

Australian Social Defence Conference

On 24-26 May 1991, a conference on social defence was held at Ballina, a town on the north coast of New South Wales, Australia. There were twenty to thirty participants.

Social defence is nonviolent community resistance to aggression as an alternative to military defence. It relies on techniques such as strikes, boycotts and non-cooperation.

Social defence has been promoted in Australia for only a decade. Before the 1980's it was virtually unknown. The group Canberra Peacemakers spread the idea, especially through the broadsheet titled - unsurprisingly - 'social defence'.

The first national conference on social defence was held in Wollongong in February 1990.

The Ballina conference was the initiative of Robyn Whyte. She was attracted by the concept and wanted to increase the level of discussion and action in Lismore. Most of the participants were from nearby Lismore and Brisbane. Some came from Canberra and Wollongong.

There were three formal speakers at the conference. Rosie Wells of Schweik Action Wollongong (SAW) told about the activities of SAW. The group has had three to five members over the past several years. The main current project involves interviewing telecommunications workers to find out how the technology could be used to oppose an invasion or coup, and also to raise the idea of social defence with those interviewed. She also described the importance of pleasant social interactions in maintaining the group.

Brian Martin, also from SAW, gave a general outline of the rationale for social defence. In addition, he argued that, rather than just waiting for aggressors to

arrive and then using nonviolence against them, more effort should be devoted towards 'social offence'. This means using various methods to support groups in other countries that are nonviolently resisting oppression or aggression.

Peter Jones, from Canberra, described some of the issues that need to be addressed to bring social defence into parliamentary debate. Currently, the Department of Defence sets the terms of the debate in terms of how much military spending rather than why. This is totally unrealistic, given that the Department itself sees no significant military threats to Australia within the foreseeable future.

He argued that there should be more attention toward redefining security, promoting measures to build confidence between countries and strengthening the Department of Foreign Affairs relative to the Department of Defence.

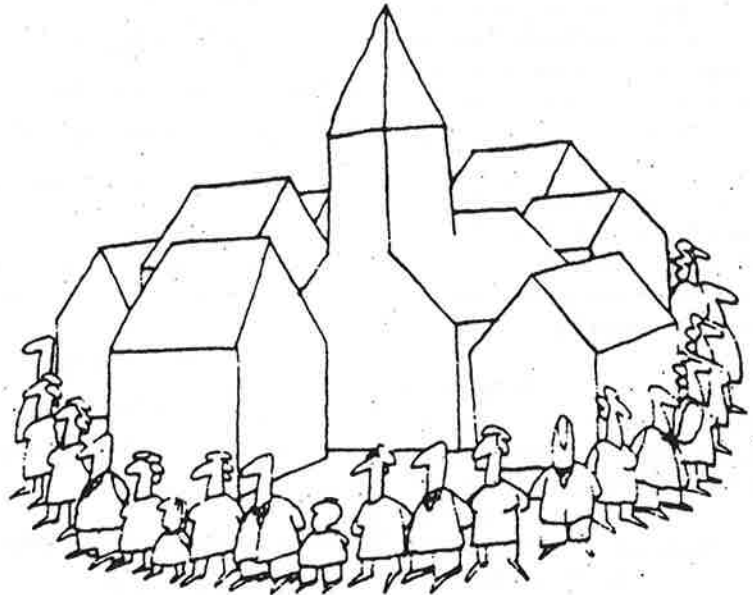
There were several sets of workshops, with the conference divided into groups of three to ten people. In the first session

of workshops, participants were asked to ponder how they could link social defence with groups in which they were already involved. In the second session of workshops, there were several topic groups, including community mobilisation, media and dissolving patriarchy.

The third session of workshops discussed action on social offence. A very positive result was preliminary plans to establish new groups in Lismore and Brisbane.

In the final session of workshops, one group participated in a role play. The other group - organized by popular demand - was on the topic of alternative forms of government. The discussion showed widespread disillusionment with representative democracy and a willingness to examine a diverse range of alternatives.

The conference was a very relaxed and pleasant affair. Although officially it was nearly winter, the weather was balmy. The conference centre, on the banks of a river near the ocean, was congenial. The



vegetarian food seemed to please everyone.

The entertainers planned for Saturday night were not available, so a variety show was quickly arranged using the talents of the people at the conference. Several poets read their work, and others offered songs, skits (on social defence), stories and jokes. It was truly participatory entertainment.

Awareness of social defence in Australia has increased quite a lot in the past decade, although obviously there is a long way to go. The successful Ballina conference was a very helpful part of the process.

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NVT

Community

*Chairs in a circle
Tables in a square
Scattering of objects
Around community hall
Coke machine and lectern
Deep freeze and telephone
Stands a lonely pool-
Table hard against the wall.*

*Papers for the reading
Assortment various
Piano for the needing, music
Stereo as well.
New books for the buying
Boiling water tap
Noticeboard for curious
Many things to tell.*



*And here we are together
Quaint circle of friends
Cast from many backgrounds
Here on centre stage
Listening and learning
Experienced or not
Sharing personal utopia
New skills for a new age*

In nonviolent action...

Wendy Falkner



No Shared Dreaming

*No Shared Dreaming, this one
White man's remembering,
White man's year!
Invader uneasy,
Invader never rest - Lest,
Another invader
Enter the nest.
No shared dreaming, this one.*

Wendy Falkner

Written on the spot by our own "people's poet", in reaction to the social defence conference and its topics.

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