

Peace Research: Centre or Periphery

In considering the use of peace research by the peace movement in relation to the newly-formed Peace Research Centre, Canberra, BRIAN MARTIN suggests the Centre could contribute to the needs of the peace movement by operating as a resource centre, disseminating research and encouraging "do it yourself" research among activists.

In 1982 the Australian Labor Party included in its party platform a commitment to fund peace research in Australia. After the ALP's victory in the March 1983 election, moves were initiated to start an academic peace research centre. More than two years later, in July 1985, the first academic appointment was announced to the Peace Research Centre, which is located in the Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University. The director is Andrew Mack, two visiting fellowships have been awarded to Ms. Randall Forsberg, Director of The Institute for Defence and Disarmament Studies, Boston and Dr. Svenne Lodgard of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and two other initial academic appointments are expected shortly.

For quite a few years now, many people in the peace movement have been pushing for government-funded peace research. The expectations for the new centre are enormous¹. While I think peace research is a 'good thing', and have no doubt that the researchers in the new Australian centre will do an excellent job, I also believe that the great focus on peace research by people in the peace movement is misplaced.

The production of peace research

The workers in the Peace Research Centre cannot be expected to produce miracles. To undertake even a fraction of the research

which has been suggested by various individuals would be impossible. Even with the greatest efforts of the Centre workers, there are several reasons to believe that the net increase in production of peace research caused by the creation of the Centre will not be all that great.

First, the Centre is small. The average rate of publication by social science academics would not exceed one paper per year. The Centre staff will probably do much better than this, but a few people can only do so much.

Second, the people appointed would have been doing quite a bit of peace research even if they had not obtained jobs in the Centre. The positions which they vacate may not be filled by people oriented in the same way. For example, Andrew Mack's previous post in the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at ANU was advertised in the field of "arms control, disarmament and peace research". The position freed by his appointment to the Peace Research Centre has been advertised in a field unrelated to peace research.

Third, there will be enormous pressures on the Centre staff: untold visitors, seminars, consultations, speaking engagements, requests for information, etc. Only dedicated staff will be able to squeeze out the time to do any research at all.

The consumption of peace research

Whatever the limits to the pro-

duction of peace research, its consumption poses much greater problems. I concentrate here on the use of peace research by the peace movement.

Quite sizeable amounts of what is called peace research have been carried out for decades. Yet most of this work has been entirely ignored by peace movements. For example, in my opinion one of the most insightful and stimulating peace researchers is Johan Galtung². Yet even his name — much less his writings — is unknown to all but a small minority of peace activists. Similarly, the various peace research journals are seldom read except by other peace researchers. Most peace research has little or no direct impact on the activities and thinking of peace activists.

One reason for this is that most peace research is irrelevant to the needs of activists. It is oriented to governments, or too academic, or simply indigestible and pointless. Indeed, much so-called peace research, such as mathematical modelling of international conflict, incorporates assumptions of conflict and competition, and may promote war as much as peace³.

Most importantly, peace groups are not set up to use peace research. Most peace activism is reactive — such as protests against MX missile tests or arms fairs — and lacks any systematic connection to an overall analysis of the war system. Few peace groups foster among their members the development of an overall conception of the causes of war and how they can intervene to oppose it. Ongoing study of the peace research literature and its implications is simply not on the peace movement agenda. Given that decades of peace research have been ignored, it seems incongruous to put so much energy