

“People Treated Me with Equality”: Indigenous Australians Visiting the Soviet Bloc during the Cold War

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This paper discusses the entwining of Australian communists, trade unions and indigenous activists: a much-studied topic. However, I approach it from a “transnational” perspective, unearthing intersections between global ideas and local activism through a case study of how the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) and trade union bodies under its control or influence sent particular indigenous activists abroad during the 1950s and 1960s. It looks at why the CPA would invest the time and money in these trips, and what indigenous Australians thought they could get out of them. In so doing, it explores the possibilities and limits of this form of globally-centred solidarity, and adds a new dimension to our understanding of international communist and trade union politics.

The “transnational” turn in historiography has revealed new connections between and across borders. For example, there is a growing literature on positive responses to the Socialist world by peoples of what can be called “internal colonies” of first world nations. African American activists read about, travelled to and engaged with the Soviet Union, representing the nation as “a superior society where racism was absent.”¹ Soviet officialdom, in return, learnt of racial segregation and violence in America’s south, information they used to label the USA “the most racist country in the world.”² In this way, a mutually beneficial relationship was created. African Americans could report on the wonders of a country where race was not an impediment, enhancing their calls for equality in the USA, while the Soviet Union procured much needed Cold War propaganda. This article discusses another transnational relationship which in a way mirrors that of African Americans discussed above: one between Indigenous Australians and the USSR and its satellite states formed when the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) and trade unions under communist leadership sent several indigenous activists to the Soviet Union and the “Peoples Democracies” of Eastern Europe during the 1950s and 1960s.

While the Soviet Union found the plight of Aboriginal Australians of much less overt propaganda value than that of African Americans, given Australia’s bit role in the Cold War, these trips still prompt important questions of how global Cold War politics effected local causes and struggles. This paper is underpinned by an understanding that, as Ravi de Costa puts it, “[t]he Australian nation-state ... is a

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1. Meredith L. Roman, *Opposing Jim Crow: African Americans and the Soviet Indictment of US Racism, 1928–1937* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 1. Further work on this topic includes Barbara Keys, “An African American Worker in Stalin’s Soviet Union: Race and the Soviet Experiment in International Perspective,” *The Historian* 71, no. 1 (2009): 31–54; Natalie Rasmussen, “Friends of Freedom, Allies of Peace: African Americans, the Civil Rights Movement, and East Germany, 1949–1989” (PhD thesis, Boston College, 2014); Joy Gleeson Carew, *Blacks, Reds and Russians: Sojourners in Search of the Soviet Promise* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008).
2. Roman, *Opposing Jim Crow*, 1.

space criss-crossed by ideas, values and norms that have arisen elsewhere and which influence Indigenous activism."³ If Australia exists as a transnational space connected with global ideas and struggles, de Costa argues, historians of the global must understand "the motivations of those making the connections."⁴ This paper seeks to understand what motivated the CPA to invest the time and money in such ventures and what indigenous Australians hoped to achieve by participating. Equally, broader questions of how the global Cold War effected local social movements and the fraught relationship between indigenous and communist activists are posed. After first considering the involvement of the CPA and sympathetic trade unions in Indigenous politics throughout the twentieth century, three particularly evocative case studies of the rare examples of indigenous Australians abroad are featured.

Told through the use of archival material, newspapers and memoirs, these narratives are used to analyse the shifting perceptions held by indigenous activists of both the CPA and the USSR as practical allies, and to reveal something of the limitations of Communist internationalism. In so doing, the possibilities and pitfalls these trips provided to all sides involved are explored, and a new dimension is added to our understanding of how the global Cold War impacted in Australia. It is also worth noting at the outset that much of this research relies on files of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO). Clearly these are morally dubious documents – collected without the individuals' consent – and as we will see include some pretty judgemental character assessments. Their reliability as historical records are far from assured. Yet these files provide insight into the lives of Indigenous activists not elsewhere recorded in movement archives.

Unions, Communists and Indigenous Australians: Historical Encounters

From its earliest days, the CPA publicised the plight of Aboriginal Australians, as part of an internationalist commitment to workers of all nationalities.⁵ In February 1925, the CPA's *Workers' Weekly* protested that "not one Labor leader or Minister [has] lifted a finger or raised his voice to protest against the damnable sweating and mean exploitation of the helpless [A]boriginal."⁶ It was not until 1931, however, that the CPA adopted a formalised policy on Aboriginal rights. Drew Cottle explains that this was largely based on – and in some places surpassed – a similar policy on African American conditions adopted by the Communist Party of the United States of America. Aboriginal Australians were called "the slaves of slaves" and "the most exploited subject peoples in the world" in the 1931 CPA document *Fight for Aborigines: Draft Programme of Struggle Against Slavery*, which called for the abolition of protection boards, the end of forced removal of children, and equal wages.⁷

3. Ravi de Costa, *A Higher Authority: Indigenous Transnationalism and Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2006), 3.

4. *Ibid.*, 3.

5. Stuart Macintyre, *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia from Origins to Illegality* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1998), chap 1.

