

Brian Manning The 'Stayput' Malaysians

In Darwin during the middle of August 1961, a group of young CPA recruits were critically reviewing their first Party meeting while having a supper on return to the old house in McMinn Street. An original tropical design with split bamboo walls and large push out shutters, the house had been the old Burton family home. On piers, with 6 bedrooms, a large kitchen and a modest 'flat' underneath also with split bamboo walls and partitions it was ideal for tropical, co-operative living.

The place became known as 'The Kremlin' as so many of the young couples - Hazel & Tom, Ian & Pat, Pam & John, Gwen & myself - had joined the Party.

The party branch was being resurrected after a long period of stagnation. The meeting had been monopolised by the old comrades from the Wharf discussing tactics and strategies in a current Wharfies' battle with the Stevedoring Authority. The young members were clearly brownd off after their first meeting having been merely silent witnesses to an endless post-mortem on the issue of the day on the waterfront.

There was a clear consensus that the Wharf Comrades should form a 'Wharf Fraction' within which to analyse strategies and give a report to Branch Meetings, thus enabling meetings to get on with other agenda items concerning National and International affairs.

So it was in this setting the discussion got round to how the Party Branch could have been organised and activated.

How does a Party Branch identify issues of injustice that we could become active on?

The Front Page Story on the 'Northern Territory News' sitting on the kitchen table leapt out at us: 'Smiles from the G.G.' 'MALAYANS CASE IS BACK WITH DOWNER'



The Editor of the N.T. News, Jim Bowditch, had served in Malaya, Borneo and East Timor with Australia's Special 'Z' Forces operating in small groups behind enemy lines. He claimed to owe Malaysians a debt and was now doing his utmost to help these men.

With Bowditch's help the men had petitioned Governor- General Lord de L'Isle, who had requested the Minister for Immigration, Alexander Downer (father of current Foreign Affairs Minister), to reconsider their position. The front-page picture showed a crippled diver in a wheel chair, a victim of the dreaded Bends, to emphasise the hazardous nature of the Industry [which industry] that employed indentured foreign labour.

The following story told of moves to deport three Malaysians who were no longer required by Jimmy Gonzales, Master Pearler and dealer in pearl shell and Crocodile Skins. There was a down turn in the pearl shell industry and they were out of a job.

Darus bin Sarus had been here 14 years
Jaffa Madunne had been here 9 years and
Zainal bin Hashim 5 years.

They had all made friends amongst the cosmopolitan Darwin community and wanted to stay here. What could we do that might influence the Federal Government to let them stay?

We decided to launch a petition, circulate it as widely as possible to see what level of support there was in the Darwin Community.

A petition was drafted simply putting a request that they be allowed to remain here and with our collective efforts in typing a stencil and resurrecting an old single sheet feed Roneo Machine, we printed pages of petition forms ready for distribution by the next afternoon.

We circulated the forms into shops where shopkeepers didn't hesitate to pledge support by drawing customers' attention to the issue, and took to the streets with clipboards and set up a table in Rain Tree Park, a central city spot. People volunteered to circulate the petitions. One of the most notable was Dawn, a young lass who worked in Government and who circulated the petition through the Public Service. She handed in 35 completed petitions in the first few days. It's no wonder that within a few years as Dawn Lawrie, she was elected to the Legislative Assembly as the Independent Member for Nightcliffe, and later in her career served as an Anti Discrimination Commissioner.

Support for the petition was overwhelming; Jim Bowditch gave it a plug in the paper saying a group of 'young people' had decided to launch a petition. The Darwin Community reaction was firmly in favour of them staying.

The Party Branch got behind the initiative and recommended that a Broad based Committee be set up under the auspices of the North Australian Workers Union to decide on conduct of a campaign. The 'Anti-Deportation Committee' was open to anybody who had the time and/or desire to be involved and sixteen people nominated from a public meeting included

Bert Graham; President, N.A.W.U
Dick Ward; Solicitor and Member Legislative Council.
Pat Wood; Secretary, Amalgamated Engineers Union.
Grace Wood; Housewife, spouse of Pat Wood.
Des Robson; Accounts Clerk, Darwin Hospital.
Norma Robson: Housewife, spouse of Des Robson
Paddy Carroll; Secretary, N.A.W.U
Brian Manning; Airport Fireman, Dept Civil Aviation
Bill Donnelly; Vigilance Officer Darwin Waterfront
Dorothy Aston; Bookkeeper
Ken Stagg; Amalgamated Engineering Union
Pauline Shah; Housewife
John Banks; Meteorological Bureau.
Frank Martin; Boxer
George Gibbs; Waterside Worker
Jim Bowditch; Editor, N.T. News

The Committee was chaired by the Union President, Bert Graham and met in the NAWU Offices. It moved quickly to organise a Public Meeting on the Darwin Oval opposite the Hotel Darwin and invited

N.T. MHR Jock Nelson to address the meeting.

