December 1953, 12. Similarly, see W.A. Wood’s article, ‘Came as Strangers, Parted as Friends’, which describes how he acquiesced in the sublimation of his own (communist) position by viewpoints ‘violently opposed’ to his own. Tribune, 7 October 1953, 5.
It is unnecessary to detail the content of the speeches, the deliberations of the sub-committees or the findings of the Convention. It is quite clear from the testimony of those delegates attended and reported back to their respective organisations that the Convention succeeded in its objectives. Genuine 'shop floor' democratic participation had occurred, the divisions of varied political, social and occupational backgrounds was bridged, and a collective spirit united by working for peace not preparing for war was achieved. Most important the principle of patient negotiation—which was as much an organising strategy as a philosophical position—was enthusiastically endorsed.

Besieged

But these achievements were both shallow and pyrrhic. The Convention was boycotted, subverted, censored and condemned. The Prime Minister attacked it, ASIO monitored it, government departments undermined it, and the press—as we have seen—ignored it. The role of ASIO was especially ubiquitous. Since 1950, it took a close interest in peace activity. In 1951, it created a special sub-section devoted exclusively to the peace movement which, soon after, it had successfully penetrated. In late July 1953, ASIO requested the Department of Immigration to refer to it any application to enter Australia to attend the Convention from any ‘Communist or Fellow Traveller’. No action was to be taken against ‘British subjects’. But because of the instruction that ‘if an application deemed by Australian Security Intelligence Organisation here to be security risk application will be refused’, ASIO and the Immigration Department did prevent or deter entry from ‘aliens’ with a non-British background who were invited. These included Albert Einstein from the United States, Dimitri Shostakovitch from the Soviet Union and Emil Zatopek from Czechoslovakia.

ASIO interference also occurred in more prosaic ways. The principal of Melbourne University’s Women’s College, Myra Roper, disclosed in late July 1953 that she had been interviewed by a ‘security policeman’ inquiring whether one of the College’s students had been involved in peace activity. Roper commented that people who were asked to speak on a peace platform now had

39 Personal conversation (c.1980) with former ASIO field officer, Jim Love (now deceased), who worked in this ‘sub-section’. See also ASIO file ‘CPA Interest in the Peace Movement’, NAA A6122/2, 219.
41 The student was most likely Lucie Fouvy, secretary of the Melbourne University Peace Club; see letter from President of Students’ Representative Council to Fouvy, 25 May 1953 in Ralph Gibson papers, UMA, 89:112, BS 3/10/29, Box 8.
to ask themselves whether or not their academic or professional career would be endangered. More significant was ASIO’s relationship with the Prime Minister. As early as 13 July Colonel Spry, the Director-General of ASIO, wrote to Menzies informing him that ASIO was placing the Convention on Peace and War under close surveillance, that it was keeping the Departments of Immigration, External Affairs and Labour and National Service abreast of ‘security aspects’, and that he, Spry, could furnish the PM with relevant information if a public statement about the Convention were necessary.

In early September Spry wrote to Menzies with ‘further information’ that clarified and defined, according to Spry, ‘the role of the Communist Party of Australia in covertly guiding, assisting and publicising the Convention’. This prompted Prime Minister to go public. Menzies telegraphed the Executive Committee of the Convention beforehand advising that ‘in response to a request’ he would be making a parliamentary statement ‘in [the] interests of [the] Australian people’. In a long statement to the House of Representatives on 16 September, just ten days before the Convention commenced, he alleged communist manipulation so duplicitous, in fact, that ‘some of the gentlemen who thought they were initiating the Convention were unaware of its having any connexion with the … Communist party’. Menzies argued that

It is recognised Communist technique to endeavour to attract to such conferences persons of standing who are not Communists. The association of good people with these conferences, people with standing, with not a hint of Communism in them, is an end in itself. In addition, their names are used to add prestige to the individual conference, to any resolutions serving Communist ends which emerge from that conference, and to the ‘Peace’ movement generally.

An angry Reverend Owen—one of the ‘duped gentlemen’—took up the cudgels and sought a private meeting with Menzies to assure him that there was no Communist Party control. This took place in Melbourne on the morning of Monday 21 September. Owen’s interesting account of that meeting was written only a few months later. There seems little reason to doubt its reliability.

