

## Truth through Fiction

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### Rationale for HSTY3902 Final Project

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A project that started as research and archiving regarding Ernest Burgmann the founding Bishop of St Mark's National Memorial Library has progressed to become a play that uses the story of Burgmann to bring historiographical issues to the public. Due to the high popularity of historical fiction as a genre, I believe it to be a significant medium through which history can reach wider audiences. Despite historical fiction's reputation among historians as being inaccurate and sensationalised, my project endeavours to implicitly argue that factual and academically researched historical fiction can enable both events and historiographical issues to reach the public. I have aimed to achieve this in the play by ensuring that the dialogue of the major historical characters, namely Burgmann, Hirst, Blanche and Menzies, is derived from primary sources. Aside from connective words that I used to improve the flow of the play, the dialogue of those historical characters is entirely taken from primary sources. Burgmann's dialogue is adapted from his publications, correspondence and sermons, whereas Menzies' dialogue is primarily from his election and parliamentary speeches. Most of the sources pertaining to Burgmann I gathered while archiving at St Mark's Library during my community engagement. However, others and much insightful historical analysis of Burgmann was found in Peter Hempenstall's biography; "The Meddlesome Priest: A Life of Ernest Burgmann". Correspondence between Hempenstall and Burgmann's family as well as with other historians that I found as part of the archives at St Mark's library was useful ascertaining the accuracy of Hempenstall's conclusions.

A key issue with local history is its lack of marketing and promotion to the wider national and even international audience. While Ernest Burgmann was well known within the community of St Mark's Theological Centre and the Anglican community of Canberra, he less well known in the greater Australian public. I believe historical fiction, and plays especially due to their engaging nature, can serve to bring fascinating local stories like that of Burgmann to a greater audience. Caroline Kammen asserted in her article on local history and historical fiction that "stories are approachable and likely to be widely read at least in the area when they are set. Historical fiction often becomes the way people understand the local past". In such a way, the play format enables my organisation, St Mark's National Memorial Library, to promote their history and their founding figure.

The structure of the play attempts to encompass aspects of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, who used real historical characters to make an implicit argument concerning the McCarthy trials of his own time. In such a way, the fictional characters of Adam, Melanie and Jacob at the television network station serve to frame the snapshots of Burgmann's history and in doing so showcase key historical themes. One such theme is that of perspective. For example, to his admirers, Burgmann's history would be seen as visionary and vital to the prevention of a bill that was a violation of the constitution. However, sources from those who oppose him testify to his communist ideas, his

irritating idiosyncrasies and his meddling in the protection of the country.

Another theme conveyed in the play is that of the subjectivity of history. Historian E.H. Carr in his book “What is History?” uses an analogy of a fish monger to suggest that history is the product of the historian. He suggests that “facts are available to historians in documents, inscriptions and so on, like fish on the fishmonger’s slab. The historian collects them, takes them home and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him”. This idea becomes central in the play and its structure. The structure of the play, namely the way in which Melanie, Adam and Jacob interact with and alter their versions of history, gained inspiration from Tom Stoppard’s the Real Inspector Hound. In Stoppard’s play, the theatre critics Moon and Birdboot interact with and alter the events of the play they are meant to be reviewing.

In terms of accessibility and sustainability, I intend to make the play freely available online. Following the completion of this unit the play will be posted on my historical fiction blog: Centuries ago: This Year in History. I will also send a copy to St Mark’s Library which they can hopefully make use of or at the very least see what project was born out of the archiving work I did for them back in September. Furthermore, the nature of a short one-act play such as this is to be easily able to be performed. I have structured the play so as to need limited props and technological capabilities. Additionally, aside from publication, a written historical fiction piece has limited means of reaching people whereas the play format will enable more people to be engaged. The play also enables a greater target audience for the issues of history and Burgmann’s story. Where the story of Burgmann may have a target audience only within the Anglican community, the fact that it is framed within the context of a national narrative with the Communist Dissolution Bill of 1951 allows for a greater audience to participate.

In essence, I hope that this play will begin a reformation of the pre-conceived notion that historical fiction is not a legitimate means of presenting accurate history and that it will enable the wider public to engage with the issues of academic history namely, the role of perspective and the challenges of the historian.