A couple of thousand people attended the meeting and heard Dick Ward, Moira Gibbs, Jim Bowditch, Jock Nelson and Brian Manning speak on the injustices and blatant racism of the White Australia policy. The meeting decided to march on the Administrators residence and elected a deputation to put the demands of the meeting to the Government through the Administrators office.



The march to Government House took up the full width of the street and speakers continued to address the crowd outside the gates through a loud hailer whilst the deputation, led by Jock Nelson and Dick Ward, approached the Administrator unannounced. But they were expected as Police had already posted a cordon outside the gates.

Roger Nott, the Administrator gave a sympathetic hearing to the deputation and undertook to pass on the demands of the Public protest to Immigration Minister, Alexander Downer and Prime Minister, R. G. Menzies in Canberra.

The noisy but orderly crowd remained outside Government House waiting for a report from the deputation before breaking up with an air of subdued optimism that perhaps the plea on behalf of the Malays would be fruitful.

Jim Bowditch was sceptical. He had connections that led him to believe that the men were to be taken into custody and deported without delay.

The paper next day carried a story with a photograph of Darus and Zainal indicating they had gone into hiding...

After a couple of weeks, Immigration realised there was a great deal of resolve amongst the Darwin Community. They despatched an Assistant Secretary to Darwin to take charge of the search, generally

read the riot act and indicate there would be serious actions taken against persons harbouring the men. He pressed the Police to upgrade their searches so we found our homes being searched without notice twice and sometimes three times daily, generally around meal times.

HIDING

Daru Bin Saris and another former boyee due for repatriation today have not turn up at Darwin this afternoon and for Singapore left

believed to be hiding hope that the dramatic battle on their side succeed in winning repatriation to stay.

and Sgt. Liu Hook mingled with the crowd which included about 30 policemen. Darui was paged three times.

Until the plane took off neither man had committed an offence.

Deportation orders and arrest warrants are likely to be taken out immediately against Darui and Zainal.

Protest march

Tuesday night's protest marchers swing down Bennett Street, past the Police Station, on their way to Government House.

Police did not interfere with the men, who marched down the middle of the road, stopping traffic in Smith Street and calling on bystanders to join the ranks.

Several hundred men and a number of women and children marched.

The demonstrators sang songs outside Government House while their delegates

Singing and shouting slogans, several hundred people gathered on Tuesday night for a protest against deportation of the four expatriate employees.

It was Darwin's first anti-Government demonstration of this type for more than 30 years.

deserted, then on to Government House, where Assistant Police Commissioner Clive Graham, Inspector Syd Bowie Sergeant, Ron Hughes, and half a dozen uniformed men met them at the entrance.

Deputation

A few of the demonstrators began shouting "Down with

of deportation.

But they were asking him to convey their views to the Minister for Immigration and the Government.

Mr. Graham said he had been NAWU president for four years and during that time there had been no industrial trouble of any note.

"There has been peace in

There was all sorts of speculation as to where the Malaysians were. Because Douglas Lockwood, well known author and Journalist was believed to have taken a photograph of them in hiding and was asking questions about the issue, it was assumed by authorities that he was involved with a Bowditch Ward group and that they had them hidden on an island in the harbour!!!

Plans were about to be put in place to use the navy to search an island in the harbour until they then believed that the 'communists' had taken custody of the fugitives and the island search plan shelved. The Authorities had concluded that the Anti-Deportation Committee was fragmented into 'groups' and the 'Communists' had 'taken over'.

Nothing could have been further from the reality, which was simply that 'Silent Majority Darwin' was in favour of the Malaysians being given the right to remain here. The Committee was working as a united group.

So what had started as a Newspaper Editor supporting a cause and a group of young idealists who happened to have joined the Communist Party taking up the cause and taking it further was proving to be a successful working model.

Meanwhile, the Darwin Community was reacting in opposition to the application of the White Australia Policy. Not surprising because the Darwin population included a significant percentage of coloured people of mixed race who had, as recently as 1956, fought with a mass demonstration against blatant racist policies which required part-aboriginals to be registered and carry permits authorising them to be in town after dark.

Also bear in mind that in addition to the large population of mixed race people, Darwin had a legacy of Chinese presence dating back to the Gold Rush days and the Palmerston to Pine Creek Railway constructed between 1886- 89.

The Anti-Deportation Committee had the task thrust upon it to take responsibility for the welfare of the two Malaysians in hiding. Jaffa Madunne, the third diver did not face immediate deportation as his passport had been lost so he kept a low profile being prepared to join the other two if the need arose. A Chinese man, Chan See Sam was also facing deportation but his case was being processed

separately.