6. F. L. H., "6d. a Week for Aboriginal Girls," *Workers' Weekly*, 10 February 1925, 2. See also, C. Arfeldt, "Unjust Attacks upon the Aborigines," *Workers' Weekly*, 7 November 1924, 3 and "Slaughter of Aborigines," *Workers' Weekly*, 6 September 1929, 2.

7. Drew Cottle, "The Colour-Line and the Third Period: A Comparative Analysis of American and Australian Communism and the Question of Race, 1928–1934," *American Communist History* 10, no. 2 (2011): 129.

As Douglas Jordan explains, Communists played key roles in the 1946 Pilbara strike and the 1966 Wave Hill or Gurindji walk off, and published significant works on Aboriginal rights.⁸ Frank Hardy's *The Unlucky Australians* (1968) helped to popularise the Gurindji struggle, while Gerald Peel's *Isles of the Torres Strait* (1947) brought the plight of Torres Strait islanders to mainstream attention.⁹ Equally, the CPA used its trade union and media apparatus to highlight crimes against Aboriginal people. Communist and Sheet Metal union official Tom Wright "steer[ed] successfully through the NSW Labour Council in October 1937" a modified version of the CPA's program on Aboriginal rights, alongside many other contributions to Indigenous rights struggles.¹⁰ Communists were instrumental, alongside allies in the churches, academia and elsewhere, in establishing the Council for Aboriginal Rights and the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, CPA member Shirley Andrews was the driving force behind the Victorian-based Council for Aboriginal Rights from 1951 to 1968, and the Party was amongst the first organisations to prioritise Aboriginal leadership.¹¹ The 1954 policy document *A New Stage in the Development of Aboriginal People* in particular saw the CPA take a turn towards greater involvement in Aboriginal issues, as Bob Boughton argues, including having many unions under the CPA's influence adopt policies and make practical efforts towards this.¹²

For their part, Aboriginal Australians had sought white allies throughout the twentieth century, and even before, particularly if they had access to resources and international connections. De Costa writes that activists were seeking "a higher authority" on whom to make claims for rights, and made alliances with the women's movement, church groups and the CPA to this end.¹³ Some Aboriginal activists including Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal), joined the CPA in the 1940s, due to its opposition to the White Australia Policy. Many more became involved owing to their involvement with trade unions. Joe McGinness was a long-time member of the communist Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) in Cairns, while Charles Leon became a member of the CPA in the 1950s after becoming involved in the Builders Labourers' Federation (BLF). What set the CPA apart from other white groups, Leon claimed, was that while mainstream political parties wanted to "do things for us," the CPA "was not for charity but for our dignity."¹⁴ So, while the CPA's policy on race remained compromised by the uncritical propagation of divisions between "half" and "full" blood Aborigines throughout the 1950s, it still seems to have been a natural home for many Indigenous Australians.

8. Douglas Jordan, "Conflict in the Unions: The Communist Party of Australia, Politics and the Trade Union Movement, 1945–1960" (PhD thesis, School of Social Sciences and Psychology, Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development, Victoria University, 2011).
9. Frank Hardy, *The Unlucky Australians* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1968); Gerald Peel, *Isles of the Torres Strait: An Australian Responsibility* (Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1947).
10. Jordan, "Conflict in the Unions," chap. 7.
11. For particular focus on Aboriginal leadership, see Sue Taffe, *Black and White Together: FCAATSI: The Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, 1958–1973* (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 2005); and Sue Taffe, "The Cairns Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander Advancement League and the Community of the Left," *Labour History*, no. 97 (November 2009): 149–67. On Shirley Andrews, see Sue Taffe, "Shirley Andrews: An Architect of the National Aboriginal Civil Rights Movement, 1952–1968," *History Australia* 8, no. 2 (2011): 153–76.
12. Bob Boughton, "The Communist Party of Australia's Involvement in the Struggle for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Rights, 1920–1970," in *Labour and Community: Historical Essays*, ed. Raymond Markey (Wollongong, NSW: University of Wollongong Press, 2001), 263–94.
13. De Costa, *A Higher Authority*.
14. Jordan, "Conflict in the Unions," 280–81.

The CPA and indigenous activists worked together for similar goals domestically, but why was this cooperation extend to sponsoring international travel, and why did Aboriginal activists choose to go on them? The answer is that both saw these trips as contributing to their very different international media and propaganda efforts. Communists, as Paul Hollander writes on the idea of the “political pilgrim,” wanted travellers to return with glowing odes to the success of socialism, reporting that racism had all but disappeared in the USSR, and that communism was what Australia needed to end racism. “Ideas are weapons [and] the favourable impressions and the hoped-for publicized accounts” of pilgrims were “political assets to be nurtured carefully,” Hollander argues.¹⁵ Thus, the CPA placed great stock in ensuring that travellers toured and wrote widely of their experiences, countering perceived propaganda from the bourgeois press, while also imagining that pilgrimages to Moscow or other socialist metropolises would strengthen the commitment of activists.

