On 18 June 1972, Patrick White made his début as a public speaker from the back of a truck in Sydney’s Centennial Park. He was there to address a rally against the state government’s plan to turn the area into a sports centre, which would have ruined the ecology and amenity of the park.1 ‘Your parks are your breathing spaces,’ he told the crowd. ‘Guard them, cherish them… [and] protect [them] from the pressure of political concrete’.2 Standing next to White that day was the secretary of the New South Wales Builders Labourers’ Federation (NSWBLF), Jack Mundey, who had just announced that his union would place a ‘green ban’ on any development in the park. This was the first of many occasions over the next few years when White and Mundey would stand shoulder to shoulder in defence of Sydney’s heritage and environment. However to many, they could not have been stranger bedfellows. Viewed through the strictures of class, White, an aesthete writer and Cambridge educated son of a Hunter Valley grazier, would have been unlikely to give Mundey, a former Rugby League star, builder’s labourer and Communist union official, the time of day, and vice versa. Moreover, the idea that these two figures and the sections of society that they represented could come together to oppose Sydney’s rampant urban development would have seemed absurd only a few years earlier. However, the 1960s cultural revolution and the rise of ecological consciousness permanently transformed these once certain social parameters. For suddenly, in place of the traditionally stratified and insular urban populace stood a new and diverse coalition of citizens who realised that the interests of society and the developers were not one and the same. Thus — as the high-rises and

expressways began to strangle the nation’s cities — workers, artists, housewives, professionals, students, pensioners, hippies and others combined to defend Australia’s urban heritage and environment.

This new epoch gave rise to the modern environmental movement, which along with the plethora of other social concerns that spilled from the 1960s became a key dimension of the Australian New Left. The term ‘New Left’ is somewhat amorphous, although in its broadest sense, it designates the movement of Western radical intellectuals at this time who were socialist in inspiration but critical of Soviet-style communism. This cohort encompassed a range of groups representing student, women’s, homosexual, environmental, anti-racist and anti-war perspectives, who all posed a challenge to the doctrines, organisation and style of the traditional, working class left. In Australia, this group comprised disparate elements ranging from the libertarian Students for a Democratic Society to the Bolshevik Maoists who were prominent in communist politics at the time. However, all groups were united by a sharp critique of Australian nationalism and racism, and of the imperially subservient and pervasively liberal nature of Australian capitalism. In this article, the New Left is taken to include all those progressive social movements of the 1960s and 1970s that challenged the ‘old left’ critique of capitalism and class, the Australian Establishment, and many tenets of traditional Australian culture and received national history. In the early 1970s this group comprised some elements within the Labor Party, sections of the union movement, various communist and Trotskyite parties, and many single issue organisations including environmentalist, feminist, anti-conscription and student groups. Importantly, many of these activists were not drawn from the ranks of the traditional working class, but had their roots in the middle and professional classes.

This article proposes that the green bans played an important part in the development of this movement in Australia. While there was an identifiable New Left

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in this country before the first ban was enforced in 1971, the actions of the NSWBLF made a vital contribution to the movement’s growth. The key to this was the way in which the green bans brought traditionally disparate interests, and until then apolitical but prominent figures such as Patrick White together in defence of the public good. This contributed to a dramatic redrawing of the political landscape, as the old class certainties began to fade. For beginning with the election of the Whitlam government in 1972, and reinforced by its dismissal three years later, many of the ‘moral middle class’ who were once the Liberals’ core constituency switched allegiance. This created the working class – tertiary educated coalition upon which the ALP depended throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and which still largely constitutes the political left in Australia today.

While this transformation was the result of a host of shifting global social and economic parameters, this article is concerned most with the way changing concepts of urbanism and cultural heritage contributed to this process. An important factor here was the de-industrialisation and subsequent gentrification of the inner city, which in Australia was accompanied by the emergence of a new left-wing nationalism built in part on a re-imagined urban mythology. This transformed the Australian city from an object of derision to one of worth, which was a necessary precondition of the campaigns for its protection. White’s conversion from detractor to defender of the suburbs provides an edifying illustration of this process.