Word count: 913

"THE CHEF'S DILEMMA"

By

Madeline Fisher

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to St Mark's National Memorial Library Canberra, most especially Susan Phillips and John Harris for their guidance, help and resources.

#### A NOTE ON REFERENCING AND ACCURACY

The characters of Jacob, Melanie and Adam are fictitious as well as the unidentified members of the groups from historical scenes. The dialogue of Burgmann, Menzies, Blanche and Hirst is adapted from primary sources, as reflected in the footnotes. The footnotes refer to the entire excerpt within which they are placed.

FADE IN:

SCENE ONE

Table positioned to the left of the stage. Melanie is sat relaxed and idle. Jacob paces and fidgets in frustration. After a few moments of this, Adam rushes on stage carrying papers and appearing disheveled.

ADAM

'Morning all. Beautiful day isn't it.

JACOB

(Coldly) Adam. A power surge?

ADAM

(Surprised) I'm sorry? A power surge?  
Where?

JACOB

Well I thought it the only explanation for your supremely late arrival. All clocks, iphones, tv's - simultaneously dying. The only reason for a man to be so late to a board meeting.

ADAM

(Laughs heartily while others remain silent) Oh sorry Jacob, that sense of humour of yours. Goes over my head sometimes.

Moments of silence while Adam takes a seat and rifles through his papers. Melanie and Jacob look on impatiently.

MELANIE

Shall we begin? This show won't script itself.

JACOB

Quite right. Adam, I know documentaries

are your usual domain but we've a new tv show commissioned that, while essentially historical, might attract the viewers that balk at the term documentary. A drama I suppose. We thought you might be able to offer some insight, into plot and what-not.

ADAM

Of course, happy to be involved. What sort of history did you have in mind? You said drama right? Nanjing Massacre? Rise of the Borgias Pope? The Somme and the Holocaust are out, of course. Too overdone.

JACOB

(Clears throat) We were thinking more along the lines of Australia. It is where our funding comes in after all. Something more local?

[Adam appears a little surprised but recovers quickly. He stands and begins to walk around the table with suggestions]

ADAM

Okay. Something to stir the national spirit. Gallipoli has been done to death what with the centenary but I suppose we could continue to ride the wave of that enthusiasm. How about the Kokoda track...

JACOB

(interrupts) Woah, woah Adam! I meant local in a strictly regional sense of the word. Local pertaining to say the history of rural towns and urban communities in Australia.

[Adam freezes mid pace]

ADAM

Local History? Regional History?

JACOB

Indeed.

ADAM

You're kidding, Jacob. Less of the documentary, more of the drama? In local history? Informative yes! Dramatic, no! Local history is loved by the locals only. If you don't have the personal connection to the place you don't care. The stories aren't big enough to draw the crowds you're hoping for. You're aiming at a niche!

JACOB

(Sighs) I know. Look I know we can make it work. That's where the funding is being placed. A local history drama. So let's make the best of it. Come on! Let's get behind it.

(Encouragingly) You're a first rate historian Adam, I don't know a producer who knows what the audience craves more than Melanie and, well, I must have a few skills up my own sleeve to remain the program's director. I'm sure that between the three of us we'll manage.

MELANIE

(Smiling) Ideas then? Adam, you're the historian aren't you? You must know a few local stories or interesting personalities even if they don't elicit much enthusiasm from you.

ADAM

(Mutters) local history. Local... history. Did you have any sort of specific history in mind? Or any sort of topic?

JACOB

Well the highest proportion of our viewers are from the Canberra and New South Wales area. So perhaps we could cater it to

that.

MELANIE

How about The "Red Priest"? The viewers love a controversial figure.

JACOB

I'm sure it's just my London upbringing but who the heck is that?

ADAM

Ernest Henry Burgmann. He was Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn from the 1930s to the 1960s. There were really divided opinions about him. He was hailed as a champion of the unemployed and at the same time accused as being a communist sympathetic. Or at the very least holding some strongly socialist ideas. Quite an interesting figure if you think about it.

MELANIE

Yeah, he founded St Mark's Memorial Library. You know the one down the road at Barton. Definitely a man with drive. Hold on, let me see what I can find.  
(Types furiously on laptop)  
Ah he was elected as Bishop in 1934 ...

