

Power Struggle: Unions' Role in a Conservation Campaign

Janis Bailey
Griffith University

Abstract

The interaction of unions, and union peak councils, with social movement groups has been relatively unexplored. This paper describes and analyses a campaign in Western Australia in the late 1980s and early 1990s aimed at the gazetting of a national park – and, incidentally, at preventing the establishment of a private power station. The campaign attracted active support from a relatively small number of union officials and rank-and-filers, who worked intensively with conservation groups and local residents. The union movement was able to deliver access to key government personnel in a volatile political economy in the wake of “WA Inc”, thus benefiting the campaign as a whole. At the same time, it derived legitimacy from the broad-based arguments about social and environmental issues developed by residents and conservationists which enabled the campaign to be framed as one about broad values rather than narrow sectional industrial interests. The campaign illustrates how successful coalitions can be built between the labour movement, social movement groups and residents' organisations by a number of dedicated participants.

Introduction

From 1988 to early 1992, a number of groups and individuals waged a campaign against a proposed coal mining operation and power station to be operated by mining giant CRA at Mt Lesueur, north of Perth. They included conservationists, unions and local residents. The campaign was ultimately successful, with the area being gazetted as a national park. This paper tells the story of the campaign, and uses the campaign as a starting point to think theoretically about the nature of union strategy on issues other than those narrowly defined as “industrial”. The underlying premise is the need to develop fully culturally materialist accounts of union behaviour, and to use sociological and geographical approaches in so doing (Bailey 2000; Bailey 2001a, 2001b). Research on the links between labour and community is expanding, but generally focuses campaigns and issues in which “union” issues are central (organising, bargaining). Less work has been done on campaigns initiated *outside* the union movement, but in which the union movement comes to play a part. My central

questions are: Who initiated the campaign? How (and why) did the union movement come to play a part in it? How were the links between the various groups in the campaign developed? What does the campaign tell us about how union peak councils operate in a broader community context?

The Mt Lesueur Region

Mt Lesueur is 20 km north-east of Jurien, a small but prosperous regional centre and low-key holiday destination, 200 km north of Perth. Jurien Bay and its environs were in 1988 (and still are) populated by farmers, retirees, local business people and fishing families (including crayfishers). Unlike the coast south of Perth, which is rapidly becoming a long urban strip, the northern area is relatively undeveloped. Mt Lesueur itself is a mesa, not a mountain. Its name was bestowed on it by a French scientific expedition in 1802-03. Though visible to the French sailors from their ships, it is tucked away and goes unnoticed by most visitors to the popular Pinnacles. Its major visitors have been, paradoxically, botanists, naturalists and bushwalkers, on

the one hand, and employees of mining and petroleum companies on the other (Burbidge, Hopper and van Leeuwen 1989, p.1).

While the area has been described as “one of the most spectacular landscapes in the northern sandplain” (Draft Lesueur Leaflet, March 1990, prepared by Rachel Siewert). Like much of the ancient WA landscape, Mt Lesueur’s treasures are subtle. The “scruffy heath” consists of great diversity: over 800 plant species occur in the region, with 10% of WA’s total native plant species occurring in an area 12 km by 24 km. Seven of the species are “Declared Rare Flora”, and 111 are said to be geographically restricted and/or rare. The area’s “species richness” is equated with much larger parks. Fauna species are also significant. A paper produced by the Department of Conservation and Land Management describes Mt Lesueur as “an area of world, national, State and regional nature conservation existence” (Burbidge et al 1989, 2). The biological and geological significance of the area was unarguable. From 1962 onwards, several successive reports had recommended the formation of a nature reserve or national park at Mt Lesueur. However, coal reserves had long been identified in the area – hence the government’s stonewalling. In 1981, Canning Resources Pty Ltd had successfully applied for mining tenements in the area. In March of 1989, CRA and Barrack House Resources, as the Hill River Development Company Pty Ltd, jointly submitted a proposal to develop a coalmine¹ and power station in the area. About half the area proposed to be mined, and the power station itself, fell within the projected National Park.

