

HOLIDAY IN NARRUNGAR

A cool Thursday night in Melbourne. Hundreds of people are milling around the steps of Parliament House. A lone cop car watches from the top landing. Images of revolution?

Suddenly some buses appear and the crowd surges forward. A few organisers try and organise things while everybody tries to find seats next to their friends. When everyone is on board the buses move off, and we leave Melbourne to writhe through it's Thursday night without us.

Soon we're over the Westgate bridge and the city lights are disappearing into the blackness. The bus ride was long (eighteen hours) and boring. I don't know why organisers think that we should watch political documentaries with subtitles while on the way to a big demo. Most people I know would have preferred some mindless American entertainment to more politics.

The bus ride can be summed up in the drivers final words; "I hope you achieve what you came here for kids and watch out for snakes, especially one eyed trouser snakes you ladies"(I thought that such imbeciles died out with the dinosaurs but no, they are alive and well and breeding at Chris's bus company).

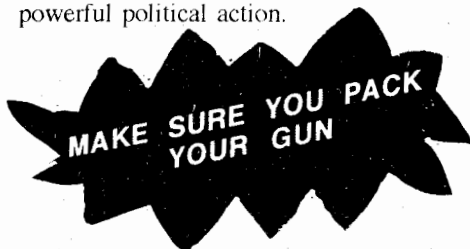
It was with some relief that we arrived at Narrungar. We were driven down to the front gate where some dusty protesters gave us a rousing cheer on command. We then drove back to the camp and gorged ourselves on delicious food provided cheaply by RAAF (Renegade Action Activist Force). It was then time to set our tents up, a hot and dusty job amongst the rocks which constituted most of Nurrungar's landscape. After getting up people either relaxed or ran around tracking down friends from previous demo's.

That night we had the first of many evening meetings to organise and communicate actions planned for the next day. Barry, a representative of the Kokatha people, spoke at this meeting. The Kokatha people are the traditional owners of Nurrungar, and since the 1950's have been unable to gain access to their land. Their land also encompasses Maralinga, where the British tested nuclear weapons, irradiating their own soldiers, hundreds of Australian soldiers, many of the Kokatha people, and thousands of square kilometers of Aboriginal land in the process.

The Kokatha people are still awaiting compensation from the British and Australian governments, neither of whom

Barry was handing out passports to their land. We were supposed to get them stamped which meant that we would abide by the conditions of entry. It appeared though that the conditions of entry were written by some white politically correct type, because Barry set about refuting some of the conditions. He didn't like the line; 'respect all Aboriginal people' (after all I would find it hard to respect an Aboriginal policeman who was bashing me) nor did he like the line; 'respect all property'. He just said, "Do what you have to do."

After Barry revised the conditions for us we all went back to our camps. During the meeting a handful of individuals had spent hours putting a rock barricade across the road. This pissed the police right off, so much so that they set up a barricade to keep our busses out (the barricade was a major bone of contention with the cops all weekend). The people who made the barricade then took off to get some supplies. While they were gone a bunch of self righteous NVA's (Non Violent Action) removed the barricade without consulting anyone, thus undermining a powerful political action.



This infuriated those who made the barricade and some of them stormed up to the main camp where they confronted the organisers (who had nothing to do with the removal of the barricade.) A potentially violent confrontation was diffused and a long meeting ensured where the right for affinity groups to do their own autonomous actions without interference from others was again spelled out. It seems the righteous NVA types can't stand not being allowed to interfere with other people's actions.

On the whole I found Narrungar great in this respect. The NVA versus the non-NVA brawl that usually erupts at large demo's, especially at Aidex, didn't really occur. CAM (Campaign Against Militarisation) organised things in such a way that there was organisation plus autonomy; if you didn't agree with an action you didn't go to it but you didn't undermine it.

The whole issue of Nurrungar was brought to a head by the fact that America had shot down some Iraqi planes and

is a joint US/Australian satellite tracking station which was used extensively in the Gulf war. The American government tells the Australian government very little of what goes on in there, and the Australian government, in its arse licking role in world politics, asks no questions and shells out money and people in an attempt to be liked by the American government.

Most people marched down to the gates, led by a contingent of women, followed by members of the CFMEU (Construction Forestry and Mining Employees Union.) Once at the gate some speakers spoke, the gates were torn down and everybody charged in, led by the CFMEU.

The cops on horses and on motor bikes, in helicopters and four wheel drives and on foot set about herding everybody up. They were hopelessly outnumbered and people could be seen running towards the base with no cops chasing them. Some people got to within five hundred yards of the base before being nabbed. Apparently the closer you got the more of a hard time the cops gave you.

There were over two hundred arrests in this action. Again a lot of people were just sent back by the cops. After about an hour they started moving the arrested people out. There was some debate about blocking the buses but it was decided that it would be hot and uncomfortable in the non-air conditioned vehicles so we let the buses out. It took hours for everybody to be processed.

One thing I found stupid was everyone outside the police station looking for their arrested friends and then yelling out their real names for all to hear. People often use false names whenever possible and to have some 'friend' yell out your real name and expose you shows a distinct lack of intelligence.

After everybody was released some of us went to the pub where we met the locals and had some interesting raves. They raised an interesting point. That is, if the base closes what happens to their jobs? They will be unemployed. I think this is worth thinking about. If we could answer this question I feel we would get a lot more support from the local community who appeared to be on side ethically but not politically. That night more bands played and all relaxed.