I gave Mr Menzies the whole story as I knew it. I told him that I knew Communists were interested and were active on the fringe of the movement. But I indicated the care that we had taken to see that no Communists were allowed to contribute to the actual shaping of the Convention and … the steps I had taken to prevent this movement from being turned

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43 NAA A6122/30, 1270, Spry to Menzies, 3 September 1953.
44 NAA A462/4, 211/2/23.
45 Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (House of Representatives), 16 September 1953, 257–60. This statement received very wide publicity in the daily press evidenced by the numerous clippings in an ASIO file (NAA A6122/30, 1272). There was also innumerable protest letters to the Prime Minister; see NAA A462/4, 211/2/23.
46 Owen gives a detailed description account of this meeting in his The Road to Peace, 16–18. Tribune, 30 September 1953, 3, incorrectly states that the meeting took place in Canberra.
into a means of extremist propaganda ... I told him of my visit to Sydney [where the possibility of CPA guidance was strongest] and of my close personal investigation of the situation there. ‘Now Mr Menzies,’ I concluded, ‘tell me, what else could I have done to safeguard the situation?’ There was a momentary pause and then he replied, ‘Well, frankly, I can’t see what else you could have done’ ... ‘I wish you had said that in public.’ ‘I will’, he answered ... 47

Menzies was true to his word and modified his accusations. He told Parliament on 22 September that his attack on the Convention was not an attack upon eminent churchmen. The Rev Owen, he said, was ‘a man whose judgement I regret, but whose integrity is beyond doubt’. He acknowledged that Owen was ‘a man of high standing’ who was not a Communist. 48 However, he repeated his charge of communist manipulation of the Convention, a charge that will be discussed later in this article. Menzies’ two parliamentary statements, on 16 and 22 September, set the tone for a series of denunciations of the Convention, some vitriolic, from numerous high-ranking government members including Richard Casey, Harold Holt and John Gorton. All these were given widespread publicity in the daily press. Letters favourable to the Convention, meanwhile, languished on the editor’s desk. 49 The Liberal government was joined by the Labor Opposition, influenced by its pre-Split Catholic right constituency, which repudiated the Convention and threatened members with expulsion if they attended. 50

The political offensive was paralleled by a sectarian skirmish. Historically, this sectarianism had a dark, subterranean presence but, as is well-known, erupted in 1954-55 during the convulsive split in the Labor Party. It was also a divisive element in 1953 and provided another ingredient in the anti-communist brew that washed over the Convention. The Catholic press achieved unanimity in its condemnation of the peace movement. 51 The Catholic Tribune simultaneously attacked Protestantism and Communism:

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47 One of the ‘steps [he] had taken’ to prevent domination by members of the CPA was to dispense with the customary process of moving motions and voting on resolutions. Thus the Convention was structured into Commissions and Sub-Commissions whose task was to find common areas of agreement around particular themes. As Owen stated elsewhere, ‘we have been determined not to be made the dupes of by pressure groups. We have expressly planned the shape of the Convention to prevent the sort of manipulation we have learned to fear from extremists of the left and of the right’. Sun, 25 September 1953, 20; Argus, 26 September 1953, 2.

48 CPD, 23 September 1953, 453. See also transcript of broadcast, ‘Man to Man—Australia Today’, Records of the Friends’ Peace Committee (Victoria), SLV, MS 11196, Box 2742/5.

49 Murray-Smith papers, SLV, MS 8272 Box 282/6-1, Minutes of meetings, Victorian Committee, Convention on Peace and War, September 1953.


51 For an earlier example of this see the fifteen page booklet by Reverend P.J. Ryan, Communism and World Peace (Sydney, 1950) in National Catholic Rural Movement papers, UMA, 84:97 L58/1, BS 4/2/11.
The controversy about the ‘Peace Convention’ in Sydney has served to underline a recent
development in Communist ‘infiltration’ which is significant and ominous—namely, the
growing sympathy among Protestant clergymen for certain ideals ... favoured by Red
propagandists ... [They] believe that Communism is not, in fact, the evil thing that it has
been represented, and that it really stands up for the causes of human well-being and
peace ...52