CRA’s Proposal

The proposal for the “Hill River project” was submitted in response to a request by the State Energy Commission of WA

¹ Estimated to have 450 million tonnes of readily open-cuttable coal (Treadgold 1989a).

(SECWA) for tenders for power generation options. It involved the construction and operation of a 2.5 million tonne per annum coalmine and a 600-megawatt power station (Dames and Moore 1990) – in all, a \$1 000 million development. CRA’s interest in Mt Lesueur was consistent with its corporate strategy at the time: it was then involved in a joint venture with Mitsubishi to build a private power station near Albury, NSW, and another in New Zealand. In addition, it was interested in downstream minerals processing; supplying its own power would give it a significant advantage.

Most of the state’s power is generated on its only coalfield at Collie, 200 km south of Perth.² However, the Labor WA government had identified a yearly increase in power demand of 14%, which would “place the state’s power grid under severe stress during periods of high demand” (McIlwraith 1989, 24). It was estimated that Hill River coal could be produced more cheaply than Collie coal (McIlwraith 1989, 24), although others pointed out the lower quality of the Hill River coal.

When CRA’s tender was received, the Environmental Protection Authority, the WA government authority with a “watchdog” role in environmental issues, decided to evaluate the CRA proposal at the level of an Environmental Review and Management Program (ERMP), which is the highest level of assessment under the Conservation and Land Management Act. CRA released a joint document (Dames and Moore 1990) in May to satisfy both EPA and DASETT³ requirements, with a ten-week consultation period. A joint campaign by various community groups and unions then began in earnest.

² In addition, there is considerable capacity privately operated in the Pilbara iron ore region.

³ The Commonwealth Department for the Arts, Sport, and Environment, Tourism and Territories also required an environmental study under Foreign Investment Review Board guidelines.

The Political Economy of Power

The broader political economy of the time was a significant contextual factor. “WA Inc” was still a very fresh memory. The radical developmentalistic ethic of 1980s Labor had recently taken down with in its wake two premiers (Brian Burke, then Peter Dowding) and several government enterprises – as well as a number of private entrepreneurs and their companies (Peachment 1995). The debt resulting from WA Inc was \$1 billion or more (Peachment 1991, 188-191; Harman 1990, 25, cited in Peachment 1995, 81). WA Inc had seen a power shift away from extra-parliamentary organisations, including trade unions, to alliances with business (Watkins 1991; Graham 1996). Dr Carmen Lawrence replaced Peter Dowding as Premier early in 1990, partly to “scuttle the WA Inc legacy” (Kaye 1990) which had been opened to public scrutiny during the WA Inc Royal Commission. Developmentalism was still alive and well in the post WA Inc era; there was a recognition however that the government had to take a “hands off” role in the future. There were also significant forces within government calling for a reduction of the State Electricity Commission of WA’s (SECWA’s) dominance over power generation and transmission; in short, there was a privatisation agenda. In addition, SECWA was cash-strapped, with an interest bill of more than \$400 million from the \$1 billion gas pipeline from the North-West shelf – and the WA government’s account books, in the wake of various disasters such as the PICL project, were in poor shape. As well, there were Federal government restrictions on State government borrowings.

Some elements within government supported the CRA proposal. Reports prepared at the time by the Department of Resources Development (DRD 1989a, 1989b) and the Energy Policy and Planning Bureau (EPPB 1990) asserted that “Hill River offers the potential for the

first time in this state’s history to obtain coal in the long term under genuine competitive conditions” (*The West Australian*, 3 May 1990). “Cleaner” gas power (from Burrup Peninsula and Perth Basin reserves) was an option but as yet unproved. The government (in September of 1989) had appointed a Power Options Review Committee, under the chairmanship of Dr Frank Harman, which was to report in mid-1990. The government faced several choices with respect to energy: coal or gas; private or public; expanding the well-unionised Collie coalfields, or going elsewhere. One factor was the unexpected loss of Collie (a long term ALP stronghold) to the National Party in the state election in February 1989; this allegedly brought about “a new freedom in government about power station location and ownership” (Treadgold 1989c). This was the context in which the Mt Lesueur campaign unfolded.