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When Patrick White returned to Australia after the Second World War, he was affronted by what he described as the ‘Great Australian Emptiness.’ This was an emptiness

in which the mind is the least of possessions, in which the rich man is the important man, in which the schoolmaster and the journalist rule what intellectual roost there is, in which beautiful youths and girls stare at life through blind blue eyes, in which human teeth fall like autumn leaves, the buttocks

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of cars grow hourly glassier, food means cake and steak, muscles prevail, and the march of material ugliness does not raise a quiver from the average nerves. 8

A short time later, Donald Horne struck a similar chord when he characterised Australia as a 'nation without a mind', while Robyn Boyd rallied against an 'Australian Ugliness' built upon 'plastic veneers...and the White Australia Policy'. 9 However, unlike these contemporaries, White’s critique of suburbia was not framed in political terms. In 1956 he admitted that his ‘political convictions [did] not burn’ and ‘worried that politics [was] a threat to art’. 10 Born of a wealthy Establishment family, who were unmoved by civic affairs so long as Labor was out of office, White grew up to be an instinctive conservative. At Cambridge before the war, he remained ‘untouched by European politics, unworried by Fascism, hardly aware of the fate of the Jews, and unmoved by the evident poverty on London’s streets’. 11 When he returned to Australia, he cast his vote for Menzies and thought nothing else of it. 12

Despite this civic introversion, White’s writing remained far from mute on the ills of suburbia. Many of his works of this time, such as The Tree of Man (1956), Riders in the Chariot (1961) and the play The Season at Sarsaparilla (1961) were set in the imaginary outer Sydney suburb of Sarsaparilla, which White used to turn ‘savagely against the place and time in which he...found himself.’ 13 Sarsaparilla was a tract of cheap fibro-cement housing sited on requisitioned farmland which at night ‘changed shape under the stress of love or strife...[while] standing brittle in the moonlight, soluble in dreams’. 14 Prose like this earned White a reputation ‘as a ferocious critic of Australian suburban life’, although his position was perhaps a little more nuanced than is often claimed. 15 While some of his suburbanite characters were truly repulsive, others were dignified and endearing. Furthermore, his derision of the suburbs stemmed not only from his contempt for their crass materiality and the general disposition of their inhabitants. He was also distressed by the destruction of the countryside

11 Ibid., 122, 173.
12 Ibid., 491.
13 Ibid.
and the loss of memory enacted in the razing of many old and stately rural homes, which points to some continuity with his later activism against urban redevelopment.

Nevertheless, White’s general imperviousness to the politics of the city and the world at large persisted into the 1960s until it was shattered by the Vietnam War. When Australia began to send forces to Vietnam, White, like most of his circle, had been unconcerned. However, his making of some more radical acquaintances began to change his view. After reading the *Vietnam Primer* in 1966 he admitted that he had ‘been wrong, chiefly through ignorance’.\(^{16}\) When Harold Holt went to Washington the following year to assure President Johnson that Australia would go ‘All the way with LBJ’, White was appalled and vowed never to vote for the prime minister again. With Holt’s death later that year, he never had to make good on his pledge, although he was not much more enamoured with his successor, John Gorton. The ALP was now led by Gough Whitlam, and although White was initially unimpressed, he reasoned for the first time that he would have to vote Labor. In 1969 he did just that, although the Coalition retained office and the status quo vis-à-vis the war remained unchanged. This impelled White to make the first major public political statement of his life, when in December 1969 he and thirty-nine other eminent Australians publicly signed the *Statement of Defiance* prepared by the Committee in Defiance of the National Service Act.\(^{17}\)

While for White this was an undoubtedly bold and unprecedented act, there is good reason to suggest that this moment was not quite as epiphanic as some critics have suggested. To begin with, although his formative familial and social circumstances and ongoing financial position were decidedly patrician, his life from his Cambridge days onwards was not altogether typical of someone of his background. His homosexuality was one factor here, as was his often debilitating asthma and experience of other cultures during and after the war.\(^{18}\)

