RESEARCH NOTE

A Note on the Files of ‘The Movement’ in South Australia

Malcolm Saunders

No labour historian over the age of 50 needs any introduction to the Catholic Social Studies Movement, more commonly referred to as ‘The Movement’ and very occasionally as ‘The Show’. Even though Liberal politician, Tony Abbott, has publicly acknowledged his debt to its leader, Bartholomew Augustine (Bob) Santamaria (1915-98), as ‘a philosophical star by which you could always steer’,¹ there are increasingly fewer people who have heard of The Movement or for whom it has any meaning. Very simply, it was a largely secret and, even more so, a secretive Catholic-inspired organisation set up in Victoria in the early 1940s to combat communism in Australian society in general, and in the trade union movement and the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in particular. Bob Santamaria was its driving force for more than half a century and possibly the most famous lay Catholic in Australian history. From 1945, The Movement was officially endorsed by the Catholic Church and at least by 1946 had been established in every state in Australia.

In the late 1940s, communist influence in Australia was at its height but anti-communism was also on the rise. Between 1945 and 1947, The Movement was decisive in persuading the ALP in most states to set up anti-communist ‘Industrial Groups’ in its affiliated unions. By the early 1950s, The Movement, working through the Industrial Groups, had achieved notable success in ousting communists from leadership positions in several major unions and was at the zenith of its power.² However, at the same time its methods had begun to disturb influential figures in both the ALP and the Catholic Church itself. When the leader of the federal Parliamentary Labor Party, Dr H.V. Evatt, publicly denounced The Movement in early October 1954, he precipitated the third and worst of the splits the ALP has suffered since it was formed in the early 1890s.³

The conflict – between the majority who wanted to stay within the ALP and those who thought it was too ‘soft’ on communism and were prepared to leave it – prevented the ALP from achieving office in the federal sphere for the next 18 years. Many in The Movement broke away and formed a new political party, eventually called the Democratic Labor Party (DLP), which at both federal and state elections gave its preferences to the conservative parties and helped them retain power in Canberra until 1972. In late 1957, The Movement, no longer a secret organisation and having lost the official backing of the Catholic Church, reconstituted itself as the National Civic Council (NCC), the name by which it has been known ever since. While communism is no longer an issue in Australian politics, The NCC, nonetheless, remains a major mouthpiece for conservative opinion.

The Movement in South Australia was never as big or as influential as it was in the eastern states (New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland) and on a per capita basis probably not as big as it was in the other states (Western Australia and Tasmania). The
milieu in which it operated was very different. Of all the states, South Australia had
the lowest proportion of Catholics.4 Within the ALP, Catholics were less influential in
the South Australian branch than they were in other states. The Catholic archbishop
of Adelaide, Matthew Beovich, was a strong supporter of The Movement in the early
1950s but an equally strong opponent of the NCC after Rome had effectively ruled
against it in 1957. Well before this he had been adamantly opposed to the formation
of a ‘confessional’ political party, especially in South Australia. Apart from Western
Australia, South Australia was the only state in which a DLP candidate was never
elected to either a federal or state house of parliament.5

Nevertheless, The Movement in South Australia was far from insignificant. As
a later publication of mine will show, its members were no less loyal to the church
or dedicated to the anti-communist cause than their counterparts in Melbourne
or Sydney. Neither was it an unimportant branch of The Movement nationwide.
Its ‘intelligence’ wing was very effective and provided valuable information to
‘headquarters’ in Melbourne and later to the Sydney branch.6 Nor was it without
success in the unions. True, it failed to oust the left-wing and longstanding secretary
of the Federated Clerks Union (FCU) from his position as its secretary but Harry
Krantz had never been a card-carrying communist anyway. Those who defeated
communists at elections for officeholders in the Shop Assistants Union and the
Federated Ironworkers Association in the early 1950s were not simply ‘Groupers’
but ‘Movement’ men (and women).7

Since the early 1970s, there have been numerous studies of The Movement in
the form of books and theses.8 The half-centenary of ‘the great split’ in the ALP
was the occasion for several and, by and large, more sympathetic works on the
subject. However, there has not been one focusing solely on The Movement in South
Australia. In the mid-1970s, John Warhurst (then a young postgraduate student
in the Politics Department at Flinders University) spent several years examining
anti-communism in Australia from the late 1940s to the early 1960s for his doctoral
thesis.9 During this time, he produced two offshoots on the origins of the DLP in
South Australia, both of which centred on the federal elections of November 1955.10
Warhurst’s published and unpublished work were pioneering studies of right-wing
forces in post-war South Australia.