The Early Campaign

From the outset, the CRA proposal had intense, but initially localised, opposition. Views were polarised, with some landholders favouring the proposal (but concerned about its effects on their activities) and others totally opposed (Dames and Moore 1990). Part of the opposition included government scientists – although their voices were not to be heard until later in the campaign. The Lesueur Landholders’ Powerhouse Action Group was formed late in 1988 or early in 1989, concerned that CRA were negotiating with farmers in the area (*West Australian*, 24th January 1989; *Sunday Times*, 29 January 1989); other local groups followed.

An initial turning point in the campaign came when Neil Blake of the Australian Conservation Foundation became involved in the issue, in March 1989. In May, environmental activist Vince Serventy launched a campaign against the mine and power station, and for the area to be declared a national park. At this stage, over

20 conservation groups and local residents' groups were involved (*Sunday Times*, 14 May 1989; *West Australian*, 20 May 1989). The two relevant local authorities had splintered and held clearly divergent positions: Dandaragan Shire supported the development - not surprisingly, since it fell wholly within Dandaragan Shire and they would reap the benefits in rates - whilst Coorow Shire, perceiving a possible loss of tourism revenue, were arguing for a reserve (*Sunday Times*, 14 May 1989).

A second turning point came with the bringing together of various interest groups into a single umbrella organisation with a convenor who had connections with the union movement. John Baas, a public servant and rank and file unionist, became interested in the area. He had not hitherto been involved with the green movement. Baas visited the site after chatting with a colleague belonging to a four-wheel drive club, who gave him a self-drive tour map of Mt Lesueur, prepared by the Wildflower Society in response to developments in early 1989. Baas recalls that he quickly became "hooked" on Mt Lesueur's significance after a three-hour drive through it. He began to talk to greens activists. By this time, local opposition had coalesced into a group calling itself Friends of Lesueur Association (FOLA). Baas was a friend of TLCWA Assistant Secretary Rob Meecham, who pointed him towards a union secretary whose partner was WA chairperson of the Australian Conservation Foundation. Impressed by the amount of work already put in by various groups and individuals such as independent botanist Ted Griffin, Baas volunteered to coordinate the campaign.

There was now a mechanism to pull together diverse groups, which nevertheless had a common aim. The Lesueur Forum, as this group became known, gathered momentum. Considerable preparatory work was done prior to the first meeting of the "Joint Groups Campaign" in January 1990. Attending the

first meeting were three representatives from the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), a FOLA representative (who also represented the Lesueur Project Challenge Group), representatives from the Wilderness Society and the Conservation Council of WA, Labor MLA Ian Alexander,⁴ botanist Ted Griffin, and representatives from the Metal Workers' Union (AMWU), the Federated Miscellaneous Workers' Union (FMWU), the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Workers' Union (CFMEU), and the Metal Trades Federation of Unions (MTFU).⁵ The conservation groups cited environmental concerns; the unions all cited concern about private power station development, although the FMWU put a position, based on environmental grounds, that had initially come from its National Park Rangers' Association, a member body (Park Ranger Rory Neal was and still is President of the FMWU). John Baas was formally named convenor and chair, and the real work of the Lesueur Forum began.

The Main Campaign

The Lesueur Forum lobbied on a range of fronts and with a diverse array of strategies. These strategies focussed on raising public awareness and the political lobbying process, and thus on "marketing" the importance of Mt Lesueur. The Forum engaged with the ERMP process, but also put much of its energy into generating others to respond. During this period, over 500 submissions (most of them form letters prepared by the Lesueur Forum) were received by the EPA (Muthuma 1991). The March to August period in 1990 was one of intense activity for the Lesueur Forum. The group kept up a stream of correspondence to politicians and the press and circulated a petition, feeding

⁴ Alexander described himself as a "member of the public", not representing the government, although he offered to be a link with the ALP Caucus.