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This engendered a vital appreciation of social, cultural and ethnic difference, which was further heightened by his choice of life partner, the Greek Manoly Lascaris. This is evident as early as 1946, when he penned an outraged letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* protesting the racism of his fellow Australian passengers towards migrants on his voyage home from Europe after the war.\(^{19}\) Moreover, his vocation as a writer was not only atypical of his class, but also led to his positioning of himself from the outset as a critic of the Establishment. This outsider persona was manifest in much of his work and in his enduring ‘self-construction as artist-cum-labourer, rather than professional intellectual, [which] sustained his imaginary connection with the life, experience and perspectives of ordinary people’.\(^{20}\) None of this is to diminish the significance of White’s intervention at this political juncture, but it does demonstrate the evolution of his thinking, and the background to his ultimate break with the Establishment.

By this time White had also abandoned Sarsaparilla, both figuratively and literally. In 1964, he and Lascaris left their home at Castle Hill on the outskirts of Sydney for Centennial Park. This brought White close to the city at a time when it was just beginning to acquire its present cosmopolitan character. It also gave him better access to Sydney’s intellectual and artistic communities, allowing him to plug into the ‘changing cultural and political energies that would develop through the late 1960s, and come to fruition in the years of the Whitlam government’.\(^{21}\) The move also saw White shift the focus of his writing from the depravity of the suburbs to the destruction of inner Sydney, which he captured powerfully in *The Eye of the Storm* (1973). Fury at this ‘most horrifying wave of vulgarity’ saw him begin to re-evaluate the worth of Australia’s urban environment, and ultimately to put himself in the way of its destruction.\(^{22}\) He was not alone.

The new political nexus which emerged in the late 1960s had two important implications for Australian urbanism. The first was that it shattered the almost universal post-war development consensus.\(^{23}\) Stemming from the rising ecological

\(^{19}\) Strictly speaking this was White’s first public political statement, albeit not a very prominent one. He also lent support to the architect Joern Utzen when he was removed from the Sydney Opera House project by the NSW Government in 1965, although once again, this was nowhere near as significant as his Vietnam activism. See, Rooney, *Literary Activists*, 32.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 38.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 47.


conscience, a new pro-conservation coalition emerged which could not be characterised along class lines. This comprised the left of the ALP and labour movement, the Communist Parties and citizens from across the social spectrum who recoiled at the scale of deracination wrought by the coming of the skyscraper, the expressway and the international property speculator. Resisting them was a somewhat diminished capitalist class, sustained largely by the state and the right of the union movement.

The second outcome was that the traditional pastoral iterations of Australian nationalism, which had until then sustained the left, began to recede. By the late 1960s the myth of the rough and tumble bushman as the embodiment of the Australian character had lost almost all resonance for the left. While this allegory had long been questionable, the near complete disappearance of the rural working class by the late 1960s sounded its death knell. For the left, steeped in the legend of the 1891 shearers’ strike and the rural birth of the ALP, this provoked much soul searching, which was exacerbated by the right’s appropriation of rural nationalism, in the form of the conservative politics of the ‘big farmer’. This forced the left to look to the cities for a new national narrative, where they also discovered a new constituency amongst the urban, cosmopolitan, middle class intelligentsia. The battle for Australia’s urban heritage in turn provided a vital link to this group, although it took a unique union to facilitate this.

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The green bans story is well recounted in both urban folk law and academic literature, so a brief outline of this remarkable period in Australian history should suffice here. For almost five years in the early 1970s, the NSWBLF operated outside the traditional confines of the labour movement to halt approximately $5000 million worth of development by withholding labour from building and demolition jobs it considered to be socially and/or environmentally damaging. Informed by a radical concept of social responsibility which held that ‘workers had a right to insist that their labour not be used in harmful ways, the union

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saved Sydney from much social, cultural and environmental destruction. The green bans were responsible for the preservation of Kelly’s Bush, Centennial Park, The Rocks, Woolloomooloo, Victoria Street Kings Cross, significant trees in the Botanic Gardens and a large number of historic buildings of cultural and architectural importance. They also saved vast tracts of public housing slated for demolition to make way for commercial high-rise and expressway developments. Moreover, this militancy was not restricted merely to the preservation of the natural and built environment, but was also deployed in aid of oppressed groups such as women, whom the BLF insisted had the right to work in the construction industry on an equal footing with men. The union also used its industrial muscle to further the rights of prisoners, homosexuals, Aborigines, migrants, students and the poor.