All three freeze mid-sentence and hold position. Other side of stage is illuminated and a group of people are frozen in the midst of conversation. Burgmann and his wife are at the centre of the group. Once illuminated, group begin animatedly chatting. TV Channel Board table is dimmed and fades out.

SCENE 2

GROUP MEMBER 1

Congratulations Burgie! How does it feel to be Bishop of surely the most influential diocese in Australia?



BURGMANN<sup>1</sup>

(Laughs genially) Oh I'm still recovering from the surprise. You know it didn't even occur to me that I was a candidate with a winning chance. Can you believe I only found out that I'd been elected when none other than a reporter from the Sydney Labor Daily rang me.

"Ernest Burgmann?" said he.

"Yes, speaking" said I.

"Congratulations on the appointment" said he.

"Appointment?" said I.

He must have found my skepticism highly amusing. No doubt he didn't think he would have to relay my own life events to me when he called. (Laughs) It's been a couple of days now and, while I feel invigorated to enhance the faith and community of my fellow Australians, I still can't believe I was chosen. Many cannot understand how such a thing could happen in the Church of England in Australia and, frankly, neither can I.

[Group laughs at the tale and spatters of conversation are made]

BLANCHE<sup>2</sup>

You can laugh Burgie, sir. But you are an excellent choice. If you maintain even half the fervor and charisma with which you used to talk to us students at St John's College, people will be flocking to your pastures and the kingdom of God will be nearer to fruition. We (gestures to group member beside him) were there at the announcement. The Te Deum rang out and the glorious prayers were said. Stillness reigned a moment and then came shouts. Again and again I heard the words "It was

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<sup>1</sup> Correspondence and newspaper comment quoted in Peter Hempenstall, *The Meddlesome Priest: A Life of Ernest Burgmann* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin Pty. Ltd., 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Correspondence Douglas Blanche to Lorna Burgmann 5/10/1967.

the Holy Spirit". It was magnificent!

BURGMANN<sup>3</sup>

(Smiling) Ah Douglas, you're too kind. I hope I can live up to such praise but I'm merely a carpenter's son with a love for Australia and a love for God<sup>4</sup>. I know I don't have all the traditions of those British-born conservative pastors. However, I want to mend the tragic divorce that has taken place between the church and those who are standing at the growing points of the world's life. The great social movements, the organization of industry have been left without the guidance of the Christian faith. I want to mend the break. The Church is not merely a sort of Sunday institution! We cannot keep using the Caesar and God division! (Pauses and clears his throat) Forgive me. I can get swept away by my convictions.

[Group laughs knowingly]

GROUP MEMBER 1

Have they set a consecration date yet, Burgie?

BURGMANN<sup>5</sup>

Yes, May Day. I picked the date. What most bishops don't seem to understand is that the majority of their diocese consists of the toiling workers both industrial and agricultural. A May Day consecration will allow me to show my solidarity with the working class struggles of the Hunter and to keep faith with my new communities. In any case, I hope to see you all there and thank you all very much for your well-wishes. Please help yourself to tea and biscuits.

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<sup>3</sup> Ernest Burgmann, *Lecture Religion in the New World*, 22/8/1941.

<sup>4</sup> "Bishop Burgmann - A Fearless Protagonist of Unpopular Causes" in *People* vol 3(4), 23/4/1952.

<sup>5</sup> Account of consecration in correspondence from Burgmann, 5/1954.

Still surrounded by talking members of the group, Burgmann and Edna move unhurriedly toward the edge of stage and then leave. Canon Hirst and a few others remain.

HIRST<sup>6</sup>

I cannot believe this. What a disaster! This rabid socialist (gestures to where Burgmann left), Bishop of Goulburn?

GROUP MEMBER 2

He is a bit unorthodox but, pastorally-speaking, he's exceptional. He really knows how to make people feel individually cared about. He does his rounds of parishes, reaches out to the isolated communities and socially disadvantaged.

HIRST<sup>7</sup>

Don't be ridiculous. It wasn't his pastoral style I was questioning, only his blatantly socialist and reformist attitudes. I can't see him fitting smoothly into Goulburn's conservative environment without trying to force his "Australian church" ideals on all of us.