In another editorial Tribune described the apparent tendency of Protestant minis-
ters to align themselves with communists in joint peace activity as ‘a grievous
matter’ and an insult to all Christians who suffered ‘ferocious’ persecution under
communist regimes.53 The Catholic Advocate headlined the Convention as the
‘Latest Move in Communist World Plan’ and condemned those ‘well-meaning
ministers of religion’, along with other ‘Parlour Pinks’ and ‘fellow travellers’, for
supporting such a ‘a bogus front’ with such ‘sinister ends’.54 After the Convention
it devoted a long editorial to ‘The Phenomenon of the “Pink Parson”’ in
which it accused ‘a large and respectable group’ of leading Protestant clergymen
for their ‘dangerous softness’. While they denied, sometimes ‘violently’, all
personal sympathy with the Communist creed, they continually echoed the
Communist line in their public statements. Thus, it was ‘difficult to be patient
with them’, these “‘modern-minded” Protestants’ who, in effect, refused ‘to stand
for God against His enemies’.55 The Catholic Weekly similarly—and sanctimo-
niously—scorned the ‘group of gullible and impressionable protestant clergymen
who had been seduced by the Communist Party into thinking they were ‘the
inspirers and promoters of the Convention’56 And, of course, the Convention and
its ‘pro-Communist clergymen’ supporters were condemned, prominently and
stridently, in successive issues of B.A. Santamaria’s News-Weekly.57 The single-
mindedness of Catholic opinion in relation to this issue was disturbed only by
two letters from individual Catholics—Brian Buckley and Vernon Rice—who
expressed support for the goals of the Convention.58 It seems clear, then, that the
Convention on Peace and War brought to the surface some dark, simmering
sectarian tensions.

The Catholic press did not monopolise allegations, at least from ecclesiastical
sources, of communist control of the Convention. The N.S.W. Presbyterian
argued: There seems little doubt that the ultimate organising power behind the

52 Tribune, 24 September 1953, 4.
54 Advocate, 10 September 1953, 3, 6.
55 Ibid, 1 October 1953, 6.
56 Catholic Weekly, 3 September 1953, 4. This paper had ‘exposed’ the peace movement three years
earlier; see Reverend P.J. Ryan, ‘Communist War Plans. The Sinister Plot Behind the Peace
57 See News-Weekly, 9 September 1953, 2; 16 September 1953, 5; 23 September 1953, 4.
58 Advocate, 17 September 1953, 18; Shop, vol.8, 5, September 1953, 5. Buckley was the Treasurer
of the Melbourne University Peace Club; Rice had organised a Disarmament Committee at
Convention is the Communist Party. Mr Menzies has told us that in Parliament ...59
It instructed its readers not to co-operate with or ‘lend one’s name’ to the Con-
vention since this would endorse its communist line. This injunction pained the
Reverend Owen. In the same paper, weeks after the Convention ended, he
wrote: ‘As I listened to men and women [at the Convention] sincerely struggling
toward mutual understanding and agreement, I felt myself saddened beyond
measure to think that my church, misguidedly standing out of this movement,
was missing this magnificent opportunity’.60

Misguided it may have been but the effect on the Convention of this
combined assault was to seriously dent its chance of success. An early casualty
was one of the original organisers and joint chairmen of the Convention
Committee, the Reverend Dr A. H. Wood. His involvement in peace activity
commenced in 1945, with Hiroshima: ‘I felt that the whole world had changed—
war with atomic bombs could never be just’.61 After Menzies’ parliamentary
attack, which left him ‘saddened beyond words’,62 he withdrew his support and
involvement. Harold Wood was the Principal of Methodist Ladies’ College and he
felt obliged to resign—even though he remained convinced that communists
were not in any way connected to the Convention. The minutes of the Conven-
tion Executive Committee meeting of 19 September indicate his personal
dilemma. ‘I am torn between my duty as a Christian and my obligations to the
School. People who do not know all the facts will criticise me as Head of my
school and the School will suffer’.63 It was not certainly Wood whom Eric Owen
had in mind when he stated that ‘official disapproval was sufficient to induce
some people to retire from the [Convention] movement with almost indecent
haste’.64 In contrast to Wood, one of the Convention’s organising secretaries,
Reverend Long, stated: ‘I have no intention of withdrawing. I shall go on with
the noble work for peace I have been doing for 40 years—long before I ever heard
of communism’.65 Wood’s action received considerable publicity; Long’s decision
received none.