Quite fortuitously, one of Warhurst’s undergraduate politics students was
John Hepworth, then a young priest in the parish of Colonel Light Gardens, a
few kilometres south of the Adelaide CBD.11 In 1975, Hepworth wrote a second-
year research essay on The Movement in South Australia which he later showed
to Warhurst. He followed it up in 1982 with a Bachelor of Arts thesis under the
supervision of Bruce McFarlane in the Politics Department at the University of
Adelaide.12 The essay was a poorly prepared piece of work and barely passed. In
the thesis, however, Hepworth discusses in some depth the intellectual and cultural
thinking which led to The Movement’s formation. Nevertheless, neither Warhurst’s
nor Hepworth’s work tells us all or even most of what might be said about The
Movement in South Australia. Neither scholar was primarily concerned with the
history of The Movement.

Very recently, Josephine Laffin, a lecturer in church history at Flinders University,
produced a lengthy study of Matthew Beovich, the Catholic archbishop of Adelaide
Beovich made critical decisions not only about the establishment of The Movement in South Australia between 1945 and 1948 but also concerning the Adelaide archdiocese’s rejection of The Movement’s successors – the Catholic Social Movement and, later, the NCC – between 1955 and 1957. Chapter VI of Laffin’s biography of Beovich is probably the most detailed and comprehensive study of The Movement in South Australia to date. However, Laffin’s focus is on Beovich, and consequently her treatment of The Movement is much more a look at it from the top down than from the bottom up.14

But the issue here is not whether the story has been told, or ought to be told, but whether it can be told. For The Movement in South Australia left little in the way of files which historians could study. Yet, by its very nature, The Movement was an information gathering and disseminating organisation, and must have generated a large amount of paperwork in the late 1940s and early 1950s. How can we explain the paucity of written sources? What has happened to whatever it did produce?

The first question is relatively easy to answer. Between 2004 and 2010, I interviewed more than a dozen men who were either in The Movement in Adelaide or closely associated with it. I asked each and every one of them whether he had kept any papers to do with his involvement in it. None had kept any, simply because there were few to keep. Communication – between officials and members, and particularly between the members themselves – was almost entirely by word of mouth, seldom by telephone, and only indirectly by means of written instructions or invitations. The member of a typical Movement ‘cell’ in a union or a parish knew the people in the office in Adelaide a little and those in their own group – which usually numbered six to twelve – quite intimately. Although they met as a ‘cell’ perhaps weekly or fortnightly, only a few times a year would they attend a large meeting in the city to hear a visiting speaker, such as Father H. Lalor SJ, Norman Lauritz or, perhaps, Santamaria himself. At such meetings most of those assembled would be strangers to one another. From their perspective, The Movement was almost paperless.

Not so at the centre where a huge amount of information was put on paper and stored away. The origins of the branch are murky, but it is clear that at least as early as 1944 some Catholics were working against communists and ‘fellow travellers’ in the state branch of the ALP and in some local trade unions.15 In 1945, for instance, they claimed at least one local scalp – the elderly, left-leaning and longstanding secretary of the ALP in South Australia, Frederick Furner Ward; in September 1944, they helped replace him with a young Catholic official from the FCU.16 Very likely, The Movement in South Australia was put on a more organised footing in late 1945/early 1946 after Beovich asked a devout middle-aged Catholic, Edward (Ted) Farrell, to resign his job as a teacher in the state school system and devote himself full time to the church.17 Another step was taken in 1947-48, when Beovich asked Farrell to head a unit within the church called the Newman Institute of Christian Studies.18

Farrell, a loyal and obedient subordinate to Beovich, was a good speaker and a superb organiser. He set about organising The Movement from the centre to the periphery. The Newman Institute was given space in Todd Building – on the southern corner of Wakefield Street and Victoria Square – which it shared with several other Catholic organisations.19 The Movement in South Australia operated under the cloak provided by the Newman Institute until the latter was reconstituted and its role radically revised in 1958. Farrell worked continuously for The Movement and
the Newman Institute – for the former in secret, the latter openly – until he returned to teaching in late 1964. Well before this, however, his services to the church had been rewarded with a papal medal.