CLEMENTS<sup>8</sup>

Yes he can be a bit abrasive. On a personal level, one could say insensitive. He was right in saying he's a product of his bush upbringing. My family and I hosted him on a visit to Tumbarumba. He set about immediately rearranging the furniture to make himself more comfortable and would descend on us at all hours of the day and night to talk business. No concern for privacy or a host's wishes.

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted by Anglican, 6/4/67.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Clements' Memoir pp. 123-139 quoted in Peter Hempenstall, *The Meddlesome Priest: A Life of Ernest Burgmann* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin Pty. Ltd., 1993)

HIRST

God only knows what our diocese is in for with this man leading us. All that can be said is that change is certainly coming. Well gentlemen, I shall see you all at the consecration. (Sarcastically) The May Day, working class solidarity consecration.

Group freezes in position and Melanie, Jacob and Adam resume their positions at Board Table while still in darkness. Board Table is illuminated to show the three frozen in the position from before. Hirst and Group fade out.

SCENE 3

ADAM

As you can see the sources are very interesting. Douglas Blanche in his letters praises his ex-teacher and gives a spiritual dimension to Burgmann. He keeps talking about how the work of the Holy Spirit was apparent. Alternatively, you can clearly see the conservative attitudes and fear for the diocese in Hirst's correspondences.

JACOB

(Amusedly) That Clements bloke gives a comic portrayal of Burgmann, doesn't he? Can you imagine hosting a man and him barging in and rearranging all your furniture? My wife would go crazy at the thought. More than that, him turning up randomly to talk shop. Picture it. You and the wife sat curled up on the couch. Glass of wine and private kisses and then Bam! The amiable and practical Bishop charges through the door and politely but firmly begins to discuss Church matters with you.

[The three of them laugh]

ADAM

The question that arises though is: whose account do we take as accurate? All have

their merits and possible biases. So the question falls to you guys? How do you want to portray Burgmann? The hero aiming to bring the Christian faith into the modern working class lives or (consults Melanie's laptop) the "rabid socialist" as Hirst proclaims.

MELANIE

I suppose the latter is more entertaining but everyone loves a fighter for the disadvantaged.

JACOB

We are aiming for accuracy though. Have we got any self-proclaimed evidence of Burgmann's views and aims? Featuring *that* would lend some credence to the drama.

[Adam makes a grab for Melanie's laptop. She tries and fails to regain it and rolls her eyes in exasperation as Adam sits hunched over her computer.)

ADAM

Burgmann had many publications: *Whither Australia?*, *Justice for All and the Case for the Unemployed*, *The Modern World's Challenge to Christianity*. We could find something useful there..

Group freezes in position and other side of stage is illuminated to reveal Burgmann sat at his desk in the presbytery writing. Edna is sat on the couch reading a magazine. Board table fades out.

SCENE 4

EDNA

Darling, I really wish you'd learn to reign in some of your political ideas. It's all very well trying to build the Kingdom of God on earth but think about the things you say. They just give you a bad image.

BURGMANN

Sorry? I was just finishing the sentence.  
What was it you said?

EDNA<sup>9</sup>

Your political ideas! Ernest darling, look  
(shows him the magazine) another awful  
caricature of you. You're holding the  
works of Karl Marx upside-down with a  
positively evil expression on your face.  
Look at the caption - "Leftist Utterances...  
misguided Marxist". It's dreadful!

BURGMANN

Oh you know the papers, Edna. Just the  
usual rubbish they serve up for readers.  
They're just peddling the rampant terror  
of the perceived communist threat.

EDNA

But there is a threat, Ernest! Menzies  
himself has asserted the fact that  
communism by nature is contrary to our  
nation's best interests and the world's.

BURGMANN<sup>10</sup>

Don't be ridiculous! The Russians are on  
our side! Everyone seems to have forgotten  
that, while the Nazis still rampage across  
Europe, the Russians are fighting back  
with us. Anyone who cannot see that rivers  
of Russian blood are being poured out in  
defence of London and Sydney is without  
sense or imagination.

EDNA

I know. It's just what people say. That  
the communists are trying to undermine our  
war effort so that, even though we will  
come out on the winning side, Russia and  
her communist ideals will be by far the

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<sup>9</sup> "Leftist Utterances", caricature in *Bulletin*, 28/4/1943.

<sup>10</sup> Ernest Burgmann, "Internment" in *Sun Telegraph*, 21/9/1941.

strongest country left.