On the other hand, Indigenous Australians wanted the chance to voice their people’s concern on an international platform. Activists were very conscious of the fact that Australia’s positions on both immigration and indigenous issues – from voting to freedom of movement and a diversity of other factors – were viewed negatively in newly developed international fora, with the United Nations (UN) providing post-colonial nations and the socialist bloc a forum to critique racialism in Western countries. Apartheid was becoming a key point of contention at the UN and within the British Commonwealth, and Indigenous activists attempted to have Australia’s indigenous policies read in a similar light.¹⁶ The 1961 Brisbane conference of the Federal Council for Advancement of Aborigines (which added “and Torres Strait Islanders” in 1963) passed a resolution condemning the White Australia Policy as a form of apartheid in Australia, and distributed this declaration to all Commonwealth nations.¹⁷ ASIO was particularly concerned that overseas trips by Australian Aborigines were part of the Soviet Union’s propaganda war against Australia. “For some time the Communist world organizations have endeavoured to classify Australia among the imperialist countries by reproaching it with colonialism and racial discrimination,” the security organisation warned. Soviet “attempts to establish contacts with the aborigines ... made via the Australian Communist Party” were to be viewed with deep suspicion.¹⁸ While it is unlikely that Aboriginal Australians ever fulfilled ASIO’s prophecy of becoming Soviet agents, scholars have demonstrated the importance of these sorts of international connections and outlets in the eventual removal of racist policies, and the connecting of Aboriginal people with activists in similarly subjugated predicaments around the world.¹⁹

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15. Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba 1928–1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 348.
 16. For more on Australia’s fears and Aboriginal responses, see Jennifer Clark, *Aborigines and Activism: Race and the Coming of the Sixties to Australia* (Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Publishing, 2008), chaps 2–3.
 17. *Ibid.*, 46–48.
 18. Undated, untitled (censored) report, A6119 4229, National Archives of Australia (NAA).
 19. This is made ably clear by both Clark, *Aborigines and Activism* and de Costa, *A Higher Authority*. On how Aboriginal people forged connections with other colonial peoples, in particular around the Pacific, see Tracey Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), particularly chap. 6.

1951: The Berlin World Youth Festival

Australia entered the 1950s at a crossroads. The end of World War II was seen by many as a chance for a new beginning, one that would avoid future war and the sort of economic crisis that plagued the 1930s, and Australia played a key role in establishing the United Nations as a key avenue for international action.²⁰ The beginnings of the Cold War in 1947, however, made such initiatives less feasible. International events, such as the blockade of Berlin and the Korean War, made former wartime ally the Soviet Union far less attractive, and membership of the CPA, which reached a peak during the war of some 23,000, dropped to less than 10,000 by the beginning of the 1950s.²¹ Equally, any hopes that the post-war settlement would lead to improvements for Aboriginal Australians, many of whom had experienced a measure of equality in the armed forces, were dashed. While the new rhetoric of human rights was employed by the Communist Party and Indigenous activists to argue for their cause, with the communist-influenced Council for Aboriginal Rights appealing to the Universal Declaration in its 1951 founding constitution, it seemed to have little effect.²² It was during this downturn in social movements that over 100 young Australians travelled – illegally under strict passport rules imposed in 1950 banning Australians from travel to Communist nations – to the third World Festival of Youth and Students (WFYS) held in 1951 in war-damaged East Berlin.²³

These festivals, as has been discussed elsewhere, were international forums central to the Soviet Union's international agenda. They were regularly attended by many thousands of delegates from over 100 countries, taking place in either communist or neutral territory with the primary aim of winning foreign youth, particularly those from the third world, over to the Soviet camp.²⁴ The 1951 festival attracted some 26,000 participants and its drawcards were more than just politics with delegates competing in an array of sporting, musical or dramatic competitions. The Festival was designed to display the benefits of the Soviet model of rebuilding Europe, countering the American Marshall Plan, and aiming to display the Soviet experiment as a superior form of nation building.²⁵

Amongst the many Australians in attendance was Ray Peckham, a 22-year-old Indigenous Wiradjuri man from Dubbo and member of the communist-aligned Builders Labourers' Federation. Attending the 1951 festivities as a member of the short-lived New South Wales branch of the Council for Aboriginal Rights, Peckham travelled along with Faith Bandler, an emerging Indigenous rights activist of South Sea Islander descent. Peckham and Bandler travelled as a member of Margaret Walker's Unity Dance Troupe to perform in politically charged plays. Bandler appeared in "The Little Aboriginal Girl," a reimagining of a poem by

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20. On reconstruction, see Stuart Macintyre, *Australia's Boldest Experiment: War and Reconstruction in the 1940s* (Sydney: NewSouth Press, 2015).
 21. On the CPA's immediate post-war decline, see Phillip Deery, "Chifley, the Army and the 1949 Coal Strike," *Labour History*, no. 68 (May 1995): 80–97.
 22. Council for Aboriginal Rights: Constitution, Council for Aboriginal Rights Records, Box 5, Folder 6, State Library of Victoria.
 23. On the passport ban, see Jane Doulman and David Lee, *Every Assistance & Protection: A History of the Australian Passport* (Annandale, NSW: Federation Press, 2008), chap. 5.
 24. Jon Piccini, "'There Is No Solidarity, Peace or Friendship with Dictatorship': Australians at the World Festival of Youth and Students, 1957–1968," *History Australia* 9, no. 3 (December 2012): 178–98.
 25. For more on the 1951 festival, see Phillip Deery, "ASIO and the 1951 Berlin Youth Carnival," *Overland* 168 (Spring 2002), 84–87.