By the early 1950s – the heyday of The Movement – at least five people worked full time for it and the Newman Institute in cramped offices in the Todd Building. Apart from Farrell himself, there were two organisers (Cyril Naughton and Brian Nash) and two female secretaries (Nell Butterfield and Patricia Ryan). With the help of scores of Movement men (and women) – from the ALP, a dozen or more trade unions and roughly 25 parish groups around Adelaide and industrial towns such as Port Augusta, Whyalla and Peterborough – they set about collating information, on paper, about communists and alleged communists in South Australia, and organising ‘the numbers’ to destroy their influence not only in the organised labour movement but also in a wide range of civic organisations. Spencer Killicoat, of the SAU, was almost certainly their most valuable local informant.

The Movement, it cannot be overstated, was a clandestine and highly secretive organisation. It should be easy to accept that, after it was wound down in the late 1950s and early 1960s, many associated with it were somewhat less than eager to deposit its records in the public domain. There are two accounts – or, in today’s scholarly parlance ‘narratives’ - about what happened to these records and, as with The Movement itself, each has an element of mystery.

The first account – which David Shinnick, who joined The Movement in South Australia in 1952, relates – is that Farrell collected some papers which he kept at his home at 46 Austral Terrace, Malvern. After he died unexpectedly in March 1976 – only days before he and his wife were due to embark on an overseas trip – his widow, Cecilia, took them to Halifax Street in Adelaide where the Adelaide City Council had a large incinerator. There the records were unceremoniously consigned to the flames in their entirety. Shinnick’s assumption is that Cecilia Farrell had first looked over the files and, aware of what the files contained, became alarmed about what use could be made of them and was therefore keen to see them destroyed.

However, Farrell’s surviving children, while accepting that their mother burned her husband’s papers, believe that she did so from a rather different motive. The Farrells had been upset by the increasing denigration of The Movement after the split in the mid-1950s and the acceptance of the view that it had been a mistake. After the still-new Catholic archbishop of Adelaide, James Gleeson, made it clear to Cecilia Farrell that he wanted her to hand over to the church any papers relating to The Movement that her husband had kept, she was disinclined to comply. The destruction of the papers, then, might be seen as an act of defiance by a disappointed servant of the church against its ungrateful leaders.

The second account is even more mysterious. In January 1971, Hepworth was appointed assistant to Father Thomas Maloney, the priest at St Therese’s Church, near the corner of Goodwood and Springbank Roads in the inner suburb of Colonel Light Gardens. Irish born and ageing, Maloney was one of a small number of priests in the diocese of Adelaide who had never really accepted Archbishop Beovich’s insistence after 1954-55 that The Movement would have to give up direct involvement in the ALP and the trade unions. Instead, through the Newman Institute, The Movement was to concentrate on educating Catholics for public life. Indeed, since 1957 Maloney had become the centre of a small group of Catholics – Father Thomas Horgan was
Father Patrick Kelly, the editor of the diocesan newspaper, the *Southern Cross*, was another – who met with ‘Groupers’ from the Australian Railways Union from the neighbouring parish of Goodwood and kept the spirit of The Movement alive.

Hepworth was interested in the history of The Movement and his attention was drawn to a number of its files which had been placed in the loft of a garage adjacent to the presbytery. Hepworth never ascertained how the files came to be hidden in the parish of Colonel Light Gardens but there is no doubt that, through Father Maloney, they were in safe hands.

