

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 Lodgaard 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



into promoting more research.

The politics of peace research

The new Peace Research Centre will come under enormous pressures from different directions. Various people associated with the peace movement have already argued for directions which escape the narrow confines of academic international relations, which are not divorced from political practice, and which address issues such as patriarchy and Third World justice. That is all very well. But there are also other pressures which have more serious implications for the fate of the Centre.

Some individuals and groups have already begun to attack any conception of peace research which can serve the interests of the peace movement⁴. The Professors World Peace Academy of Australia has set up conferences which in the main promote the line of 'peace through strength' and the message that the greatest threat to world peace is the peace movement itself.

Another factor is the short-term nature of the Centre appointments.

None of the staff will have tenure. This will create pressure to be 'academically respectable' in order to ward off attacks from the right, and possibly to protect future job prospects. The phrase 'academically respectable' means doing nothing which offends the interests of powerful interests inside the university or the interests of related powerful interests outside. If the Centre takes a stand which is too overtly political, it risks being abolished when it is reviewed in five years time.

Any programme in a university which does not fit into one of the standard disciplinary boxes is open to attack. The difficulties faced by environmental studies, women's studies and adult education are instructive. Any work which cuts across disciplinary boundaries is seen by many academics as automatically sub-standard: it is not 'rigorous'. This insistence on 'rigour' disguises an attack on knowledge which has potential or actual relevance to non-elite groups. Most disciplinary knowledge is constructed so that only experts and their state or corporate patrons can understand it or apply it.

Some holistic academic programmes are attacked. Others are pushed into a reproduction of the esoteric academic mode. Yet others are marginalised. A few thrive and retain some critical thrust, usually due to a lucky set of environmental conditions. Most tragically, the enormous pressures on holistic programmes often lead to internal conflicts. This has been the ironical fate of more than one peace research centre around the world.

Status

If the Peace Research Centre has only a limited capacity for adding to the stock of knowledge about war and peace, and the peace movement is not geared to utilising the knowledge, then why is there such a great concern about the Centre? The key is not the Centre's contribution to the reservoir of knowledge — however considerable that may turn out to be — but the status which the establishment of the Centre provides to a focus on the problems of war and peace. Attacks from the right are provoked because the very existence of the Centre provides greater legitimation for examining and criticising the traditional military understandings of security and order.

There are several reasons why a similar focus by peace activists on high status peace research should be questioned. The peace movement should be going beyond a reliance on experts and a dependence on 'outsiders'. The modern military system is premised on reliance on professionals, namely the military itself and its state sponsors. I would argue that it is wrong to expect the solution to the problem of war to come from placing reliance on a different set of professionals: peace research professionals rather than military or government professionals. The existence of the peace movement itself is testimony to the failure of governments, corporations and any other major source of institutionalised power in society to challenge the war system in a fundamental way.

I suggest the following courses of action in relation to peace research.

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Diary of peace and disarmament meetings

November 19-20. Peace Vigil
for Geneva Summit Meeting
Melbourne CIGD (03)
663 3677.

November 30. War Toys
Boycott USA.

December 7. MAUM Fair.
Church of All Nations,
Palmerston Street, Carlton.
Details: Val (03) 555 5625.

December 8. Ecumenical
Prayer Service for IYP. — St.
Patrick's Cathedral.

International Peace March
through Central America —

Dec. '85-Jan. '86. Panama,
Custa Rica, Nicaragua,
Honduras, El Salvador,
Guatemala, Mexico —
Contact — Melbourne — LAIC
(03) 419 5588 or (ah)
419 0858 — Sydney —
RACCA (ah) (02) 560 4532 —
Adelaide — SOE (ah) (08)
337 0396.

January 1 — December 31
1986, International Year of
Peace.

January 1, 1986. Conference
on Peace Studies and
Conflict Resolution University
of South Pacific, Suva, Fiji.
Details: Janette Maas.

January 13-February 4.
Peace Activists' Tour of
Philippines Details: Mick
Boyle, P.O. Box 5, Fitzroy,
3065. (03) 419 5718.

January 8-18 — Part of ANU
1986 Summer School
Women's Work in Politics —
January 8-10 Women in War
and For Peace — January
15-18: Contact: Summer
Studies, Centre for
Continuing Education, ANU,
GPO Box 4, Canberra, 2601.
(072) 49 2858, 49 2384.

March 23 — Palm Sunday
Peace Rallies

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* Use the staff of the Peace Research Centre as resource people. They can answer questions, provide references and offer advice! There is no point in ignoring the Centre even if it does not live up to everyone's expectations. Even criticism of the Centre for failing to help the peace movement may be helpful, by protecting against right-wing attacks!

* Develop the peace movement's internal capacities to use the existing and future body of peace research. Those members of peace groups who are so inclined might agree to survey different journals and books, or to write to researchers in Australia and overseas, and to report to others in the group about the work and its implications.

* Translate theoretical perspectives in peace research into practical implications for action. This is hard. What does the feminist analysis of war and patriarchy imply for local group dynamics or for direct action? What does an understanding of the nuclear policies of the United States and the Soviet Union imply for planning an agenda of campaigns?

* Do research within the movement. 'Research' is usually associated with esoteric and difficult work by professionals. But much research work which will be

of use to peace activists can be done by activists themselves: surveying opinions, developing ways of organising people, testing out conceptions of peace, finding out about local power structures and how to change them⁵. Research done by people in the peace movement is more likely to be understood and taken up by others in the movement. It is also much easier to link to action. Indeed, research can be a way of mobilising people. In-house research, since it seldom depends on conspicuous figures or costs very much money, is much less vulnerable to attack. Furthermore, it can serve to stimulate academic research and protect those academics who do research relevant to the movement. Last and not least, research in the movement will help to strengthen the movement itself by leading to better-informed social action.

Notes:

1. The concern about the funding and direction of peace research in Australia has been apparent to me from numerous conversations over the past several years. It is also apparent from the efforts of the Committee for an Australian Peace and Development Research Institute (APADRI), and in Robin Burns, 'Peace studies — twixt research and action', *SANA Update*, No. 15, April 1984, pp. 2-3; Margaret Bearlin,

'Peace research for beginners', *Peace Studies*, No. 9, December 1984, pp. 30-33; Herb Feith, 'Peace research at universities and colleges', *Peace Studies*, No. 4, July 1984, pp. 25-26; Grover Foley, 'Technocratic or humanist peace studies', *Peace Studies*, No. 9, December 1984, pp. 28-29; Jim Legge, 'APADRI — its background, aims and progress', *SANA Update*, No. 15, April 1984, pp. 4-5; Andrew Mack, 'A peace research institute for Australia?', *Current Affairs Bulletin*, June 1983, pp. 3-18; J.L. Richardson, 'Peace research and the peace researcher', *Peace Studies*, No. 1, March 1984, pp. 21-23; Heather Williams, 'Peace research in Australia', *VAPS Newsletter*, No. 12, September 1982, pp. 7-11.

2. Many of Galtung's papers are included in the six volumes subtitled *Essays in Peace Research* (Copenhagen: Christian Ejlertsen, 1975-1980). A good summary of much of his work is Johan Galtung, *The True Worlds* (New York: The Free Press, 1980).
3. See for example Berenice Carroll, 'Peace research: the cult of power', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 16, No. 4, December 1972, pp. 585-616.
4. Arthur Burns, 'Peace research at the ANU', *Quadrant*, December 1983, pp. 49-53.
5. See for example Yoland Wadsworth, *Do It Yourself Social Research* (Melbourne: Victorian Council of Social Service/Melbourne Family Care Organisation, 1984).

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