BURGMANN<sup>11</sup>

For God's sake. It's not the communists that are undermining our war effort. It is the wooden-headed folk, whose minds are used only to chew over past prejudices and ancient fears, who suck the vigour from our national effort. (sighs) Darling, I know you're just concerned for me, for my image, but this country needs change. It's the 1940s and we still have unemployment as if it's the Depression. Gambling is rampant and the endless amounts of money and effort we are pumping into a war we are fighting because of Britain is ridiculous.

EDNA

Don't say that too loudly darling (smiling). If the papers got wind of such musings then a caricature of you reading Marx will be the least of your worries.

[Burgmann moves over to Edna and tenderly kisses her.]

BURGMANN<sup>12</sup>

Darling wife. You've known my views almost as long as I have. You know I'm not a communist. I don't want to be labelled as such. That's why I refused the MAWF's invite - You know that Comintern inspired peace front<sup>13</sup>. I'm well aware that I'm limited in political capability by my position. However, I am also aware that capitalism is a failing system. That doesn't make me communist. I simply believe that the internal collapse of capitalism is inevitable due to its weak

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<sup>11</sup> Ernest Burgmann, *Justice for All and the Case of the Unemployed* (Morpeth: St John's College Press, 1933).

<sup>12</sup> Mansfield Address, "Capitalism is Warfare", 28/5/1936.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Hemenstall, *The Meddlesome Priest: A Life of Ernest Burgmann* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin Pty. Ltd., 1993)

economic and social structures. I believe that the Church will be picking up the pieces when that happens...

They freeze mid-sentence and the Board table is illuminated. Both sides of the stage are now illuminated and Burgmann and Edna hold their positions.

MELANIE

This is not going to work!

ADAM

What? Why?

MELANIE

The audience can't just sit and watch Burgmann and his wife discuss their political views! In what way is that visual at all? One may as well just read his publications. No matter how controversial the ideas, the visual scene would just be unengaging. We need some action! Some sort of drama!

JACOB

She has a point Adam. It is a bit dry.

ADAM

Well you wanted true local history. How would you enhance it then?

As this is said, Burgmann and Edna on the other side of the stage relax their positions and return to those from the beginning of the scene. Burgmann behind his desk. Edna on the couch. They then proceed to mime a conversation as the Board members continue:

MELANIE

Well let's think about what audiences find appealing in dramas. I suppose action and violence is always a possibility.

As she says this, Burgmann and Edna leap from their seats and begin to mime a fierce argument with large gestures.



JACOB

What did you have in mind?

MELANIE

Well Edna and Burgmann were worried about the papers why not have a reporter enter?

On the other side of the stage, where Burgmann and Edna are still miming an argument, a suited reporter with a note pad barges on stage. Edna and Burgmann jump back in shock and begin to mime an argument with the reporter.

MELANIE

He could rush in having heard Burgmann's spiel about Russia and the inevitable collapse of capitalism and then proceed to try and get an interview.

ADAM

Barge into their living room. Completely likely. They just left the door open and he didn't want to sneak around for stories like the average reporter he wanted to get in on the debate himself.

MELANIE

(Rolls her eyes) I know it's a bit far-fetched but bear with me. I'm just throwing a few ideas around. Anyway so they're all there arguing and then Burgmann throws a punch at the reporter and catches him by the shirt collar and drags him off stage.

As she speaks, the events she talks about occur on the other side of the stage. Burgmann punches the reporter and then drags him off stage.

MELANIE

And then, having sent the reporter on his way sufficiently chastised, Burgmann can return to his wife. They can iterate their love and forget chaste kiss, give me passionate marital reunion kiss!

On other side of stage, Burgmann and Edna share such a kiss. Break apart and then freeze.

There are a few moments silence and then Jacob and Adam burst into laughter. Melanie begrudgingly joins in.

ADAM

That is the most unrealistic script for a historical drama that I've ever heard. Well done Melanie, the pacifist and kindly Bishop fought a reporter and then swept his wife off her feet.

MELANIE

I guess it is a bit unrealistic but I just wanted to give you an idea of what audiences like in dramas.

ADAM

But it's history. We can't change the past. True we can tell different perspectives and we can showcase it through different lenses but the actual events must be grounded in the sources. Unless you can find me a source or photograph that proves Burgmann at some point in the 1940s punched a reporter then I'm afraid that scene is out.