A small sub-committee took on the task of co-ordinating the Malayans movements, selecting hiding places and moving them from house to house. Needless to say, as a security measure, the sub-committee was anonymous and no reports were detailed.



We were to learn much later that this security precaution was frustrating Immigration and Police intelligence and led to the belief that 'The Communists' had 'taken over' the Committee. In fact this belief was contained in a report by an Immigration official, H.G. Brooks, who came to Darwin to coordinate the search. He reported that this 'takeover' had caused some concern and 'some responsible people' seeking immediate action in the matter made an approach to the Administrator.

Mr Brooks attended a meeting of the Anti-Deportation Committee in early October with Les Liveris the local Immigration Chief. He indicated he was not in a position to reach any decision but listened to our pleas and suggestion that the Malayans case be reviewed and they be allowed to remain in the community pending further consideration of their request to remain in Darwin.

It is now apparent through reading his report, available under Freedom Of Information, that Mr Brooks was convinced the Committee was being manipulated by 'The Communists'. He reported that non-committee members spoke first but didn't contribute anything new; non-communist members spoke next but introduced no new material that had not been previously submitted. The Communist members concluded the orations with 'a series of political slogans'.

One could be forgiven for assuming that Mr Brooks was influenced by the White Australia Policy when he found it necessary to mention in his report that: "Jim Bowditch's views were undoubtedly influenced by the fact that he was married to a mixed blood girl." Frank Martin he described as "Half Caste Boxer". Pauline Shah as "married to an Indian"

Brooks' report claimed that a plot had been reported to police by a "well known and respected member of the Darwin Community" to 'kidnap' him after luring him to a secluded spot for a meeting with the Malayans.

He claimed that he took some precautions but didn't take the threat seriously. In the event it did not happen so he dismissed it as a publicity stunt.

It wasn't a proposal of the Anti-Deportation Committee but I have not discounted it was a stunt set up by Immigration to claim some sympathy from the public.

Consistent with this view, Immigration generated erroneous public statements that Darus Bin Saris had four children in Malaya and the Minister had also been guilty of deliberate misrepresentation by asking

the Administrator to release a cabled plea from Zainal's father asking him to come home.



Zainal responded in a note saying he had heard the news on the radio but could not believe his father was interested in him as he had not heard from him for years, besides he was now of age and wanted to stay in Australia amongst friends

There was a need to raise funds and appeals were made for financial support. As usual the wharfies dug deep with pay line donations to meet the men's living expenses. One wharfie who had a small property down the track, donated a pig to B.B.Q so the young people living at 'the Kremlin' organised a pig on a spit whilst Jaffa Madunne, the third Malayan who was not in hiding, displayed his cooking skills by making and cooking Sarte chicken Malayan style; marinated chicken pieces basted with marinade using a brush made from lemon grass. We even had a hula dancer, Mary-Anne, an Australian born lass of Malaysian parents, as the main attraction. It was a good social and fundraiser.



The remarkable thing that remains in my recollections is the courage of ordinary people; folks who had never contemplated breaking the law; people who were aware they could be in serious trouble if caught harbouring immigration fugitives. People I only vaguely knew sidled up to me saying, 'you can hide them at my place' whilst slipping me their address.

The 'sub-committee' discussed movements and selected the placements, deliberately avoiding the homes of Party people whose homes were being searched regularly by police who had obtained 'general warrants'. One morning, I awoke to the presence of police who decided to start early. I occupied the downstairs space of the Kremlin. My partner and I with our two girls were asleep in one room and Jaffa Madunne was asleep in the lounge area. Jaffa pulled the sheet over his head and the police officer asked me "Who's that?" I off handedly said, "Oh just one of the Malaysians". He looked at me and said sarcastically, "Oh yeah!" and walked out.

We believed the police officers were not diligent in carrying out these searches because they privately held reservations about the issue of 'White Australia'.

Nevertheless, the Federal Government was eager to take the heat out of the issue, which was developing increasing support nationally. Negotiations commenced around the proposition that the men would surrender themselves and the Government would undertake to review the matter.



On 26th September, Darus and Zainal presented themselves to Sgt Barry Tiernan of the Federal Police on the understanding that the matter of their remaining in Australia would be reviewed. They gave themselves up to the Administrator in the company of:

Harold Cooper, The Mayor of Darwin.
Rev N.C. Pearce, Uniting Church.
Brother Aidan, Church of England.
Paddy Carroll, N.A.W.U.
Pat Wood, A.E.U
Lou de Courcy, private citizen, Rotary.

It was agreed that they would not be taken into custody provided they report daily to Immigration.

Jim Bowditch lost no time in getting them on a plane down to Melbourne where the support movement was very strong. Jim had contacted prominent Barrister, Frank Galbally, with a view to challenging the deportation orders in the High Court, thus at least giving us some breathing space to pursue the issue politically.