However, the movement was short-lived, as the BLF federal executive led by Norm Gallagher conspired with the Master Builders Association to have the NSW

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28 In all there were forty-three green bans enforced in Sydney. Elsewhere the BLF was not so militant. In Melbourne there were only twenty-five bans, while in Perth there were four, in Adelaide three, and only a couple in Brisbane and Hobart. See Roddewig, Green Bans, 29-35.

29 Burgmann and Burgmann, Green Bans, 3.
branch deregistered. Mundey and fellow leaders Joe Owens and Bob Pringle were subsequently expelled from the union in late 1974. No further bans were enforced and some existing ones were broken. However, despite its brevity, this period of BLF militancy ‘impressed and inspired constituencies far beyond its membership and even beyond the working class’. This in turn aided the transformation of many previously apolitical and/or conservative people into enthusiastic New Leftists. It also opened up new spaces for alliances which transcended the strictures of race, gender and sexuality, and exposed the rapacious, philistine and unsustainable nature of speculative capital.

How then did the green bans inspire and unite these seemingly disparate groups? The first precondition was the NSWBLF’s preparedness to concern itself with a broader set of issues than just the wages and conditions of its members. This transcendence of economism had few precedents in the Australian labour movement. The second key factor was the temper of politics and development in Sydney at the time. The city had experienced a building boom throughout the 1960s and 1970s which was turning it into a ‘concrete jungle’ of high-rise office buildings and expressways. This destruction angered people from all walks of life, particularly as it was overseen by a corrupt state government that was impervious to citizens’ concerns. This left residents’ groups with nowhere else to turn but the BLF when their neighbourhoods were threatened, which broke down class barriers when bans were enforced to protect middle and upper class suburbs. Moreover, when bans were placed on buildings for their architectural and historical significance, community prejudices about the unsophistication of manual workers were dramatically confounded. Another important factor was the ultra-democratic nature of the union. For not only did the rank and file have unprecedented control over union affairs, but the leadership kept their salaries at the same level as those on the job, forwent remuneration during strikes and had limited tenure of office. This in turn coloured the BLF’s interaction with the wider community, giving residents a voice on development.

30 Ibid., 267-75.
31 Ibid., 5.
33 See, Short, “Construction Workers and the City,” 739.
34 One striking exception to this was the Waterside Workers Federation’s refusal to load pig iron onto ships at Port Kembla which were bound for Japan in 1938. See, Mallory, Uncharted Waters, 39-48.
35 Ibid., 47.
36 Burgmann and Burgmann, Green Bans, Red Union, 36-9, 46-9.
37 Ibid., 228-9.
issues through the union’s industrial power.\textsuperscript{38} Also significant was the ‘green ban’ neologism, which Mundey adapted from the traditional ‘black bans’ enforced by workers over industrial issues. This was imperative to overcoming the often ugly connotations of the black ban, while expressing the expansive and inclusive aims of the movement.\textsuperscript{39} The union’s receptiveness to New Left ideas also helped broaden its support base, particularly amongst students, academics and hippies. This broad alliance came to constitute an alternative public sphere which transcended the traditional class-based strictures of conflict and association.\textsuperscript{40} Finally, the prevailing political climate of the time also fostered the movement. Although the Labor government elected in 1972 had far more prosaic ambitions than Mundey and his supporters, its overall comportment did offer some succour to Australian radicals, particularly as Whitlam and his ministers gave the green bans their tacit support.\textsuperscript{41} Moreover, many of the principles of town planning, consultation, and environmental and heritage protection sought by the BLF were eventually incorporated into the planning processes of local, state and federal government.\textsuperscript{42}