Langston Hughes, a key figure in the Harlem Renaissance. This poem on African-American life was superimposed on to Aboriginal life in Australia, which shows just how much, as Marilyn Lake puts it, “The Australian Left [was] influenced by the approach to racism of its American counterpart.”²⁶ The second performance depicted the arrival of white invaders to Australia, in which Peckham played the role of the subjugated native.

ASIO was concerned that this trip was more than just an act of cultural internationalism. An early entry in Peckham’s file remarks that his trip was funded by the “World Federation of Democratic Youth ‘Solidarity Fund,’” unlike other travellers, who were funded by the CPA itself. ASIO’s agent reported that the purpose of this fund, directed from Moscow, was “supplying colonials and other useful Party material with the necessary funds” to attend global events.²⁷ As such, the young man’s trip became a part of the global Cold War battle. Peckham’s trip was almost scuttled, with his permission to travel only granted at the last minute. Peckham was subject to the NSW Aborigines Protection Act, which deprived those under its ordinances of basic rights, such as freedom of movement. Marilyn Lake, in her biography of Faith Bandler, writes that Peckham’s permission – and subsequent passport – were only granted after communist Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) union official Jim Healy threatened a strike.²⁸

Walker’s Unity Dance Troupe had close links with left-wing trade unions, in particular with Healy’s WWF. Bandler later described how the second performance was made possible by dancers who were members of both the WWF and the Building Workers Industrial Union (BWIU) – of which CPA Sydney District Committee member Pat Clancy was Assistant Secretary – “great big miners and wharfies.”²⁹ Many of these performances were first tested on union members during stop-work meetings and lunch breaks, and waterside workers “wept for shame” upon witnessing them.³⁰ Apparently, the performances had an equal impact on Berlin audiences, with “The Little Aboriginal Girl!” winning the festival prize for best performance.

What the travellers made of the festival was widely reported in the CPA’s national newspaper, *Tribune*, upon their return. Peckham reported being “very impressed with the peaceful atmosphere over there,” noting how “[p]eople treated me with equality and no race discrimination of any sort. I was an equal in all walks of life. That was so both in Berlin and in the Soviet Union, which I toured afterwards. I have never felt so much at ease in all my life.”³¹ This style of reportage both mirrored that of returned African American pilgrims, and was exactly what the CPA wanted from a returnee, presenting the benefits of Soviet life to counter the widespread newspaper reports of oppression and violence that had contributed to its membership falling so precariously.³² Race was, of course, a significant part of Peckham’s reportage. He described how “Faith and I have been very popular, and also the other dark-

26. Marilyn Lake, *Faith: Faith Bandler, Gentle Activist* (Crowds Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 38.

27. Berlin Youth Festival, August 1951, 14 May 1952, A6119 2948, NAA.

28. Lake, *Faith*, 40–41.

29. *Ibid.*, 39. On Clancy, see Suzanne Jamieson, “Clancy, Patrick Martin (Pat) (1919–1987),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, accessed September 2016, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/clancy-patrick-martin-pat-12320/text22131>.

30. *Ibid.*, 39.

31. Excerpt from *Tribune*, 23 January 1952, reproduced in A6119 2948, NAA.

32. On African-American reports on their travels see, see Roman, *Opposing Jim Crow*, chap. 2.

skinned brothers from other countries. The youth just love to link arms around us and shower us with autograph books for us to sign."³³ While his experiences may have been ephemeral, and the Festival was heavily stage managed to engineer positive encounters, they had a powerful effect on Peckham, who became involved in Communist politics for decades to come. Equally, their play's critical success in Berlin and Peckham's claims to have been treated better in supposedly totalitarian Russia than democratic Australia, would have made for potentially powerful propaganda impact.