⁵ The Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union and The WA Wildflower Society (Inc) were also involved - their first involvement in a political campaign

completed petition sheets to the government via Ian Alexander.⁶ It produced information material, including 30 000 copies of a four-page colour brochure (“An Open-Cut Coal Mine and Power Station in the Mt Lesueur Area?” 1990). The various groups distributed the pamphlets and the “form” submissions via a range of outlets, including a mass handout of the brochures, on street corners, railway and bus stations in Perth, the Hyde Park Festival and Garden Week (both in March), the Palm Sunday Rally in April, an Easter racing festival at Leeman (near Jurien) and the May Day march. A rally was held at Parliament House on World Environment Day on 5 June, with the participation of unions, conservation groups and residents (*Civil Service Journal*, 24 May 1990).

In addition to this mass lobbying activity, various groups associated with the Forum put in detailed responses to the EPA. The TLCWA argued against a privately owned coal fired power station on account of its private ownership and operation, environmental damage from both mining and power generation, and fragmentation of infrastructure associated with coal mining. It put the case a 12 month delay in decision-making to allow the range of alternatives to be considered. The TLC focussed its attention on the proposed project’s *social* impact, stating that the *economic* arguments would be analysed in its response to the findings of the Harman Inquiry (TLCWA, Circular No. 155/90).

A key feature of the campaign was the involvement of the arts community. Just prior to the campaign, the WA Branch of the Operative Painters and Decorators Union (OPDU) had unionised visual artists and obtained an award for them (Bailey 2001b), part of an Australia-wide strategy by the union. The union had experimented with organising approaches for this atypical group of members; it had an

“artworkers committee”, and had organised a number of promotional activities for members, including a changing series of exhibitions at an inner-city hotel, and some funded programs which created “art and working life” projects. There was thus a nucleus of emerging young artists, with experience on funded local government arts projects and other community-based arts activities, from which the Lesueur Forum could draw talent. As a mixed industrial, political and environmental campaign, Lesueur offered a challenge to these artists – many of whom had been involved in campaigns or projects on one of these fronts, but not on all. Ric McCracken, TLCWA arts officer and Di McAtee, artworker organiser for the OPDU (both former visual artists) threw themselves into the campaign and were able to coordinate artist involvement. The hospitality of local landowners was important; they hosted two two-day visits, one for visual artists and one for performing artists (McCracken 1990, 42). Key strategies included production of 2 000 copies of a postcard⁷ distributed as petitions by the Conservation Council; screen-printed T-shirts;⁸ and the brochure referred to above.⁹ Artist Louise Lodge curated an art exhibition to support the campaign, with 43 artists donating part or all of the proceeds of their sales of 104 works. Singer/songwriter Johnnie Miller composed a song “Have we watched the final wedgetail fly the slopes of Mt Lesueur?”.

Success for the Campaigners

The campaign bore fruit. SECWA announced in July 1990 that it had dropped the CRA proposal from its consideration of power generation options. The Harman Committee recommended at the same time

⁷ Artists Sarah McNamara, Michelle Elliott and Pam Kleeman.

⁸ Artists Geoff Vivian and Kathy Taylor.

⁹ Produced with the combined talents of writer Rod Moran, graphic designer Kent Coulter, musician Julia Mendelawitz, and prominent photographer Richard Woldendorp.

⁶ Eventually 10 000 signatures were received.

that the state choose a gas-fired power station if sufficient gas reserves could be proved (*The West Australian*, 23 May 1999, p.1). Although there was considerable debate about whether sufficient gas reserves existed, this took the spotlight off the need to develop another coal-fired station.¹⁰ From a strategic perspective, a key factor was the alleged “doctoring” of a CALM report on Mt Lesueur, in the public arena since July 1989, which was made much of in the press. Censorship included deletion of a chapter on “Possible Impact of Coal Mine and Power Station”, which included warnings on the dangers of dieback spread, and the possibility that the area would never recover from mining. Warnings about the possible effects of power station stack emissions were also deleted.¹¹

Shortly afterwards, CRA withdrew its proposal from EPA consideration. In December 1990, the EPA upheld its earlier recommendation that the Lesueur area be classed as a Class A national park, a recommendation which was endorsed by the Minister for the Environment. The Lesueur Forum remained operative until February 1992, as the final status of the park needed to be determined. The group knew of the history of ‘recommendations’ about the area, and wanted to see the issue through to finality. One of its final actions was arguing against a submission from the Chambers of Mines and Energy, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Confederation of WA Industry that the CRA coal leases be excised from the proposed Park (Lesueur Forum letter to all MLAs and MLCs, approx February 1991). The Park was finally gazetted, with only an existing gravel pit as an excision, in

February 1992 (Lesueur Forum letter to all members, 14 February 1992).

