
WE WERE NEVER GREEN

Raging Red

Ron Brunton, a conservative from the Institute of Public Affairs in Melbourne deserves our thanks for confirming that the radical student movement of the late 60s had absolutely no links whatsoever with greeny politics¹. He proves his point by going through old copies of the Monash University student newspaper *Lot's Wife* from 1960 to 1971. Monash was by far the most radical Australian campus during that period. For the whole of the 1960s Brunton only found two stories on environmental issues - one about conservation written in 1964 by a zoology student and one on pollution written in 1967 by a proponent of nuclear power. It was only in late 1970 that environmental stories began to appear in *Lot's Wife*. They then quickly became a torrent. However, by that time student radicalism had abated.

This is in line with my own recollections. In 1970 I read an article in a radical American paper about something I had never heard of before called 'environmentalism'. The article dismissed this new phenomenon as an attempt to divert people from the class struggle.

Brunton also makes the point that the mainstream showed much more interest in environmental concerns. While *Lot's Wife* ignored them the daily press regularly covered them. He also mentions that the Australian Conservation Foundation was founded by conservatives such as Malcolm Fraser and Sir Garfield Barwick.

Brunton reminds us that it was the extreme right, eg, the League of Rights and the anti-fluoridationists, that first used ecological issues to attack liberal capitalism, and they said very similar things to greenies today. Brunton could also have mentioned that the Nazis had a greeny tinge - the intimate relationship between the Volk and the Land as revealed in the German equivalent of dreamtime legends.

This 1970 quote from the League of Rights could have been written by a modern day greeny.

If present policies are continued, Australia will become a type of offshore island quarry for foreign interests. ... We stand for conservation in all its aspects and oppose the rape of our

¹ See *IPA Review* Vol. 46 No. 3 1993.

environment and resources to feed an economic monster which progressively ceases to serve true human needs.

Brunton aims to discredit the left by making out that it belatedly took up green politics as an act of opportunism. He is right about there being a lot of opportunism involved but it wasn't by the radical left. This greenyness was part of a different brand of politics and generally involved different people. On campuses the distinct break was associated with a complete turnover of students - the radicals of the late 60s mostly entered university in 1966-68 and had left by 1971.