Faith Bandler's recollections – recorded much later – were less positive. She recalled, in particular, being disappointed by the persistence of class in both East Berlin and Bulgaria, where she travelled after the festival. Military and Party officials got pride of place on the trains Bandler travelled on, while "out in the corridors – packed, packed, packed the corridors – were the poor people."³⁴ Upon Bandler's return to Australia via Fremantle her passport was confiscated, while in Sydney police confiscated books, festival paraphernalia and even records by famous African-American singer Paul Robeson.³⁵ Upon return, Peckham became a person of interest to ASIO, earning at least three volumes of surveillance from the 1950s into the 1970s. One report from Peckham's file recorded

He probably had no previous contact with the Communists before leaving Australia, but is now prepared to co-operate with them. He had a very good time, both in the Soviet Union and in Berlin, but is probably not a Party member, he being more use to the Party outside it.³⁶

Peckham joined the CPA upon his return from Europe, going on to play a leading role in Party work amongst Indigenous Australians, becoming Vice President of the New South Wales-based campaigning organisation the Aboriginal Australian Fellowship, in which he played a leading role throughout the 1950s and 1960s.³⁷ He travelled again to the USSR in 1964 to attend political training at the Moscow Institute of Social Sciences, which ASIO lauded as "the highest form of political education that a communist can receive," as well as the World Solidarity Forum in Prague.³⁸ He also went on to play roles as an organiser in the NSW BLF and the BWIU, and co-published the *Aboriginal Worker* newspaper, which Jordan described as "almost certainly one of the first newspapers to be aimed directly at Aboriginal workers."³⁹ ASIO occasionally recorded gossip of so-called "difficulties" Peckham had with the leadership of the CPA over its attempts to "control" him. He appears however to have remained involved in CPA activities, including the Eureka Youth League and the Australian-Soviet Friendship Society, throughout the 1960s.⁴⁰ Peckham's experience of the Soviet Union, then, convinced him of the utility of working alongside the CPA in fighting for his people's rights, while the Party was able to use his story of

33. *Tribune*, 10 October 1951. Quoted in Lake, *Faith*, 44.

34. Lake, *Faith*, 45.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Berlin Youth Festival, August 1951.

37. See Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770–1972* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1996), Part V and VI.

38. Raymond Edward Peckham, 17 December 1965, A6119 2949, NAA.

39. Jordan, "Conflict in the Unions," 282.

40. On so called "difficulties" see Raymond Edward Peckham, 17 December 1965.

positive treatment behind what had been recently dubbed the “Iron Curtain” to try and allay its woes in the Australian context.

1961: The Trade Union Delegation

Ten years later, another young indigenous worker travelled to the Eastern Bloc in a similarly turbulent climate. Internationally, the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 created what was to become one of the longest-lasting concrete expressions of the Cold War, while domestically the CPA had continued to contract in membership over the past decade, having lost many after the “Secret Speech” and Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 as well as the general state of Cold War fear.⁴¹ The pace of change for Aboriginal people was slow, with practical reforms slim and the symbolic campaign to change two discriminatory clauses in the Australian constitution only in its early days. Vincent “Monty” Maloney was one of the lesser-known Indigenous activists of this time, a part-time coach of the Redfern All Blacks Rugby League club from 1961 until 1962 and Builders Labourer. Born on the Yarrabah Aboriginal mission near Cairns in 1934, Maloney had a very difficult childhood, raising himself from a young age and being hospitalised for two years due to a bone disease, during which time he taught himself to read using cartoon books. Maloney moved to Sydney in the late 1950s.⁴² The All Blacks Rugby League Club was a “means to challenge the depressed socio-economic conditions of Redfern through sport [and] articulate a distinctive Indigenous identity that defined the dominant discourse of assimilation.”⁴³ Members of the Club also made more concrete political connections, working with various left-wing Aboriginal rights groups such as FCAATSI, which was leading a petition drive to hold a referendum on issues of constitutional discrimination, and sparking ASIO’s interest as a potential front for communism.

Despite his involvement in this organisation and having been involved in the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement as the NSW branch Secretary for some years, it was his “elect[ion] as rank and file worker to represent NSW building trades unions on a delegation to the German Democratic Republic” in 1961 that saw ASIO open a file on him.⁴⁴ Maloney’s trip to East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary in September and October of 1961 was as part of a “delegation to study working and living conditions.”⁴⁵ Much of Maloney’s subsequent reportage had a familiar ring to it. According to an ASIO agent who was present at a report-back Maloney gave to the Sydney District Conference of the CPA in 1962, he reportedly said that he “couldn’t express” how he felt to be “treated as an equal and accepted” during his visit to the People’s Republics.⁴⁶ However, if anything Maloney’s reportage was even more laudatory – potentially the beleaguered CPA need to talk up Eastern Europe’s successes. Indeed, Maloney’s recent trip to Europe made him a

41. See Phillip Deery and Rachael Calkin, “‘We All Make Mistakes’: The Communist Party of Australia and Khrushchev’s Secret Speech,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 54, no. 1 (2008): 69–84.

42. See entry 17, “Valentine Moloney,” in *Proud Race, Exhibition Catalogue: Celebrating NAIDOC Week 7–14 July 2013*, Victorian Government, accessed September 2016, <http://www.proudrace.org.au/resources/news-updates-events/proud-race-exhibition-catalogue-2013>.

43. Jackie Hartley, “Black, White ... and Red? The Redfern All Blacks Rugby League Club in the early 1960s,” *Labour History*, no. 83 (November 2002): 149.

44. *Tribune*, 16 August 1961, quoted in A6119 2834 NAA.