JACOB

As entertaining as it sounds. Adam is right. Our aim is a truthful drama. A documentary but with less narration and more live action.

ADAM

I think what we need is the introduction of a well-known event or figure into our Burgmann story. Something to give the tale gravity or scale. While it is a local story, we could suggest that local stories do have national significance.

MELANIE

Yes that could work. Any ideas?

JACOB

Perhaps we should reconvene with fresh eyes after a lunch break. I'm starving. Adam you look like you could do with a coffee and I know Melanie has a date with that new assistant from HR. (mischievously) You don't think he's a bit young for you?

MELANIE

(Rolls eyes) If you weren't my boss, you would be receiving a sharp sarcastic reply to that comment. He's nice, we are hardly getting married only sandwiches.

ADAM

(Wisely) Yes, but that's how it always starts. Sandwiches today, candlelit roast dinners tomorrow and elaborate wedding cake next year.

MELANIE

(Laughing) Okay I'll bear that in mind. See you all in an hour.

All fade out.

SCENE 5

Fade in.

Adam alone in Board room typing on Melanie's laptop. Other side of stage remains in darkness. Enter Jacob.

JACOB

Adam! Tell me you actually left the room!

ADAM

(Looks up from laptop) I did. Briefly.

JACOB

Did you eat? Innovation is born of good nutrition and sleep.

ADAM

(Absently) Yes I ate a little something.

[Vaguely gestures to the table where a foam coffee cup stands]

JACOB

I know it might come as something of a shock to you but you do know that coffee isn't a food group, right?

ADAM

(Rolling eyes) Yes I *do* know that besides I had a bagel with it. You sound just like my mother. This past weekend she rang and the first thing she said upon me answering was "you need to stop drinking so much coffee. It's terrible for your health- I saw it on A Current Affair." Not even a hello.

JACOB

(Laughs) That's mothers though isn't it? No matter how old and educated you become, to her you are still the disagreeable 8 year old who refused to eat his vegetables.

[Melanie enters and throws herself down in the chair]

MELANIE

(To Adam) will I ever regain possession of my laptop?

ADAM

(Cheerfully) probably not.

JACOB

So how was lunch, Melanie?

MELANIE

The food was delicious. I would really like to go again.

ADAM

He may be dancing round the point with his English diplomacy but we couldn't care less how nice the salmon or whatever the dish you had was. How was the date with the junior assistant?

MELANIE

(Laughs) to be honest I'd rather talk about the food. Really nice guy, sweet and attentive...

ADAM

Like a puppy dog?

MELANIE

(Grudgingly) very much so. He was terrible at making conversation. I heard more about his job than anything else which is the last thing I want to hear on a break from work. Also I'm not going to lie I thought 10 years wasn't such a gap. But he had no idea who Natalie Imbruglia was!

JACOB

(Chuckling) Well that's it! Deal-breaker!

MELANIE

Come let's just get on with this drama. Anyone have any flashes of inspiration?

JACOB

I was wondering if any of the conservative politicians shared Canon Hirst's view of a socialist Burgmann.

ADAM

I had a similar idea. I was browsing articles surrounding Burgmann and one said that the Menzies Government had named Burgmann a "most meddlesome priest" during parliament.

JACOB

When was this? In what context?

ADAM

In 1951 Menzies attempted to ban the Australian Communist Party. A group of bishops led by Moyes and Burgmann opposed this ban and spoke out against it. Perhaps we can include that in the story.

MELANIE

Menzies would be an ideal figure to include. His staunch anti-communist stances are well-known.

ADAM

The conflict between Burgmann, his Bishops and the Menzies government can be easily imagined. Menzies' election speech in 1949 for example. The ideas were completely different to Burgmann's. Listen to this: the communists are ...

As Adam begins to read an excerpt from Menzies' 1949 election speech, the other side of the stage is illuminated and Menzies stands on a podium delivering the speech. Menzies takes over for Adam but Adam continues to mime the speech to his colleagues.

MENZIES<sup>14</sup>

...the most unscrupulous opponents of religion, of civilized government, of law and order, of national security. Abroad, but for the threat of aggressive Russian

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Menzies, *Election Speech*, (1949), <http://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1949-robert-menzies>.