Analysis

The agenda of the union movement was different from that of the residents and conservation groups. The TLC and its affiliates had a long-term anti-privatisation agenda, coupled with a strong commitment to continuation and expansion of the Collie coalfields and coal-generated power. The residents’ aims, on the other hand, were focused on removing the threat of *this* power station – which only eventual gazettal of the Park would achieve. Finally, the conservation groups had a commitment to cleaner energy production in the long haul, as well as stopping the Hill River project. In the medium to long term, the greens and the union movement may not have agreed on power options for WA. What was significant for *this campaign*, however, was that different groups could agree about one thing – no (public or private) power station near Jurien, and the gazettal of Mt Lesueur as a national park. Essentially, then, the union movement needed the support and legitimacy of the conservation movement to frame a campaign that was about “the public interest” and not simply anti private power station and pro Collie coal. At the same time, the interests of the conservation movement were served by unions’ political connections to the ALP, the party in power. Residents had effective informal and formal ties with Opposition parliamentarians¹² which were useful, but they too were served by an alliance with the union movement. The campaign bears out the contention that “[w]ith a social base and very often privileged channels of access to institutional decision-makers (both directly through the public administration and indirectly through the political parties) the trade unions can

¹⁰ The ALP had also set up an internal Power Generation Review Committee, which came to different conclusions to the Harman Report, giving a greater emphasis to coal (Harman 1992).

¹¹ The report had been “leaked” to one of the “greens” – probably by someone within government – who then held onto it until a strategic time when its release would make the most impact.

¹² A local resident campaigner co-owned his property with the Opposition spokesperson on transport; another Opposition spokesperson helped by presenting petitions to parliament.

increase the mobilisation capacities and chances of success for social movements” (Della Porta and Diani, 1999, 214). In addition, the labour movement was well placed to deliver political benefits in terms of votes (Harman 1992) and continued affiliation of unions. One cannot claim however that the union movement “used” the greens and/or the residents; one could as justly claim that the reverse occurred. Rather, it was an issue on which interest converged, without overlapping entirely, and where the final goal suited all parties.

The groups were also able to agree that the focus of the campaign was on public campaigning and influencing key decision-makers, not so much on attempting to influence the EIA process. The Lesueur Forum’s role focussed on public campaigning and lobbying. Lengthy submissions, if they were to be made, were generally made by individual organisations involved in the Forum. Muthuma contrasts this campaign with the Tasmanian woodchip controversy, which focussed on detailed criticism of the environmental impact statement, leaving the campaign to generate public support until very late (nd, citing Formby 1987).

In all, research, planning and strategy development were highly thought-through. Bronfenbrenner and Juravich detail a range of strategies that are used in successful mobilising campaigns, most of which are evident in the Mt Lesueur campaign. Firstly, the campaign used person-to-person contact, which was achieved in various ways, evolving out of existing networks, such as friendships and partnerships and the OPDU’s Artworkers Committee. There is a large body of social movement literature which confirms how important networks are for the recruitment of activists and the mobilisation of supporters (Snow et al 1980; Diani 1995, pp.71-72). Perth’s size is conducive to the kinds of “dense links” that foster affective ties and communitarian relations. The Lesueur Forum was important in