45. Maloney to Department of Immigration, 7 September 1961, A6119 2834 NAA.

46. Valentine Edmond Maloney k.a. Monty Maloney, 16 October 1962, A6119 2834 NAA.

popular candidate for talks, despite one ASIO informant describing him as a “very poor speaker.”⁴⁷ His name appeared alongside CPA luminaries Laurie Aarons and Mavis Robertson on a list of potential speakers at CPA educational meetings, where he was described as “an interesting new young speaker about Socialism and the Aboriginal people.”⁴⁸

Maloney spoke at the same gathering about how

It was not until he returned from East Germany that he realised that the only way to give the coloured people of this country equality was through the Communist Party. This also applied to the other coloured peoples in the world – their only chance of equality is through the Communist Parties of their countries.

He added “When I returned to Australia I joined the Communist Party. I don’t refer to myself as an Aborigine but as a Communist.”⁴⁹ Maloney’s enrapture with the USSR appears to have surpassed even Peckham’s, while his casual talk of embracing communism over his aboriginality speaks to the ongoing power of assimilationist rhetoric, which pervaded even the CPA. As Stuart Macintyre has put it, the CPA practiced “a cult of proletarian virtue ... the clear unity of interests of those who lived by the sale of their labour,” which was far more powerful than bonds of race.⁵⁰ Yet Maloney also used his platform to articulate issues specific to the Aboriginal cause, pronouncing his desire “that the Communist Party will share in correcting the injustices done to my people in the fight for the right of education and in our general petition for equal rights.” He used the platform of the 1962 District Conference to attack Australian policies on census collection, where sheep and cattle were counted, but Aborigines were not.⁵¹ Maloney was using his trip as a way of cultivating international networks as well as local allies.

Maloney’s trip to Europe shows what the CPA aimed to achieve from sending travellers abroad – getting reports from people who had “been there,” to contradict what the CPA considered the lies and distortions of the capitalist press. This was particularly important in 1961, as the building of the Berlin Wall was a key international news event that risked furthering party the party’s growing irrelevance. The Soviet Union was by this time well-practiced in ensuring visitors saw the positives of state socialism, travelling along a well-planned itinerary and meeting only those people whose loyalty was guaranteed.⁵² An interview with Maloney appeared in the CPA’s *Tribune* shortly after his return, reporting that “He had no doubt that the workers of the German Democratic Republic were satisfied with the progress of their country and didn’t want to leave it.” The wall had been built by “voluntary workers from different parts of the country,” Maloney insisted, and “all the GDR citizens he met approved of its building.”⁵³ Clearly, Maloney’s role – much like that of attendees at the 1957 World Festival of Youth and Students – was to

47. Sydney District Communist Party of Australia Conference, 1962, 12 November 1962, A6119 2834 NAA.

48. CP of A Cottage Meetings, 7 June 1962, A6119 2834 NAA.

49. Valentine Edmond Maloney k.a. Monty Maloney, 16 October 1962.

50. Stuart Macintyre quoted in de Costa, *A Higher Authority*, 50.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*.

53. *Tribune*, 8 November 1961.

re-establish faith in the powers of “real existing socialism.”⁵⁴ Maloney went on to be involved in workers’ rights struggles for many years, becoming known as “Brother Mont” by his fellow unionists and working on the *Aboriginal Worker* newspaper with Peckham.

1968: The Sofia World Youth Festival

The story of Dexter Daniels – who attended the World Festival of Youth and Students in Sofia, Bulgaria in 1968 – differs in a few ways from that of Peckham and Maloney. This difference speaks to the profound changes in both Communist and Indigenous politics during this period. The time that elapsed between Maloney’s trip and Daniels’ saw an unprecedented series of reforms – voting rights were granted in all states and federally to all Aborigines, the famous 1967 referendum abolished two discriminatory clauses in the constitution, and Aboriginal workers were theoretically granted equal wages.⁵⁵ The CPA was also undergoing its own reforms, more open to Australian traditions, democracy and rights, and finally broke with the Soviet Union.⁵⁶ Daniels was a significant figure in equal wage struggles and a well-known figure around Australia, having played a significant role in instigating the Gurindji or Wave Hill walk off over poor working conditions and what would eventually become land rights in the Northern Territory.⁵⁷ The primary difference was that, unlike previous travellers discussed, both Daniels and the CPA leadership felt particularly let down by his experience of overseas travel.

Born in the 1939 at the Roper River Mission in the Northern Territory, Dexter Daniels was elected organiser for the North Australian Workers Union in the mid-1960s. He played a significant role in organising for the instatement of equal pay clauses in pastoral awards, and was also a member of the Northern Territory Council for Aboriginal Rights (NTCAR), established by CPA and indigenous activists in 1961. It was the Gurindji walk off which brought him to national importance, however, with the BWIU amongst those who sponsored his Australia-wide speaking tour in 1966, where he addressed 60 meetings in five weeks.⁵⁸ Yet Daniels was not entirely happy with CPA influence over Indigenous struggles. He found that public perceptions of the NTCAR’s communist domination were making recruitment in Aboriginal communities difficult, and he tried to distance himself from the CPA in the press.⁵⁹ His election to the NT ALP executive in 1968 was a part of this process.⁶⁰ Daniels’ agreement to attend the 1968 World Festival of Youth and Students in Sofia, Bulgaria appears strange given his notable distaste for communism.