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On 16 March 1972, White opened the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} and read that the state government was planning to build a $76 million sporting complex in Centennial and adjacent Moore Parks in the hope of securing the 1988 Olympic Games. The scheme would have alienated more than a hundred acres of public land and destroyed many of the formal Victorian gardens, ponds, grand avenues, historic buildings, significant trees and other flora and fauna that characterise the park. His house and the thirty-five others in his street, some of which had been designed by the likes of Walter Burley Griffin and Alfred Waterhouse, were also slated for demolition. ‘He was appalled’.\textsuperscript{43} ‘[F]ancy…spending such a fortune on SPORT…when we haven’t enough hospitals, schools, poverty is increasing every month [and] we have done hardly anything for the Aborigines’.\textsuperscript{44} The next night White appeared on television for the first time in his life to condemn the plan, which he described as ‘a gigantic political lurk for the

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 52-8.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 8-9. This was also the first time the adjective ‘green’ had been used in association with the environment movement anywhere in the world.
\textsuperscript{40} Burgmann and Burgmann, \textit{Green Bans, Red Union}, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 25; Mallory, \textit{Uncharted Waters}, 152-5.
\textsuperscript{42} Burgmann and Burgmann, \textit{Green Bans, Red Union}, 278-86.
\textsuperscript{43} Marr, \textit{Patrick White: A Life}, 508.
glorification of shaky politicians’. Rallying against what he called the ‘great god sport’, he maintained that it was ‘immoral to spend so much on sport when there are so many other things that should be attended to first’.45

In June, he joined Mundey and others for the rally recounted above. For the normally reclusive and media-shy White, this was a frightening experience. He was ‘horrified at the prospect…and doubted whether [he] could play the role’. However, when he was finished and the applause had abated, White realised that a ‘desire to speak was [now] added to [his] impulse to write’.46 He never looked back. After meeting in the park, White and Mundey led nearly 5000 marchers to the Town Hall where White again spoke. ‘This sports complex’ he said, is:

a great concrete growth…only three miles from the city’s heart…It seems incredible that those acting for our good have not given more thought to the blessing they are wishing on us, when there are other sites in the sprawl of Sydney far more suited.47

Mundey and his union promptly placed a green ban on the scheme, which effectively ended the project.48 White was impressed and one of the new conservation movement’s most prominent alliances was born.49 In November 1973, another rally was held in support of the ban. White sent a letter of support which was also published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.50

It is a sad reflection on our so-called civilisation that the residents of Sydney in times of threat to their homes or way of life are forced time and again to turn to the Builders Labourers’ Federation, involving them in constant vilification, misrepresentation by the media, and frequent loss of pay. It is a rare thing to find a union with so advanced a social conscience.51

Demonstrating his recent rapprochement with suburbia, White declared that ‘the oasis in the backyard is more important than the ultimately suicidal tower if the average citizen in our still developing cities is to preserve his piece of mind’.52

48 Burgmann and Burgmann, *Green Bans, Red Union*, 188.
51 Ibid. White also wrote a joint letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* with the economist and fellow Centennial Park resident, Neil Runcie, which took the paper to task for its hostility to the green bans campaign. It also highlighted the inadequacies of town planning in Sydney at that time. See, White and Runcie, “Black Bans by Builders’ Labourers,” letter to the editor, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 August 1972.
In his memoir *Flaws in the Glass* (1981), White admits that ‘we the bourgeoisie were bludgeoned out of our complacency’ by the threat to Centennial Park.\(^53\) For White, this marked the beginning of a profound personal transformation from private conservative to public radical. ‘I had started voting Labor while Menzies still had [me] in his grip, [but my] convictions had been comparatively passive. As time went by [I] began to see the for the injustices and dishonesties of the Establishment’.\(^54\) For Mundey this sentiment was significant, as the green bans ‘showed that it was possible to bring enlightened sections of the working class and the middle class into an alliance’.\(^55\) Centennial Park and Patrick White were an important factor in this. ‘Quite a number of the people who [campaigned for the park] were then apolitical...[But] when it was all over the majority...became involved in the cause of conservation. Ahead of them all was Patrick White’.\(^56\) This ecological politicisation of the previously apathetic was the key to saving Centennial Park, and also a central dynamic of the new environmental movement.\(^57\) Reflecting on the campaign, White contended that Mundey was ‘a most remarkable man, who has done a lot towards saving bits of Sydney we don’t want destroyed’.\(^58\) He also acknowledged the new position in the politics of the city he now occupied due to his support for the green bans. ‘Because [Mundey] is a Communist there is a perpetual stream of screams from the right, by whom I too, am labelled a Communist’.\(^59\)

