

2/9/83

NUCLEAR CULTURE, SOCIAL REACTION:
OPPOSITION TO URANIUM MINING IN AUSTRALIA

Michael Andrew Muetzelfeldt B.Sc(Hon).

Department of Anthropology
The University of Adelaide

October 1981

CONTENTS

List of Tables	iv
List of Figures	v
Summary	vi
Author's statement	viii
Acknowledgements	ix
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2. SOCIAL ORGANISATION AND SOCIAL SETTING	13
Social movement literature and its problems	13
The location of social movement action	17
Mass society and social movement theory	21
Groups and membership	26
Groups and political action	30
Case 1. Friends of the Earth	33
Case 2. Opinion-sharing publics	37
Groups and group structuration	42
Conclusion	44
CHAPTER 3. THE PAST AND STRUCTURE IN THE PRESENT	45
Phase 1: 1944 to 1961	47
Phase 2: 1966 to 1972	56
Interlude: socially given settings as resources	65
Phase 3: 1973 to May 1976	73
Conclusion: the past and structures in the present	106
CHAPTER 4. NUCLEAR SYMBOLS	114
The emergence of symbols through time	114
Australian nuclear symbolism	120
Symbols and action	140
Conclusion: the past and structures in the present revisited	146
CHAPTER 5. TALKING ABOUT MORE THAN URANIUM	147
The emergence of the uranium topic	148
Discursive arenas	158
The uranium topic in its discursive arena	163
Conclusion	186
CHAPTER 6. FROM STRUCTURE TO SOCIAL MOVEMENT ACTION	189
Introduction	189
The doorknock campaign	193
The survey	194
Survey results - first analysis	195
Survey results - a reanalysis	204
Personal project and relevance structure	208

CHAPTER 7. SOCIAL MOVEMENT ACTION AND PERSONAL REAFFIRMATION	220
The production of demonstrations	224
Focussed demonstrations	227
Interfaced demonstrations	238
Demonstrations as process	246
Conclusion	253
CHAPTER 8. SOCIAL MOVEMENT ACTION AND STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION	259
Swanston Dock, July 1977	260
The transformation of structure through action - 1	270
The incorporation of the uranium issue into party politics	277
The transformation of structure through action - 2	295
CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSION	299
APPENDICES	
1. Meaning-establishment and culture	310
2. Doorknock campaign survey	318
Footnotes	336
Bibliography	376

SUMMARY

For over two years from late 1976 the question of uranium mining and export was one of the most widely attended to and contested issues in Australian public politics. The topic was extensively covered in the mass media, was discussed in a wide range of community-based and political organisations, and was widely talked about in informal conversations. Opposition to uranium was sustained and broadly based, and although poorly organised it led to much well-supported protest activity. Although it initially cut across and extended far beyond the established party lines of public politics, it had major impacts within the arena of government. Consequently it was widely described as a social movement.

In this thesis I focus on two interrelated processes: the emergence, growth and maintenance of that opposition; and its subsequent decline. These processes cannot be adequately analysed within the conventional limits of the sociology of social movements, and so I necessarily locate the opposition to uranium within a broad socio-cultural setting.

I firstly focus on why the uranium issue became more important than other issues which were more direct in their impact on Australians' interests or more immediate in their morally evaluated consequences. This involves consideration of circumstances and actions in the past, ranging from Hiroshima to opposition to French nuclear testing in the South Pacific in the early 1970s. I argue that perceptions of these events established the topic's relevance for many large and overlapping audiences, providing the cultural basis of its potential as a major political issue. In the analysis of the realisation of this potential from 1976 I consider contemporary circumstances and actions through which those relevances were reinforced and extended, and through which those audiences were mobilised as political groupings. The involvement of the

mass media and the inability of political parties to act decisively to defuse the emerging issue, as well as direct protest activity, were crucial here.

I then focus on the incorporation of the issue into the established overtly party political arena. This involves consideration of the interplay between the previously analysed circumstances and actions, and established party politics, and the consequent extension of the scope of the party political arena even as the uranium issue was defused within and through that arena.

This study employs an analytical perspective which emphasises the interrelationships between generative structures and action, including the reproduction of each through the other. Running through the analysis is an argument for the utility of analysing social action - in this particular case social movement action - with an emphasis on the broad structuring settings within which that action is embedded. This contrasts with an emphasis on the organisation of that action as such, and the mobilisation of specific resources through that action, which is current within the sociology of social movements. However my broader analytical emphasis does elucidate specifically 'social movement' processes, so this study may be taken as an exploration of a direction for bringing the analysis of social movements within a generalised sociological framework.