Not so some other of The Movement’s files. In the early 1970s, Hepworth used to help conduct Mass at St Xavier’s Cathedral in Wakefield Street, after which he and two other priests chatted with one another over coffee or tea in the church’s offices on the corner of West Terrace and Grote Street. It became clear to the others that Hepworth took a serious and scholarly interest in The Movement. Perhaps a year after Hepworth was appointed to the Colonel Light Gardens parish, one of the priests in the church office, Father Philip Kennedy, contacted him and asked him to drive into town and take possession of some other papers that had been generated by The Movement. It was about the same time (1971-72) that Gleeson replaced Matthew Beovich as Catholic archbishop of Adelaide. It was Hepworth’s understanding that Gleeson wanted the papers destroyed so that they would not reveal his involvement in The Movement. Kennedy and others, Hepworth believes, were keen to see that they were preserved for posterity. As a result, Hepworth was able to use both sets of papers for his undergraduate essay and his honours thesis. In 1975 he gathered both sets of papers into the same suitcase he had been given by Kennedy and handed it to Warhurst. Warhurst then went on to make further use of both sets of papers for his doctoral thesis and articles.

While this account is both factual and credible, one must speculate as to why the files have had such a complicated history. At the root is Beovich’s transformation from an ardent backer of The Movement – he regarded Santamaria as a personal friend as well as a fellow Catholic – to a staunch opponent of any attempt to continue it (as the NCC) or to form a distinctly Catholic political party (that is, the DLP). From late 1954, Beovich was very much on the side of the ALP *vis-à-vis* the NCC–DLP. Undeniably, he had come to believe that The Movement in South Australia had overstepped the mark and that overall it had been a mistake. While the vast majority of priests in South Australia seemed to comply with Beovich’s wishes, there were undoubtedly some – Hepworth believes they could even have been a majority – who publicly conformed to the new orthodoxy but privately resented the fact that The Movement, except in Melbourne, had been emasculated. The about face of the Australian bishops – and especially their own archbishop – on The Movement was too much for them to bear with equanimity. But, being unable to openly defy the church, they met informally and, above all, tried to preserve as much as they could of what they considered a proud chapter in the history of Catholicism. Indeed, Hepworth thinks it highly likely that the documents had been deliberately broken up and dispersed to a number of locations in Adelaide.

And so at least a fragment of them was passed to Warhurst, who in 1984 – years before he took up the chair in Politics in the School of General Studies at the Australian National University (ANU) – arranged to have them deposited in what was then the Archives of Business and Labour at the ANU – possibly the foremost
repository for labour movement records in Australia. ‘The Edward Farrell Papers: Series III’, in what is now called the Noel Butlin Archives Centre (NBAC), take up no more than about one-and-a-half metres of shelf space. It is clear from any perusal of them that much of what an historian would hope and expect to find simply isn’t there. Most obviously absent are documents dealing with the period between 1946 and 1954 in general, and correspondence between the main office in Melbourne and the branch in Adelaide over the same period in particular. Gary Lockwood, who was on the periphery of The Movement in South Australia when still only a teenager in 1954, remembers visiting Todd Building several times and seeing on a wall a map of greater Adelaide in which pins had been stuck to identify where known communists lived. There is nothing like that in the Farrell Papers in the NBAC.

Certainly, there are informative documents dealing with this earlier period, that is, before October 1954. There are, for instance, highly detailed notes on the files of the South Australian branch of the Shop Assistants Union (SAU). Movement members had been particularly active in the SAU Industrial Group and they were able to wrest this union from ‘the comms’ at SAU elections in 1953. There are numerous and tantalising pieces of paper on which an organiser or an informant has jotted down a few details about someone thought to be a communist. There are letters between members of The Movement in Adelaide and in Sydney – in real terms between Ted Farrell and Roy Boylan – in the years following October 1954. But the assiduous researcher will search in vain for anything that suggests, let alone details, such things as size of membership, location and size of parish branches and, apart from the identity of those who worked in and from the Todd Building, those who comprised The Movement.

Hepworth believes that, after ‘the split’, a number of priests sympathetic to The Movement deliberately had the documents dispersed around Adelaide. But there will always be questions hanging over the files of The Movement in South Australia. What are the files dealing with The Movement in the Adelaide Catholic Archdiocesan Archives (ACAA) in Wakefield Street to which Laffin used to good effect? What were the files that Ted Farrell kept at home and which his widow later destroyed? How did the files Hepworth found at Colonel Light Gardens get there? In what way did the files that Kennedy gave Hepworth differ from those that are retained by the church in the Adelaide Diocesan Archives? One might even question whether ‘The Edward F. Farrell Papers’ is the appropriate description of the papers that can now be consulted in the NBAC.