54. Piccini, “There Is No Solidarity,” 181–85.

55. On the 1967 Referendum and changes across the 1960s, see Bain Attwood and Andrew Marcus, *The 1967 Referendum: Race, Power and the Australian Constitution* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007).

56. On the CPA in the 1960s see Mark Aarons, *The Family File* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2010) and Jon Piccini, “‘More Than an Abstract Principle’: Reimagining Rights in the Communist Party of Australia, 1956–1971,” *Journal of Australian Studies* 39, no. 2 (2015): 200–15.

57. Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 186–94.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Julie Kimber, “‘That’s Not Right’: Indigenous Politics, Dexter Daniels and 1968,” in *Labour History and Its People: The 12th Biennial National Labour History Conference, Australian National University 15–17 September 2011*, ed. Melanie Nolan (Canberra: Australian Society for the Study of Labour History Canberra Region Branch, 2011), 153–64, accessed September 2016, <http://labourhistorycanberra.org/2015/02/2011-asslh-conference-thats-not-right-indigenous-politics-dexter-daniels-and-1968/>.

60. *Ibid.*

Daniels, however, framed his trip very differently from those of previous activists, putting much more emphasis on educating overseas audiences about Indigenous struggles in Australia rather than learning about the triumphs of a post-racial socialism. Travelling to Sofia, Daniels claimed, was not anything to do with communism or socialism. Instead he argued that “[b]y visiting Bulgaria I will be able to raise my people’s claims and let the injustices of my people be known.” One of the festival’s key topics, after all, was “ending racial discrimination,” the continuation of which in his own country was denying Indigenous people “the wonderful opportunities that Australia can offer.”⁶¹ However, ASIO noted that Daniels seemed to be suffering some malaise about his impending trip. One agent commented that “Dexter seems to be avoiding people. He might even try to avoid going to Bulgaria at the last moment. He appears to be suffering from a mental burden.”⁶² Julie Kimber writes of another ASIO report, which speculated that Dexter was upset at being forced to tour the Soviet Union after his trip to Bulgaria, as he hoped to return home as soon as possible.⁶³ Upon his eventual return, Dexter struck a different tune from Maloney in the *NT News* – “I wouldn’t say we should become a communist country – there are good communists and there are bad communists. But we should try to improve our system so that everyone has something.”⁶⁴ Dexter’s rhetoric of extending opportunity, rather than radical societal transformation, was a marked departure from previous CPA sponsored travellers to the Eastern Bloc.

This lack of enthusiasm might have been due to simmering racial tensions in the Soviet Bloc. Significant numbers of African scholars were attending universities in Sofia and other communist capitals under fraternal aid arrangements with left-wing post-colonial governments. In 1963, however, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that riots had broken out between black students and Bulgarian police over racism. The black students reported being called “black apes” by Bulgarian locals, and 350 consequently left. The *SMH* writer wrote that it would be interesting to see Daniels’ response to Sofia with this tension in mind, given that Soviet treatment of racial minorities was a major issue of Cold War propaganda at the time.⁶⁵ Equally, the 1968 festival was marked by disputes and conflicts, particularly between conservative festival organisers and the “New Left” – Czech students and West German radicals in particular. Conference sessions were disrupted, police action against unapproved protests was common. The “united front” presented at previous festivals was splitting open.⁶⁶

Whatever the reason for Daniels’ relative silence upon his return, it appears that at least some CPA leaders were displeased. Tom Supple, WWF member, National festival organiser and member of the Party’s conservative, Stalinist faction, wrote in November 1968:

61. “That Trip to Bulgaria?” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 July 1968.

62. Dexter Daniels, 9th World Youth Festival, 5 June 1968, A6119 2621 NAA.

63. Kimber, “That’s Not Right.”

64. “Back from Bulgaria, Aboriginal Leader Seeks Change But Not Communism,” *The NT News*, 10 September 1968.

65. “Aboriginal Off on a Trip to Sofia,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 June 1968. For more on conflicts between African students and citizens of Socialist nations, see Sean Guillory, “Culture Clash in the Socialist Paradise: Soviet Patronage and African Students’ Urbanity in the Soviet Union, 1960–1965,” *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 2 (2014): 271–81.