59 N.S.W. Presbyterian, 25 September 1953, 4. Deference to the authority of the Prime Minister was
also apparent in the letter to him from William Rogers who was sent to Sydney by a group of
Presbyterian Ministers in Adelaide to discover ‘the part communists were playing’. Although he
returned from Sydney convinced that the Convention was ‘a bona fides peace movement’, after
hearing Menzies’ speech, ‘it now appears that I failed to make a true judgement’. Rogers to
Menzies, 16 September 1953, NAA A462/4, 211/2/23.
60 N.S.W. Presbyterian, 23 October 1953, 7. Owen’s long article, entitled ‘The Proof of the Pudding’,
was subsequently reprinted and distributed as a flyer.
61 Cited in Carter, ‘The Peace Movement in the 1950s’, 65. Anglican churchmen in Britain experi-
enced similar epiphanies in 1945; see Dianne Kirby, ‘The Church of England and the Cold War
62 Owen, The Road to Peace, 15.
63 Similarly, he told Owen, ‘I must sever my connection with [the Convention] or injure the school
of which I am principal ... I hate doing it’. Ibid.
64 Owen, The Road to Peace, 11.
65 Murray-Smith papers, SLV, MS 8272 Box 282/6–1, Minutes of meeting, Victorian Committee,
Convention on Peace and War, 18 September 1953.
The political fall out also expressed itself in several other ways. One was the attendance figure. In the weeks prior to the Convention, organisers confidently and repeatedly predicted that more than three thousand would participate; in the end, only 947 attended. Similarly, it was anticipated that ‘at least 500 delegates will go from Victoria,’ 66 only 174 arrived. Eighty-four arrived from other states and there was one overseas delegate, from New Zealand. Young people had especially been targeted and high hopes were held out for a ‘Youth Forum’ at the Convention. 67 In the end, a mere forty three delegates classed as ‘Youth & Students’ attended. 68 As the Anglican commented: ‘The moral is clear. Many who could have taken a constructive part in this Convention did not do so. They had been intimidated by a “smear” campaign against it in advance’. 69 Attendance figures are, of course, only one criterion of success. The extent to which the mobilisation of opinion occurs outside the meeting halls is, arguably, a more significant if less quantifiable measure. But given the indefatigable efforts of the State Convention Committees—or at least the Victorian Committee as revealed in the minutes of its meetings—the number of final participants must have disappointed. There was not only withdrawal of interest. Permission to use several municipal halls for meetings, film screenings and social functions was also withdrawn. 70 This forced hurried relocations to less central and congenial venues. At one stage even the all-important opening venue, the Sydney Town Hall was withdrawn by the City of Sydney municipal council. 71 The various Convention Committees, with their limited sources of funding, 72 were no match against the more powerful forces of a hostile parliament, press and a range of government instrumentalities.

66 Murray-Smith papers, SLV, MS 8272 Box 282/6–1, Circular, 17 August.
67 See Just a Minute! Young Australia! (Sydney [1953]) in Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, (hereafter ML) MSS 5021 112 (155); The Labour Club and the Peace Convention’, Shop (Melbourne University Labour Club), vol.8, 5, September 1953, ML MSS 2389 4(8).
68 VPC Records, UMA, 80:172, Box 6, File 3, ‘Number of Participants, Sydney Convention’.
69 The Anglican, 23 October 1953. In an overblown analogy to the two orphaned sons of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, it continued: ‘It requires little thought to discern where Australia is headed if similar “smear” techniques succeed in the future: the fate of the two children in America is a sufficient warning’.
70 The Australian Convention on Peace and War Bulletin 6, 4 September 1953 reported, in a less-than-sanguine way, that the cancellation of bookings of the Trocadero, Presbyterian Assembly Hall and Leichhardt Stadium was due to ‘misconceptions of [our] aims and intentions’. Bulletin 7, 11 September 1953, reported on problems of accommodation for interstate delegates: although more than 10,000 leaflets requesting billets had been distributed in Sydney, fewer than 200 firm offers had been received.
71 This was reversed after sustained petitioning. One petition stated, correctly, that ‘it is no part of the functions of municipal government to suppress public meetings convened in accordance with the law...’ See Reverend F.J. Hartley papers, UMA, 80:163, Box 21, File 7.
72 See Australian Convention on Peace and War Bulletin 7, 11 September 1953 (in VSL MS 11196, 2742/5) that referred to the desperate and urgent need for money to cover anticipated expenses.
Fighting peace