Alexander Downer was heckled wherever he went with students painting their faces black and disrupting his efforts at electioneering for the forthcoming election.

After a few weeks in Melbourne, being feted by supporters they returned to Darwin now buoyed by what they felt were strong chances they would be allowed to stay. They reported back to Immigration and were advised that they should report daily in future.

They would have but for information that the following day when they reported they would be arrested and immediately deported. Sure enough, a drive past the Immigration offices confirmed a Federal Police vehicle at the rear of the building. We felt this was a breach of trust on their part and did not hesitate to once again put them in hiding.



Daily searches recommenced with determined efforts. The heat was turned up to the point where we feared the searches might be successful as we understood road blocks were to be set up and vehicles searched.

It was clear we had to move them out of Darwin. But what about the roadblocks and where would we take them?

Jack & Esther Meaney, semi retired from wage slavery, had taken up some property near Adelaide River. But we weren't ring them as our phones were being tapped.



It was decided we would travel in convoy with three cars using stop pedal signals in the event that we came across a roadblock. The men would be in the last car; three pumps on the brake pedal would relay a signal, enabling the men to skirt around and join the convoy out of sight of the road block.

We did not encounter a roadblock at three in the morning and travelled on to Adelaide River. The first two cars pulled up in front of the pub to wait for the last car, which we seemed to have lost! It arrived after an anxious wait. Jim Bowditch had a tyre blow out and nearly rolled the car when he swerved off the road knocking down some small scrub and into a wire fence. We needed Jim, to navigate to "Milton Springs" the Meaney farm. We had come too far. Jack & Esther's place was down the Stapleton Creek turn off a couple of miles before Adelaide River.

We reached the Meaney's property just on sunrise and with no fore warning prevailed on them to hide the Malaysians. They didn't hesitate - Jack was a Union stalwart. He had held just about all positions in the Union, who had stayed in the top end during the war and helped re-establish the NAWU after the war despite official obstruction. Esther, a devoutly religious person who practiced her humanity, had been a Northern Territory delegate to a southern peace conference before the war. A remarkable woman who prior to her marriage to Jack, had worked alongside her father and brothers, working cattle in the harsh Territory outback.

The property was on a permanent spring so Jack set up a camp in the bush near the spring where the men languished for the duration of the campaign.

With the care of the Malaysians resolved we put extra effort into publicising the issues around the 'White Australia Policy.' Police resumed their daily raids morning and evening and included Jim Bowditch's house whereupon he initiated proceedings for trespass and damages. The claim was disallowed but police toned down their raids to those premises where there were grounds to believe the deportees might be hiding.

Channel Island was thoroughly searched and the police enlisted the aid of Aborigines but their efforts were fruitless.

Police continued to receive telephone tips of sightings but they concluded that they were diversionary measures to throw them off the scent.

Mr Brooks was having no luck so he prepared to leave Darwin concluding in his report that the people of Darwin were apathetic and the issue was not fully understood.

He claimed that the Anti-Deportation Committee only represented a couple of hundred people and that Community Leaders such as the Mayor and clergymen were only acting on their personal behalf and did not represent the Council or their Congregations.

He claimed that 'responsible people' in Darwin have privately expressed support for the Government and that some deplored the 'direct action' outside the law.

I believe citizens have a duty to oppose bad laws such as the current Immigration laws of this country, which fly in the face of international conventions. Mr Brooks and his contemporaries in Immigration might study this quote:

"Individuals have international duties which transcend the national obligations of obedience. therefore [individual citizens] have the duty to violate domestic laws to prevent crimes against peace and humanity from occurring." - Nuremberg War Crime Tribunal, 1950

May Day was planned nationally to highlight the blatant racism of the policy in parades around Australia when the Federal Government did an about-turn and decided to allow the men to stay. In Jim Bowditch's words, the issue of "The Stayput Malaysians" drove a big nail in the coffin of the White Australia Policy.

Ten years later, an effort was made to prevent a Filipino family being forced to leave despite the Darwin Community supporting their desire to stay. The family had decided to leave voluntarily rather than be deported.

At the time, the Labor Party was holding its Conference in Hobart and a phone call to Bob Hawke and Gough Whitlam secured a pledge that when in Government, they would facilitate the family's return to Australia. It was a colourful Al Grassby as Minister for Immigration who in the Philippines, where he had gone to honour the pledge, when asked "What about the White Australia Policy Mr Grassby" replied, 'The White Australian Policy is dead ... Give me a shovel and I'll bury it!'

It's a wonder Al Grassby's ghost doesn't haunt the hardliners in the Howard Government given their performance with the people smuggling issue, the Siev 6, the Children overboard debacle and their present compulsory detention policy.