It seems likely that no-one alive today would be able to say what files were destroyed (or lost) and what survived. Archbishops Beovich and Gleeson are dead. The Movement operatives (Farrell, Nash, Naughton and, effectively, Killicoat) and the dissenting priests (Horgan, Maloney and Kennedy) are no longer able to enlighten us. Hepworth believes that the dissenting priests were likely to have selected from the files they held – and were expected to destroy – those files which showed The Movement in an activist rather than an intellectual light. No-one can tell us what proportion of The Movement’s files is housed in archives or even if some remain in private hands. What is certain is that much of what an archivist would like to have – and an historian would like to peruse – is missing, very likely forever.
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Endnotes

3. ‘State Labor backs Dr Evatt’, Advertiser, 7 October 1954, p.3.
4. David Hilliard, ‘Religion in Playford’s South Australia’, in Bernard O’Neil, Judith Raftery and Kerrie Round (eds), Playford’s South Australia: Essays on the History of South Australia, 1933-1968; Association of Professional Historians Inc., Adelaide, 1996, pp. 254-55. In 1954, Catholics numbered only 16 per cent of the state’s population whereas in Australia as a whole they were well over 20 per cent. However, the proportion was increasing; in 1933, Catholics had comprised only 12 per cent of South Australia’s population.
11. Hepworth (born 1944) took up the post of curate (or assistant parish priest) at Colonel Light Gardens in January–February 1971. After the parish priest there (Thomas Maloney) died in April 1973, Hepworth served as its administrator until January 1974. Ironically, the man eventually appointed parish priest to replace Maloney was Owen Farrell, a younger brother of Ted Farrell.
16. This event is discussed at some length in Malcolm Saunders, ‘Never favoured and now forgotten: a tribute to “a good Labor man”’, Labour History, no. 59, November 1990, pp. 9-12.
17. For a Catholic in South Australia in the 1940s, Farrell had had a very good education. After attending Christian Brothers College and then Rostrevor College (where he had been head prefect), Farrell went on to the University of Adelaide where he gained a BA in History and English. For most of the 1950s and early 1940s, he taught in a number of state primary schools. Farrell’s last position with the Education Department was as a demonstration teacher at Gilles Street Primary School in the early months of 1946.
19. For example, the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, set up by Beovich in 1942 and now known as Centacare Catholic Family Services.


21. Information courtesy of Monsignor Vincent Tiggesman via David Shinnick to author, 6 March 2010. The formal title of the medal, the Cross of Honour or the Holy Cross, was Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice (For Church and Pope).

22. Spencer Killicoot was the only one of the four still alive in 2000. I interviewed him twice in Adelaide – once on 24 January 2005 and, with David Shinnick, on 21 January 2006 – but he showed signs of dementia on both occasions. He died in June 2008.

23. Estimates of how many men and women were in The Movement in South Australia at its peak vary, but the number was certainly more than 200 and very likely less than 300.

24. Personal interviews with David Shinnick, St Mary’s (Adelaide), 21 January 2006 and 20 January 2010.


26. Telephone interviews with John Hepworth, Belair (Adelaide), 31 March 2010, 22 April 2010 and 23 April 2010. Since 2003, Hepworth has been the primate of the Traditional Anglican Communion, effectively the Anglo-Catholic Church in Australia. Unless otherwise indicated, the information in the next few paragraphs was derived from these interviews.

27. These were supported by John Warhurst in an email to the author on 6 March 2006.

28. Beovich retired as archbishop in May 1971 and Gleeson took up the position immediately. Kennedy was auxiliary bishop to Gleeson between 1973 and 1982.

29. Beovich’s transformation is, of course, discussed at some length in Josephine Lafinn’s book, Matthew Beovich: A Biography (See Chapter VI) and her paper, ‘The perils of piety and politics: Archbishop Matthew Beovich, B.A. Santamaria and the ALP split’.

30. In June 1991, a student, Eliza Hempel-Jorgensen, examined the papers as part of a research project and produced a detailed 15-page description of them. This indexed description is available from the NBAC.


33. After the split, The Movement in Adelaide, as suggested above, was absorbed into a reconstituted Newman Institute, while in Sydney it became the Paulian Association. Farrell was head of the former, Boylan of the latter.