formalising existing informal networks and building a network structure based on exchanges that relied on interpersonal relationships (Mandell 1999, p.45) and in the process built “social capital” (Coleman, 1990). The Forum was an important point of contact; commitment to it was high, it was efficient (meeting only monthly even at the height of the campaign), with of course intensive work by members *between* meetings. In addition to social ties, there were strategies *across space* in generating person-to-person contact, such as the visits to Mt Lesueur by a range of individuals and groups which were underpinned by the unremitting hospitality of local residents, who hosted weekends, held barbecues, conducted tours for anyone wanting them, etc.¹³ The alliances between groups appear to have been built on attachments to place. As Greider and Garkovich (1994) have argued, such attachments can vary in intensity and kind, with the same place meaning different things to different people. Places are not “givens”, but are culturally constructed. In this case, the residents and farmers had a particularly strong attachment, but other participants developed their own “sense of place” which was underpinned by visits to the region.

Secondly, the campaign involved active rank-and-file participation, most particularly by artworkers and by a range of environmentally interested or committed union members; though not in their thousands, such involvement was crucial.

Thirdly, there was a long-range campaign strategy aimed at gazettal of the national park, rather than merely defeating CRA’s aims in the short term. As long as CRA continued to hold mining leases around Mt Lesueur, only creating a national park could secure the region’s future once and

¹³ The non-human residents were not so welcoming: Ric McCracken recalls being driven out of Cockleshell Gully by “ferocious” mosquitoes when he tried to camp out one weekend.

for all. However, union involvement in the campaign peaked with the withdrawal of the CRA proposal in late 1990, whereas greens and residents' groups maintained their commitment to the finish.

Fourthly, this was a campaign in which the union movement had a focus on broader issues rather than narrowly focused matters of wages, benefits and job security. For the union movement to fight an ideological war against privatisation and in favour of Collie coal may have been deemed by many to represent narrow sectional interests. Thus the framing processes used by campaigners were central to the success of the campaign. The Lesueur Forum and its constituent groups were able to argue that the "pro" arguments for a coalmine at Mt Lesueur were narrowly focused on CRA shareholder interests. They stressed the alternatives available regarding power generation - there was no logic in *having* to develop Mt Lesueur coal reserves in a state with diverse energy sources. The interests on the campaigners' side were to do with preserving a unique area for future generations. Analysis of the media reports on the campaign shows that the TLC did not strongly frame their objections around the threat of a private power station to union interests generally, and to the future of the Collie coal union and its members in particular; such a tactic would have reduced the TLC to supporting a "sectional interest" against the "sectional interests" of CRA shareholders. The TLC *did* use these arguments with the government – directly, to Ministers – and via ALP channels, but chose not to emphasise them in its more public pronouncements.

Both sides attempted to "frame" the dispute to suit their own ends. Reporter Tim Treadgold of *The West Australian* filed a number of strongly polemical reports which focused on the benefits of the power station ("the lifeblood of new industries") and criticism of "loony environmentalists", "luddite unions" and "basket weavers and flower farmers", who

were all complicit in consigning WA to "the poor white trash category of Asia" (Treadgold 1989a, 1989b, 1989c). However, the Lesueur Forum kept up a steady flow of letters which emphasised values – community, economic, environmental - and stressed the range of interests and allies arrayed against the narrow sectional interests of CRA shareholders, and fed strategic stories to *The West's* environmental reporter. Baas and particularly more media-savvy "greens" developed a media strategy that was carefully thought through; Baas at one stage nearly "spilt the beans" prematurely regarding the doctored CALM report, which campaigners knew about for some time before its release, but which one of the conservation activists was keeping in abeyance for just the right moment.

In all of this, those involved in the campaign were able to exploit the fact that "the State" is clearly not a monolithic entity. Inevitably, except in the most totalitarian societies, the state provides chinks and gaps which may be exploited by social movement campaigners for their own ends. In this case, the state presented a far from united front, especially with respect to power policy. The traditional "state owned" approach had dominated up to the late 1970s, irrespective of the government in power, but there had been a shift in the late 1980s to a more market-oriented view (Harman 1992, 3). DRD, the EPPB and at least segments of SECWA were clearly in favour of increased "competition" in the power sector, and thus in favour of the project (Nicholson 1990).¹⁴ However, there were strong forces within government opposing private power stations – including more conservative elements within SECWA (referred to as

¹⁴ One supporter was Julian Grill, former Minister for Economic Development and Trade in the Dowding government, but by 1990 – in the wake of WA Inc - a Labor backbencher (Kaye, 1990). Two Federal Parliamentary members produced a discussion paper that was highly supportive of the project (Nevill and Campbell, 1990).