So what underlay Menzies’ war on peace? Few analyses of his government’s position extend beyond the ‘McCarthyist Cold War atmosphere’ explanation and they emphasise his visceral, almost irrational, hostility to communism. But such an explanation begs the question as to why the Menzies government was so obsessively concerned—and it was a genuine, not contrived concern—about the peace movement. There were a range of contextual influences that moulded Menzies’ views in the run-up to the 1953 Convention. Perhaps the most important was the defence and global war preparations within Australia and the mobilisation of the national security state. Menzies believed—to use the striking phrase of one government document—that peace activity would ‘morally cripple the government’s rearmament programme’ by distracting the attention of many Australians away from the menace of international communism.

Other factors included the outbreak of the Korean War, which intensified both domestic anti-communist feeling and the sense of impending international crisis, the revelations overseas of communist spy rings and espionage operations, which appeared to confirm the existence of a ‘fifth column’ and the perception that, in the now likely event of a third world war, the Communist Party would act as a subversive agency of a foreign enemy—a perception aided by the Party’s own actions and language. There was a further, important determinant of Menzies’ response. It was his conviction that the Australian peace movement followed closely the directives of the World Peace Council which, essentially, was a Cominform creation. By 1953, Menzies had access to ample convincing evidence from the Department of External Affairs, Naval Intelligence, and the British Foreign Office (via the Information Research

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74 NAA A1838, 69/1/3/7/1/1/12, pt.1, 1 (emphasis added).
75 In this belief Menzies was consistent. During his introduction of the Communist Party Dissolution Bill three years earlier, he argued that the communist-controlled peace movement was designed to ‘prevent or impair defence preparations in the democracies’. *CPD*, 27 April 1950, 1995.
76 See NAA [Australian War Memorial] AWM54, 665/7/30 Pt 41, Intelligence Summaries, 1950.
77 In particular, the trials of Nunn May and Fuchs in Britain and the Rosenbergs in the US; by 1952, the Director-General of ASIO and Prime Minister Menzies had been informed by MI6 of the Venona Operation which pointed to espionage activity in Australia.
Department) that elaborated and validated these links. It was a short step to the belief that the Convention on Peace and War in effect if not in intent assisted the so-called ‘Peace Offensive’ of the Soviet Union. Part of that ‘offensive’ was to use the peace movement to sow discord within society, weaken the resolve and the defence efforts of the West, and compromise the peacekeeping role of the UN.

Stripped, therefore, of its colourful language, Menzies would have had little difficulty accepting this assessment made by an External Affairs officer prior to the Convention:

The Peace Movement is a revolutionary movement, a cloak by which the Soviet leaders hope to dissimulate Great Russian Imperialism. Conscious that its guise has been penetrated and exposed in many quarters, it continually seeks fresh means to ensnare the wary. Like shady night club proprietors the Communist promoters are no sooner put out of business by exposure in one place than they are busy organising a fresh venture under entirely new management.

The Convention on Peace and War constituted such a ‘fresh venture’: another strategy in the Cold War that must be exposed and discredited. Menzies’ conviction that the Convention was a communist front under ‘new management’ was articulated in his ‘Man to Man’ national broadcast on 25 September 1953:

The Communists are very clever men, naturally much cleverer than their dupes. Their designs are so treacherous and evil that they would never succeed in Australia except in disguise. The best Communist disguise, one which they have assumed in almost every free country, is to put up a ‘front’, a public showing, which appears to be exactly opposite to Communism ... Thus, atheistic Communism, the arch-enemy of Christianity, is willing to come in behind a Christian clergyman and use his name, provided that he is sufficiently unaware ... It creeps up behind this peace-loving Christian and, by devious means, encourages a peace propaganda ... [T]t is time that we recognised that Communist inspired peace movements in the democracies are the counterpart of a vast and menacing growth of war power in the Soviet Union.

All this was anathema to the non-communist Christian clergymen who sponsored the Australian Convention on Peace and War. For them ‘defence policy’ was a euphemism for an armaments build-up. For them, to remain silent

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81 NAA A1838/2, 69/1/1/16/1, Pt.7. For the Prime Minister’s articulation of such similar views, see his parliamentary statement about the Convention: CPD, 16 September 1953, 257–9.