Imperialism, there would be real peace today.  
Communism in Australia is an alien and destructive pest. If elected we shall outlaw it!

[Applause sound effects initiated here]

Menzies nods in acknowledgement and then that side of the stage fades out.

#### ADAM

Like all controversial historical figures, the same issues of perspective that exist with Burgmann arise with Menzies. To his supporters and to Australians of that generation, Menzies was a supporter of education and a protector from the threat of communism. There has been some debate about the communist threat. To some historians, Menzies appeared unusually paranoid with a possible communist "world take-over" but at the same time the majority of the public supported his views<sup>15</sup>. At the First Meeting of the National Security Resources Board in 1950, Menzies suggested that it was obvious that this "cold war" was a prelude to a "hot one"<sup>16</sup>. "A period of twilight between peace and war" he said<sup>17</sup>.

#### MELANIE

Let's visualise the conflict then. Did they meet? Burgmann and Menzies?

#### ADAM

Only a few times. The conflict was less a personal conflict and more of a clash of ideas. To Menzies, Burgmann and Bishop Moyes were a distinguished voice that

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<sup>15</sup> David Lowe, *Menzies and the Great World Struggle* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> First Meeting of the National Security Resources Board, 18/12/1950, Cabinet Agenda vol.7, CRS A 4639/XMI, AA.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

undermined his ideas and plans for an anti-communist Australia. They played a huge role in preventing a successful referendum to ban the Australian Communist Party in 1951. To Burgmann, Menzies represented a conservative clinging to the ideals of British Monarchy and Capitalism. In his eyes, a disaster waiting to happen in the modern world<sup>18</sup>.

MELANIE

A montage would work *amazingly* with this.

JACOB

A montage?

MELANIE

A selection of short scenes jumping between Burgmann and Menzies advocating their ideas. Snippets of speeches and rousing campaigning. A tension-building musical score. It would be great!

As before, the three of them freeze and hold position as the other side of the stage is illuminated. To the left, Burgmann stands with Moyes, Julien and another Bishop on a podium, arms raised as if preaching. To the right, Menzies also stands on a podium, frozen as if mid-speech. Board table fades out as Menzies begins to speak.

## SCENE 6

As this scene progresses, each opposing side delivers snippets of their opinions as if in debate. Although it is apparent from their positioning that they are addressing different crowds. A divider may be used to further demonstrate this difference and accompanying crowd sound effects employed. While one side is speaking the other remains frozen mid speech.

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<sup>18</sup> Ernest Burgmann, *Whither Australia?* (Morpeth: St John's College Press, 1932).



MENZIES<sup>19</sup>

The day has gone by for treating Communism as a legitimate political philosophy. Our attitude has been one of great tolerance. The Communist Party will be declared subversive and unlawful, and dissolved.

BURGMANN<sup>20</sup>

The Roman Catholics are behind the present Government in this proposed legislation and are no doubt supporting the Government vigorously. The Labor Party also has an unduly large number of Roman Catholic members in the Federal Parliament. Unless we Anglicans and others awake in time and come to the rescue of our traditional British-inherited freedoms, Rome is likely to win a victory in this referendum that she will know how to use in the future.

A response of outrage by some follows this. But applause follows behind it. Julian moves to take the microphone from Burgmann.

JULIEN<sup>21</sup>

More importantly, I, with many Australians, will vote "No" in the referendum for the dissolution of the Australian Communist Party. Not because we under-estimate the Communist menace, not because we have any sympathy with Communism, but because we will not tolerate the Australian Constitution becoming a modern form of the Inquisition - still dear, in however refined a form, to the totalitarian heart.

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Menzies, *Election Speech*, (1949), <http://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1949-robert-menzies>.

<sup>20</sup> Burgmann quoted in "Roman Catholics" in *Tumut and Adelong Times*, 10/10/1950.

<sup>21</sup> Correspondence from Rev. Julien to Sydney Morning Herald, 12/9/1951.

MENZIES<sup>22</sup>

Korea is a sort of preliminary; a testing of our strength and willingness. A cheap war for the Communist, since he fights it with Koreans and by means of an industrial fifth column in our own country. Look at the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it. Australian communists can be part of this plan for global conquest. I know that the majority of Australians share my concerns. The Gallup Poll last year recorded that Communism is seen as our Nation's biggest problem by the people.