“entrenched bureaucrats” by Treadgold [1989b]). At the same time, the state Premier, Dr Carmen Lawrence needed to shake off the WA Inc legacy: “she stands apart from business, is an acceptable shade of green and concerns herself with respectable and compassionate social issues” (Kaye 1990). With respect to the environmental issues, CALM, via its reports provided unequivocal support for the unique conservation values of the region (even in the so-called “doctored” report). With “official” views on power options fragmented, to say the least, but with the environmental scientists’ views unambiguous, the ideological and policy gaps in the state bureaucracy favoured the campaigners. A shifting political context and “elite instability” can provide a favourable political opportunity structure for campaigners (Tarrow 1994, pp.88-89; Gotham 1999, p.335) - in this case, this was certainly true.

What was the role of the TLC? Gaspasin and Wial (1998) suggest that there are two broad orientations of central labor councils: a “conventional” orientation that involves supplying services to affiliates in a context of “only limited and sporadic ties with other community organizations” (p.58); and a more “transformative” orientation which sees labour councils “become active participants in the development of grassroots regional economic and political power” (p.60). The TLC became involved in the campaign, particularly via the involvement of its Assistant Secretary, its Arts Officer, rank and file unionists (especially members of the arts unions) and about a dozen key officials from affiliates. However, an examination of TLC records show little reference to the Lesueur Campaign, and indicates that it was not a central activity for the TLC or one that involved the broad-based labour movement in any deep way. This campaign appears to fall within the category of a “limited and sporadic” one.

Nevertheless, the TLC’s involvement was important and it provided key resources.

Ric McCracken, TLC Arts Officer at the time, described the campaign as an unusual one from his perspective. In contrast to his usual role in initiating projects himself, in this case the TLC and the Lesueur Forum came to Ric and said “artists have to be involved, can you help?” The organising work that had been done with visual artists by the OPDU in the eighteen months prior to the Lesueur campaign was crucial, as was the fact that the Musicians’ Union and Actors’ Equity had a number of politicised members. Baas cites production of the attractive glossy leaflet referred to above as the most important single strategy of the campaign.¹⁵ Johnnie Miller’s song as encapsulated the values of the campaign, and the Mt Lesueur Art Award was important in cementing relationships between groups and individuals.

The campaign effectively illustrated the process of resource mobilisation. CRA had reputedly spent \$20 m on proving its coal reserves and attempting to develop them; the Lesueur Forum eventually collected just over \$10 000 in donations – but used this as strategically as possible on a few keys elements of the campaign.

The labour-community alliance that was created was a “one off”. The TLC networked extensively with non-labour organisations, particularly via the Lesueur Forum, during the campaign, but the network dissipated with the gazettal of the National Park. A tentative campaign to protect the d’Entrecasteaux area, in the South West of WA, from the operation of sandmining companies, fizzled out. Without a particular corporate giant’s plans to provide a focus for opposition, and with most of the mining to take place on already

¹⁵ It was not produced on recycled paper, as this would have reduced its quality and attractiveness; this caused considerable disquiet amongst some members of the Lesueur Forum.

cleared farmland, there was no effective way of mobilising effectively.

Conclusion

While the campaign did not lead to lasting formal alliances between groups, that is the nature of such coalitions, which fulfil a certain purpose at a point in time by establishing common short-term goals on which to cooperate. The Mt Lesueur campaign was a well coordinated and in the end highly successful effort to formally reserve the area as a national park. The volatile political economy of the time was undoubtedly a factor in the campaign's success – but it was not the only factor. The campaign illustrates how successful coalitions can be built between the labour movement, social movement groups and residents' organisations by a number of dedicated participants.

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