66. On these conflicts, see Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics and Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

I have been trying to get Dexter to make a statement for publication, but he is either hesitant or will not write ... This is pretty important as there was a rumour here that Dexter made a statement that the wharfies had never done much for him. This may not be factual but if these things are not countered they could have effects on future campaigns on the waterfront. If anything Dexter got too much from the boys.⁶⁷

Such unpleasantness clearly points to at least some CPA members feeling that the Party's pro-Aboriginal policies were costing too much for too little gain. Equally, it seems apparent that Dexter witnessed the exhaustion of the CPA's networks of political patronage and power for indigenous activists. The Soviet Union, once imagined as a modicum of post-racial virtue or a powerful international ally, was waning in significance on the international stage, as the CPA and its diminishing trade union power base was doing domestically.⁶⁸

While Indigenous activists had sought internationally-linked white allies to further their cause of real citizenship rights in the early to mid-twentieth century, a new cultural and political assertiveness marked the late 1960s and 1970s.⁶⁹ No longer wanting white groups to be campaigning "for" them, many Indigenous activists began to embrace the radical language and "wider horizons," as one activist put it, of Black Power and a new host of international connections to campaign on their own terms. In 1970, leading Indigenous activists would travel to the USA to attend a black power conference, adding to a growing positive reception for these ideas in Australia and signalling a refocusing of their global imagination.⁷⁰ Communists of various stripes would continue to work with the Indigenous activists, but never again would the USSR hold much hope. During the 1960s – and particularly after the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia – the USSR lost any of its remaining lustre to progressive activists. The CPA condemned the invasion, and severed ties with Moscow to establish a more independent existence, leading to the Party's second major post-war split in 1971. Maoism in China now appeared as a new force for global revolutionary change: African American activists travelled there during the early 1970s, as did two delegations of Indigenous Australians in 1972 and 1974.⁷¹ Maoism's radical language of third world nationalism and smashing colonialism appealed to the militant sensibilities of black power, and one returning indigenous activist excitedly proclaimed that they now had "800 million Chinese on our side."⁷² New transnational networks and ideas were replacing those of old.

67. National Festival Committee, 23 December 1968, A6119 5369 NAA.

68. For decline of CPA, see Aarons, *The Family File*; and Tom O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream: The Decline of Australian Communism* (North Carlton, Vic.: Vulgar Press, 2009). For decline of trade unions, see Tom Bramble, *Trade Unionism in Australia: A History from Flood to Ebb Tide* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

69. On this transition, see Russell McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion: Aboriginal People and the Australian Nation* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2011); de Costa, *A Higher Authority*, chaps 3–4; and Jon Piccini, *Transnational Protest, Australia and the 1960s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), chap. 6.

70. "Wider Horizons," *Smoke Signals* 8, no. 3 (March 1970): 5. For travel to the 1970 Black Power conference, see Piccini, *Transnational Protest*, chap. 6.

71. For the increasing African American interest in China, see Taj Frazier Robeson, *The East Is Black: Cold War China in the Black Radical Imagination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). For Indigenous trips to China, see Jon Piccini, "'Light from the East': Travel to China and Australian Activism in the 'Long 1960s,'" *The 1960s: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture* 6, no. 1 (June 2013): 25–44.

72. "Black Power Warning: Support for Aboriginals," *Daily Telegraph*, 12 February 1973.

Conclusions

De Costa foregrounds the importance of “motivations” in his study of indigenous transnationalism, and as these case studies have shown, such motivations are never static.⁷³ The Soviet Union appeared for much of the twentieth century as a model for progressive activists. Workers had seized power, and in so doing sought to remove the cultural baggage of capitalism, including the global scourge of racism. This was an ideal held by Indigenous activists as well as their white supporters. Ray Peckham and Vincent Maloney travelled to the USSR a decade apart and returned to sing off a similar sheet – praising the Soviet Union and the experience of being treated equally – as such exhorting Australia to abolish discriminatory practices. The power of these trips for indigenous activists was two-fold, seeking out a higher authority in the form of a global superpower, and taking indigenous protest to the global stage. The Communist Party of Australia and sympathetic unions sponsored or organised these trips, and published the supposedly authentic reports these travellers made upon return, hopefully undermining biased local reportage in a Cold War where information was a weapon.

Yet the example of Dexter Daniels shows how quickly such a situation could change. From a mutually beneficial relationship between Party and activist in the 1950s and early 1960s, by 1968 the political landscape had shifted so thoroughly that these global networks appeared as far from useful, even antiquated. While never entirely happy, the relationship between communists and indigenous radicals was ruptured in the late 1960s, with a strong cultural and political nationalism empowering Aboriginal activists to form their own organisations and challenge the old slogan and “Black and White Together.”⁷⁴ While Daniels never fully embraced this ideology, he was aware that perceived communist domination of the Aboriginal rights movement was dangerous from a political and public relations standpoint. The CPA also underwent its own political recalibrations – from an organisation which served the interests of Soviet foreign policy, it threw off this role and embraced a new, Australian-focused outlook during the 1960s. As such, this paper has shown the worthiness of exploring international travel as a way of understanding both the power of global ideas and their varied local outcomes, as well as filling a significant gap in our understanding of Australia’s experience of the Cold War.

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73. De Costa, *A Higher Authority*, 3.

74. On these splits, see Peter Read, “Cheeky, Insolent and Anti-White: The Split in the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders: Easter 1970,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 36, no. 1 (1990): 73–83.