82 Records of the Friends’ Peace Committee (Victoria), SLV, MS 11196, Box 2742/5, Transcript of Broadcast, ‘Man to Man—Australia Today’.
or inert was to remain an accomplice in the government’s war preparations. And for them, nothing could sanctify modern war; nothing could defile the cause of peace. Better relations between East and West was their goal, patient negotiation their favoured means. And they denied vigorously and repeatedly that they were hoodwinked by clever communist manipulators. By reducing them to dupes, such allegations denigrate their intelligence, integrity and capacity to think in ways independent from but, at least in peace work, parallel to the CPA. Many clergymen and most of the Convention organisers, such as St. Clair Anderson, Owen, Brand, Long and Wood, had commenced their involvement with the peace movement long before peace activists were seen as synonymous with fellow travellers and crypto communists and long before the communist-influenced Australian Peace Council was formed in July 1949.83

A Communist ‘front’?

The broader issue of Communist Party control of the Australian Peace Council (APC) has been extensively canvassed.84 Suffice it to say that despite constant denials from the APC,85 the Communist Party was the early driving force behind it. This close involvement in the establishment of the APC was confirmed by an ‘insider’—its first organising secretary, Ian Turner: ‘The post-war Australian peace movement had its origin in a top-secret meeting of party members … early in 1949. That meeting agreed to initiate a broadly-based Australian Peace Council’.86 This issue, of CPA initiation of postwar peace activism, is not of direct relevance here but the extent of CPA control over the 1953 Convention is. The alleged communist connection was the linchpin of the combined assault on the Convention and the effectiveness with which the charges were hurled severely circumscribed its success. Menzies’ claim that the Convention was a communist front relied heavily on his use of information, intelligence and internal CPA documents supplied by ASIO. The evidence Menzies used in his statement to the House was an address ‘to a select [Communist] Party group’ by an unnamed high-ranking

83 See early issues of The Peacemaker and Carolyn Rasmussen, ‘The Australian Peace Congress, September 1937’, Australia 1938 A Bicentennial Bulletin 3 (December 1980): 19–28. The papers of the Friends’ Peace Committee list no fewer than thirteen peace organisations in 1951. None of them was a Communist Party ‘front’; it did not list the Australian Peace Council, which was. (VSL MS 11196, Box 2742/6)


85 See, for example, the two-column letter from Hartley and James to the Melbourne Herald, 2 February 1950.

member; a resolution ‘passed by a senior Committee of the Communist Party’ outlining tactics to be used at the Convention; the decision by the CPA to establish ‘a working committee for the Convention’; and the directive to a member of the Central Committee to assume ‘general political leadership and responsibility of the Convention’. The following day newspapers headlined his speech with ‘P.M. Reveals Top Red’s Order to Party’ and ‘Communists Behind Peace Convention, Says P.M.’ The ‘secret documents’ from which Menzies—and press political reporters—generously quoted gave the allegations verisimilitude. Assertion was fast becoming fact. But not for those who were actually organising the Convention.

Immediately after Reverend J.E. Owen met with Menzies on 21 September, he met with ASIO. In a remarkable twist, Menzies arranged by phone, possibly with Spry himself, that Owen see the actual ASIO documents: ‘Show him everything, anything he wants to look at’. To see classified documents dealing with communism, especially in 1953, was highly irregular but Menzies was anxious that Owen, whom he obviously trusted, be convinced of communist complicity. Owen pored over the incriminating documents with the Director General and the officer ‘in charge of the file’ and saw names, connections and affiliations. According to Spry, ‘it appeared to me that he had been if not convinced, at least surprised by the documents produced’. In fact, Owen was not convinced: ‘I saw the names of men whom I had long suspected of being Communists … I saw the names of men who had kept their affiliations with the Communist Party as discreetly hidden as they could, but … I saw no names that I or my friends had not already suspected.’ What Owen discovered is that ASIO, and therefore Menzies, had conflated two peace conventions—one planned but never held by the Communist Party; the other, with which he was associated, due to commence in five days’ time. This was a remarkable revelation. It certainly cast Menzies’ parliamentary statement in a different light. Owen felt ASIO acknowledged, albeit perfunctorily, that its ‘proof’ was circumstantial rather than prima facie. When he finished examining all the ‘secret documents’, he asked the officers present:

Will you let me sum up what I have seen, and then tell me if I am correct or not? … I believe that you have evidence here that the Communists planned to hold one of their Peace Conferences in Sydney early in this year; that subsequently they got wind of the fact that we were in the field; that they then decided to drop theirs and swing in behind ours; that they have been very close to the movement in Sydney in the planning of the machinery of the Convention; but there is no evidence that they have either wished to influence the nature of the Convention, the matter to be discussed, the manner of discussing it, or the conclusions to be arrived at, or have succeeded in doing so. One of the men replied, ‘I think that is fairly accurate’.