With Centennial Park safe, White threw himself into the wider green bans movement. In mid 1973, for instance, he spoke at a rally opposing the eviction of residents from their historic homes in Victoria Street Kings Cross to make way for a high-rise development. ‘What seems to me to be overlooked continually by those who plan building development’ he said, are

> the ones who are most closely affected by the development — the human beings who are to be disposed of like sheep or cattle...Civilisation is not a matter of money and concrete...Civilisation, as I see it, depends on spirit — human beings — human values.\(^60\)

These ruminations on the menace money posed to civilisation and humanity were

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\(^{53}\) White, *Flaws in the Glass*, 222.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 225.

\(^{55}\) Mundey, *Green Bans and Beyond*, 148.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 100.


\(^{59}\) Ibid.

to inform White’s activism for the rest of his life.

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In 1974 White was made Australian of the Year after becoming the first — and to date only — Australian to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He used his acceptance speech to honour Manning Clark, Barry Humphries, and Jack Mundey, whom he described as ‘three mavericks’. Of Mundey he said:

What gives me hope for Australia is that during recent years men have emerged who are aware of our faults and gifted enough to warn us by drawing our attention to them in highly individual and forceful ways…Such a man is…Jack Mundey…Mundey was the first citizen of our increasingly benighted, shark infested city of Sydney who succeeded effectively in calling the bluff of those who had begun tearing us to bits…I want to take this opportunity to salute Jack…an exceptional Australian and…a man whose sincerity has survived his rise to a position of influence.

After Gallagher’s intervention in the NSW branch of the BLF, White continued to support Mundey and the green bans campaign. In 1975 he became a foundation member of Mundey’s Friends of the Green Bans Movement, which sought to defend the remaining bans, while in 1981 he wrote an open letter to the ACTU urging it to reinstate Mundey’s union membership and accord him his due. He also immortalised Mundey in the figure of Terry Legge, the union official at the centre of his 1978 play *Big Toys*, who resists the blandishments of the corrupt society around him.

White’s green ban enthusiasm also spilled out into broader political activism. Before the 1972 election, he had attracted only passing attention when he

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62 White, ‘Australian of the Year,’ speech delivered 25 January 1974, in *Patrick White Speaks*, 47-8. Of Clark he said: ‘We should be deeply grateful to [him] for giving us this living panorama of a developing nation, omitting none of the sweat, the wounds, the aspirations and the failures, as well as touching interludes in both high and low places. We must thank this great historian for showing us that what we were is what we are.’ He described Humphries as ‘one of the most original, scintillating minds [Australia has] produced,’ although he was soon to fall out with the satirist over his support for the dismissal of the Whitlam government. See Marr, *Patrick White: A Life*, 578.


signed an open letter in support of Whitlam’s campaign.\textsuperscript{65} The 1974 election however, was his political ‘coming out’.\textsuperscript{66} Speaking at a huge rally in support of the Labor government, White said:

Some of you...may be in a quandary over how to cast your vote – as I too found myself in a quandary at a certain point in the post-Menzies era. Brought up in the Liberal tradition, I realised we had reached the stage where a change had to be made – that we must cure ourselves of mentally constipated attitudes [and] heave ourselves out of [our] terrible stagnation.\textsuperscript{67}

He commended the ALP for its support of the arts, its attempts to alleviate poverty and address indigenous dispossession, and for its programmes of urban renewal and conservation. ‘The Whitlam government, I believe, recognises and respects the rights of the defenceless to a degree that the opposition, with its subservience to monied interests, cannot pretend to emulate’.\textsuperscript{68} After this particular performance, Judith Wright warned White that so far as activism is concerned, ‘[o]nce you put your foot on the flypaper, you’ll never shake it off’.\textsuperscript{69}

In White’s case this was to prove deftly true.

