

Dan O'Neill at Forum on 6 September 1977

SPEAKERS

Dan O'Neill, Jim Alexander

Dan O'Neill 00:01

I suppose the most extraordinary thing about living in Queensland, is that Joh Bjelke-Peterson has such immense power that he can that he can even change the chronology of the years. I mean, after 1967, you'd think that we'd have a whole decade leading up to 1977, and so on. But it appears that what you do is that after you get tired of 1976, you just change the numbers around and make it 1967 again.

So here we are, in the same kind of numbers that we began to be in in the beginning of 1967, contemplating the same kind of action that in 1967, led to the virtual displacement of the university from the Saint Lucia campus into town, to a battle with the police in Roma Street.

Now, I don't suppose there are any of us, who went through that, who particularly relish the idea of having another battle with the police in Roma Street. And God save us, that won't happen. But it seems to me that what we must confront, is the fact that we're now facing a situation that is even more potentially provocative than the situation that we faced then the reason why there are so many people in this forum today, when for the last 10 years, there have been about 1/10 of this number in the forum, is that we're faced again, with what has continued to be the basic issue in Queensland politics, along with all the other issues that are germane to Australian politics, that is the issue of civil liberties.

In 1967 it was simply the misuse of existing traffic regulations, that is their discriminatory use, not for the purpose of regulating traffic; but a discriminatory use against certain people who demonstrated politically rather than others.

There will be many people in this crowd who remember the massive demonstrations that greeted Lyndon Baines Johnson, when he came here at the height of the Vietnam War. The number of people who blocked traffic, the number of people who held up placards welcoming him. There was no invoking of the traffic regulations against those people.

But when small bands of 10 and 20, people tried to march from the university, they were invariably met by rather more police. And on one occasion, there were more people arrested than were actually in, in the demonstration itself.

Now it was that the threatened the liberties of those people, which led to a movement, so well organized, that in a very short space of time, it took 4000 people marching on the road out of this

university, and about 2000 people walking on the street beside them, so that we had 7000 people in, in the city, inner city area, confronting the police.

Now, the point I want to make is simply this that whether we decide to march tomorrow or not, seems to me not to be the decisive issue at the moment. In fact, I think it would be an error to march out of this university, in relatively small numbers, even if they amounted to 1,000 people to join the demonstration in town, I think it would be a good idea for people to go there individually, to the rally of trade unionists, to show our solidarity with the Zaphir case.

And then to discuss this issue, the threat to civil liberties further in the park, what I think is even more important than either of those things, is to begin now to organize so that within two or three weeks' time, we have an absolutely massive demonstration, and an absolutely massive march, that doesn't involve simply a crowd of angry students; that doesn't involve simply a crowd of the people that Joh Bjelke-Petersen likes to call communists and their dupes.

But that involves a wide cross section of people gathered and structured by representative organizations, so that we tap the real anger that does exist, and that was manifested even in such an organ of conservative opinion as a Courier Mail this morning. That is, I think that the way out of this is to realize what the Bjelke-Peterson's doing, he hasn't pulled this on by accident at this time. It's got clear electoral advantages for him, if he can show himself to be victorious on the law and order issue against a number of sporadic, ill-conceived precipitate attempts by various sections of the community that he can characterize as troublemakers.

Now he's got a number of these potential events coming up. He knows that the anti-uranium movement is about to engage in demonstration activity in late September, and in late October, he knows that the Zaphir case is going to be seen as a crucial issue of trade union rights. He knows that there are possibilities of further demonstrations on Timor. He knows that women have been active, he knows that they're all his groups, the blacks have been particularly harassed by the police in a completely scandalous fashion in recent weeks; he knows that there are all these people who've got legitimate grievances, and at any time in an uncoordinated way, they might act in the streets, and that will be that will be trodden upon by the police. And what I'm suggesting to you is that we take these uncoordinated actions, and we coordinate them.