87 CPD, 16 September 1953, 258–9.
88 See Age and Argus, 17 September 1953.
89 Owen, The Road to Peace, 19.
90 NAA A6119/1, 85, Spry to Menzies, nd [September 1953].
91 Owen, The Road to Peace, 19.
92 Ibid., 19–20.
If this testimony is reliable, and comments from both sides of the political fence regarding Owen’s integrity suggest that it would be, then the edifice, upon which allegations of communist control rested, collapses. The file that ASIO compiled, that Owen saw and that Menzies used is now available to historians. The key documents were a set of eleven small note-pad size pages taken from the ‘left side drawer of J.D. Blake’s desk’ at CPA headquarters in Sydney, and a three page set of rough and rather disorganised notes taken from the ‘gent’s wardrobe’ at the home of H.B. Chandler. The authors of these notes—the first was handwritten, the second typed—were not identified. However it is clear that the handwriting, scrawled and nearly illegible, belonged to Jack Blake. It is not clear whether ASIO knew this; if so, which is likely, it would gleefully have interpreted ‘we ask responsible citizens to join with us in leading and preparing this great convention’ as conclusive proof of communist initiation and manipulation. Blake, after all, was in 1953 a member of the highest-ranking CPA committee—the three person Central Committee Secretariat—and, arguably, the most influential CPA leader until forced to resign in 1954 after an internal power struggle. So this document was a real catch. Except that Owen was right: it referred to a communist-organised National Peace Convention which the Central Committee previously planned. With the emergence of the Australian Convention on Peace and War, initiated by the clergy-based Peace Quest Committee, the Communist Party switched strategy: ‘we have had to change those plans and make different ones’.

Further, if less authoritative, evidence that the Convention was not a ‘Red Front’ comes from the Communist Party’s own assessment of the event. Identical editorials, written by J.D. Blake, appeared in the communist papers Tribune and The Guardian. After applauding the work of the Convention and attacking the methods of the Menzies government (it used ‘every weapon in the arsenal of the secret police from crude forgery to outright intimidation’), they stated:

By negotiation, discussion and a genuine spirit of give and take, the Convention reached conclusions of a limited character which were acceptable to all participants. There are some aspects of these findings with which we do not agree, but they express the views

93 CPD, 23 September 1953, 453; personal conversation with Norman Rothfield, 16 August 2001, who described Owen as ‘a passionate peacemaker’, one who had ‘peace inside his heart’. Rothfield was president of the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, a member of the Australian Peace Council, attended the 1952 Vienna Peace Congress and was a Victorian Executive Committee member of the Australian Convention on War and Peace Committee. See his Many Paths to Peace (Melbourne: Yarraford Publications, 1997).
94 NAA A6122/30, 1270. Other ASIO documents on the Convention are located in NAA A6122/30, 1271–4
95 A comparison of his private correspondence to myself and with other pieces of writing in his papers (ML MSS 5971/1 and MSS 5971 ADD-ON 2087 2(2)) establishes this fact.
97 Statement by CPA Central Committee member, E. Robertson [nd] cited in NAA M1508/1, 35.
of non-Communist people who desire peace. On all other matters contained in the unanimous findings of the Convention the Communist Party has a much more far-reaching policy, and the Party will continue its own work for this policy.\textsuperscript{98}