The next day there was a plan to storm the Woomera rocket range. While this was being thrashed out, a tractor shovel appeared, heading straight for the barricade. The meeting dissolved as most people ran to the barricade. The cops

removed the first one but the second one was surrounded by people. After a confrontation and some arrests a stand off ensued and the cops eventually went away - our first victory.

By lunch time people were getting on the buses for the ride to Woomera. About a hundred and fifty people turned up and leapt over the gates running into the restricted area. Within minutes the cops appeared but not before most people had found hiding places. Some had managed to climb a huge tower and dropped a banner across it. The cops then set about rounding people up. Most people they just picked up and escorted to the other side of the gates, thus undermining the mass arrest strategy which many of the actions over the weekend were based on. Once they'd cleared most people away they brought the dogs in and those remaining were savaged by dogs and bashed by cops (there's something ludicrous about a cop bashing you while saying that he agrees with you and asks you why you don't come peacefully).

After being arrested we spent an hour locked in a fully enclosed truck with the air conditioning turned off in the hot desert sun. Finally we were taken into the station, asked to accept bail conditions (which were that we wouldn't trespass again) and if you accepted you were released. Most people broke them again anyway. There were about eighty arrests at the Woomera action.

That night some bands played, including Melbourne band Mutiny and the camp wound down after a long day.

The next morning another meeting occurred to discuss the day's action, which was to be a mass storming of Narrungar. These meetings were good but I found a lot of time was taken up with self congratulations and back slapping/hugging etc which I soon got tired of. I didn't come all this way to enter in a new age feel good session.

Monday was the last day and again we marched down to the gates. Some children went through the gates with balloons to give to the cops as a symbol of peace. The cops of course stood by stoney faced and refused to take the balloons, although

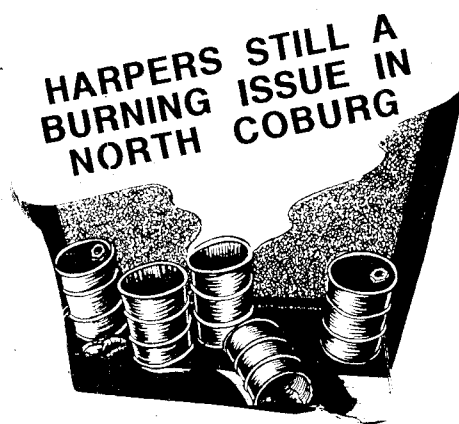
I did see a few trembling hands as the cops restrained themselves from bashing the children. Next was the nude action where a lot of people painted a letter on their bodies. Together they said, 'You don't have to wear the bases'. I wondered if the cops found the naked bodies threatening. They certainly looked disgusted. The media had a field day though. This was followed by more speakers and a ton of self congratulation (I think this is for the once a year activists, so much self congratulation will sustain their glow of goodness and political correctness all year.) Then we all went back to the camp and packed up.

I found Narrungar to be good on the whole. Although we didn't close the base down (we didn't expect to) the protest did work well. There are many reasons for this. One in the work CAM and PeAcE (Peace Action Committee) put into the whole thing. They ran a sustained campaign and made everybody's stay comfortable, considering where we were. They provided toilets, lawyers, doctors etc and weren't dogmatic in their approach to the protest and peoples actions.

The Marxist conference on in Melbourne, meant that the ISO (International Socialist Organisation) were there vomiting out their antiquated philosophies and not ramming papers down our throats while trying to take credit for the whole protest. I think this alone ensured that the protest would be a success. The fact that confest was on helped too. This meant that the hard line NVA types were undergoing their fourth re-birthing session instead of telling us the word 'fuck' is violent and trying to incite us to sleep with cops as a way of closing the base.

Overall it was great that around a thousand people travelled to a spot five hours north of Adelaide and managed to co-exist and work in relative harmony despite our Political/philosophical differences. I might add that CAM is \$4000 in debt from the protest and any donations would be greatly accepted send them to

CAM
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In previous *Burning Issues* there has been news on the ongoing fight to get the toxic waste treatment plant, run by Harpers Waste in Newlands Rd., North Coburg, either relocated or closed down.

During 1992, local people were opposing the extension of the plant, which involved Harpers being allowed to burn off toxic waste from inside drums. We celebrated our successful agitation when the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) refused to issue permits to Harpers for these plans.

Then, in December, we were shocked when the EPA gave Harpers permission to build another incinerator to burn waste wood. Burning wood sounds innocuous enough, but the wood is likely to contain lead-based paints and arsenic. Harpers licence prohibits the burning of these substances, but as they have a long history of polluting the area with smells ranging from ammonia to phenol, locals have no expectation that Harpers will be restricted in their licence.

To put a brake on Harpers plans, we have appealed against the issue of a permit for the wood waste incinerator to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. We may be successful, but if we aren't the next stage is to oppose the granting of planning permission by Coburg Council. We have been getting support from the Environmental Defenders Office, a group of volunteer lawyers and law students.

Meanwhile, research has been going on into Harpers smelly and toxic history. Workers at a nearby foundry, Davis and Baird, many of whom suffer from asthma and other breathing complaints, walked off the job nauseated and retching after poisons from Harpers reached their workplace in 1985. No-one knows the effects of the incineration of toxic chemicals which can combine in the burning process to form other substances. Many asthma sufferers link the smells from Harpers directly to the onset of an attack.

So watch this space for the next instalment of news from our fight to get just one polluter to keep their toxic residues out of our lungs. If you want more info or can help, especially from a science angle, contact

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