BURGMANN<sup>23</sup>

I refuse to see socialism as completely alien and incompatible with Western traditions. The mistakes of the Communist powers are comparable to how little our own great nations have learned from history. As unwelcome as this might sound, socialism is perhaps closer to the ideals of the Gospel than our Christian West. The early Soviet society was demonstrating the progress an ideal society might make in uniting so many people and in abolishing divisions of class and culture.

MENZIES<sup>24</sup>

Our opponents mean business. This is our year of decision. Are we for the Socialist State, with its subordination of the individual to the universal officialdom of government, or are we for the ancient British faith that governments are the servants of the people, a faith which has given fire and quality and direction the whole of our history for 600 years?

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Menzies quoted in David Lowe, *Menzies and the Great World Struggle* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> Ernest Burgmann, *The Modern World's Challenge to Christianity* (Sydney: Friendship with Russia League, 1940).

<sup>24</sup> Robert Menzies, *Election Speech*, (1949), <http://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1949-robert-menzies>.

BURGMANN<sup>25</sup>

We are no longer a colony of exiles from Great Britain! The Australian has not yet made a national culture but he is beginning to feel the need of it. He cannot become an Englishman if he remains organic to his Australian environment and there is no reason at all why he should. We need to make the decision as a nation and vote "No"!

Both men fade out and the Board table is illuminated again.

SCENE 7

ADAM

Burgmann's fights against Menzies' anticommunism were admired by some. Many Anglicans supported the anti-Catholic views he voiced. However others, Menzies supporters included, thought that he and his merry band were jeopardizing the safety of the nation. As interesting as we can make this clash between Menzies and Burgmann, I don't see how we can reconcile the different views into one documentary. We are supposed to be telling history but the politics surrounding the two of them are so distorted by perspective that there isn't a history to tell.

MELANIE

Let's convey that to the audience then! Why take the historical issues out of it? A local story with this much convoluted controversy would be perfect.

JACOB

(Grudgingly) You have a very fair point

MELANIE

There's always a danger in television to

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<sup>25</sup> Ernest Burgmann, *Whither Australia?* (Morpeth: St John's College Press, 1932).

underestimate your audience - not everyone has become desensitized by the drama levels of HBO channel. I think that displaying a drama with the label "ACCURATE" will draw them all in. Everyone loves a juicy local story. All the more so if it's true.

ADAM

But what truth do we tell? History is what the historian makes it. Which version of events do we use? Which perspective? Who is the hero?

MELANIE

I suppose there wouldn't be one. Show all the perspectives! In the fashion of films like Vantage Point and Source Code. This is right up your alley Adam. All those historiographical issues you go on about and the problems with accuracy - involve the audience in the problems of history.

(Gestures become larger and more animated)

Such a series would be a breath of fresh air. They are not being told history. They are being called to acknowledge the problems of memory and discern the past for themselves.

[She finishes standing and awaiting approval]

(Short pause)

ADAM

My God.

JACOB

That is ideal. Portray the both of them, Burgmann and Menzies in all their ... Er personas per se. Burgmann in sympathy with the needs of Christians, the needs of Australians, the needs of the working class. Menzies in sympathy with the needs and protection of a Western Capitalist

nation...

ADAM

(Dryly) yes sympathies all round. Have sympathy for the poor man attempting to weave all those viewpoints into a coherent plot line. No, no don't get me wrong. It's exactly what we need. I just... I just think we tread a fine line between sensationalism and accurate history.

JACOB

Public history or at least the history that people want to engage with always dances that line. What was it you said - history is what the historians make it?

ADAM<sup>26</sup>

A historian E.H. Carr in the 1960s discussed it. He said that facts were available to the Historian like fish on the fishmonger's slab. The historian collects them, takes them home and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him. Now we have the same problem.

MELANIE

(Amusedly) The Chef's dilemma?

JACOB

(Laughs) I think she's right. We can deal with logistics later, figure out our recipe later. At least we have a framework now. Our audiences are in for a delicacy.

FADE OUT:

THE END

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<sup>26</sup> E.H. Carr, "The Historian and His Facts" in *What is History?* (London: Penguin, 1961).

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