Notwithstanding Blake's policy, throughout 1952–53, of broadening the peace movement and, correspondingly, diminishing Party domination, such a statement—with its caveats and qualifications—would be unthinkable were the Convention a creature of the Communist Party. A comparison with the 1952 Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship also held in Sydney, is instructive. That major event was organised primarily by the CPA via a 'front' organisation, the Eureka Youth League. In none of the many assessments of the Carnival, public or internal, did the Party allude to any aspect being of 'limited character' or a source of disagreement. Instead the lessons drawn were necessarily profound, salutary, far-reaching.\textsuperscript{99} With the Carnival, the Party was omnipotent; with the Convention, it was subordinate. The ideological myopia of cold warriors blurred such subtleties. It prevented distinctions being seen between desire and outcome, influence and control. The Cold War polarities meant that, in the 1950s, any peace work ipso facto assisted, or was assisted by, the Communist Party. Guilt by association, that emblematic feature of this troubled, tense period, applied to the peace movement. Peace parsons, if not already pink, were easily duped and therefore made naive but valuable allies on the side of Soviet communism in the great world struggle for moral and military supremacy.

\textbf{Legacy}

The aftermath of the Convention saw 'report back' meetings and rallies in October 1953.\textsuperscript{100} But the heady rhetoric expressed on the final evening of the Convention—'we will save the peace of Australia and we will save the peace of the world'—withered beyond the Convention halls where the Cold War air was far more chilly. Soon, audiences dwindled and preaching was to the converted. The hoped-for momentum inspired by those days in September that would sweep up masses of previously uncommitted Australians to the cause of peace quickly ebbed as 1953 drew to a close. The Australian Peace Council, the Peace Quest Forum and the Society of Friends Peace Committee, all important backers

\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Tribune}, 7 October 1953, 2; \textit{Guardian}, 8 October 1953, 2. See the three page leaflet, \textit{Findings of the Australian Convention on Peace and War}, for an indication of how broad, even innocuous, the findings were (VSL MS 8272, Box 282/2–1). There is not a trace of communist ideology. For example, the final paragraph read, in part: 'Peace emanates from within the individual, in an attitude to other individuals, starting first in the home and then spreading in ever widening circles of society until finally it embraces the whole'.

\textsuperscript{99} Records of the 1952 Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship, Eureka Youth League Archive, in private possession of Barry Blears (EYL historian), Surrey Hills, Sydney. A leading organiser of the Carnival was Blake's wife, Audrey, then national secretary of the EYL.

\textsuperscript{100} See, for example, the report of a peace rally in Melbourne in the \textit{Guardian}, 15 October 1953, 1.
of the Convention, fell collectively silent on previously-announced plans to hold a further National Peace Convention in Melbourne in 1954.\textsuperscript{101} In fact, even if Menzies had not announced the Petrov defection in April 1954, against which the peace movement could not compete and with which it would, most likely, have been tarred with the broad brush of espionage, it seems highly improbable that any significant peace activity would have been undertaken in 1954. This was a far cry from the frenetic activity, outlined at the outset of this article, in the early 1950s. Not for another six years, with the 1959 Peace Congress in Melbourne, was anything on the scale of the 1953 Convention attempted. The Menzies Government had succeeded in discrediting, isolating and marginalising the peace movement.

Besides the shaft of light it throws on the broader issue of anti-communism in the early 1950s, particularly the alleged synonymy of peace and communism, an examination of the Australian Convention on Peace and War revises our customary perceptions of the post-war years, ‘our contemporary imaginings of a flat, complacent and largely uneventful period’.\textsuperscript{102} It reveals that the twin issues of war and peace made the early 1950s a turbulent and fragmented period. These issues were interpreted in radically different ways by different sections of society. They were, therefore, a source of tension rather than consensus. The invasion

\textsuperscript{101} The Victorian Executive Committee recommended to the Full Committee that the Convention Committee should be disbanded but should reconvene in 1954 ‘for purpose of organising 1954 Convention in Melbourne’. It was never reconvened. Murray-Smith papers SLV MS 8272 Box 282/2-1, Minutes, Executive Committee meeting, 7 November 1953.

\textsuperscript{102} Murphy, \textit{Imagining the Fifties}, 8.
threat of World War II united, at least temporarily, the community. The apocalyptic threat of World War III strained and polarised it. On the battleground of the Cold War a wide gulf existed between the combatants; any effort to enter the no-man’s land of political neutrality, such as the attempt by the Convention clergymen, was condemned. In this sense the friction between the Menzies government and the peace movement foreshadowed some of the bitter conflicts that characterised Australian society fifteen years later during the Vietnam war. But by then ‘peace’ was no longer such a wicked word.

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