White’s enthusiasm for Labor’s politics was also accompanied by a new appreciation of its personnel. In 1966 he had described Arthur Calwell as a ‘working class imbecile’ with a voice like a ‘cement mixer’\textsuperscript{70}. However, by the early 1970s he was corresponding regularly with Whitlam and counted a number of ALP figures amongst his personal friends.\textsuperscript{71} Indeed, by 1977, White had come full circle. Writing to Manning Clark he asked: ‘Does it strike you how \textit{common} the Liberal politicians sound on the radio?’\textsuperscript{72} However, it was Whitlam’s dismissal in 1975 that completed White’s radicalisation, and turned many others like him permanently against the Liberals.\textsuperscript{73} It also precipitated his final severance from the Establishment, as the, ‘greed and impatience of the conservatives [and] all those who applauded this bizarre royal exercise’,
disgusted him.\textsuperscript{74} He again spoke in support of Whitlam:

The events of November 11 reminded me of events in other countries in recent times. There was no use of tanks and troops but there are still sinister overtones…in the sense that we are moving away from democracy…If the Liberals came to power I am afraid that we would slip back to those Philistine days that we had in their previous days of rule.\textsuperscript{75}

The Establishment had initially looked on White’s enthusiasm for Whitlam as a ‘sympathetic eccentricity.’ Now they disowned him. He was abused at the shops and his friends were insulted at parties.\textsuperscript{76} White meanwhile, simply severed all ties with those in his acquaintance who welcomed Fraser’s ascendancy.\textsuperscript{77}

The events of November 1975 propelled White into many other progressive campaigns. Initially these were for constitutional change and the abolition of the monarchy and later for nuclear disarmament and an end to uranium mining.\textsuperscript{78} He also lobbied for the protection of Fraser Island from sand mining and against the monorail in Sydney.\textsuperscript{79} White’s biographer, David Marr, suggests that the common thread that, ‘ran through all the political causes he had taken up since he spoke from the truck in Centennial Park…was his fear of the power of money’.\textsuperscript{80} He was dismayed by the philistinism of the developers who threatened to destroy Sydney; disgusted by the impatience of the conservatives who disposed of Whitlam; and revolted by the greed of the uranium miners and the governments who supported them.

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In 1956 White told a correspondent that he was afraid that, ‘art is art, and politics is politics’.\textsuperscript{81} Nearly a quarter of a century later, these sentiments were long forgotten. ‘How,’ he asked in his memoir, ‘is it possible for any but a superficial artist to live and work inside a vacuum’.\textsuperscript{82} White had changed and so had Australia. The political landscape had been redrawn and the green bans had played a

\textsuperscript{74} Marr, \textit{Patrick White: A Life}, 557.
\textsuperscript{75} Ian Frykberg, “Patrick White Sees ‘Sinister’ Overtones,” \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 29 November 1975.
\textsuperscript{76} Marr, \textit{Patrick White: A Life}, 557-8.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 578.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 578, 611, 618.
\textsuperscript{80} Marr, \textit{Patrick White: A Life}, 612.
\textsuperscript{81} White, “Letter to Peggy Garland,” 10 May 1956.
\textsuperscript{82} White, \textit{Flaws in the Glass}, 226.
small, but not insignificant part in this ‘revolution’. For had the NSW Builders Labourers’ Federation not come to the rescue of Sydney’s lumpenbourgeoisie when their city was threatened, formidable figures such as Patrick White may have been forever lost to the Australian New Left.

By 1980, the green bans were a fading memory and the New Left had been largely subsumed by the broader and less radical modern Australian left. This coalition of interests and social movements has continued to shape the agenda for progressive politics in this country, and retains many of the distinctive elements which first emerged during the green bans period. These include a concern for the environment and minority rights, and a membership which defies categorisation along traditional class lines. White remained a prominent figure in this movement until his death in 1989, however, his role did not end there. During the ‘culture wars’ of the 1990s and 2000s, he was dragged back into the fray posthumously as an emblem of the elitist, anti-Australian intellectualism so vociferously decried by Howard-era conservatives. Thus, while the political terrain has shifted greatly since the time of the green bans and Patrick White’s political ‘coming out’, the legacy of these events endures to this day.

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83 Murphy, “New Left.”