What I'm suggesting to you is that we rob the Bjelke-Peterson of the electoral advantage, which will enable him to intensify the reactionary regime that he's presently bought about in Queensland by exploiting the rifts within his ranks. Now a Tasmanian liberal, just yesterday, denounced Bjelke-Peterson and wants the Tasmanian parliament to do the same. And I'm sure there are many liberals in the state of Queensland who feel the same way, because what he is assaulting at the moment, and quite provocatively, is not something that's dear only to the hearts of those of us who want to bring about a socialist Australia.

He's assaulting something that's dear to those people who want opinion, to be respected, who want the free flow of information, who want all those things that were fought for, not in 1877. But in 1777. And in 1789, he wants to roll the clock back to the times before the French Revolution, before the declaration,

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Now on a platform such as that one can gather a really massive front of people who are willing to act. So what I'm suggesting is not that we bring about even a strategy that will try to get the Labour Party to have more than a cricket team to have, for example, a rugby union team in Parliament, I don't think we should envisage our activity in that way. But I think we should directly address ourselves to all those organized organizations in society that have some interest in civil liberties, which means setting up and what my concrete suggestion to this body is that out of this meeting, we set up a Civil Liberties Coordinating Committee, and that Civil Liberties Coordinating Committee begin to operate with financial support of everybody at this meeting, that we immediately try to make ourselves resourceful financially and organizationally. So that we go into an immediate process of contacting a whole list of organizations, the greater the list of organizations, the better.

And just to mention some examples for a beginning, I think that we should make every attempt to contact as many trade unions as we can to contact the Civil Liberties Union and Derek Fielding himself will be speaking, I gather along somewhat similar lines. Later on that we contact all a Christian grips. Remember that one of the features of the 1967 march was the massive participation of the Newman society and the student Christian movement, and the Students Union, we contact all those Christian groups that we contact all the black, the groups that represent the cause of the black people, all the different women's groups across the whole spectrum from the Women's Electoral Lobby, through to the separatist lesbians, that we that we contact all of the left-wing groups, and we contact all the Christian radical groups.

Now with secure contacts with all these groups carried out over a period of about a week to call a meeting of all the representatives of those organizations to speak to another rally of this size and another larger size and incorporating not only university students on this campus, but other people invited onto this campus next week. And we hold that rally not in the forum area. But in the Great Court, where the last great rally was held, some seven or eight years ago. And we put to that meeting, that the prosecution of a plan of seeking a permit as soon as possible.

And I'd suggest that the permit be sought no later than a week or 10 days time that we seek that permit. And if the permit is rejected, we appeal against the rejection. And then on a certain given date, well within the time, which is available for the granting of a permit, whether we have a permit or not. We march in an organized and nonviolent fashion, even if you like, with organized marshals, so that the Bellke-Peterson will have to confront something like a crowd of 10,000 people.

Now, it seems to me that that's the only circumstances in which it will turn to his electoral disadvantage, and have the advantage of the cause of civil liberties. Because only a totally massive, non-violent crowd drawn from all sectors of opinion, and from all classes will confront the Queensland Police with the option of doing something that's obviously an anti-popular action and an action that will be repudiated in every state of Australia. And that brings up the question of seeking through this Coordinating Committee to have marches in solidarity in every other state.

And let's not neglect this issue which has been granted to it. It's an issue that can be exploited in a way that very few other issues at the moment in Queensland can be exploited. And within two weeks, I think

we could organize to have 10s of 1000s of people on the street, not only in Queensland, but in solidarity with us in the other states.

So what I'm suggesting is that we apply for a permit that if the permit is not granted, then we march and let's see whether the police will be willing to confront a crowd of 10,000 people drawn from every rank of professions, every occupation, every class and every range of opinion in Queensland. It's my betting that they weren't and that for the first time the Bjelke-Peterson will be slapped in the face if not kicked in the ass.

Jim Alexander 10:00

The next speaker is Derek Fielding from the Council for Civil Liberties.